I cannot overstate the importance of Adult Education. Learning happens over the course of a lifetime and includes the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training. Adult learning is an investment that pays off for all; there is no learning without benefits. It is the key for personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and sustainable development.

Lifelong learning gives mature learners the chance to increase their knowledge, develop new skills and improve the career prospects available to them and expand their professional knowledge. The confidence and aptitude gained with adult education is valuable both in and out of the workplace.

Studies have shown that developing literacy and numeracy skills in adulthood gives individuals a better ability to reach their full potential, while many adult students gain additional confidence in their academic skills after pursuing adult education. While the importance of adult education is immense, we have to acknowledge that there are a range of challenges that adult learners may face. These include the difficulty of returning to a classroom setting and that of balancing education and a full-time career, which is difficult for people in full-time employment.

This Government is committed to encourage adults, from all walks of life and socio-economic background, to further their studies and facilitate them to find a balance between work and learning.

This strategy, provides for community learning: meeting the needs and aspirations of various communities living within the Maltese Islands, including the both the native Maltese and also the migrant communities; respecting the fact that we have a cosmopolitan and diverse society and that such diversity is an enriching experience for all.

The strategy encompasses the present realities, following the onset of the Covid pandemic and thus it acknowledges the importance of online learning and has concrete proposals to reduce the digital divide amongst adults.

I am confident that this National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2020 – 2030), will act as a catalyst to better the adult learning services in our country and will reach many more adults and leave a positive impact in their lives.

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Lifelong Learning and why it matters

Learning happens over the course of a lifetime. It covers the entire range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities - both general and vocational - undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training.

Adult learning is an investment that pays off for all; there is no learning without benefits. This requires developing further a learning culture in the economy and society, and making everyone aware of the benefits of learning. It is the key for personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and sustainable development.

Adult learning is not only required to meet the need for new skills and answer the needs of the labour market but it also enhances life as an individual and in society (European Association for the Education of Adults, n.d.).

Benefits for learners (European Commission, 2019):
- Economic: better quality work, higher income and improved employability
- Wellbeing: improved general wellbeing and health
- Social: improved engagement in community and civic activities

Benefits for employers (European Commission, 2019):
- Companies improve their competitiveness, productivity, innovation and profitability
- Higher motivation of the workforce

Benefits for the community (European Commission, 2019):
- Economic: greater economic competitiveness and higher GDP and improved skills abilities to adapt to changes in the labour market
- Social: positive effects on health, the environment, innovation, growth and investment and community integration

Target groups: which adults need specific attention?
Adult learning should be for all. This means that all adults shall be provided with opportunities for learning under the right conditions. These conditions differ between target groups (European Commission, 2019), such as those who have a migrant background, have long been out of education and training pathways, lack basic skills, are unemployed, are below or at the poverty threshold, have physical or psychosocial disabilities.
EU Policy on Adult Learning

Within a context where 40% of European employers report being unable to find people with the right skills to grow and innovate (European Commission, 2019) and where 61 million Europeans lack adequate reading, writing and digital skills (ibid.), lifelong learning and skills development are recognised as key elements (as stated in the ET 2020) in response to the economic crises, demographic ageing, skills gap in the labour force and global competition (The Council of the European Union, 2011).

European Union Member States are to put their focus on ensuring that adult literacy, numeracy skills and digital literacy are improved (The Council of the European Union, 2011). The Council of the European Union under the strategic framework for European cooperation Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) set up the following targets by the year 2020 (The Council of the European Union, 2009):

1. At least 15% of adults (25-64 years old) should participate in lifelong learning.
2. The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%.
3. At least 40% of 30-34-year-olds should attain some form of higher education.
4. The share of early leavers from education and training (ELET) between the age of 18 and 24 should be less than 10%.
5. At least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education;
6. At least 82% of graduates (aged 20-34 years who completed upper secondary education and who left education between 1 and 3 years) should be in employment;

As priority areas for 2012-2014 the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) proposed to focus on (European Commission, 2019):

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality.
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training.
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning.
4. Enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and their learning environments.
5. Improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring the adult-learning sector.

In 2015, the Council and the Commission provided a revised set of more specific priorities for the Member States and European Commission to focus on until 2020 (European Commission, 2019):

- Improve governance through better coordination between policy areas, enhanced effectiveness and social relevance.
- Significantly increase the supply and demand for high-quality provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills.
- Ensure effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies to reach and assist adult learners.
- Be more flexible and have wider access through more workplace learning and use of ICT, skills assessments, and second-chance qualification programmes.
- Enhance the quality of adult learning by monitoring the impact of policies and improving the training provided to adult educators.

The European Commission launched the first Skills Agenda in June 2016 to set out policy priorities and actions aimed at training more people in the skills for a job (European Commission, n.d.). The Skills Agenda delivers on the European Pillar of Social Rights and notably its first principle; spelling out the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning (European Commission, 2020). One of the recommendations of the Agenda was the Upskilling Pathways (2016) aiming to help adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills or a specific upper-secondary level qualification (level 3 or 4 in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)) (European Commission, 2019).

