**­­Questionnaire on the right to education by every girl in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Input from the Republic of Malta

It is the right of every citizen of Malta to receive education and instruction without any distinction of age, sex, disability, belief or economic means.[[1]](#footnote-1) The right for education is also enshrined in Malta’s Constitution. [[2]](#footnote-2) It is the right of every parent of a minor to give his decision with regard to any matter concerning the education which the minor is to receive.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Education in Malta is compulsory for all children and youths aged from five to sixteen years. This is defined in Chapter 327 of the Laws of Malta - The Education Act - and subsequent amendments. Compulsory education covers six years of primary education followed by five years of secondary education. It is offered full-time and free in all state schools, but parents can opt to educate their children in Church or Independent schools. Education in Church schools is also free while parents of children attending schools in the Independent sector enjoy a number of tax-relief measures.

In Malta, the Ministry for Education and Sport has the mandate to monitor the development of education in the country via the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education. Malta persists in its work for equality of opportunity and accessibility for all. Malta’s education policy is built on two main premises: equity and quality. This commitment is evidenced by an inclusive policy at all levels of education.

Malta’s updated National Inclusion Policy and Framework re-designed processes and practices in a manner that respond effectively to all learners’ needs and social realities. It is currently being implemented to address the inclusion of all learners, especially those at risk of being marginalised. This policy, although not specifically targeting the Covid-19 situation, is supporting Malta’s educational system to tackle possible inequalities brought about by the pandemic. This policy has various smart targets related to disability, attendance, behaviour, bullying, gender, and healthy lifestyle. These targets have started being implemented this year and are projected to be reached by 2030 in line with European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030).

Moreover, in Malta, various initiatives are being undertaken to support the inclusion of all learners. These include:

• Several psycho-social services are offered to students and their parents within compulsory education and tertiary level, ranging from psychotherapy services to career guidance services.

• Learning Support Educators paid by the Maltese Government are employed in public, Church and independent schools to universally cater for and support all learners who might be encountering difficulties because of their emotional, social or cultural, linguistic barriers.

• In 2021, during the summer months, a programme for students who had missed on a considerable amount of schooling due to personal or familial vulnerability took place. Apart from the core subjects, a programme to address the social, emotional wellbeing of the learners was implemented.

• Nurture Groups and Learning Support Zones aim to support learners through whole class support in their social, emotional well-being.

• The restructuring of the Early Intervention Service in the early years and adopting a whole school approach to meet the needs of children with a disability as well as those who are manifesting developmental delays or are at risk of falling behind in their education journey and thus not achieving their full potential.

• Continued support to Resource Centres to support learners with a severe disability and Learning Centres to support learners with extreme challenging behaviours. This support includes adequate resources, support services and training.

• Several professional development learning opportunities for educators in various areas of inclusion including but not limited to dealing with challenging behaviour, differentiated teaching, communication development, addressing sensorial issues and behaviours.

• Ongoing support to learners, educators and families through support services offered by the National School Support Services within the Ministry for Education. These include learners with a visual impairment, hearing impairment, learners on the autism spectrum, learners who due to chronic illness receive home tuition and learners currently hospitalised.

• Ongoing collaboration and funding of non-governmental organisations to offer various services in inclusion.

The Ministry for Education and Sport is also working to strengthen individualised learning outcomes to ensure an inclusive system which works for all. Through the ‘My Journey: Achieving through different paths’ reform, the Ministry has sought to provide parity of esteem in general, vocational and applied subjects.

Malta launched an Early Leaving from Education and Training Policy 2020–2030 that aims at an inclusive and holistic whole school approach through fifteen strategic actions within the prevention, intervention and compensation pillars.

In 2014, Malta set up the free childcare scheme, offering free childcare services to children up to the age of 3 years, whose parents are in employment or education. This initiative serves as an opportunity to provide young children with safe and quality child care, stimulating learning environment, establish school going habits and school readiness under the care and guidance of professionals. All children are offered a personalised service of quality care. Working in partnership with primary caregivers, each child is empowered to develop a lifetime of learning in a fun, caring and ​stimulating environment. Furthermore, Malta’s National Policy Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (2021) addresses a democratic, systematic and universal design approach and establishing a shared understanding of quality ECEC.

An after-school hours’ service, ‘Klabb 3-16’, is available for 3–16-year-old children in state primary schools. The programme consists of activities such as arts and crafts, drama and storytelling, physical education and games, cookery sessions, science experiments, activities related to technology, educational talks and workshops that are linked to monthly themes. ​

Malta’s National Literacy Strategy 2021-2030 aims to raise literacy levels and to ensure access to professional development opportunities in literacy learning and teaching.

Malta’s National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020–2030 aims at improving educational opportunities; diversifying methods for learning; ensuring quality in lifelong learning provision; and supporting adults to make informed educational decisions.

