TOWARDS A QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

The National Curriculum Framework 2011

**Consultation Document 2
Rationale and Components**

Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family

Towards a

Quality Education

for all

The National Curriculum Framework

2011

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Rationale and Components

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The National Curriculum Framework

Consultation Document 2

Rationale and Components

This document provides a detailed introduction to the theoretical background against which the proposals of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) were conceptualised. By presenting an overview of seminal reports and documents which highlight the local policy context together with recent EU policy directions, this document introduces the reader to the rationale which motivated the review of the existing curriculum. The first section concludes with a summary of the main tenets of the NCF summarising the major changes and challenges envisaged by the framework.

The second section of this document presents the aims and general principles upon which the NCF is developed and which can be achieved and realised through the proposed learning areas and cross-curricular themes.

The third and final section of this document invites the reader to reflect upon the implications which the proposed organisation of the curricular learning areas has for effective pedagogy, practice and evaluation procedures.

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Message

Hon. Dolores Cristina
Minister

Ministry of Education,
Employment and the Family

The concept of a National Curriculum that guaranteed a minimum level of education provision for all learners in Malta was first introduced in the 1988 Education Act. In 1999 a new national curriculum *Creating the Future Together (1999)* was published. It presented a series of aims and objectives which still guide education decisions to the present day. The underlying philosophy focused on the holistic development of all learners, by encouraging and supporting the professional decisions of educators in schools and thus providing quality education with a long-term vision.

In effect, following the publication of the 1999 curriculum, a series of in-depth analysis and discussion on key areas took place, each presenting challenges to be addressed in this review of the national curriculum framework. These areas included *Inclusive and Special Education* (2005), *Absenteeism* (2005), *Early Childhood Education and Care* (2006), Career Guidance (2007), *Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta* (2007*), Smart Learning: Malta's National eLearning Strategy 2008-2010* and *Physical Education* (NAO, 2010).

After a decade of experience, it is now time to appreciate what we have achieved and, in the light of the increasing changes within and around our society, review our educational thinking and practice to ensure that all children succeed. Moreover, this will be the first curriculum framework to be adopted since Malta joined the EU in 2004 and hence it has also considered policy-related documents issued by the European Commission.

Employability, quality of life and lifelong learning are at the heart of the new draft National Curriculum Framework that aims at equipping young people with the key competences needed to meet the challenges of Malta's future labour market.

At a time when together with other Member States of the European Union, Malta is overcoming the economic crisis in the context of demographic changes and social cohesion, this curriculum framework will ensure that present and future generations acquire skills that will enrich their lives and secure economic growth, sustainability and the foundations of a knowledge society.

A primary goal of this Government is that all children will exit compulsory education with acquired skills and qualifications and that schools become attractive learning environments. Thanks to the heavy investment in information technology and student services in all col leges,

this curriculum framework review will transform the existing physical structures into opportunities for personal and social growth, reduce early school leavers, retain learners in formal education for as long as possible as well as give credit to informal and non-formal learning. With the development of a National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and its referencing to the European Qualifications Framework, this document will facilitate access to further and higher education, work-based learning, continuous professional development and adult learning.

I look forward to an intensive and comprehensive consultative process characterised by healthy debate from all stakeholders on where we want our compulsory educational provision to go, and what decisions we need to take to fulfil this vision, so as to ensure that all our children receive the quality education they deserve, so that they may all succeed.

Dolores Cristina

Message

Prof. Grace Grima
Director General

*Directorate for Quality
and Standards in Education*

This curriculum review stems from Part II of the Education (Amendments) Act, 2006 which puts the onus on the Directorate for Quality and Standards for updating the National Curriculum Framework, implementing it as well as reviewing the implementation process at regular intervals. The process of reviewing and updating the National Curriculum included representatives from the Directorates of Education, the Faculty of Education, the MATSEC Examinations Board, and Church and Independent schools. The draft document has been refined following feedback received by invitation from curriculum experts from the Ministry of Education in New Zealand and Learning and Teaching Scotland. This draft document is being presented for a national consultation process after which it will be refined, finalised and adopted as the national curriculum framework.

The draft curriculum framework is presented in a set of four consultation documents, namely:

Document 1: The Executive Summary

Document 2: The National Curriculum Framework - Rationale and Components
This document includes a detailed introduction to the theoretical background against which the proposals of the national curriculum framework were conceptualised.

Document 3: The National Curriculum Framework - The Three Cycles: The Early Years, The Primary Years and the Secondary Years
This document presents details of how the national curriculum framework envisages the learning programme to be offered to children and young people in the early years, the primary years and the secondary years. This document focuses on the application of the framework in schools and colleges.

Document 4: The National Curriculum Framework - The Way Forward
This document summarises the recommendations of the national curriculum framework and examines the implications of such recommendations. The document presents ideas about the management of change which underpin the consultation and implementation strategies the framework would like to promote. In turn, the consultation and implementation strategies presented are based on an understanding of a change management process.

In essence, the updated national curriculum framework promotes these key ideas:

• the development of lifelong learners who are engaged and responsible citizens, and active in the economy.
• the support for all learners to achieve and succeed, whatever their backgrounds, needs and aptitudes.

- a clear focus in colleges and schools on meeting the needs of all learners through increased curricular autonomy.
- the creation of active, inclusive learning communities which put learning and learners at the heart of all that they do and are accountable to their stakeholders.
- seamless progression through the early, primary and secondary years in the skills and competences required for lifelong learning.
- learning which is active, personalised, relevant, and purposeful.
- learning that emphasises the application of knowledge and skills in different contexts and settings as well as breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding.
- a curriculum framework that focuses on learning areas, creating links and synergies across traditional subjects.
- assessment and evaluation which use information and feedback formatively to inform planning for improvement.
- cycles of quality assurance and evaluation which recognise that continuous professional learning is an essential part of educational practice.

The process of consultation is crucial for the success of the updated national curriculum framework. The consultation strategy presented in Document 4 has been designed with the aim of enabling a wide-ranging and authentic discussion and debate which enables all stakeholders to engage with the draft document in a positive way and participate actively in the formulation of the final version.

The consultation process itself is divided into three phases:

- **Phase 1: Reflection for action May 2011 to August 2011**
  This phase will serve to present the updated national curriculum framework and prepare the various stakeholders for the consultation process. The meetings with the stakeholders will serve to highlight (i) the main recommendations of the updated national curriculum framework; (ii) the implications arising for the various stakeholders as envisaged by the updated national curriculum framework; and (iii) the role of the stakeholders in the consultation process, in terms of both their personal contribution to the process and their role in bringing together the feedback and responses of the learning communities for which they are responsible. In addition, this phase allows all participants sufficient time to read through the documents and consider in some detail their content and implications.
- **Phase 2: Reflection in action from September 2011 to November 2011**
  This phase will provide stakeholders opportunities to share and consolidate their ideas within and across different institutions. The aim of this phase is to invite and encourage stakeholders towards actively participating in generating a national, reflective professional discussion and debate about the updated national curriculum framework proposals, thus initiating a process of sharing critical and constructive feedback in preparation for the final version of the updated national curriculum framework.
- **Phase 3: Reflection on Action from November 2011 to December 2011**
  This phase will bring together all the stakeholders and the feedback offered by the various institutions. The highlights of this phase include a two-day national conference and the submission of written feedback. Once the working group reviews the proposed NCF in light of the feedback received, the working group will submit a final NCF document to the Minister for approval.

I invite all educators, parents, students and society stakeholders to participate actively in this consultation process so that the final approved document will be a true expression of our hopes and aspirations to provide a relevant quality education for our children which meets the current and future needs of our country.

Grace Grima

Section 1

Background and Rationale

Introduction

In Malta we have much to be proud of in our education system. Our concern for all learners, the strength of our communities and our desire to develop a society of lifelong learners are strengths of our education system. Yet society is changing nationally and internationally. We need to recognise these changes in education and look towards new scenarios to ensure that the young people in Malta are prepared to cope with whatever the future might hold.

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18th December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning recognises the role of education in preparing citizens to cope with and adapt to changes:

As globalisation continues to confront the European Union with new challenges, each citizen will need a wide range of key competences to adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing and highly interconnected world. Education has a key role to play in ensuring that Europe's citizens acquire the key competences needed to enable them to adapt flexibly to such changes (p. 5) (2006/962/EC)

In Malta we need a curriculum that prepares students not only for today but also for a demanding and more socially active society of the future. This National Curriculum Framework (NCF) calls for greater responsibility at all levels as educators together with other stakeholders engage to create the *essential education programme* for all children to succeed. It emphasises that education is everybody's business. In the face of new competitive challenges Malta will thrive economically only if our education system is willing and able to change. The intent of this NCF is to make a powerful case for reviewing, overhauling, updating and injecting new life into our curriculum – formal, informal and non-formal. It aims both to provoke and to challenge our thinking, whilst providing insight and inspiration into the various challenges that await us. It presents a focus on content and process, on programme structure, on the role of technology, on globalisation and sustainability, and on the need to develop the habits of mind required for the 21st century. It is our strong belief that together we can all make the difference that will go towards creating meaning for present and future generations.

This document is one in a series of four documents designed to engage all stakeholders in the process of change. The challenge that permeates all four documents is "*What is the purpose of education in a democracy in the 21st century? What must we do differently to leave a lasting impact on students so that they can ultimately lead more engaging lives and have a lasting impact on making this a better world to live in*?" The NCF promotes new ways of thinking and reflecting upon effective learning and teaching. This document:

- outlines the **goals of the review**,

- reflects on our **starting points for change;**

- **challenges myths** that still shape our thoughts, policies and practice; and

- presents the **main tenets** of the NCF.

The Goals of the Review

For all Children to Succeed (2005) is the policy document that spearheaded the Education (Amendment) Act of 2006. Its vision is also a major goal of this review. The primary concern, always and without exception, must be the children and young people whom teachers pledge to serve as they receive their warrant.

The contention of this document is that to prepare our young people for life in the 21st century we need to review and update our curriculum and the way it is managed and, where necessary, create new forms of working and interacting in schools, between schools and colleges and other entities. Our responsibility is to prepare learners for their world and their future. The NCF presented in this document deliberately attempts to move away from a prescriptive curriculum to a framework. In so doing, a certain amount of flexibility is advocated thus encouraging stakeholders to have a greater say in determining the content to suit the needs of the learners.