The 2020 revised European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, presented a paradigm shift in skills to take advantage of the green and digital transitions and support a prompt recovery from the COVID-19 crisis (European Commission, 2020).
The updated EU Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience includes 12 actions organised around four building blocks (European Commission, 2020):

1. A call to join forces in a collective action:
   • Action 1: A Pact of skills

2. A strategic set of actions to ensure people have the right skills for jobs:
   • Action 2: Strengthening skills intelligence
   • Action 3: EU support for strategic national upskilling action
   • Action 4: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience
   • Action 5: Rolling out the European Universities Initiative and upskilling scientists
   • Action 6: Skills to support the green and digital transitions, through developing a set of core green skills, statistical monitoring of the greening of our workplaces, boosting digital skills through a Digital Education Action Plan and ICT jump-start training courses
   • Action 7: Increase STEM graduates, fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills
   • Action 8: Skills for life in order to support adult learning (young people and adults) on issues such as media literacy, civic competences and financial, environment and health literacy

3. Developing Tools and set-up initiatives that empower people to build skills throughout lifelong learning:
   • Action 9: Initiative on individual learning accounts which can help close existing gaps in the access to training and successfully manage job transitions
   • Action 10: A European approach to micro-credentials in order to recognise short courses particularly in the digital field
   • Action 11: New Europass platform, to help people effectively communicate their skills and qualifications and to proactively guide them to a job or learning opportunity

4. A framework to unlock investments in skills:
   • Action 12: Improving the enabling framework to unlock Member States’ and private investments in skills

The Skills Agenda has set up the following four objectives for the next five years (European Commission, 2020):

1. Participation of adults aged 25-64 in learning during the last 12 months to increase to 50% by 2025, from 38% in 2016.
2. Participation of low-qualified adults aged 25-64 in learning during the last 12 months to increase to 30% by 2025, from 18% in 2016.
3. Share of unemployed adults aged 25-64 with recent learning experience to increase to 20% by 2025, from 11% in 2016.
4. Share of adults aged 16-74 having at least basic digital skills to increase to 70% by 2025, from 56% in 2016.

Adult education must contribute to inclusive and digital societies and to developing learning workplaces (European Commission, 2019):

• Inclusive societies: adult learning could do more to include key competences in the learning processes and contribute to inclusive societies.
• Digital societies: adult learning should focus more on the use of digital tools.
• Learning workplaces: adult learning could further stimulate learning in the workplace, emphasizing that the workplace is seen as a site of learning for all.

Recommendations for Future European Policies and Strategies (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2019):

1. Broad and Holistic Approaches
2. Ensure Policy Coherence
3. Strengthened adult learning structures and policy makers
4. Structure and Financial Support
5. Promotion of Civil Dialogue for Adult Learning

Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning identifies eight key competences needed for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion:

• Literacy
• Multilingualism
• Numerical, scientific and engineering skills
• Digital and technology-based competences
• Interpersonal skills, and the ability to adopt new competences
• Active citizenship
• Entrepreneurship
• Cultural awareness and expression
EU Drive towards Digital Education

- In Malta, The National Digital Strategy 2014 – 2020 was published in March 2014, focusing on education, citizens, and the proposal of enhancing and extending the intensity of ICT in educational curricula, harnessing the potential of senior citizens, up-skill and re-skill persons in vulnerable groups and increase female participation in the ICT Industry.

- In 2017, the Malta ICT Skills Audit highlighted the fact that if a career in IT is not catered for adequately, could become problematic, and cause a slow-down on the Maltese industry growth and prosperity.

- In 2018, the Commission’s Digital Education Action Plan (2018-2020) aimed to play a key role in the boosting of ‘growth, innovation and job creation’, reiterating that digital technology has increasingly become at the forefront since it enriches learning in a variety of ways and offers learning opportunities, which must be accessible to all. The digital transformation of the economy means that almost all jobs now require some level of digital skills.

- In 2019, four in five young people (80%) aged 16 to 24 in the European Union (EU) had basic or above basic digital skills. This was 24 percentage points (pp) higher than the share of individuals aged 16 to 74 (56%) (Eurostat, 2020).

- In February 2020, the Commission unveiled the European Digital Strategy to ‘Shape Europe’s Digital Future’ aiming to become a ‘global role model for the digital economy; support developing economies in going digital; develop digital standards and promote them internationally’.

- The Commission is expected to adopt a new Digital Education Action Plan by September 2020. Currently there is an open consultation to gather the views of citizens, institutions and organisations on their experiences and expectations during the COVID-19 crisis well as their visions for the future of digital education.

Participation in Adult Learning in Europe

- One of the targets under the strategic framework for European cooperation and training (ET 2020) is that, at European level, an average of at least 15% of adults (aged 25 to 64) should participate in lifelong learning by 2020 (Eurostat, 2019);

- Modest progress towards the EU target for adult participation in learning has been observed since 2010. The European average (28 countries) in 2010 was 9.3% (European Commission, 2019).

- In 2018, the participation rate in the EU stood at 11.1%, 0.2 percentage points increase when compared to 2017. The rate has increased gradually since 2015, when it was 10.7%. (Eurostat, 2019);

- On average, across the EU, in 2018, the participation rate for adult learning among women was higher (12.1%) than the rate for men (10.1%) (Eurostat, 2019);

![Objective for 2025](image_url)

**FIGURE 1:** Share of adults (25-64) participating in learning, 2011-2016 (%) (EU Adult Education Survey). Data excludes informal learning and guided on the job training. Data for Croatia in not available in 2011. There was a break in time series between 2011 and 2016 in Sweden, Ireland and Luxemburg. The countries are ranked in a descending order based on 2016 data (European Commission, 2020)
• In 2016, 44.4% of people in the EU aged 25 to 64 took part in education and training, the majority of which participating in non-formal education and training. This marked an increase of 3.5 percentage points compared with the previous survey, which was conducted in 2011 (Eurostat, 2020).

• In 2016, participation rates in EU Member States ranged from 7.0% to 64.1% (Eurostat, 2020).

• The participation of younger persons (aged 25–34) in the EU was more than 20 percentage points higher than that of older ones (aged 55–64) in 2016 (Eurostat, 2020).

• Persons with a tertiary level education reported the highest participation rates (65.4% for the EU in 2016), while those having completed, at most, lower secondary education were the least likely to have participated (23.6%) (Eurostat, 2020).

• In 2016, employers in the EU were the most common providers of non-formal education and training activities (33.8%) (Eurostat, 2020).

