2019

MCAST and Malta Union of Teachers agreement

On 27 July 2018, the Malta Union of Teachers and MCAST signed a collective agreement to primarily ensure MCAST academic staff benefit from better working conditions and a substantial increase in salaries. Through this agreement, academic staff will also be provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to further develop their professional career. This development should aid MCAST students in gaining the necessary knowledge, skills and competences required by today's and tomorrow's workforce.

2018

Act Regulating Work-based Learning and Apprenticeships

Malta’s leading vocational college, the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) is the VET institution responsible for governing and managing the Apprenticeship system at national level in Malta, and has been working to raise the quality of apprenticeships so as to strike a balance between theoretical and on-the-job training and hence enable the apprentice to remain employable in the long run on the basis of transferable and regularly updated expertise. In this regard, a Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act has been approved by the Maltese Parliament. Its legislation was proposed in 2016 spearheaded by Cedefop’s apprenticeship review. This Act provides regulations and governance and administration of accredited training programmes for work-placements, apprenticeships and internships for VET purposes.

The Act aims at strengthening work-based learning and apprenticeship by:

a) setting definitions and operational parameters for work placements, apprenticeships and internships;

b) outlining responsibilities and governance structures (such as National Skills Council, Sector Skills Units);

c) defining rights and obligations for VET providers, employers and learners;

d) highlighting the role of employers as responsible learning partners;

e) setting a compulsory minimum number of hours for all forms of work-based learning and linking remuneration to the minimum wage;

f) using ECVET/ECTS in all forms of work-based learning;
g) introducing a single EQF-based apprenticeship qualification replacing the dual certification currently in place;

h) launching a training agreements register to support data collection and policy-relevant analysis by the national skills council

With regards to MCAST, the next step is to ensure it has all the organizational mechanisms in place to be able to implement all the obligations outlined in the Act.

Apprenticeships will also be introduced through other providers, including private ones, to tap new areas of expertise. The aim is to make apprenticeships more inclusive and more flexible for learners, for instance by offering part-time schemes.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between MCAST and the Malta Football Players Association**

The purpose of the MoU is to support football players through training and education during their sporting career in order to help them achieve their highest sporting standard whilst also acquiring qualifications that will enable to find suitable employment once their sporting career is over.

**MCAST award at Level 2**

In February 2018, MCAST Foundation College piloted three Awards at Level 2. These courses are 12 weeks long and include a substantial work-based learning component. The aim of these Awards is to offer Foundation College students who are likely to drop out in December-January, to transfer to one of these short courses as a stepping stone to employment. Generally, these are students who do not wish to continue their studies for various reasons and wish to join the work force as soon as possible. The outcomes of these awards are being evaluated.

**MCAST Master’s Degree Programmes**

During October 2018, MCAST launched two Master’s programmes under the ESF project. A further 6 programmes will be launched progressively.

Additionally, during November 2018, MCAST advertised the launch of the MCAST Master’s in Vocational Education Applied Research 4.0. This Master's Degree is aimed for future specialists and leaders in VET and proposes highly innovative practices necessary to equip learners with knowledge, skills, and competencies adequate to thrive in the 4th industrial revolution. In the implementation of this Master's Degree, MCAST shall be taking a team teaching and assessment approach.

**EU Agenda for adult learning**

Through the EU Agenda for Adult Learning implementation in Malta (2018-19), Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) has secured funding to coordinate the implementation of the Recommendation on Up-skilling Pathways in Malta and to focus on how various entities will be working on establishing and improving skills assessment, learning opportunities, validation and recognition for adult learners.

a. Overall coordination of commitment of Malta to the Upskilling Pathways agenda.

b. Policy coherence initiatives through the coordination of the Lifelong Learning steering committee and stakeholder working groups (including Ministries, Entities, Community Centres, Local Councils, NGOs, Adult Education professionals, public private training providers).
c. Collection of updates on activities carried out.

d. Formation of Thematic working groups (disadvantage audiences, accreditations, validation, etc.)

e. 50 key persons within 25 organisations.