Moving beyond the ideas in these documents will involve different groups seeking answers to key questions, tackling different tasks, and undertaking different initiatives to explore how ideas might be made real in classrooms across Malta. What do we keep? What do we review? What do we eliminate? What do we create? Interestingly but ironically enough we will find some answers in our past. In Latin, the word curriculum means "a path to run in small steps". Whilst as adults at this stage we may negotiate the paths along which students and adults should walk, we need to realise that students will, in the end, determine how they will, or if they can, take steps in the path with each class, each group, each teacher, and each day. For this reason the NCF challenges us to constantly review the steps we thread; to monitor and review the decisions we take; to engage with our students and take account of their stories, of their needs and to place their voice at the centre of our discourse. This will help us transform the way we engage with the curriculum and the ways we engage with others. As we turn our schools, colleges and organisations into communities of learning we will be on our way to creating the essential education for our changing world. However, we need to be very aware that solutions of the past and realities of the present alone do not add up to the transformation needed for our future.

The challenge is to match the needs of learners in a world that is changing with great rapidity. In order to meet this challenge, the local community needs to accept and actively promote the importance of learning throughout life – a process which acknowledges that everyone can become a successful learner along their own path. The challenge is not merely to endorse the importance of learning but to create opportunities for all those who come in contact with the school to leave an impact on learning - to turn schools into communities of learning. This is the debate that this NCF encourages. A positive attitude towards learning implies that we can all learn from one other, that we can create a climate where diversity of opinion is respected. Learning is about expanding our perspectives, updating our approaches, moving beyond our comfort zones, challenging set modes of thinking and doing. It is critical that the NCF allows educators to become active inquirers, developers of innovation and explorers of new directions.

Starting Points for Change

Malta is no stranger to change and our education system is a picture still in the making. In this section we recognise the importance of starting from where we are and we offer an overview of the path we have taken since 1988. We acknowledge all the work that has gone before, the documents, the initiatives, and the commitment to create curricula that have been central to current reforms.

Our local policy context

The 1988 Education Act introduced a number of innovative ideas including: "the right of the State to establish a National Minimum Curriculum of studies for all schools" (Part I section 7) introducing the concept of compliance with the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC). Over time this involved kindergarten, primary, secondary and post-secondary levels. Following criticism of the political nature of a national curriculum in a democratic context, alternatives were proposed (Wain, 1991). These initiatives led to a better understanding of what is meant by a national curriculum and the way in which it should be drawn up and discussed.

The process of reviewing and strengthening the NMC was set in motion in 1995 with the publication of *Tomorrow's Schools: developing effective learning cultures* (Wain, Attard, Bezzina, Camilleri, Darmanin, Farrugia, Psaila, Sammut, Sultana, Zammit, 1995). This process continued with the 1998 publication of the draft NMC and later with the formulation of the final document *Creating the Future Together* (Ministry of Education, 1999) after a nationwide consultation process.

The process of reviewing a national curriculum has been defined as "*the Will to Be … and the Courage to Do*"[1]. This statement is still relevant today. Reviewing a curriculum framework is not a neutral process. The framework presented to schools ought to reflect current needs, challenges, opportunities and realities, but it should also create space for the educators of the future to adapt the curriculum to their contemporary challenges, in a continuous process of review. This is the first framework that is being proposed since Malta joined the EU in 2004. Thus, EU targets and other documentation related to education and training issued by the European Commission need to be reflected in the NCF in order to ensure the educational entitlement of learners in both the local and the wider European context.

The policy document *For All Children To Succeed* (Ministry of Education, 2005) set out the initial landscape for the setting up of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the Directorate for Educational Services (DES), as well as different models for the College set up in Malta and Gozo. The document proposed that the ownership of curriculum design, management and implementation fall within the remit of the DQSE. This policy document acted as a precursor to amendments to the Educational Act that were discussed in parliament in 2006.

The Education (Amendment) Act (2006) heralded a different orientation to reform, especially school reform. Innovation has been brought about through the college network system and the still evolving relationship between Directorates and colleges. This review stems from

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1   This expression was originally used in *Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures pg 51.*

Part II of the Education (Amendment) Act, 2006 which focuses on the constitution and functions of the Directorates of Education; it essentially puts the onus on the Directorate for Quality and Standards for:

- updating the National Curriculum;

- its implementation (taking into consideration issues such as syllabus design, assessment and training needs);

- quality assurance mechanisms; and

- reviewing the implementation process at regular intervals.

The process of reviewing and updating the National Curriculum was launched in March 2008 and completed in July 2010. It included representatives from the Directorates of Education, the Faculty of Education, the MATSEC Examinations Board, and Church and Independent schools. The draft document has been refined following an invitation for feedback from curriculum experts from the Ministry of Education in New Zealand and Learning and Teaching Scotland. A draft NCF document is being presented in April 2011 for a national consultation process after which it will be refined, finalised and adopted as the NCF.

Entitlement and quality education were key principles in *Tomorrow's Schools* (1995) and *Creating the Future Together* (1999).

What are considered to be the basic requirements of a quality education – one that is meaningful, worthwhile, responsive to individuals and social needs – and does each and every student, without fail get those requirements, regulated as these are by the principle of entitlement? (Wain et al., 1995, p.8).

The underlying philosophy has been the holistic development of all learners, by encouraging and supporting the professional decisions of educators in schools and thus providing quality education with a long-term vision.

…One main characteristic is that it places the needs of the learner before anything else. It is the child who is at the centre of all the vision, the planning and the provision. Equally interwoven in its aims and provision is the celebration of diversity. (Vella, 1999, p.9).

The publication of the 1999 NMC opened the gateway to further educational reform in Malta. The year 2003 saw the start of in-depth analysis and discussion on key areas, each presenting challenges to be addressed in this review of the NCF. These areas included:

- **Inclusive and Special Education**: Spiteri, Borg, Callus, Cauchi, and Sciberras (2005) recommended that mainstream education was to become all inclusive with relevant syllabi addressing the needs of all students.

  - The challenges include how to ensure that learning support in mainstream schools is provided by adequately trained personnel and the syllabi within the framework of the national curriculum might best be adapted to meet individual students' needs.

- **Absenteeism**: Clark, Borg, Calleja, Chircop and Portelli (2005) analysed the situation of absenteeism in Malta and provided a variety of recommendations to address the issue of absentees in a country where human resource capacity is a top priority for the development of the national agenda.

  - The challenge includes how to review the current curriculum in relation to students' needs thus making it more appealing. This would impact on their motivation regarding school attendance.

- **Early Childhood Education and Care**: Sollars, Attard, Borg, and Craus (2006) concluded that *"a curriculum specifically designed for early years, linking theory and practice is absent"* (p. 9) and that *"practitioners do not have any clear documentation about the content and planning of their work or how such material can be translated to their daily practice"* (p. 9).

  - The challenges include how to acknowledge early years as a distinct phase and to develop a purposely-designed curriculum as a firm foundation for primary and secondary curricula.

- **Career Guidance**: Debono, Camilleri, Galea and Gravina (2007) proposed a national policy focusing on career guidance to ensure smooth transitions from one educational phase to another and to the world of work, focusing on the individual's needs and labour market demands.

  - The challenges include the setting up of a framework of services and operation in thearea of career guidance that would also have implications on the curriculum.

- **Smart Learning: Malta's National eLearning Strategy 2008-2010**: technology ought to support teachers in adapting to different learning styles in order to address specific learning needs, thus personalising learning.

  - The challenges include how to encourage more student-centred pedagogies promoting autonomous learning. A fundamental shift is required in the relationship between the teacher and the student. From one where the teacher provides and organises most of the content, knowledge and skills, this relationship needs to become one where the teacher guides, challenges, and monitors activities and where students are actively participating and taking responsibility for their learning and working towards becoming autonomous, technologically proficient learners

- **Religious Education**: The teaching of Catholic education is guaranteed in primary and secondary schools[2].

  - The challenge includes how, in the increasingly multi-cultural context of our local schools, to cater for students who do not wish to receive an education in the Catholic Religion.

- **Physical Education:** Physical Education needs to be given its due importance in schools at all levels. Between 2008 and 2009, the National Audit Office (NAO) carried out an audit

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2　The 1989 Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta regarding *Teaching and Education in the Catholic Religion in State Schools*.

in State primary and secondary schools with a view to collecting information about the status of Physical Education and Sport (NAO, 2010)

- The challenges include the need to consider how to implement fully the recommendations from this report namely to place greater emphasis on the quality of Physical Education and structured activities; to improve facilities and equipment and to ensure that the recommended time for Physical Education in primary schools is fully utilised.

- **For all Children to Succeed (2005)**: In this policy document, state colleges were proposed implementing the concept of decentralisation through the concept of networking of schools. Colleges were tasked with ensuring that all students received their educational entitlement in a full, continuous and smooth process of education from an early age to the end of compulsory education in the perspective of lifelong learning and inspired by the highest human values. They were to ensure that the NCF was translated into an appropriate curriculum implemented in all its schools, with the best methodologies, including an extensive use of information and communication technology as a pedagogical tool.

  - The challenges include how to realise these aspirations in flexible ways. The concept of flexibility is promoted throughout the NCF. It implies opportunities for colleges and schools to individually address the range of needs of students. This implies changes in pedagogy. Flexibility can also be achieved through adjustments which can be made to timetables, choice of subjects, subjects organised in modules and the number of lessons allocated to certain subjects/areas. However, a further challenge is that the amount of flexibility is seriously limited by the number of subjects and the content for each subject which students have traditionally been expected to follow in the local context. Inevitably, working within a flexible framework requires a rationalisation of the range and depth of content in all subjects, with a direct impact on syllabus design, learning and teaching and the format of examinations.

- **Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta (2007):** In spite of the positive results obtained by high achievers, the Junior Lyceum and the Common Entrance examinations have excluded many students from a quality education and labelled them as failures at an early age. This result has had long-term implications with students leaving the schooling experience with low self-esteem and no certification. Moreover, segregation has become an accepted reality within the State education system.

  - The challenge is how to enhance transition and raise achievement for all learners. With the termination of these examinations from 2011, this NCF proposes an infrastructure for a curriculum which facilitates the transition from the Primary to the Secondary years, primarily addressed through the identification of levels of achievement expressed as learning outcomes and organised into a progression and through collaborative partnerships that facilitate transition.

- **Vocational Education:** Technical and vocational education has a long and varied tradition in the Maltese educational system. Sultana (1992) identified several factors which contributed to the failure of vocational education at the secondary level in

Malta: for example, the difficulty of attracting status from both industry and education; the lack of a technical culture which embraces an alternative form of schooling; the inappropriate award structure for students who pioneer the new system; the lack of material resources to equip the schools for the new system, and the inadequacy of human resources to provide the expertise to enable the system to succeed. In their report *MATSEC: Strengthening a National Examination System*, Grima, Camilleri, Chircop, Mallia & Ventura (2005, p.94) suggested the introduction of certification for vocational subjects which require the same rigorous preparation that exists for the traditional subjects.