• In 2016, 59.9% of adults aged 25-64 in the EU reported participation in any informal learning. Participation in informal learning ranged from below 35 % in Lithuania and Poland to over 90 % in Croatia and Cyprus. In the majority of countries, women were more likely than men to participate in this type of learning (Eurostat, 2020).
Lifelong Learning Policy in Malta

Malta’s recent education policy initiatives are shaped by membership of the European Union and the Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (2011). In 2014 the Ministry for Education (MFED) in Malta published the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024; the second of its four educational goals being to increase participation in lifelong learning and adult learning. The Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 covers the 2014-2020 period (Carpentieri, 2019).

- In Malta, the proportion of low-qualified adults is still high but there is a gradual improvement. The overall proportion of adults aged 25 to 64 who have low qualifications was down from 48.9% in 2017 to 46.7% in 2018, and their employment rate increased over that year from 58.6% to 60.9% (European Commission, 2019);

- In Malta, the case for further upskilling and reskilling is strong, since the 125,800 low-qualified adults largely exceed the elementary jobs available (European Commission, 2019);

- There was an increase in adult learning participation, which rose from 7.7% in 2014 to 12% in 2019, still 3 percentage points below the EU 15% benchmark (Eurostat 2020);

- In 2019, the participation rate for adult learning among women was higher (13.4%) than the rate for men (10.7%), both above the EU average (11.9% for women and 9.8% for men) (Eurostat, 2020);

- Participation for people with tertiary qualifications has increased by 6.2 percentage points and is now above the EU average (22.6% v EU 19.0% in 2018). For low-qualified adults who are more in need of upskilling and reskilling, this has only increased by 0.7 percentage points (from 3.4% to 4.1%) since 2010 (European Commission, 2019).

- Total number of persons aged 25-64 who have actively sought information about education and training possibilities during 2016 amounted to 45,664 (equivalent to 19.3 percent of the estimated target population count) (NSO, 2018).

- The number of persons participating in Formal Education (FED) increased from 4.4% (9,481 persons) reported in 2011 to 7.2% (16,994 persons) in 2016 (NSO, 2018). The most popular reason for undertaking formal education was to increase skills/knowledge in a subject of interest, with 92.3% of FED participants confirming this (NSO, 2018). Each FED participant spent an annual average of 245 hours in this form of learning during 2016 (NSO, 2018).

- 33.8% of the target population participated in Non-Formal Education (NFE) during the reference period (NSO, 2018).
Nearly 40% of the youngest category of respondents (aged 25-34 years) did not participate in either FED or NFE activity during 2016 and did not show any interest in future participation (NSO, 2018).

The number of persons participating in Informal Education (INF) stood at 42% (99,178 persons) in 2016 (NSO, 2018).

The largest proportion of INF participants belonged to the age group 35-54, with 48.7% (48,338 persons) (NSO, 2018).

In 2015, 16.1% of enterprises in Malta provided some form of Initial Vocational Training (IVT) and 61% provided some form of Continuous Vocational Training (CVT). In fact, 35.8% employees underwent at least one CVT course (NSO, 2017).

Around 1.5 million paid working hours were spent on CVT courses (0.8 percent of the total paid working hours), 56.5% of which were allocated to Internal CVT courses (NSO, 2017).

Enterprises spent an average of €636 per participant on CVT courses plus an average personal absence cost (i.e. the indirect cost of sending employees to training) of €522 per participant, adding the total average cost (direct and indirect) up to €1,158 per participant (NSO, 2017).

Conversely, 38.4% of enterprises did not provide any form of training to their employees, including 66% of all small size enterprises. The majority of enterprises who did not provide any training claimed that this was because employees were already skilled or qualified prior to employment (NSO, 2017).

In Malta the incidence of low skilling among adults is higher than those observed on average in the EU28+ countries, both in the level of education and in the computer and digital skills. In particular, the share of adults with low educational attainment levels is particularly high, reaching almost 55% of the adult population in 2016 (Cedefop, 2019).

The share of adult population in potential need of upskilling (education attainment), literacy, numeracy and digital competences) is estimated to range between 65.6% and 71.5% of its total adult population (from 154 to 168 thousand adults), depending on the measure of digital competences considered (Cedefop, 2019).

Low skilling is particularly high among people out of the labour force aged 55-64 and 35-54. They all present on average the highest share of low skilling in all domains considered; education and digital skills (Cedefop, 2019).

Women account for approximately 48% to 53% of the adult population with low education and low digital skills, respectively. Among adult women, the absolute risk of low skilling is higher for education (54%) as compared to the other skill dimensions. Moreover, the relative risk of low skilling is higher among women out of the labour force (inactive) and among unemployed women in all the skill dimensions considered (Cedefop, 2019).

Figure 5: Incidence of low skilling among adults aged 25-64 by type skills (%) (Cedefop, 2019)
Examples of successful strategic actions emerging from the National Lifelong Learning Strategy for Malta 2014 – 2020

- Between 2014 and 2017, the Lifelong Learning Task Force Group was set up to ensure a single, coherent place to guide actions in Lifelong Learning. In 2018, the groups’ remit was extended to oversee the implementation of both the Lifelong Learning Strategy for Malta 2020 and the monitoring of the Upskilling Pathways recommendation (MEDE, 2017).

- In order to improve adults’ basic skills, in 2016, the University of Malta created the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education where it introduced a two-year evening diploma course in adult education, training and development. In 2018, the Department launched a 1-year-long programme for those holding qualifications in adult education or an equivalent to pursue the master’s degree course in adult education (European Commission, 2019).

- Malta established The Upskilling Pathways Core Working Group, one of the recommendations established by the Skills Agenda in 2016 (European Commission, 2019). Through this working group, the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability engaged experts to conduct a Basic Skills Policy review and devised an implementation plan for basic skills provision (MEDE, 2017).

- Malta implemented ‘The Schools as Community Learning Spaces Programme’ (SCLS). The main aim of this programme was to create a learning space in schools for adults (including parents and guardians) whose children are in compulsory education in order to increase the rate of participation in learning and improve their basic skills. A total number of 6 schools took part in this project (European Commission, 2019).