Malta has also been working on a National Strategy for Digital Education. This strategy builds on identified learning outcomes in digital education and include five categories of digital competencies, namely: information management, communication and collaboration, digital media, using digital tools for learning, and management of the internet.

Malta has invested heavily in digital infrastructure, to equip schools with interactive whiteboards, providing a seamless mix of digital and offline education. This has also been reflected in the TIMSS 2019 survey, which not only confirms the improved outcomes achieved by Malta’s students since the previous study, but also the efficacy of the measures being put in place targeting low achievement.

Within the Ministry for Education and Sport, the Directorate for Digital Learning and Transversal Skills (DDLTS) for the past 5 years has been pivotal in providing support services to the One Tablet Per Child (OTPC) project since this was introduced in all Year 4, 5 and 6 classes in primary schools. This in certain aspects has been a contributing factor towards democratisation in the learning process where students now have the tools to collaborate in online learning, the sharing of knowledge through various media such as pictures, video and sound, and through the use of digital tools which were made available on their devices and updated according to requirements.

These initiatives are complemented by an Online and Distance Learning Toolkit, participation in EU Codeweek, eTwinning, the MySchool initiative, Digital Literacy workshops, Future Classroom, and SELFIE.

Malta believes that digital education and training also needs to prioritize the needs and circumstances of vulnerable learners. The Ministry for Education and Sport is ensuring that free internet access and electronic devices such as laptops and tablets are provided. This became ever more important following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This approach has recently been extended to encourage post-secondary education, where eligible students will benefit from free internet for one year if opting to immediately continue their studies after finishing secondary education.

Malta continues to operate virtual primary, middle and secondary schools for vulnerable students, as well as providing 12,600 free online recorded lessons through *Teleskola* that are accessible on-demand.

This measure was supported by an educational Catch-Up programme organised over Summer, targeting medically vulnerable students who would have missed out on lessons. This is being continued in Winter. Such measures serve as a good exploratory platform, to tap into the possibilities of exploring mixed online and offline blended learning methods.

At further and higher education level, from a VET perspective, at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Malta’s main VET institution, a large number of e-modules in the areas of ICT, creative arts, mechanical engineering, electrical and electronics engineering and community services are being offered free of charge to the general public through MCAST’s online platform. These e-modules are being offered for self-learning but are not accredited. However, participants who register and follow any of these modules shall be issued with a letter from MCAST confirming participation.

MCAST’s new strategic plan 2022-2027 aims to drive the College in laying the structures and identify the resources to sustain an open community of learners and workers that will make Malta more competitive, sustainable and greener.

The six thematic Institutes and the Learning Support Unit within MCAST collaborate closely to ensure that learners receive the necessary academic support to acquire the basic academic key skills and consequently become autonomous learners. Different teaching and learning strategies are considered to help students acquire the basic skills in line with the set Key Skills syllabi, from foundation programmes to higher-level courses. One of the key skills offered to students is Information technology at Level 1, 4 and 5.

* *At Level 1 -*The course is designed to provide the necessary training in basic skills, as well as the fundamentals of computer systems and programming skills. Students will begin to appreciate the basic components that make up a computer system, and the interaction of the components with each other to allow us to use this technology as an effective tool for study, work and leisure. Students will also be introduced to Programming to develop skills in designing simple algorithms as well as writing simple computer programmes
* *At Level 4 -* This unit aims to impart to the learners the necessary skills to produce, report, and analyse their work in a digital environment. Based on five learning outcomes which when combined together give the learners the possibility to create advanced report, represent data visually, understand the target audience and prepare outstand presentations as well as manipulate images.
* *At Level 5 -*The unit aims to give the student advanced IT skills and the ability to use advanced IT tools in their day-to-day work, to analyse information and leverage other skills in real life and real work environments. The unit builds on the IT Key Skills level 4 Unit and basic IT knowledge. Most of the outcomes within this unit require basic understanding of IT and it is highly recommended that students are already practiced in IT.

MCAST offers a number of relevant Masters Programmes in the following topics: Retail, AI, Environmental Engineering, Exercise and Sports Science, Water Resources Management, High-Performance Buildings, Mechatronics, Lean Enterprise, Information Technology and Systems, Product Design and Small Business. One of the most important objectives of these programmes is to build a high level of expertise among VET students in vital areas including ICT.

MCAST offers part-time courses that are affordable, flexible, supportive and high-quality learning experiences which guarantees student the development of new skills or progress in their career.

Furthermore, also at further and higher education level, within the the VET sector, computer literacy is an integral part of the curriculum at all levels at the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), Malta’s second main VET institution. This ranges from EQF level 2 to 7. ITS considers computer literacy as an important transversal subject.