- The challenge is to redress the absence of a vocational education component by incorporating it within the secondary curriculum rather than as a separate route in the education system and providing recognized certification at the end of the process which facilitates progression to different options in post-secondary education. A pilot project is being implemented in a number State, Church and Independent schools in September 2011.

The proposed NCF draws upon previous documentation in the light of changes in society, the setting up of colleges in the state sector, the on-going transition reform and to face the challenges set for education in Malta. In the next section of this document we look at recent EU policy documents.

Recent EU policy context

The first two aims of the *'Key Competences for Lifelong Learning — A European Reference Framework'* (included in the annex of the Recommendations) (2006/962/EC) suggest that:

"… the key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge society" need to be developed "by the end of initial education and training to a level that equips [learners] for adult life and which form a basis for further learning and working life." (European Commission, 2006, p. 4)

The *European Reference Framework* sets out the following eight key competences:

1. Communication in the mother tongue (p. 4).

2. Communication in foreign languages (p. 5)

3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology (p. 6).

4. Digital competence (p. 7).

5. Learning to learn (p. 8).

6. Social and civic competences (p. 9).

7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (p. 11).

8. Cultural awareness and expression (p. 12).

Furthermore, the *European Reference Framework* lists the following themes which are embedded in the eight key competences, namely: critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision-making and constructive management of feelings. These competences will form a key underpinning element of the NCF.

More recently, the *Council Conclusions on a Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020)* (European Commission, 2009) recommended that:

in the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring: (a) the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens; (b) sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue (p. 2)

In this *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation* (European Commission, 2009):

lifelong learning [is] regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts - whether formal, non-formal or informal - and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning" (p. 3)

The more recent document *Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart sustainable and inclusive growth* (COM (2010) 2020) is the follow up to the *Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs* (Memo 06/478/12th Dec 2006) (European Commission, 2006) to help Europe emerge from the financial and economic crisis and prepare its economy for the next decade. Two of the targets are having less than 10% of early school leavers and 40% of the younger generation in possession of a tertiary degree[3]. The proposed NCF aims to provide recommendations that pave the way for the education system in Malta to reach these targets.

Challenging Myths

The NCF sets out to challenge particular myths that still shape our thoughts, policies and practices with respect to education. One of the myths challenged is related to the role of the teacher. For far too long the richness and complexity of the work teachers do has been undervalued. The teacher has been revered as a knowledge-delivery mechanism, preparing students for high-stakes examinations. Effective teachers are not only knowledgeable in their subjects but also resourceful across multiple subject areas and skilful at integrating them. They are spontaneous, alert to the teachable moments, and able to play out the fruits of that spontaneity and plan the next steps incrementally as the lessons unfold. Such teachers believe in the varied capabilities of their students, constantly challenging them, creating opportunities and setting higher expectations over time. They value their students as individuals and as social beings. Good teachers understand their students and reflect upon, modify and adapt their teaching, thus improving their strategies in a dynamic manner.

A second myth is that teachers should think alike and, as a result, do the same thing. The NCF does convey general direction and comfort, but it only comes to life in schools and

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3 The European Council of the 25/26 March agreed to "improv[e] education levels, in particular by aiming to reduce school drop-out rates and by increasing the share of the population having completed tertiary or equivalent education; taking into account the Commission's proposal, the European Council will set the numerical rates of these targets in June 2010.

classrooms through localised application of individual ideas by teachers who are grounded in particular contexts and provoke reflection, innovation and improvement. Such teachers do make a difference.

A third myth challenged by NCF relates to the emphasis on examinations. Assessment should reflect what matters in learning. Within the NCF our assessment system must change to reflect this position.

These changes in the role of the teacher are consistent with the devolution of increased authority to the school site. The NCF envisages uniqueness through the diversity of ways that colleges and their respective schools tackle potentially similar issues or the way they implement national policies. This has major implications to the way college-based practices are assessed, monitored and supported.

The critical development that will help us turn the NCF into reality is the cultivation of habits of mind (Costa & Kallick, 2000, 2009) or habits of thought as John Dewey (1933) called them. Shifting our mental models about what we teach, how we teach, how students learn and how we assess students' learning growth will take some getting used to. Such changes require open-mindedness, flexibility, patience and courage. The NCF champions the national educational paradigm shift and creates the structures and mechanisms that encourage us to change our mindset and then form new habits and routines as we review and possibly abandon old ones.

Main Tenets of the NCF

In the light of historical developments, existing documentation and challenges faced by the local educational community, the NCF assumes:

- a paradigm shift away from a prescriptive curriculum towards a framework which allows for some degree of internal flexibility;

- a move away from stand alone subjects to learning areas that form the entitlement of all learners;

- the continuous development of all practitioners, and ongoing support to enable them to interpret the framework and adapt it to meet the needs of their learners; and

- that all stakeholders in the State, Church and Independent sectors take responsibility for the proposed changes.

Hence, the NCF promotes:

- a clear focus on improving the quality of education and raising the level of student achievement;

- a readiness to depart from traditional curriculum structures and practices that may restrict learning;

- guidelines which allow for some a greater of choice to suit the interests and capabilities of individual learners within nationally accepted parameters;

- flexible learning programmes providing diverse and integrated learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners;

- learning programmes that focus on understanding and emphasise the process of learning and the active co-construction of meaning rather than the mere acquisition of content;

- learning programmes that empower teachers to implement innovative teaching/ learning strategies especially through the use of eLearning;

- a move away from an exclusively subject-based approach that favours fragmentation and compartmentalisation of knowledge to a more cross-curricular, thematic, interdisciplinary and collaborative approach that reflects real life situations and encourages transfer of skills from one learning area to another;

- an assessment policy that values and assesses both the processes and the products of learning;

- initial teacher education and further opportunities for training and support in the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity;

- professional development that is congruent with the availability of opportunities within the extended reality of the EU; and

- the development of the school as a learning community of reflective practitioners.

Conclusion

The first section of this document introduced the reader to the background and rationale underpinning the NCF review process. It highlighted the goals of the review and the initial considerations ahead of the changes and modifications to be proposed. The section concluded with a summary of the main tenets of the NCF.

In the subsequent section, the general principles and aims upon which the NCF is formulated are presented together with a proposal for grouping traditionally separate subjects into eight key learning areas and five cross-curricular themes to facilitate the realisation of the curriculum framework.

Section 2

Principles, Aims and Learning Areas

The NCF has seven components:

- General Principles

- Aims of Education

- Learning Areas

- Effective Learning and Teaching

- Assessment and Evaluation

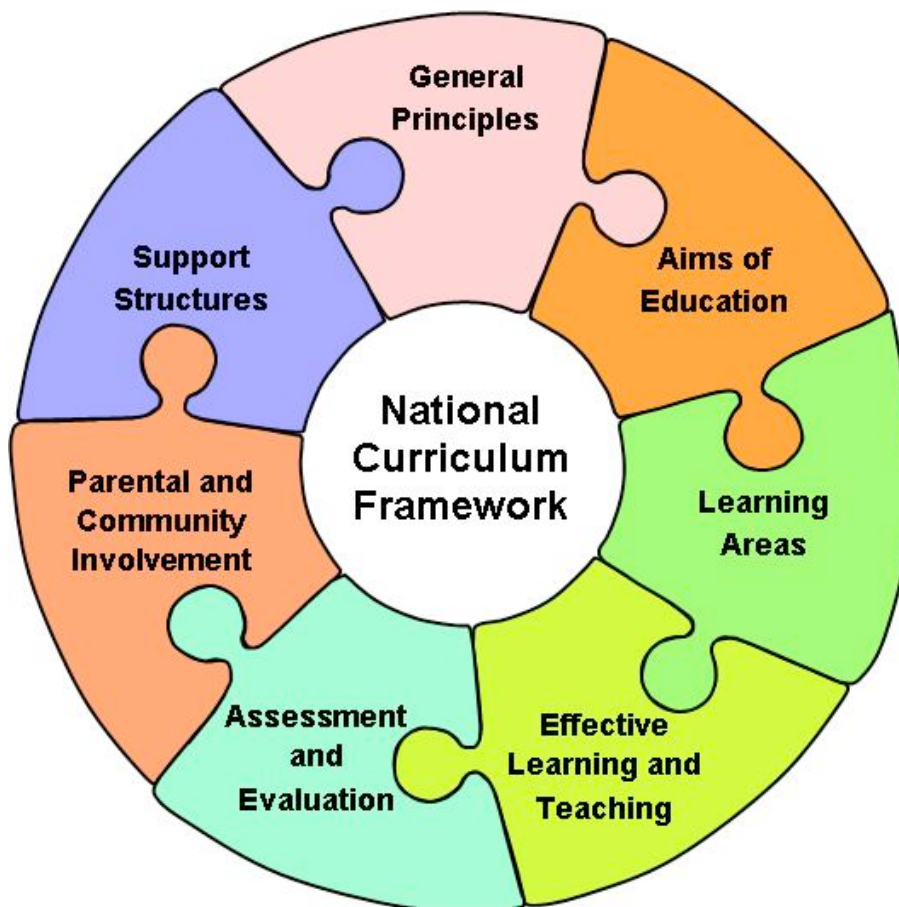- Parental and community involvement

- Support Structures

Figure 2.1: *Major interdependent components of the National Curriculum Framework*

This section of the document focuses on the three components which establish the theoretical framework.

General Principles

Six **General Principles** form the foundation of the NCF. These principles are derived from the values expressed in *Tomorrow's Schools* (1995) and *Creating the Future Together* (1999) and, affirmed in the *Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta: A Review* (2007) document as well as in national and EU directives.

Principle 1: Entitlement

Within and beyond the educational community, there appears to be consensus that every child is entitled to a quality education experience. Therefore all learners need to be supported to achieve personal excellence. In this respect, the NCF promotes for every learner the development of:

- fundamental values and attitudes;

- a holistic education relevant for life;

- analytical, critical and creative thinking;

- the ability to communicate in the context of bilingualism and multilingualism;

- contemporary learning approaches, including eLearning;

- individual and collective progress, success and achievement;

- smooth transitions within the system and diverse pathways for further learning; and

- the support of families and the wider community.