- Malta is participating in CITO: CheckIn TakeOff, one of the projects under the ERASMUS+ EU Policy experimentation in the fields of Education and Training led by high-level public authorities in Malta, Ireland and Norway. This project aims to develop a SkillsChecker tool that enables individuals to independently carry out an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and digital skills and provide options for flexible learning opportunities as well as a pathway to recognise these skills (European Commission, 2019).

- Malta along with five other countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece and Slovenia), is participating in an ERASMUS+ project on basic skills namely PROFI-TRAIN. PROFI-TRAIN uses the knowledge base of work based basic skills training and aims at the development of a transferable and flexible professional training concept for experts in adult education and vocational training (MEDE, 2017).

- Malta is taking part in the Back to Learning project (2018-2020) focusing on developing key competences of adults for high quality learning opportunities. One of the main objectives of the project is to get acquainted with the good practices applied by the organisations of the international partnership in the area of the development of key competences of adults who lack the skills needed for becoming employed and for lifelong learning.

- Malta established The National Skills Council in 2016 with the aim to first analyse the present available skills within the labour work force, evaluate the changes required and propose and plan strategies and training opportunities that would reduce these gaps and prepare the labour force with the right skills to meet current and future needs (Government of Malta, 2020).

- In 2019, the Lifelong Learning Unit piloted an Active Citizenship Education programme, offering non-formal teaching and learning strategies focusing on different aspects of becoming an engaged member of the community.

- In 2020, in response to reducing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the Lifelong Learning Unit introduced online course provision. Online course provision is introduced as part of the regular course provision from academic year 2020/21.
Adult Basic Skills Provision in Malta

- The proportion of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 in Malta is still markedly above the EU average (17.5% versus 10.6% in 2018) (European Commission, 2019).

- The performance of 15-year-olds when using basic skills is low compared to other Members of the European Union (European Commission, 2019) and Malta’s performance in reading, mathematics and science was significantly low compared to the EU member states (PISA 2018). Furthermore, there was a gender gap whereby girls outperformed boys in the mentioned tested fields (Education GPS OECD, 2020).

- In academic year 2019/2020, 8222 learners enrolled in courses provided by the Lifelong Learning Unit, of which 1,385 enrolments were in basic skills courses, with more than half (57%) of enrolments being in Maltese as a Foreign Language (MFL) courses (Carpentieri and Lister, 2019), yet fewer than 2% of all enrolments taking up mathematics courses (ibid.) The largest enrolment cohort was that of 30-34 year olds.

- As from the academic year 2013/2014, there was a decrease in the number of enrolments (both females and males), where the largest number of enrolments was in 2014/2015. However, there was an increase in EU and Third Country Nationals (TCN) enrolments (except for the year 2019/2020 for TCN) in contrast to a decline in Maltese Nationals enrolments.
• As from the academic year 2018/2019, the majority of enrolments were at MQF 1 followed by courses at MQF 2. Courses below MQF 1 were the least chosen.

• In 2020, learners at the lifelong learning unit had an average pass rate of 94.8%, slightly higher than 2017 (90.6%).

• In 2020, the pass rate in Maltese and English as a Foreign Language at MQF 1 was 98.2% and 98.6%, much higher than 2017 (91.1% and 78.5%).

Feedback on Basic Skills Course Provision by the Lifelong Learning Unit indicates that:

• About 68% managed to complete the course. However, around 11% of the applicants did not attend the courses at all, mainly due to unforeseen family circumstances (Grant Thornton, 2015). The main issues of those who stopped attending the course were unforeseen family circumstances, delivery of the course clashed with work commitments and health issues (ibid.).

• 9% of the respondents who attended the Computer Awareness course did not complete the course because they found it too difficult, computers provided were old and participants in the class had different levels of knowledge of the subject (ibid.).

• Respondents found the educators to be well prepared (94.5%) and available to discuss queries (92.6%). However, the only main issue was lack of communication in class (ibid.).

• Respondents lamented the use of language during Lifelong Learning course provision, either because they were foreign and the lessons took place in Maltese or because their level of English made it difficult for them to follow an English language class taught solely in English. In both cases, learners found that language was a barrier to their learning of the subject (ibid.).

• The assessment method was deemed as appropriate by the majority of respondents (86.0%), while 3.9% found it too complex (ibid.).

• 10.9% of the respondents found the course location inappropriate because of distance and transport problems, especially in the case of elderly people (ibid.); Transport challenges were the key barrier to attendance – both for learners and for educators (Carpentieri and Lister, 2019). Traffic congestion and poor public transport delay prevented people getting to classes and also had an impact on course choice, where adults chose courses less on their educational suitability and more on their accessibility (ibid.).

• The time and duration of the course was not convenient to 14.6% of the respondents (Grant Thornton, 2015).

• Pensioners would prefer to attend the courses in the morning while employed persons prefer to attend late in the afternoon (ibid.).

• With regards to the lecture room, 17.5% found it inappropriate due to various issues, namely, inadequate equipment, lack of cleanliness, broken or no furniture, lack of light, slow internet connection, and lack of accessibility to the buildings (ibid.).

• DRLLE set no specific targets for the number of basic skills enrolments (whether in total or by subject), nor for course completions or qualifications gained (whether in total or by level) (ibid.).

• Basic skills provision in Malta lacked a clear identity, certainly in comparison with the wider Lifelong Learning Strategy, and some uncertainty was found among those in the sector about the composition and reach of the basic skills offer.

• There had been no national data gathering exercise on the language, literacy, and numeracy levels of the adult population and Malta did not participate in the OECD’s Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (ibid.).

• Both PIAAC and findings from the DRLLE’s pilot research (Fenech & Mifsud, 2019) suggest that where employers do provide work-based learning or on-the-job training the focus has been on work practices (e.g. job-specific or health and safety training) and company ethos, not basic skills (ibid.).

• In academic years 2014/15 and 2016/17 more women than men enrolled on basic skills courses and most learners were drawn from older age groups (very few were aged under 25 years). Around four in ten learners were employed, and a significant minority had achieved tertiary-level education (ibid.).