**National Lifelong Learning Strategy for Malta 2020**

The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education and Employment is responsible for this policy document. The National Lifelong Learning Strategy for Malta 2020 focuses on adult learning, specifically the participation of people aged 25 to 64 years. It embraces post-compulsory education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education, adult education and learning in senior years. The Strategy consolidates and builds on ideas and processes already taking shape in different organisations and institutions in Malta, to ensure a single, coherent place to guide actions in lifelong learning.

In line with the primary goals of EU 2020, the Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 recognises a number of pre-requisites and addresses a number of immediate challenges such as the low level of adults participating in adult learning; the high rate of early school leavers and youths with low skills; the low number of women actively at work or engaged in lifelong learning; and the persistence of low education passed on from generation to generation.

The Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020[2] also identifies a set of basic transversal principles that are adopted in a pyramidal approach as follows:

1. The Vision provides the over-riding guideline for the lifelong learning strategy.

2. This is followed by Five Strategic Objectives to support the Vision.

A number of strategic benchmarks serve as planned key performance indicators for the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Strategy. These strategic objectives aim to

(a) stimulate participation in lifelong learning by Maltese adults by creating both a demand and a desire for learning

(b) place the ‘learner’ at the centre by optimising all possible types of innovative learning methods and environments so as to make learning flexible, personal, accessible and relevant

(c) improve skills sets that contribute to professional development, employment mobility and active citizenship

(d) develop support structures for adult learning; (e) and finally improve governance in the lifelong learning sector.

3. Ten Strategies support at least one of the five Strategic Objectives. Each strategy identifies the current challenges and proposes a set of measures.

4. Forty Indicative Programmes support at least one of the ten Strategies. Indicative programmes can form the basis for future action plans. Each programme is associated with one of the following action types: Structure; Policy; Vocational Education and Training (VET); Open Education Resources (OER) and Quality.

A task force group to monitor the implementation of the strategy was set up in 2018, the group’s remit was further extended to oversee the implementation of both the Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and EU Agenda for Adult Learning policy coordination to ensure continuity and complementarity in policy and provision initiatives and to avoid duplication.
In July 2018, the group drew up are report on the 11 measures targeting different sub-groups of adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences. These initiatives address the key elements mentioned in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and in line with the Lifelong Learning strategy objectives namely:

- Skills assessment
- A tailored and flexible learning offer
- Validation and recognition
- Outreach, guidance and support measures
- Coordination and partnership
- Follow-up and evaluation

Recent outcomes and impacts as a results of monitoring Lifelong Learning strategy include:

1. Evaluation of basic skills courses and the National Diploma in teaching adults.
2. Implementing at national level the Schools as Community Learning following successful implementation of pilot project.
3. National media campaign focusing on adult learners’ stories to encourage participation.
4. Over 70% of courses offered by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning are accredited and collaboration with over 12 Government entities and NGOS and 35 Local Councils with a reach of over 8,000 adults.
5. A newly revised quality assurance policy was developed and published to ensure better quality in Lifelong Learning courses.
6. A new website and applications system is being developed for Lifelong Learning courses to ensure a more user-friendly platform accessible to those who may have low ICT skills and to ensure better learner analytics by the public provider.

In recent years the Lifelong Learning Unit conducted a pilot project called ‘School as Community Learning Spaces’ at the Valletta Primary School to increase the number of less qualified parents, guardians and community members participating in learning. This project is further being extended to other schools across the countries.

**2017**

**National Skills Council**

Malta launched the National Skills Council (NSC) with the aim of improving understanding and relevance by bringing together the worlds of education and industry and create better conditions and incentives for continued upskilling to address skills gaps and skills mismatches. The NSC is expected to minimize the skill gaps that exist in some of the demanding and rewarding sectors such as the digital, technical and financial sectors where Malta is, and can maintain, excellence. It is the Council’s task to recommend policy changes to the government that would reduce these gaps and prepare the labour force with the right skills, to meet the future challenges.