Principle 2: Diversity

The NCF acknowledges Malta's growing cultural diversity, and values the history and traditions of its people. It recognizes the heterogeneous nature of the community of learners, thereby acknowledging and respecting individual differences of age, gender, beliefs, personal development, socio-cultural background and geographical location. Learners' identities, their language competence, intellectual abilities, aptitudes, interests and talents are recognized and supported accordingly through appropriate learning and teaching approaches. The NCF affirms that all children can learn, grow and experience success by:

- respecting diversity in all its forms;

- promoting an inclusive environment; and

- recommending policies and practices that address the individual and specific needs of the learners and learning community.

Principle 3: Continuum of Achievement

The NCF embraces a developmental approach to education. This implies that within and across all learning areas/subjects, the curriculum meets the needs of learners according to their stage of development. In this respect the NCF:

- promotes the development of early childhood, primary and secondary education curricula as a seamless process in order to ensure continuity in the educational paths followed by learners; and

- steers the designing of curricula towards the identification of learning outcomes to reflect progressive development and achievement.

Principle 4: Learner-Centred Learning

The NCF promotes the development of a learner-centred approach to learning and teaching which requires:

- active and personalised learning;

- relevant, meaningful and purposeful engagement on the part of the learners;

- negotiation among learners and teachers; and

- the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes which promote self-directed and lifelong learning.

Principle 5: Quality Assurance

Quality education for all can be realised through a system of ongoing self-evaluation, monitoring and review within schools complemented by an external review system that together foster school improvement. In this respect, the NCF:

- provides direction to schools and colleges about key areas of the curriculum and aspects of school life;

- facilitates the effective implementation of the curriculum;

- demands and supports high-quality educational leadership at school, college and systems level;

- encourages the adaptation of the curriculum according to the particular contexts and needs of schools and colleges; and

- promotes reflective practice, mentoring and professional development for teachers, and self-evaluation and external reviews at school level.

Principle 6: Teacher Support

The NCF advocates the effective and efficient use of resources within and across schools and colleges. In this respect, the NCF requires that:

- stimulating and supportive environments and resources are available and accessible for all;

- continuous professional development programmes are organised for all practitioners within schools and colleges;

- on-going professional development support is available to schools and colleges to address national and strategic issues; and

- appropriate internal structures are available to provide support to meet the needs of learners, teachers, school administrators, families and other stakeholders in schools and colleges.

Aims of Education

In conformity with the principles outlined above, the **Aims** of education set out below prepare all children to become lifelong learners, confident, successful, creative, connected and engaged in the community and the world around them. Their education should enable them to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that make them capable of sustaining their life chances in the changing world of work, and to become actively engaged citizens. Figure 2.2 presents a more detailed description of the aims of education proposed by the NCF setting out the desired characteristics of Malta's young people as actively engaged citizens and lifelong learners.

The National Curriculum Framework aims at developing …

Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners

This will require the development of:
- personal and social skills
- moral and spiritual development
- literacy, numeracy and digital literacies
- bilingualism and multilingualism
- science and technology competence
- critical and innovative thinking
- aesthetic appreciation and creative expression

Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work

This will require capacity-building to achieve gainful employment and sustain:
- the ability to communicate effectively and confidently
- competence in using new information and communication technologies
- the ability to train, re-train and develop new skills
- economic stability and independence
- innovation and entrepreneurship
- the ability to readily embrace mobility and exchange
- a systems view of reality that facilitates their engagement in the promotion of sustainable development
- active involvement in sustainable development issues

Learners who are engaged citizens in constantly changing local, regional and global realities

They will need to:
- respect diversity and value difference
- respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage
- develop intercultural competence and appreciate their heritage within the Mediterranean, European and global contexts
- work towards strengthening social cohesion and ensuring social justice
- uphold social justice and democratic principles

Figure 2.2: *The Educational Aims of the National Curriculum Framework*

Aim 1: Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as life-long learners

This requires the development of:

• *Personal and social skills*

In the early years, children build their well-being and self-esteem, developing a positive self-identity and a sense of independence and autonomy, gaining confidence in themselves and their achievements. They need to learn to become risk-takers and develop individual strategies which help them to cope with new challenges. As they become independent and learn to take care of themselves, young children need to learn how to deal with their feelings, recognise and label emotions, and learn to be comfortable with themselves. They also need to start to develop social competences, learning how to live and grow with others.

As they move through the Primary years, children need to develop respect and value for each other, developing a sense of community and resolving conflicts. They should start to understand the emotions which others are experiencing and see different perspectives, developing empathy, respect and acceptance of different points of view. They need to learn to collaborate with peers and adults with diverse backgrounds and needs.

During the secondary years young people need to continue to develop their social and personal skills to ensure that they leave school equipped to handle an ever-changing social reality. The fundamental values of family, respect, inclusion, social justice, solidarity, democracy, commitment, care, love and responsibility should be strengthened.

• *Moral and spiritual development*

In the early years, as they develop social competences, young children develop a moral identity and sense of right and wrong, distinguishing between what is acceptable or unacceptable. They will experience and adopt values depending on how they are treated and how they see others being treated. As they move through the Primary years, they need to develop an awareness of the more abstract concepts of fairness, a sense of justice and non-preferential treatment.

The Secondary years experience should help young people to strengthen and enhance their moral and spiritual development. Through formal, non-formal and informal learning, individual, group or classroom experiences and through personal reflection, they need to develop the various skills that lead to moral and spiritual growth. After passing through a period of doubt and questioning of values that normally occurs in the middle of the secondary years with the physical and emotional changes of the teenage years, young people will generally mature and acquire the moral and spiritual growth that will serve them when they leave the sheltered world of school.

• *Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy*

During the Early Years, children gain familiarity with symbols and patterns and their use in everyday settings, including on computers and other electronic devices. These literacy,

numeracy and digital literacy skills form the foundations for further learning in the Primary years. Through programmes which build on their initial skills, children should become proficient in speaking, listening, reading and writing in both Maltese and English. They need to develop essential numeracy skills and key numeric competences that include the understanding of concepts, principles, and applications to support them in daily life and allow them to develop higher order thinking and function as autonomous adults.

Availability of and accessibility to different kinds of information, including through different media and the internet, enables learners to engage with and make sense of the world around them and encourages them towards communication and collaboration. Becoming digitally literate involves developing understanding of data sources and manipulation of data; information communication & presentation; programmed control; and social, ethical & personal aspects of the connected world.

As young people move through the secondary years, they need to further develop a range of competences in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, to enable them to think and solve problems and communicate their ideas, promoting skills for conducting research as well as representing and communicating ideas and locating, storing and retrieving information.

- *Bilingualism and multilingualism*

In the Early Years, children become aware of different language systems, notably their first and second languages. In the Primary years, whilst their first language is respected, promoted and strengthened, they begin their journey of second language learning. This is a direct reflection of growing up in Maltese society rather than necessarily being an immediate need. However, it is imperative that children are exposed to the two official languages of the country in meaningful ways which serve to promote learning and understanding of the world beyond language learning itself. Second-language teaching can be successful if lessons are learnt from mother tongue acquisition and the pedagogies used in the more formal school settings are driven by principles which are appropriate for the age group. During this years awareness of foreign languages is desirable with the aim of becoming open to other languages and cultures.

Being multilingual implies being able to communicate in speech and in writing in at least three languages. At the secondary level young people start learning a third language with a possibility of opting to study a fourth language. The EU's recommendation of learning one's mother tongue plus two others has been a reality for a long time in our educational system, which supports multilingualism.

- *Science and technology competence*

Early years experiences offer children the opportunity to engage with and understand the world around them. Through inquiry, children develop their curiosity about natural phenomena, leading them to question what they see and feel.

In the Primary years, developing scientific and technological competence requires an inquiry-based approach to learning. Challenging activities, environments and resources give children the chance to explore diverse sources of information. As they study science and technology they need to come to grips with conceptual change and to deepen their

knowledge and understanding of scientific and technological processes. Science and technology are also part and parcel of the key competences that need to be developed during the Secondary years. The aim is to ensure that learners experience a broad scientific education that will prepare them for a society where science and technology increasingly play a leading role.

- ### *Critical and innovative thinking*

'Imagination is the capacity for original thought; creativity is applied imagination' (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Early years settings are responsible for helping children become aware of skills and strategies necessary to access, look for, elicit, retrieve, organise and understand information. Equipped with appropriate strategies and a healthy approach to risk-taking, children acquire a range of skills that underpin critical thinking such as identifying, labelling, sorting, grouping, sequencing, classifying, categorising, and matching.

During the Primary years children's imagination and inquisitiveness need to be developed as a means of investigating problems and using their imagination to explore possible solutions. They need to experience different media and materials which allow them to develop their own ideas and experiment with alternative ways of thinking, problem-solving and self-expression. They need to learn to focus on systematic ways of addressing problems by collecting, testing and analyzing information and applying their results in different situations. They need to thus develop a range of critical skills, including labelling/identifying, recognition, sorting, hypothesizing, predicting, comparing, sequencing, grouping. They should also develop positive dispositions including enthusiasm & motivation, curiosity, questioning, concentration, perseverance, imagination, and the ability to accept alternative suggestions/criticism.

During their secondary education young people's problem-solving and enquiry skills will be developed and extended through practical work and through exploring ideas. The skills of investigation, designing and making, testing and reporting are all important in this context. Young people should develop the critical skills of exploring a particular issue from various perspectives and be able to assess whether a particular source of information is trustworthy or not. They are expected to be creative and innovative, to express their ideas and to allow their imagination to run freely within set parameters.

- ### *Aesthetic appreciation and creative expression*

The skills and dispositions involved in aesthetic appreciation and expression should underpin and enrich learning from the Early Years, through the Primary and Secondary years and across curriculum areas. Young people's skills are enhanced especially through the study of art, music, dance, drama and literature.

Through exploring a range of different media as part of their learning, children develop their personal expression and ideas. These experiences provide them with opportunities to be imaginative and creative, to experience inspiration and enjoyment, and to appreciate, evaluate and respond to local and foreign values and culture. They can develop skills in communication, presentation and interpretation of others' ideas. Actively engaging in creative and imaginative expression helps them to explore, appreciate and communicate feelings and develop their personal aesthetic dimension, thus supporting the development

of their personality. They can also begin to develop an understanding of the creative process and the development of aesthetic standards and values in society, so that by the time they leave school they are able to participate effectively in the cultural life of their community.

Aim 2: Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work

This requires:

• ### *The ability to communicate effectively and confidently*

Successful personal and social development requires children to express themselves in comprehensible and meaningful ways. Of all the means available to them, language is the one which best facilitates communication. As children engage with and gain experiences in using both oral and printed language, including symbols and images, their abilities to think, understand, express themselves and extend social relations are strengthened. The overall objectives of learning in the Early Years and Primary years should be to help children appreciate the functions and purposes of language[4] and to make them capable of using different forms of language and media to communicate effectively and confidently. They need to interact and engage with many types of media: oral, visual and written text; gain flexibility and control in their use of language and media; learn how to assert themselves and get things done; and start to become aware of the subtle influence which language and media in all their forms have on society.