• In Malta, adults typically learn about basic skills provision through word-of-mouth (ibid.).

• The enrolment process is an inconsistent process lacking formal support services to guide learners onto appropriate courses (ibid.).

• Information, advice and guidance services specifically aimed at adults with low basic skills are not integrated into the current basic skills offer (ibid.).

• Majority of the respondents reported high levels of satisfaction and say they have benefitted educationally and socially from these courses (ibid.).
• Learners particularly value the hard work of their educators who were patient and flexible and made effective use of formative feedback (ibid.).

• Learners and educators alike faced challenges when the abilities in the classroom were highly varied. There is currently no specific way to identify learners with learning disabilities and no provision targeted to this cohort (ibid.).

• Educators currently have autonomy in the classroom as there is no national curriculum or syllabus to follow until learners reach Level 3 (ibid.).

• As there is no national curriculum or syllabus for basic skills in Malta, there is no centralised supply of teaching and learning resources (ibid.).

• The duration and intensity of courses (generally one three-hour class per week) was felt by educators to suit learners well, even if there was some frustration on the part of educators about the amount of progress that could be made (ibid.).

• However, there was a strong feeling that the current “school format” is unsuited to basic skills, as its rigidity works against the flexibility many adult learners need. The current structure is evidence also of a one-size-for-all approach (ibid.).

• With a limited pool of available educators, there is a dissonance between a desire at the policy level to create a flexible and learner-responsive portfolio of provision, offering courses to suit the demands on individuals and communities, and the inflexibility of an educator landscape where the right person is not available to teach the right course at the preferred time (ibid.).

The Future of Adult Learning

The European Education Area proposes to raise the participation of adults in lifelong learning to 25% by 2025. It is necessary to increase participation in general, but particularly of those adults with low basic skills (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2019).

To progress in this direction, further attention post-2020 needs to be given to (European Commission, 2019):

• Financing

• Coordination

• Engagement with employers

• Professionalisation of adult learning staff and institutions
STRATEGY AIMS

National Strategy

This National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020-2030 aims to:

• Facilitate the possibility of adults to continue learning

• Ensure that 15% of adults continue their education

• Create synergies between multiple stakeholders

• Instigate a national conversation about adult learning

• Continuously improving adult learning

• Support other entities within the Ministry for Education, such as the Unit for the Prevention of Early School Leavers, the National Literacy Agency and the National Skills Council, to implement elements of their Strategies, the remit of which overlaps with or complements that of the Lifelong Learning Unit;

• Align course provision of the Lifelong Learning Unit with Malta’s changing skills needs and in alignment with the economic vision of the Government of the day.

STRATEGY OUTLINE

The Four Pillars

This Strategy is embedded in the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 and the evidence from EU and local research. It comprises four main pillars:

PILLAR I
Improving educational opportunities for low-skilled and low-qualified adults at higher risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion

PILLAR II
Diversifying the methods and opportunities for learning

PILLAR III
Ensuring quality in Lifelong Learning course provision

PILLAR IV
Supporting adults to make informed educational decisions through the provision of a guidance system
Strategic Measure 1: Address skills gaps by diversifying the provision of adult learning courses

Strategic Actions:

1. Work with the relevant bodies to create a framework on basic skills by collaborating with foreign and national partners. This Framework should allow for the:
   - Development of an accredited in-between training award for educators already qualified in pedagogy to improve their knowledge and skills in andragogy
   - The creation of intensive short courses on literacy, numeracy, digital skills and life skills through different modes of flexible learning
2. Offer vocational and applied courses up to MQF 3
3. Review course provision, on the basis of data obtained by the Skills Observatory within the National Skills Council to broaden vocational and applied learning opportunities for adults, which are relevant and add value to both the individual and the enterprise
4. Consider the feasibility of providing courses on the basis of Occupational Standards. Develop, seek accreditation and implement such courses.

Strategic Measure 2: Addressing skills deficit by introducing skills assessment measures

Strategic Actions:

1. Develop a diagnostic assessment to increase better matches between learners and courses. This diagnostic assessment needs to inform the delivery of courses and allows for a review to ensure its efficacy.
2. Provide support for learners to enrol and engage in learning at the appropriate level

Strategic Measure 3: Carry out a tracer study of learning at the Lifelong Learning Unit

Strategic Actions:

1. Develop a learner tracking policy for students enrolled in any lifelong learning course. This tracking policy should include tracking learners’ educational and employment progression from date of application for a course with the Lifelong Learning Unit until one-year post-course completion
2. Develop the technical infrastructure to enable automated and timely tracking of learners’ attendance and participation in class to be able to immediately detect potential drop-outs so that the Guidance Unit will be able to provide mentoring, support and, where necessary, mediation with a view to preventing drop-outs
3. Collect and analyse longitudinal data and understand practices of participation for further improvement in services. Liaise with stakeholders to ensure that gaps identified through longitudinal data are addressed

Strategic Measure 4: Support adults to access financial support for learning

Strategic Actions:

1. Stock-take existing funding opportunities available to adults who wish to continue their learning to evaluate the funding opportunities currently available in Malta. The stock take is to include a gap analysis to identify areas of learning or learner populations to which funding is not available or accessible. Upon completion initiatives are to be proposed in response to the gap analysis
2. Offer amended or new funding opportunities on the basis of the aforementioned recommendations, which funding will be linked with the provision of Career and Educational Guidance (see Pillar 4)
3. Review the uptake, impact and long-term outcomes of available funding opportunities with a view to making recommendations for further improvement in funding provision
Strategic Measure 5: Improve the accessibility of Lifelong Learning course provision to persons with disabilities

**Strategic Actions:**

1. Carry out research to inform the development of courses aimed at teaching skills for independent living and employment. Deliver such courses through an applied pedagogy and assessment.
2. Carry out an accessibility audit of learning spaces within which Lifelong Learning courses are provided to ensure conformity to standards.
3. Develop and seek recognition for courses aimed at teaching skills for independent living, through an applied pedagogy and assessment. Such courses will be tailored to different cohorts of persons with disabilities, targeting their specific needs.
4. Develop and seek recognition for courses that enable persons with disabilities to join the workforce. The delivery of this course needs to be aligned with the needs of its target audience, including, where necessary, specialised equipment and HR support.
5. Plan infrastructural improvements or alternatives to ensure that Lifelong Learning courses are delivered within accessible premises so that physical accessibility will not be a barrier to learning.
6. Provide free transport to persons with disabilities to ensure that transport is not a barrier to following Lifelong Learning courses.