The National Skills Council was set up by means of Subsidiary Legislation 327.547 of the Laws of Malta, and has set itself a strategic direction for the next 3 years.
Following the publication of National Employee Skills Survey [4] in July 2016, and as a main driver in labour market preparation, the NSC:

- Is tapping into studies carried out by different entities to assess the skills shortages on a national level and in particular sectors.
- Is encouraging and facilitating educational institutions to network with industry in order to diminish the skills gap.
- Is reviewing past and current available skills within the labour work force to recommend policy changes targeting the skills gaps that exist in certain sectors of the economy.
- Is organising monthly Business-Education encounters to facilitate networking between education professionals and industry representatives to identify collaboration options.
- In July 2017, the National Skills Council (NSC) set up a sub-committee with the remit of:

  1. reviewing existing pertinent documentation:
  2. consult with relevant players in the field, including stakeholders in the EU;
  3. identify a workable approach to address identified digital skills mismatches and related issues;
  4. draw up a list of priority actions taking into consideration multiple stakeholders including private training providers;
  5. develop a report for the NSC with an analysis of the digital skills gap in Malta and a set of recommendations.

The sub-committee presented its report to the NSC in January 2018.

Regarding the training offer linked to the labour market needs, the NSC has set wide priorities for Malta’s main scholarship scheme financed jointly by the European Social Fund as well as national funding. It has provided guidance and established the subject areas to be prioritized by the Endeavour Scholarship Schemes with a total budget of more than €2 million allocation per year. In this way, keeping in mind the skills shortages and skills priorities flagged in the various studies carried out recently, the NSC could identify priority areas for skills development.

This report will be used to steer education and industry stakeholders to ensure the development of the relevant skills in the Maltese labour force. The NSC has set work-based learning as one of its upmost priorities and intends to:

- identify a feasible approach to make work-based learning more available to learners in different contexts and following different learning programmes;
- draw up a list of priority actions taking into consideration multiple stakeholders including private training providers.

**Memorandum of Understanding - MCAST and the Authority of Transport in Malta**

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology [5](MCAST) signed an MOU with Transport Malta [6] with the aim of strengthening the collaborative relationship between the Government Transport Regulator and MCAST. The collaboration will help to enhance the employability of students in related disciplines within the transport sector. Various activities are planned through this MOU including focused training, upgrading of courses, upskilling of personnel already employed in the transport sector.

**Memorandum of Understanding - MCAST and the Malta Employers Association**

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology [5](MCAST) signed an MOU with the Malta Employers Association [7] with the aim of developing business qualifications. The parties agreed to provide training and work placement opportunities to students following business related course at MCAST and to identify
and address the gaps between the curricula of courses offered at MCAST and the requirements of the industry.

**Memorandum of Understanding - MCAST and Malta Maritime Forum**

The MCAST signed an MOU with the Malta Maritime Forum with the aim of strengthening the collaboration between the Maltese maritime industry and the MCAST to help contribute to develop the skills and competences of persons already working in the sector but also to offer training opportunities to students and individuals who wish to take up a career in this sector.

**Memorandum of Understanding - MCAST and The Institute for Education**

The MCAST entered into an MOU with the Institute for Education. The main theme of the MOU is to help support the deployment of vocational education and training (VET) in schools. This will be achieved through a number of initiatives and activities that will be coordinated by both parties in view of their expertise.

**MCAST Partner Schools**

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) launched the concept of MCAST Partner Schools, which provides a platform for close collaboration of MCAST Foundation College with secondary schools with which to become Partner Schools. Two Schools have already become MCAST Partner Schools and it is envisaged that more schools will follow.

The first MOU was signed with St Benedict College with the aim being that of offering secondary school students the possibility of finishing Form 5 (Year 11) with a full MCAST Level 3 Diploma. Thus during the academic year 2016-2017, St Benedict College collaborated with MCAST in developing a further 3 vocational units in ICT as well as a further 3 vocational units in Engineering (other than the 3 units already offered as SEC) to provide students with the opportunity to choose to follow such units after school. The units were developed and one unit from ICT and one uniform Engineering have started being delivered as from October 2017 to Form 3 students who voluntarily decided to take these units. Moreover, a number of students in this Partner School are also following a Performing Arts MCAST Award after school.

The Education Hub has also become an MCAST Partner School with the aim being that of students in the Hub having the opportunity to take particular Skills Kits, especially the vocational strands, as part of their curriculum. Collaboration will include MCAST supporting teachers for delivering the vocational Skills Kits.
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