As they move into the Secondary years, young people need to continue to develop their confidence and skills in verbal, non-verbal, written, visual, physical, technical and emotional/ expressive communication. They need to learn to use and apply their communication skills in a variety of contexts to respond and interact with situations as they occur, including the different learning areas and everyday life situations.

• ### *Competence in using new information and communication technologies*

In the Early Years and into the Primary years, emphasis is given to the acquisition of basic ICT skills including issues related to safety and use. As they move through the Primary years and into the Secondary years young people need to learn how to use a variety of communication technologies to access and share information resources; to assess the reliability of information resources; and to critically analyse the information obtained. They need to be able to use the information they find to reach an informed opinion and develop attitudes that are reflected in the choices/decisions they make.

• ### *The ability to train, re-train and develop new skills*

Throughout the Early, Primary and Secondary years, learning and teaching strategies need to enable children to be receptive to their own strengths and weaknesses, providing them with an ability to improve and adapt intelligently to changing realities and contexts. As they

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4   'Language skills' refer to listening, speaking, reading & writing. 'Language skills' is also broadly used to refer to receptive skills & production skills.

grow and mature, young people need to become capable of constructive self-evaluation and appreciate the need for lifelong learning within the context of a changing society; be capable of identifying and possibly anticipating emergent needs in society;

identify organisations that offer training opportunities; and be flexible in adapting to new technologies and associated skills.

• *Economic stability and independence*

Children's initial understanding of the value of co-operation and collaboration from the Early Years should be further strengthened at Primary level. Children learn to take initiative and to become independent thinkers and participants in team-working. Through their experiences, they need to become aware of the vital contribution of each member in society towards the good of the community. Learning to be flexible, tenacious and resilient paves the way for responsible citizenship.

As they move through the Secondary years, young people need to know how to use personal, national and global resources in order to maximise their economic value. They need to develop a socially responsible economic ethic that prioritises approaches which promote the common good.

• *Innovation and entrepreneurship*

Throughout the Early and primary years children need to be encouraged to value the processes that lead to creating and implementing new ideas. Through risk-taking, planning, perseverance and the use of their imagination, children will understand and develop the ability to think critically and create and value new products that help them and others adapt to changes in society. As they develop self-belief and the ability to be useful and productive for one's self, one's group of friends, class and school, they will also develop the positive attitudes they need to contribute towards the common good as mature citizens. In the secondary years learners are equipped to anticipate, initiate and deal with change; develop organisational skills that lead towards individual and collaborative ventures and develop and be proficient in the skills required for group dynamics, risk assessment and conflict resolution.

• *The ability to readily embrace mobility and exchange*

Throughout the primary and secondary years, exchanges with young people from other schools, colleges, sectors, towns and countries can promote and encourage mobility. Such activities prepare children for the social, cultural, and economic changes that they will experience during their lifetime. When they leave school, young people need to be prepared to respond to emergent needs of the workforce and to be ready to change profession/ employment. They need to show flexibility, knowing how to evaluate the local and foreign resources required for personal development; to adapt plans to include travelling abroad to train and/or specialise in a particular field of expertise; to appreciate the value of cross fertilization of ideas, methods, techniques and approaches; and to appreciate and be willing to share local expertise with other social contexts.

- *A systems view of reality that facilitates their engagement in the promotion of sustainable development*

From a young age, children can appreciate and value empathy and, with appropriate support, develop curiosity, enthusiasm and good judgment. With the aid of inquiry-based learning, children should learn to understand that all actions may have long-lasting effects on communities and societies. Through experiencing interdisciplinary themes, learners can come to appreciate that reality is the sum effect of various component realities. They need to develop skills to identify and acknowledge the complexities and interrelatedness of personal, social, cultural, religious, political, economic, technological and environmental concerns in any collective endeavour. They need to be sensitive to the needs of other members of society, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged individuals or groups; to develop a realisation of the impact of personal decisions and actions at the local level on community and global levels and vice versa; and to approach problem-solving by looking for links and promoting partnerships and synergies on the basis of dialogue, negotiation and conflict resolution.

- *Active involvement in sustainable development issues*

Responsible citizenship results in active citizenship. Young children need to build a sense of community through the inculcation of the value and belief systems most prevalent in their schools and home. Through their school experiences, including cross-curricular learning, they need to become aware of a range of plausible solutions and take action to improve their immediate environment. They should also become aware of national and regional issues and develop informed opinions about them. As they grow towards adulthood, young people should become committed to improvements in the quality of life at a personal, communal, national and global level. They need to develop critical thinking and reflective skills to evaluate current policies and practices, and suggest alternative sustainable behaviours. They also need to understand their own personal – not just the authorities' – responsibility towards the adoption of sustainable development, and develop into empowered citizens who are active participants in decision-making.

Aim 3: Learners who are engaged citizens in constantly changing local, regional and global realities

They need to:

- *Respect diversity and value difference*

In their earliest years, children discover similarities and differences around them through their experience of different cultures and languages. In this way they begin to understand and value diversity. The inclusive school should cater for every child irrespective of gender, religion, race, ability and beliefs, but should also set as one of its aims the promotion of the potential of each learner through individualised attention and support. The school ethos and practices, in the primary and secondary years, will transmit this value to all learners, who will achieve the aim specifically through the learning areas, through cross-curricular themes such as multicultural education and education for sustainable development, and through alternative curricula, depending on the aptitudes and abilities of the student population.

- ***Respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage***

During the Early Years and Primary years children should explore and experience the wealth of their cultural and national heritage through visits, exhibitions and other first-hand opportunities. Inquiry-based and active learning and viewing artefacts in context, as well as the study of documents and multi-media texts, enable pupils to form a solid understanding of who they are and where they come from. Children should actively engage in projects that assist in the conservation of their regional and national heritage.

In the later years of the Primary cycle and into the Secondary cycle, young people should continue to experience Malta's national culture and heritage, helping them to appreciate their own national identity and to strengthen their capacity as responsible citizens. Children should also be encouraged to explore different cultures and ways of life through their language programmes and a foreign language awareness programme. In particular they need to learn to make skilful use of the Maltese language. Through the Expressive arts (art, music, dance and drama), combined with environmental studies, history, and geography, young people need to develop understanding of the importance of our culture and the arts for our national identity and of Malta's place in Europe and in the World.

- ***Develop intercultural competence and appreciate their heritage within the Mediterranean, European and global contexts***

Children and young people need to strengthen their ability to appreciate social, cultural, national and geographical realities by acquiring historical and geographical knowledge relating to the different learning areas and developing attitudes and skills which promote intercultural understanding. The Mediterranean and European dimensions are of particular importance to Maltese children. Participation in e-twinning, Comenius and other projects among schools both at local and at international levels facilitate intercultural experiences.

- ***Work towards strengthening social cohesion and ensuring social justice***

Appreciating diversity and difference, whilst concentrating upon similarities, promotes tolerance and the ability to recognize ways in which a community can contribute to a more socially-cohesive society. At a class, year and school level, children need to engage in collaborative learning strategies that promote practices which are socially inclusive. Multicultural schools, a strong civic sense and non-discrimination in schools are the seedbed of social cohesion. Young people need to learn how to engage in dialogue and reach consensus with the common good in view. Voluntary work schemes should be offered and Principles of Mediation could be part of the Personal, Social and Health Education programme. Developing respect for diversity and valuing difference will help young people as adult citizens to build a stable and healthy society where every individual feels valued, respected and equal.

*   ***Uphold social justice and democratic principles***

During the Early years, children need to develop a sense of fairness and justice in their play and everyday lives. As they move into the Primary years, they need to learn more about social justice and democracy and develop their understanding of individual rights and responsibilities as they actively engage in discussions, debates and straightforward governance practices. Cross-curricular links will reinforce the development of this crucial aspect of learning. As they move into the Secondary years, Citizenship Education together with initiatives which embrace democratic practices in schools are the most obvious ways to pursue this aim. An inclusive approach will of itself promote social justice for all. Young people need to develop their understanding of social justice and democratic principles and assume greater responsibility for these as part of the life of the school. The school administration should give commensurate space to the initiatives taken and co-ordinated by the Student Council, and should consult the Student Council on matters directly affecting the student population.

Learning Areas

One of the main purposes of the NCF is to identify what is to be learnt in the Early, Primary and Secondary years The current system of partitioning the primary and the secondary curricula into independent single subjects presents learners with a fragmented view of knowledge which is not conducive to holistic education. The NCF proposes an alternative perspective of curricular content which conceptualises learning as occurring through meaningful and challenging experiences, drawing upon learners' prior knowledge, interests and dispositions. This can be best achieved through merging various subjects into learning areas to contribute to the acquisition of a body of relevant, purposeful and connected knowledge and skills that engage and motivate learners. This does not imply the elimination of traditional subject content but the establishment of links between and across subjects to reinforce learning.

Discrete learning areas are not proposed for the Early Years, where the emphasis is on the development of skills and positive dispositions towards learning which will be developed and extended in later years. Learning areas are introduced in the primary years and extended into the secondary years, where learners also choose a number of optional subjects according to their interest.

Learning in the Early Years (Figure 2.3) and the eight learning areas proposed in the NCF as the entitlements for each young person (Figure 2.4) have been derived from the aims outlined in Figure 2.2. It is also worth noting that similar learning areas are identified in national curricular documentation from other countries, such as Scotland (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008) and New Zealand (2007) as well as in EU directives.

The learning areas are set out in a way which ensures that a broad-based and well-balanced curriculum can address and achieve the aims outlined above. Learning experiences in each area should serve to develop the important dispositions of active thinkers and learners: "*cooperation, concentration, courage, curiosity, direction, empathy, flexibility, good judgement, humility, imagination, independence, perseverance, an open mind, precision, reflectiveness, responsibility, risk-taking and self-discipline.*" Simister (2007, p. 23).

Once the broad outline of the NCF is agreed, subsequent guidance will be developed by curriculum experts and content area specialists to provide more detailed and comprehensive descriptions of each learning area and the respective learning outcomes, at Early, primary and secondary years. These documents will in turn be translated into syllabi and programmes of study which can be used directly in all learning and teaching contexts. Within each learning area, for primary and secondary schools these curriculum documents will identify the mandatory core curriculum as well as the flexible components that allow for different learning programmes to match the individual needs of learners.