Strategic Measure 6: Reduce the educational inequality gap between Maltese nationals and migrants living in Malta

**Strategic Actions:**

1. Establish a working group that tackles migrant education. The working group is to ensure that learning offer is reaching all migrants to allow for fair and equal treatment. This working group is to create an outreach plan to outline what gaps are found in the educational attainment of migrants, and create collaborative incentives to align these gaps. The working group should explore ways in which newly arrived migrants, particularly young people, can be targeted and supported to enter education.
2. Developing outreach activities focusing on adult learners’ motivation through an educational campaign targeted at migrants that increases awareness of courses, guidance measures and support that is available.
3. Develop, seek accreditation and deliver literacy courses in migrants’ mother tongue to address literacy issues in first languages. This needs to be accompanied by an assessment of the programme and outcome quality of the literacy course in migrants’ mother tongue with a view to deciding whether to alter, cease or expand provision of such courses.
4. Develop MOUs with stakeholders in the migration field so that newly arrived migrants, particularly young people will be referred to the guidance unit. It is to be ensured that the guidance unit (pillar 4) develops cultural competences.
5. Develop an immersive cultural integration programme to include culturally sensitive language courses in collaboration with stakeholders.
6. Develop, seek accreditation and implement a course for cultural mediators, which courses would improve cultural mediators’ professionalism, education and employability.

Strategic Measure 7: Adult learning as a compensatory measure for Early Leaving from Education and Training

**Strategic Actions:**

1. Work with the Early School Leaving (ESL) Unit within the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability to direct schools as community learning as a measure to help parents of students at risk of becoming early school leavers.
2. Deliver, together with the ESL Unit, a school as community learning programme across the different colleges. Review the delivered schools as community learning programme with a view to further widen and extend the programme.
3. Partner with educational establishments and industry to develop educational and employment pathways.
4. Engage in individual coaching and mentoring for early school leavers who approach the Lifelong Learning Unit, informing them about pathways for further study or into employment, helping them enrol in courses which meet their aspirations and supporting them to continue and successfully complete courses of their choice.
5. Explore the introduction of the Adult Learning Card as a means to make funding more accessible and keep better track of adult learning.
6. Promote modular courses with starting dates at several points throughout the calendar year.
7. Develop an outreach programme to target Early School Leavers or persons at risk of becoming Early School Leavers to help them return to education. Work with the ESL Unit to provide second-chance education through offering intensive courses that enable learners to achieve an MQF3 qualification within one year, with the possibility of progressing to further qualifications or employment.

**Strategic Measure 8: Continuous Professional Development to educators teaching basic skills**

**Strategic Actions:**

1. Provide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for educators who wish to work specifically with adults on basic skills.

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**PILLAR II**

**Diversifying the methods and opportunities for learning**

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**Strategic Measure 1: Promote Community Learning**

**Strategic Actions:**

1. Develop a Community Learning Unit as a branch of Lifelong Learning provision with a view to promote learning within specific communities. Through this unit create and implement a strategy where hard to reach adults are targeted.

2. Review Community Learning Provision with a view to improving, strengthening and promoting provision.

3. Support Primary and Secondary Schools in Malta and Gozo to become community learning spaces. Initiate discussions with School Management Teams to identify the learning needs of the School Community and to facilitate collaborative learning while reducing duplication of provision.

4. Develop flexible learning spaces for adults to engage in learning, through collaboration with School Management Teams, to create an environment which is conducive to learning.

5. Create informal and non-formal learning programmes within schools depending on the needs of the community.

6. Strengthen the provision of active citizenship education, offering non-formal educational opportunities focusing on different aspects of becoming an engaged member of the community.
Strategic Measure 2: Strengthening work-based learning in collaboration with industry

Strategic Actions:

1. Develop an outreach campaign for employers to explore the possibilities of providing training for better employability and to explain the importance of transversal skills to cope with a changing market. Through this outreach campaign, collaborate with stakeholders to identify companies and SMEs that need to provide training to their employees. The campaign can also feature the importance of building resilience to crisis, on issues such as media literacy, civic competences and financial, environment and health literacy.

2. Through a number of Memoranda of Understanding with various stakeholders in industry, explore a strategy whereby the needs of industry are clear to the lifelong learning provision and create educational programmes where adult educators are more aware of such necessities. Through Malta Enterprise, adult learning will commit its willingness to provide tailor made programmes for the industry.

3. Pilot on the job training with employers through specialised programmes and curricula. This could include the development, support and promotion of short-term courses in skills areas which are industry specific and are valuable for employers in the labour market.

4. Create new methods of learning within certain courses to allow for a better reflection of work practices.

5. Liaise with the Malta Crafts Council with a view to altering the Lifelong Learning Unit’s course provision in a way that enables learning pathways and sensitises social entrepreneurship. Deliver such courses pegged to a learning pathway.

6. Improve the skills of adult educators through modularised programmes, which include on the job workplace learning.

7. Create a guidance mechanism which will allow adult educators and coordinators to act as mentors to support work life balance and work-learning constraints.

Strategic Measure 3: Improve digital education and lifelong learning

Strategic Actions:

1. Develop educator-training programmes to include short-term and modular programmes focusing on digital education and competences to upskill/reskill educators. There should be a selection of tailored courses available for learners including online and blended learning focusing on the needs of the individuals, the society and employment.