Moreover, at higher education level, at the University of Malta, the Faculty of Education provides professional learning in applied digital skills as part of the courses in initial teacher education and in post-graduate degrees specialization in various aspects of the professional development of Educators. Within these professional learning initiatives digital skills are promoted either as part of subject methodology (E.g. Digital skills in language, mathematics, science, humanities education) or in optional courses in digital literacy, technology-enhanced learning or digital education. Students enrolled in early years or primary teacher education programmes are trained to promote entry-level digital functional skills required to make basic use of digital devices and online applications. These include:

* *Digital foundation skills* – the fundamentals of being able to use digital technologies, such as using a browser, connecting to the internet, and keeping passwords secure.
* *Communicating* – sending emails securely, using attachments, and participating on social media.
* *Handling information and content* – using search engines, being aware that not all online content is reliable, accessing content across devices.

Education students in the secondary education track are trained to promote more advanced digital skills, the higher-level abilities that allow users to make use of digital technologies in empowering and transformative ways. These include:

* *Transacting* – setting up accounts to use or purchase goods/services online, using different secure payment methods, filling in online forms.
* *Problem-solving* – finding solutions to problems using FAQs/tutorials/chat, presenting solutions through software, and improving productivity.
* *Being safe and legal online* – understanding best practice in data storage/sharing, updating and keeping passwords secure, and taking precautions against viruses.
* Social media skills - Analytical skills, understanding trends, communication, creativity, time management, using social media management tools.

Also from a VET perspective, the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS)’s strategic plan (2021–2025) aims at shaping excellence and innovation in tourism, through teaching and learning, quality research, advice, and realisation of innovative business concepts.

At tertiary education level, the University of Malta Strategic Plan 2020-2025 aims at creating dynamic frameworks providing holistic learning; developing physical environments conducive to learning; expanding high-quality online learning; engaging in experiential learning; and maintaining the relevance of teaching programmes.

Student teachers are trained to adopt a holistic approach to the development of key digital competences (defined as knowledge, skill and attitude). To thrive in the connected economy and society, digital competences must also function together with other abilities such as strong literacy and numeracy skills, critical and innovative thinking, complex problem solving, an ability to collaborate, and socio-emotional skills.

Within the adult education sector, basic digital skills have been inserted as part of the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education’s basic skills programme that was revised during 2020-2021. This is part of a wider strategy for basic skills. Also, as from 2020, the said directorate set up an internet hub to enable those without digital skills or without access to the hardware, to come to the hub and use the facilities with the personal assistance of a mentor. This will enable these users to follow online courses in subjects of their choice.

A number of additional initiatives in the education sector were announced with the unveiling of Malta’s budget for 2022, including a 10% increase in students’ stipends, including those that work part-time; further investment in apprenticeships, particularly in the technology sector; and an investment in the modernisation of STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) subject facilities, with 180 science laboratories that will benefit from this.

**Relevant statistics in Malta**

In 2019, the participation in early childhood education (from age 3 to starting age of compulsory primary education) stood at 91.9%.[[4]](#footnote-4)

During academic year 2019-2020, students enrolled in pre-primary, primary and secondary education totalled 58,284. The majority of students enrolled in pre-primary, primary and secondary education comprised of male students, at 52.0 per cent. During 2019-2020, students with a foreign nationality accounted for 13.5 per cent of the total students enrolled from pre-primary to secondary education.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Student enrolments in post-secondary and tertiary institutions during academic year 2019-2020 increased by 3.1 per cent over the preceding academic year, totalling 26,673. Post-secondary students enrolled in sixth forms and other post-secondary institutions totalled 9,620 during academic year 2019-2020. The largest proportion of post-secondary students (87.8 per cent) were aged under 19 years. Foreign students enrolled in such institutions amounted to 995, accounting for 10.3 per cent of the total students enrolled at post-secondary level. The share of 16-17 year old students at the post-secondary level accounted for 76.9 per cent of the 16-17 year old resident population, increasing by 1.6 percentage points from the previous academic year.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Students enrolled in tertiary level courses numbered 17,053 during academic year 2019-2020, an increase of 6.1 per cent when compared to academic year 2018-2019. Female students comprised 57.0 per cent of the total students enrolled at the tertiary level. During academic year 2019-2020, foreign students at the tertiary level totalled 2,498, equivalent to 14.6 per cent of all tertiary enrolments. This accounted to an increase of 2.3 percentage points over the previous academic year.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In 2020, Malta’s tertiary educational attainment (age 25-34) stood at 40.1%[[8]](#footnote-8)

For Malta’s additional relevant data for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 disaggregated by sex, age and orientation of study, vide attached Annex “*MT Annex - Questionnaire report on Right to Education by every girl.xlsx*”[[9]](#footnote-9).

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1. Education Act Chapter 327 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Constitution of Malta: https://legislation.mt/eli/const/eng/pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Education Act Chapter 327 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Malta National Statistics Office, News Release 177/2021, <https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2021/10/News2021_177.pdf>, accessed on 9 February 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Malta National Statistics Office, News Release 193/2021, <https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2021/10/News2021_193.pdf>, accessed on 9 February 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Source for the Annex is the Malta National Statistics Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)