The Early Years

The hallmarks of successful, quality Early Years programmes are those which:

• embrace the socio-cultural dimension surrounding children's learning;

• are concerned with promoting and encouraging positive learning dispositions;

• put children at the centre of the learning environment;

• allow child-initiated activities acknowledging that learning in the early years is a process of co-construction and collaboration;

• promote activities that are related to children's real-life experiences;

• offer children opportunities for hands-on activities; and

• draw on a variety of pedagogies which address needs of particular learners.

Thus, rather than identifying specific content knowledge associating it to subject areas, in the early years emphasis should be given to general competences developed through cross-curricular themes which contribute to establishing the foundations for lifelong learning. The early years are comparable to a journey of discovery where children find out who they are as individuals and position and establish themselves within a society as they interact with others. To achieve both successfully, children learn about and experience ways of using communicative tools necessary for self-fulfilment, personal development and meaningful social engagement.

Success in promoting a love for learning and holistic development comes with suitable pedagogies which must embrace play and experiential, joyful learning. The various types of play children should engage in effectively meet the objectives and outcomes necessary for quality experiences in early childhood education. Thus pretend play, imaginative, creative, constructive, symbolic and role play as well as engagement, interaction and participation in all forms of expressive arts constitute an integral part of children's experiences in the early years. Through programmes which seek children's active involvement and experiential learning, children are expected to acquire social, communicative and intellectual competences in an environment which fosters personal well-being and positive learning dispositions (See Figure 2.3).

These competences can be translated into learning outcomes which young children are expected to achieve by the time they are moving from the early years to the later primary school years. The holistic development of children contributes to successful achievement of all the outcomes.
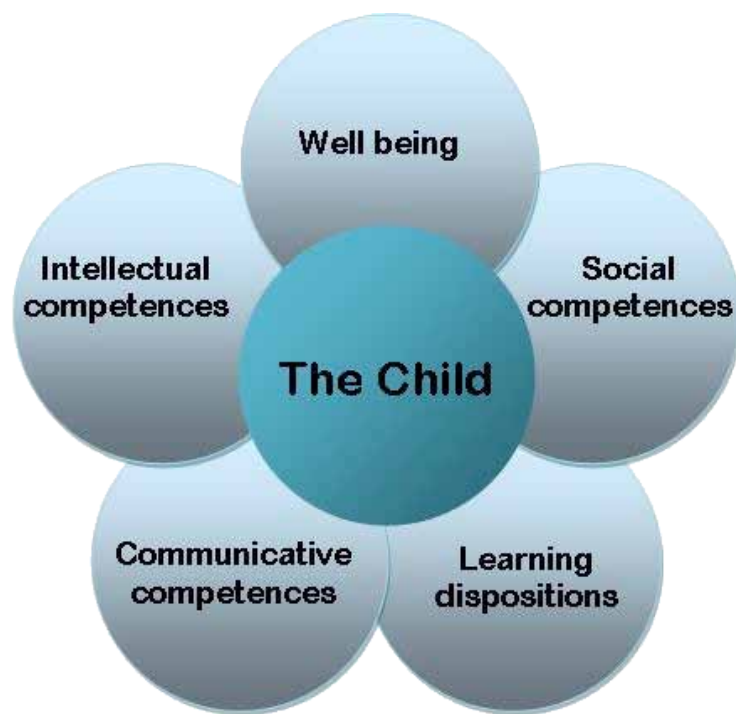

Figure 2.3: *Competences in Early Childhood Education*

Early Years competences

Well-being

The early years ought to offer environments where children feel safe and secure to the extent that they have a sense of belonging; feel loved and accepted by all; and are respected for who they are. Adults working with young children need to show and share a genuine interest in each child and make every effort to foster warm, caring and friendly relationships. The extent to which a child's well-being is enhanced depends on the very attitudes and relationships which are promoted and which prevail amongst the adult carers themselves.

An environment which offers children security is one where there is stability and consistency. Such environments support children in building their self-esteem, developing a positive self-identity and gaining confidence in themselves and their achievements. Within a safe environment where they are accepted, given freedom of choice, and allowed to explore and experiment on their own and with others, children learn to become risk-takers. They can develop individual strategies which help them to cope with new challenges, become autonomous, self-regulating and self-determining individuals who make progress, overcome difficulties and feel satisfied with their endeavours. Hence, young learners become independent.

As they become independent and learn to take care of themselves, young children learn how to deal with their feelings, recognise and label emotions, accept themselves and learn to be comfortable with themselves and others. In developing socio-emotional competences, young children acquire self-discipline as they learn to be more in control of who they are and what they can do. In addition to their affective development, in the early years children learn about who they are and what they can do through physical activities which can be used to promote a healthy life.

Social competences

Apart from learning to feel comfortable with themselves, in the early years children increasingly gain awareness of others and learn how to live and grow with others. This means that children experience and deal with turn-taking and sharing activities, ideas, thinking processes and achievements that will help them develop positive and authentic relationships. In so doing, children realize what it means to respect others, value each other and develop a sense of community. Together, children have to resolve conflicts as a result of their learning to contribute and participate in a democracy. Empathy development occurs when children can understand the emotions which others are experiencing and see different perspectives.

As they develop social competences and in an atmosphere where their personal well-being is safeguarded, young children develop a moral identity; a sense of right and wrong as they distinguish between what is acceptable or unacceptable; as they experience and adopt values depending on how they are treated and how they see others being treated.

Communicative competences

Successful personal and social development necessitates expressing oneself in a comprehensible manner. Several communication tools are available to help children understand themselves and others. The predominant tool which facilitates communication is language. As children engage with and gain experiences in using both oral and printed language, their abilities to think, understand, express themselves and extend social relations are strengthened. The overall objectives of language in the early years should predominantly focus on helping children increase their awareness of the functions and purposes of language skills[5] which make them a versatile tool for any member in a society. Where language learning is concerned, from a young age children gain flexibility and control over language through correct and appropriate choice of words; extend their vocabulary; learn how to assert themselves; become aware of the subtle influence which language has on society and how listening, speaking, reading and writing are tools which are used almost constantly in order to get other things done.

Whilst respecting, promoting and strengthening the child's first language, young children growing up in the Maltese context begin their journey of second language learning. This is a direct reflection of the wider society rather than necessarily being an immediate need young children have. However, it is imperative that children are exposed to the two official languages of the country in meaningful ways which would serve to promote learning and

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5   'Language skills' refer to listening, speaking, reading & writing. 'Language skills' is also broadly used to refer to receptive skills & production skills.

understanding of the world which goes beyond language learning itself. Second-language teaching can be successful if lessons are learnt from mother tongue acquisition and the pedagogies used in the more formal school settings should be driven by principles which are appropriate for the age group.

In addition to language, from a relatively young age, children are exposed to alternative sources of communication, access to which has been greatly facilitated with the widespread availability of digital technologies. Growing up in the 21st century, children require digital competences which enable them to communicate more effectively not only with their immediate contacts but even with others. Availability of and accessibility to different information sources enables children to engage with and make sense of the world around them; encourages them towards communication and collaboration, promote skills for conducting research as well as locating, storing and retrieving information.

Learning dispositions

A child-centred environment is one which encourages children to find things out for themselves; allows for experimentation, hypotheses testing, and trial and error. Through hands-on approaches in pursuit of answers to self-initiated activities, young children develop perseverance and concentration. The role of adults is to be sensitive to young learners' interests and inclinations and to provide stimulating environments which challenge the minds of learners in their quest for information. Adults responsible for young learners need to believe that children have a thirst for knowledge and by allowing for inquiry based activities and independent exploration, children are more likely to remember and understand what and how certain results are achieved. Learning by doing is a more effective methodology than learning by telling. Children need to enjoy learning and have a real sense that they are more than capable of achieving and learning.

Intellectual competences

The early years experiences should offer children possibilities to engage with and understand the world around them. Rather than restrict children's opportunities and interests, every effort ought to be made to ensure that activities, environments and resources are challenging and that children are given the possibility of tapping into diverse sources of information. Early years settings are responsible for helping children become aware of skills and strategies necessary to access, look for, elicit, retrieve, organise and understand information. Equipped with appropriate strategies and a healthy approach to risk-taking, children acquire a range of cognitive skills such as identifying, labelling, sorting, grouping, sequencing, classifying, categorising, and matching.

Learning Areas for the Primary and Secondary Years

The NCF presents a brief description of each learning area outlining the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes which learners are expected to acquire. Many of the descriptions are adapted from *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: European Reference Framework* (2006/962/EC).
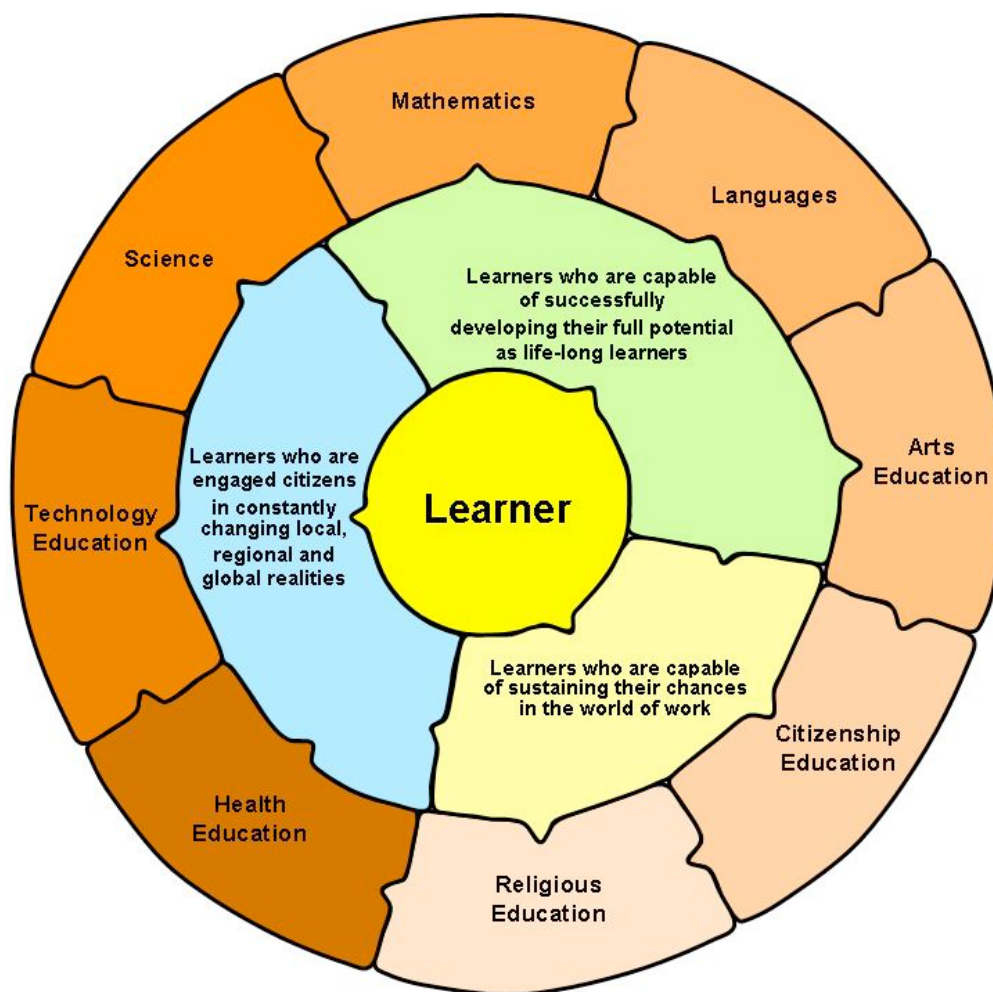
Figure 2.4: *The learning areas*