2. Improve Digital/ICT curricula representing the 21st century skills and adapting to the emergent technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, Computer Science, Instructional Design and Educational Technologies. This allows for proper instructional Design and encourages Educational Technologists to ensure the personalisation of content and delivery and provide versatile courses for formal and non-formal education.

3. Mentoring and Peer-to-Peer Learning provision for educators in collaboration with the Private Sector to improve the educators’ digital competences.

4. An online digital education hub for educators with resources, training availabilities, professional development courses and Peer-to-Peer Mentoring such as availability of active teacher mentoring.

5. Improving access to the internet and technology for Educators whilst enhancing the digital environment with available software for teaching and learning.

6. A multi-partner group with a collaborative aspect that constantly reviews existing policies such as the Digital Education Action Plan (2021 – 2027) and supports research and innovation in digital education. This working group should put forward recommendations to implement emergent technologies across online teaching and learning while supporting, proposing and engaging in on-going research. This research should yield recommendations and implementation of new software, any minor adjustments and review of the emergent trends in technology.

7. Piloting a physical digital hub for learners with state-of-the-art technology and a community space fit for lifelong learners with the possibility of further extending the hubs in various geographical locations including Malta and Gozo.

8. Improving access to the internet, technology and offering learning solutions such as MOOCS, OERs, Blended and Online Courses for different learners. This in turn allows for the creation of multi-modal learning activities and immersive technologies such as virtual and augmented realities and learning support for all learners and increase engagement and retention of learners.
9. A centralised feedback form completed by all learners who attend/complete online blended courses to identify areas that need adjustment and improvements. An online live analysis of the feedback form to inform policy makers, stakeholders, collaborators about the actual digital education strategy in Malta

10. Review of the lifelong learning strategy 2020-2030 and recommendation for the implementation of Digital Education in the new lifelong learning strategy

11. To introduce simplification measures and seek new funding to appeal to a wider audience and generate partnerships between stakeholders

**Strategic Measure 4: Recognition and validation of prior learning**

**Strategic Actions:**

1. Creating dialogue with entities who are providing validation of prior learning to understand processes, provide support, discuss standards and streamline practices to develop practical validation arrangements together with stakeholders. This dialogue should also cater for the discussion of the guidelines for validating non formal and informal learning (VINFL) to enhance the development of this common platform.

2. Creating a framework for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that contains 3 stages: Pre-assessment (evidence based), Assessment (documentation of evidence), Feedback and Awarding the credit

The Recognition of Prior Learning assessments will be included in standardisation and evaluation activities so that processes are reviewed, and approaches improved based on user feedback. After the assessment, the assessor will need to give feedback to the learner, discussing the results and giving support and guidance on the options available to the learner. If the decision has been not to award credit(s), the learners will have to undertake the current standard assessment for those unit(s)

**Strategic Measure 5: Deliver courses which are applied and vocational in nature**

**Strategic Actions:**

1. To align the course offer with MyJourney through the introduction of VET subjects, up to MQF3 and the Applied subjects, in line with EQAVET requirements as part of the national QA framework for Further and Higher Education up to the total of 9 courses as outlined by MyJourney. This introduction needs to be accompanied by a discussion with schools for the purposes of opening VET labs for adult learning

2. To further develop courses in areas not serviced by SEC and also to develop modular courses in response to Occupational Standards

3. Liaise with industry to implement a modular system, which gives value to units accomplished by an individual. Launch a quality-assured apprenticeship scheme with stakeholder engagement
PILLAR III
Ensuring quality in adult education

Strategic Measure 1: Improving the institutional quality of the Lifelong Learning Unit

Strategic Actions:

1. Establish an internal ‘Think Tank’ to propose ideas for broadening and improving Lifelong Learning Course provision

2. Clarify the ethos and identity of the Lifelong Learning Unit, course provision, as well as the operational implications thereof in terms of the intersection between lifelong learning, personal development and employability

3. Develop, formalise or develop further policies and procedures for:
   a. teaching, learning and assessment
   b. student participation and feedback
   c. adaptation of provision and mitigation of assessment, including with respect to students with specific learning needs
   d. resits
   e. complaints and appeals
   f. staff CPD
   g. systematic gathering of data and use thereof public information
   h. determination of participant capacity for each course
   i. course rationalisation
   j. vetting and approval of student selection and matching to course
   k. student feedback.

4. Finalise the Internal Quality Assurance document (IQA), taking into consideration the feedback and recommendations from the first External Quality Assurance Audit Report (EQA), with the participation of all stakeholders, including educators, students and employers.

5. Prepare a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) in preparation for the next EQA during 2024

6. Undergo the mandatory Quality Assurance Audit according to the NCFHE guidelines once every five years

7. Develop and implement a plan for meeting the mandatory recommendations of the 2024 NCFHE external quality audit

8. Enhancing Quality Assurance through implementing of the recommendations for improvement

9. Establish a structure in which Lifelong Learning educators are involved in the assessment cycle, from assessment design to communication of results and review of teaching, learning and course design accordingly. This needs to be accompanied by the introduction of technical support within lifelong learning centres

Strategic Measure 2: Improving the programme quality of the Lifelong Learning Unit

Strategic Actions:

1. Review the lifelong learning language provision, focusing on student engagement in all language skills, so that lessons learnt can be applied to all other language courses. This needs to be accompanied by a review in course provision to ensure alignment with MQF levels.

2. Introduce a virtual learning environment to complement in-class instruction

3. Introduce a system to collect learner feedback annually while also analysing data already available to inform the Lifelong Learning Unit’s business information process as well as course design, review and range of offer.
Strategic Measure 3: Professionalise educators and other staff working in andragogy

Strategic Actions:

1. Work with the University of Malta and the Institute for Education to ensure regular provision of accredited courses in andragogy. Explore the possibility of developing and implementing a system for warranting adult educators. It is important to promote accredited courses in andragogy among educators and staff working within adult learning provision.