Languages

Communication in languages is the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing). This linguistic fluency and competence is expected in both the mother tongue (L1) and the second language (L2), which in the Maltese context generally refer to Maltese and English respectively, and to a somewhat lesser extent to foreign language(s). Learning Maltese, English and other languages enables learners to develop an awareness of the nature of language and language learning, widening their personal, social and cultural understanding. Learning a language enhances young people's cognitive and affective development, nourishing confidence in their own abilities and thus helping them to take responsibility of their own learning. As they develop communicative competence they also improve learning skills of a more general application including memorisation, pursuit of knowledge, analysis, drawing of inferences and self-evaluation. As young people use language for different purposes and in different contexts, they develop an awareness and understanding of the culture/s of the people who speak the target language and learn to respect cultural diversity, prepare themselves for the world of work and further education in Malta and abroad.

Consultation Document 2: Rationale and Components

Developing language skills enables children and young people to:

- use questioning, information, critical thinking, decision-making and memory to organize thoughts, ideas, feelings, and knowledge;

- communicate with others and respond to how others communicate;

- formulate, express and present their arguments, feelings and ideas in a persuasive manner; and

- appreciate and enjoy the literary heritage of the languages they learn.

Through learning languages, children and young people develop:

- a positive attitude towards communication;

- a disposition towards critical and constructive dialogue; and

- an appreciation of aesthetic qualities and a willingness to strive for them.

Learners should be able to interact linguistically in appropriate and creative ways within a broad range of societal and cultural contexts. They need to be able to select appropriate genres, distinguishing between and using different types of texts, and searching for, collecting and processing information from a range of texts including situations and events, printed materials, literary texts and ICT. A positive attitude towards communication promotes an appreciation of cultural diversity, and an interest and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication.

The learning and teaching of the **second language** (generally English, which is one of the two official languages in Malta), reinforces the acquisition of the most important international language of communication. English language learning further provides access to the knowledge and culture of most of the world. Whilst Maltese and English are core languages in this learning area, the introduction to foreign languages through a language awareness programme is being proposed in the later years of the primary cycle[6]. Given the political, geographical and historical context of the Maltese Islands and the EU's emphasis on language learning, multilingualism (developing individuals who are proficient in more than two languages) assumes a greater importance.

The learning and teaching of **foreign languages** at secondary level provides for the acquisition of further communication tools that are useful to appreciate cultural diversity and to facilitate interaction within the European and international contexts. In addition to the compulsory languages (Maltese and English), learners choose one foreign language

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6   The Common European Framework (Council of Europe 2001) promoted the need for multilingual capability. Although the imposition of learning too many languages needs to be safeguarded against, children need to be given the opportunity to study at least one other language (L3) in an informal and semi-formal manner during the final Primary years. The current trends in language learning at this level point to an approach that is dialogic and interactive, wherein pupils are exposed to learn the language and the culture through carefully selected language activities.

in the first year and continue to study this throughout the secondary years. There could also be the possibility for learners to choose a second foreign language in the later years of the secondary cycle. The acquisition of multilingualism, which is directly related to one's opportunities in the world of work, is encouraged in the secondary years.

Mathematics

The ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations is important for all learners. Through mathematics, learners acquire a sound knowledge of numbers, measures and structures, basic operations and basic mathematical presentations, an understanding of mathematical terms and concepts, and an awareness of the questions to which mathematics can offer answers.

Learners develop skills to apply basic principles and processes in everyday contexts and to follow and assess chains of arguments, thinking, manipulating, reporting and presenting results. They learn to reason mathematically, understand mathematical proof and communicate in mathematical language, with the use of appropriate resources. As they learn, they should develop a positive attitude based on a respect for truth and a willingness to look for explanations and assess their validity.

As they become more fluent in Mathematics, their studies increasingly provide young people with opportunities to deepen their mathematical knowledge and reasoning, to come more formally into contact with abstract and logical reasoning, and to better appreciate and apply the communication possibilities that the mathematics medium offers. They will come to appreciate and use a range of approaches to the use of number, measurement, data handling, space and shapes and use logical and creative mathematical thinking and modelling to investigate problems and propose solutions.

With the great majority of young people expected to continue further education, the secondary mathematics experience assumes the responsibility of preparing and motivating young people for further studies both in Mathematics itself as well as in other areas of learning. It should be a preparation that paves the way to a variety of levels of mathematics that relate to both academic and vocational routes.

Science

Competence in science is the ability to use a body of knowledge and methods to explain the natural world, in order to identify questions and draw evidence-based conclusions. All learners need to acquire knowledge of fundamental scientific concepts, principles and methods, the impact of science on everyday life, the benefits and risks of certain applications of science, as well as some of its limitations. Competence in science also involves an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of individual citizens. Consideration of ethical, economic, social and moral issues contributes to a deeper understanding of science and its links to everyday life. This dimension should help young people to integrate knowledge from different learning areas and understand that science does not have a solution to all problem situations[7].

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7   A vision for Science Education is being developed concurrently with this document.

Early learning in science involves children in finding things out for themselves by observing, exploring and investigating their environment. As they do so, they develop a sense of wonder about the world, acquiring understanding of simple scientific concepts and the vocabulary to communicate their findings. They start to learn how scientists work and develop a sense of themselves as "young scientists".

Through their study of science, learners also acquire inquiry and critical thinking skills which enable them to ask appropriate questions, devise methods for answering them, obtain and interpret evidence and communicate the conclusions and reasoning that led to them. As their understanding of science develops, young people will learn to use their observations to explain concepts, principles and theories, and use their skills to elaborate on explanations using appropriate scientific language and techniques such as tables, charts and mathematical methods. They will learn to use their imagination to explore creative solutions to the scientific problems they encounter. They will also discover how our understanding of scientific theories, principles and information has been built up through history in biological, chemical, physical and environmental contexts. They will link science to daily living and the local environment and develop an interest in ethical issues and a respect for safety and sustainability. Further studies in Science provide students with a variety of opportunities in the world of work.

Technology Education

The area of Technology Education includes Design and Technology and Digital Literacy. In Design and Technology learners combine practical and technological skills with creative thinking to make useful products. In Digital Literacy they learn how to use digital information and communication technologies. Design and Technology education primarily concerns 'design and make' tasks, where learners work through a creative process. They typically generate, develop and communicate ideas for chosen products; plan how to put their ideas into practice; select appropriate tools, techniques, and materials; explore the qualities of materials; shape and combine materials and components; apply safety procedures; critically examine what they are doing; and on the basis of feedback, plan to improve their work. Their exploration of materials will include Resistant Materials, Electronics and Graphic Products as proposed by the subject review committee commissioned by the DQSE (2010).

The 'design and make' process, in Design and Technology empowers learners, as they progress through the different cycles, to intervene creatively in the manufactured world, manage resources in an entrepreneurial manner and integrate knowledge across domains. The values of consumers and manufacturers together with the values and judgements of the designer come into play in the decision-making process of 'design and make'. In addition, Design and Technology provides learners with opportunities to focus on health and safety, and environmental issues. The exploration of values, judgements and decisions enables learners to join the technological debate and become active citizens in the community.

In digital literacy learners acquire skills in the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology for communication, work and leisure. They acquire basic skills in ICT organised around four major overlapping strands: data sources and manipulation; information communication & presentation; programmed control; and social, ethical & personal aspects. They will discover and use digital data sources, and learn to organise, manipulate and interrogate data. They will learn to communicate and present information

using multimedia presentations; send emails and attachments; use VOIP and video-conferencing, and chat to collaborate with others. They may use collaborative authoring tools and program devices to respond to input using a simplified iconic interface. They will also explore social and ethical dimensions of digital technologies and learn to practice netiquette and online safety measures.

Further studies in this area can potentially pave the way for opportunities in ICT-related careers.

Health Education

The area of Health Education includes Physical Education and Sport, Personal, Social and Health Education including aspects of Home Economics. The learning experiences that take place during health education activities aim at equipping learners with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills which they will need to maintain, promote and enhance physical, emotional, psychological and social well-being throughout their school life and as lifelong learners. Educators are encouraged to collaborate with parents and the wider community to ensure meaningful and long-lasting experiences in order to inculcate a deep understanding of 'self', 'other' and the impact of choices and actions upon individuals, communities and the environment. Health Education lays the vital foundation for dispositions necessary for lifelong learning. As they move through the Primary and Secondary years, commitment to social communities and environmental issues also forms part of young people's development.

Learning in this area involves understanding key concepts; analysing information, behaviours and influences on health; and communicating information, skills and attitudes which promote a healthy lifestyle. Learners demonstrate and apply positive attitudes and behaviours that maintain and enhance healthy living.

Health Education deals with two aspects:

Through **Physical Education and Sports** children develop physical skills and agility through experiences incorporating indoor and outdoor games, athletics, gymnastics, rhythmic movement and dance. These activities encourage children to:

• participate enthusiastically in activities that develop important physical skills in an enjoyable way, encouraging social interaction and promoting the self-awareness, reflective behaviour and consequential thinking which contribute to emotional and social intelligence;

• learn the skills and rules of collaborative play, sportsmanship, leadership and competitiveness;

• develop skills in teamwork and experience the benefits of working together;

• appreciate the importance of a healthy body and physical well-being; and

• become aware of and appreciate the changes that take place physically as they grow.

Through **Personal, Social and Health Education** children and young people are encouraged to learn about the importance of good health and general well-being. This is done in order to bring about an early awareness of the benefits of developing:

- a positive and resilient approach to life;

- a healthy body and active lifestyle; and

- a basic understanding of what personal and social responsibility is all about and how one's choices and actions may impact positively and/or negatively on the wellbeing of ourselves, others, communities and environment.