2. Sensitise training institutions, such as the University of Malta and the Institute for the Public Service, to develop Continuous Professional Development courses for adult educators. Create opportunities for continuous professional development for educators and coordinators as well as knowledge transfer and sharing of resources among educators.

3. Training officers and mentoring advisors to be able to better support adults seeking to re-enter education as part of the guidance unit.

4. Develop online modular courses with EBSN to upskill educators who teach basic skills. Pilot the online modular courses for educators teaching basic skills. Improve, accredit and deliver the online modular courses for educators teaching basic skills.

Strategic Measure 4: Manage the implementation of this Lifelong Learning Strategy

Strategic Actions:

1. Enhance the coordination of the National Lifelong Learning and Upskilling Task Force with the primary objective of owning, leading and coordinating the implementation of this strategy. Ownership and governance of this strategy and the implementation of programmes are pre-requisites, since the structures involved in this strategy are not just limited to adult education institutions, but other Ministries, public and private entities, NGOs and members of civil society. This strategy should form the basis for the Task Force’s terms of reference. The National Lifelong Learning and Upskilling Task Force is chaired by the Permanent Secretary and includes participation from the Directorate for Lifelong Learning, the University of Malta, MCAST, Jobsplus, the National Skills Council and Foundation for Educational Services.

2. Improve the measures outlined in this strategy on the basis of the outcome of the annual review and data collected by emergent data up until 2030.

3. Develop an evaluation scoreboard against which the outcomes of this Strategy are measured and evaluated every 12-months. Establish a procedure for a review of the Lifelong Learning strategy.

4. Direct and coordinate funding towards adult education in order to be able to implement the measures outlined in this Strategy.
PILLAR IV
Supporting adults to make informed decisions through the provision of a guidance system

Strategic Measure 1: Improve the Lifelong Learning Unit's capacity to provide learners with pastoral care

Strategic Actions:

1. Provide training to customer care personnel, who may interact with current or prospective learners at the Lifelong Learning Unit, on the course offer, disability equality training and other relevant matters. Develop modular professional development sessions for staff within the Lifelong Learning Unit on lifelong learning guidance outreach strategies.

2. Develop a marketing and outreach plan to steer outreach and promote guidance with stakeholders, learners and educators. This needs to happen in tandem whilst the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability increases the staff capacity of the Lifelong Learning Unit to provide pastoral support to those requiring such services. The marketing plan and outreach plan should accommodate for the creation of a support system to track educational progression and a system of mentoring for adults beyond course completion.

Strategic Measure 2: Establish an independent guidance unit

Strategic Actions:

1. Establish an independent guidance unit, together with stakeholders, aimed at supporting adults about educational opportunities in a learner-centred, neutral manner.
   - The guidance unit is to:
     - provide support to adults contemplating restarting or continuing their education, by helping them to explore and evaluate the potential value of learning and to find self-directed motivation to continue learning;
     - provide information and guidance to adults wishing to continue or restart their education, by providing information about the various courses available to them, helping them to explore the options and come to a positive educational decision, and supporting them with the application process.

2. The Guidance Unit is to develop partnerships with industry stakeholders to entice industry to enable education and training opportunities for their staff and to reduce existing mismatches between the career aspirations of learners and opportunities in the labour market.

3. The Guidance Unit is to create a culture where guidance throughout life is normalised and expected.

4. The guidance unit is to be complemented by an Educational Psychologist and learning difficulty specialist to support learners with overcoming barriers to learning.

5. Launch an awareness campaign on undiagnosed learning difficulties in adults (ensuring inclusive and equitable, quality education as a second chance). The guidance unit is to then propose measures to address undiagnosed learning difficulties in adults.

6. Promote lifelong learning to sensitise adults to consider learning as an option for improving themselves and their prospects. This will be done through campaigns aimed at the general population and specific at-risk groups.

7. Develop training to career and/or employment advisors to be able to engage with the public and provide immediate support in the community.

- develop a directory of all adult learning courses provided in Malta and Gozo containing information about the courses, their level of recognition and accreditation (if applicable), and how to access more information about the courses and their providers.
- develop a website and social media pages aimed at providing access to the aforementioned directory.
- provide real-time online support through the aforementioned website and social media pages and a free of charge call centre.
- develop training to career and/or employment advisors to be able to engage with the general public and provide immediate support in the community.
Annex 1: Stakeholders

The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability will be working with the primary operators in the Lifelong Learning Sector in Malta and Gozo in implementing this strategy.

The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education is the primary public organisation in charge of Lifelong Learning. Its primary objective is to develop a strong and responsive adult learning sector.

The Directorate interfaces on a regular basis with a number of stakeholders with an interest in Lifelong Learning.

These include:

- Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children’s rights
- Ministry for Justice, Equality and Governance
- Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs
- Ministry for Health
- Ministry for Finance and Employment
- Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure & Capital Projects
- Ministry for Research, Innovation and the Co-ordination of Post Covid-19 strategy
- Jobsplus
- State and non-state educational establishments
- National Skills Council
- National Commission for Further and Higher Education
- National Literacy Agency
- Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
- Early Leaving from Education and Training Unit
- Directorate for Digital Literacy and Transversal Skills
- Malta Enterprise

- European Union Programmes Agency (EUPA)
- Planning and Priorities Coordination Division (PPCD)
- Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology
- Support
- Lino Spiteri Foundation
- Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS)
- Refugee Commission
- National School Support Services
- European Basic Skills Network
- EPALE
- Institute for Education
- Local Councils
- Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS)
- Arts Council Malta
- Malta Society of Arts
- School of Performing Arts
- Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA)
- Chamber of Commerce
- Malta Chamber of SME (GRTU)
- Malta Employers’ Association
- Malta Crafts Council
- Malta Digital Innovation Authority
- Foundation for Information Technology Accessibility (FITA)
- Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA)
- University of Malta
- Malta Career Guidance Association
- Institute of Tourism Studies
- Servizz.gov
- Trade Unions
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