Learners also develop the attitudes and the skills for health within the following key areas: Physical Health; Emotional and Psychological Health, and Social and Environmental Health. The sub-strands include aspects of: physical activity and fitness, sport, food and nutrition, growth, body care and safety, sexual health, emotional, personal and social development, and healthy and sustainable communities and environments.

Religious Education

In Malta the teaching of religion in schools is seen as an important element in the integral formation of the person. Catholic Religious Education throws light on the basic questions about one's relationship with God, the meaning of life, on issues of an ethical nature, on one's personal identity and on the different dimensions of dialogue and social cohesion in a society that is becoming pluralistic like the rest of the European continent. Deeper knowledge of the different religious traditions should provide a valid contribution to the social and civic formation of the young people.

In the Maltese context religious education is currently understood as Catholic Religious Education (CRE). The development of CRE is the responsibility of the RE office of the Maltese Episcopal Conference (Martin de Agar, 2000). CRE leads learners to read, understand, interpret and communicate the Religious Language; connect to, respond to, and express their Spiritual Dimension; comprehend, analyse, and evaluate the Word of God as it finds expression in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Sacred Tradition of the Roman Catholic Church; and engage with and form a Personal Catholic Worldview that enables them to analyse and evaluate personal, local and global issues and apply the Christian message to different situations.

The parents of children and young people have the right to decide that their child does not follow Catholic Religious Education. For young people opting out of Catholic Religious Education, it is recommended that the Religious Education learning area will consist of an Ethical Education programme, which is preferred over a Comparative Religious Education programme. It is anticipated that following the endorsement of the NCF, this will be one of the programmes to be developed following discussion with stakeholders. The development of the Ethical Education programme will be the responsibility of the Education Directorates.

Learning in Religious Education challenges all children and young people to move beyond knowledge. RE seeks to educate young people regarding the dignity of the human being and the responsibility of each individual towards others for the building of a better society

and a better world. It should be a process of self-discovery, developing the moral, spiritual, and religious dimensions and contributing towards children's capacity to value, appreciate, perceive and interpret the world they live in. Learning in this area nurtures and enhances a sense of spiritual self. Children and young people develop their own identity and understand better their cultural identity. The spiritual dimension of the self should be supported by promoting values that include justice, personal responsibility, respect, reflection and active engagement in moral issues. It is important that every cycle of the RE programme is sensitive to the diverse ways in which human beings throughout history have given expression to the spiritual dimension of humanity.

The aim of CRE is to initiate children into a profound and life-long search for truth and the value of life and existence through a Catholic perspective. It is about discovering their own uniqueness, in the context of a community that is rich in experiences. Through CRE pupils may explore and experience God's love, principally through the person of Jesus Christ but also through creation and life in the community. Young people will learn to express and better understand the fundamental questions which have always been asked by humanity and begin to critically question society and find their place in it.

Citizenship Education

Civic competence is based on knowledge of the concepts of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights... It includes knowledge of contemporary events, as well as the main events and trends in national, European and world history. An awareness of the aims, values and policies of social and political movements should also be developed as well as knowledge of EU structures, objectives and values, and the diversity and cultural identities in Europe (2006/962/EC).

Citizenship Education includes History, Geography, Social Studies, Environmental Studies and aspects from Personal, Social and Health Education and Home Economics. This area allows for the introduction of entrepreneurship and the development of citizenship. Through their studies in this area learners acquire skills in enjoying rights and exercising responsibilities in various communities; dealing with conflict and controversy; making informed choices and decisions, and taking action, individually or collectively to promote a just and sustainable society whose policies are based on justice, equity and a respect for the community of life.

Through their study of historical, geographical, environmental and social concepts, learners will develop the basic concepts of chronology, empathy, cause and effect, change and continuity. Through active learning and investigative and fact-finding experiences, they gain an understanding of the interrelationships between people, their cultures, contexts and land use. Through exploring and investigating their immediate past and present, they develop observation and recording skills and gain understanding of the importance of collecting evidence. They learn to collate, examine and test data in an attempt to draw simple conclusions from it.

As they develop their learning in this area, young people will learn to employ citizenship skills, showing responsibility towards their environment and their world and understanding the impact of enterprise and industry on the local and global community. They will gradually acquire positive attitudes and a respect for human rights; learn to adopt sustainable lifestyles; and develop a sense of belonging within their locality, country, European and international community and a willingness to participate in democratic decision-making at all levels to

improve the quality of their lives.

Arts Education

Arts education includes Art, Music, Dance and Drama. This area provides opportunities for learners to be creative and imaginative, to experience enjoyment and inspiration, and to develop skills in the visual and performing arts. Participation enables learners to experience and enjoy the energy and excitement of making images and forms, performing and presenting for different audiences and of being part of an audience for others.

Learning in this area involves the development of artistic and creative skills, technical and practical knowledge through the performing and the visual arts, and music. Through the particular techniques of each art medium learners develop personal expression and ideas; appreciation and evaluation of both local and foreign art and culture; and communication, performance and interpretation skills. These skills are all transferable to other areas of learning. Appreciating, responding to and actively engaging in creative and imaginative expression supports the development of one's personality. Children learn to explore and appreciate feelings, communicate them through different media, and develop their personal aesthetic dimension.

Arts Education allows children and young people to acquire a range of skills necessary for creative expression. In drama and dance they learn communicative and theatrical skills; in music they develop musical ability, appreciation and expression; and through art and design activities they learn to appreciate and construct visual imagery, respond to the feelings they evoke, and make artefacts. They also experience enjoyment and contribute to other people's enjoyment through creative and expressive performance and presentation. Through this area they begin to develop an understanding of the creative process and the development of aesthetic standards and values, appreciating the Arts within local and international cultural settings.

Cross-curricular themes

The following cross-curricular themes have been identified as essential for the education of all students and for achieving the aims of education: **eLearning** (MEYE & MIT&I 2008); **Education for Sustainable Development** (United Nations, 2004; UNESCO, 2006); **Intercultural Education** (2006/962/EC); **Education for Entrepreneurship** (2006/962/EC) and **Creativity & Innovation** (2006/962/EC).

eLearning

Waller and Wilson (2001) define eLearning as the effective learning process created by combining digitally delivered content with (learning) support and services. This definition is a practical one that highlights the interaction required for learning to occur. Through technologies and digital content, eLearning in primary and secondary schools ought to enhance the teaching and learning processes, the interaction among peers, and interactions between students and teachers.

eLearning in the primary and secondary schools is driven by the need for increased access to learning which can be facilitated through:

- a shift to constructivist education philosophies;

- a move from teacher to student-centred learning activities;

- accessing both local and global resources;

- making full use of the potential of technologies to enable children to show and create knowledge; and

- an increased complexity of tasks and use of multi-modal information.

Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a process enabling learners to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required to become active participants, individually and collectively, in decision-making processes, both at local and global levels that will improve the quality of life of present and future generations. ESD promotes a system based approach and an integrated knowledge base that invites learners to develop a holistic view of their surroundings, i.e. an interaction of aesthetic, environmental, economic, political, technological, cultural and societal perspectives. Through ESD, the learner's environment (within and outside the school) becomes a fundamental teaching resource that is locally relevant and culturally sensitive. Learning experiences are structured around the identification and resolution of environmental issues that equip and empower learners with problem solving and decision making skills that are indispensible in the context of lifelong learning. ESD is about learning that:

- re-orients education to address sustainable development;

- respects, values and preserves past achievements;

- values the Earth's resources and its peoples;

- strives towards a world in which all humans have access to sufficient food and water, a healthy and productive life, basic education, and a safer and just environment;

- assesses, cares for and restores the state of our planet; and

- develops citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally. (United Nations, 2004; UNESCO, 2006)

Intercultural Education

Intercultural Education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all. It provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society which enable them to respect, understand and show solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations (UNESC0, 2006).

Intercultural Education promotes an inclusive educational culture and respect for diversity, allowing individuals to function across cultural divides, and offering a platform for children and communities to assert their culture and individuality with confidence.

Intercultural Education challenges various educational processes, such as decision-making

within the school, languages of instruction, methodologies used, student interactions and learning resources. Intercultural Education ensures the inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices within the learning environment, provides spaces for learning about the languages, histories, traditions and cultures of non-dominant groups in a society, encourages team work and cooperative learning in multicultural contexts, combines traditional and local knowledge and know-how with advanced science and technology, and values the practice of multilingualism. In doing so it encourages an understanding of global issues and the need for living together with different cultures and values.

Education for Entrepreneurship

"Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk taking as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports individuals, not only in their everyday lives at home and society, but also in the work place in being aware of the context of their work and being able to seize opportunities, and is a foundation for more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance." (2006/962/EC, p. 11).

Entrepreneurship allows children to develop skills for life. It enables young people to handle uncertainty, respond to change and be creative. A distinction can be made between soft entrepreneurial skills which include social skills and entrepreneurial attitudes on the one hand, and hard entrepreneurial skills which focus more on developing business skills such as drafting a business plan.

The embedding of elements of entrepreneurial behaviour (curiosity, autonomy, creativity, initiative and team spirit) can be strengthened through the integration of entrepreneurship programmes, projects and activities in the established curriculum for schools both at primary and secondary level.

Creativity and Innovation

Creativity and Innovation are two aspects which need to be fully explored as they impact our personal lives, our workplaces and our communities. They are agents for change and contribute to the economic prosperity of society in general and to the well-being of the individual in particular.

Every learner has talents and our goal is to move away from the traditional meaning of creativity as an expression of artistic genius and nurture the right environment to discover such talents and to cultivate them. A whole-school approach can potentially promote a climate conducive to creativity which constitutes a vital source of flexibility, adaptability and the capacity to innovate. Creativity and Innovation is about developing:

- affective communication
- problem-solving
- fostering entrepreneurial mindsets
- lateral thinking
- leadership
- openness to cultural diversity
- originality
- questioning
- self-expression
- emotional development
- intuition

Curriculum planning should take into account cross-curricular themes thus providing connecting strands interwoven with the learning areas (see Figure 2.5). This gives learning areas coherence, relevance and stability providing a holistic learning experience by highlighting common objectives, content and pedagogies. Integration is effectively achieved through the specific planning choices once the individual curriculum documents are planned for each learning area. Such cross-curricular themes should, where possible, permeate every facet of the curriculum through a whole-school approach. Curriculum developers and teachers also need to keep these cross-curricular themes in mind when they prepare syllabi, schemes of work and lessons within each learning area.
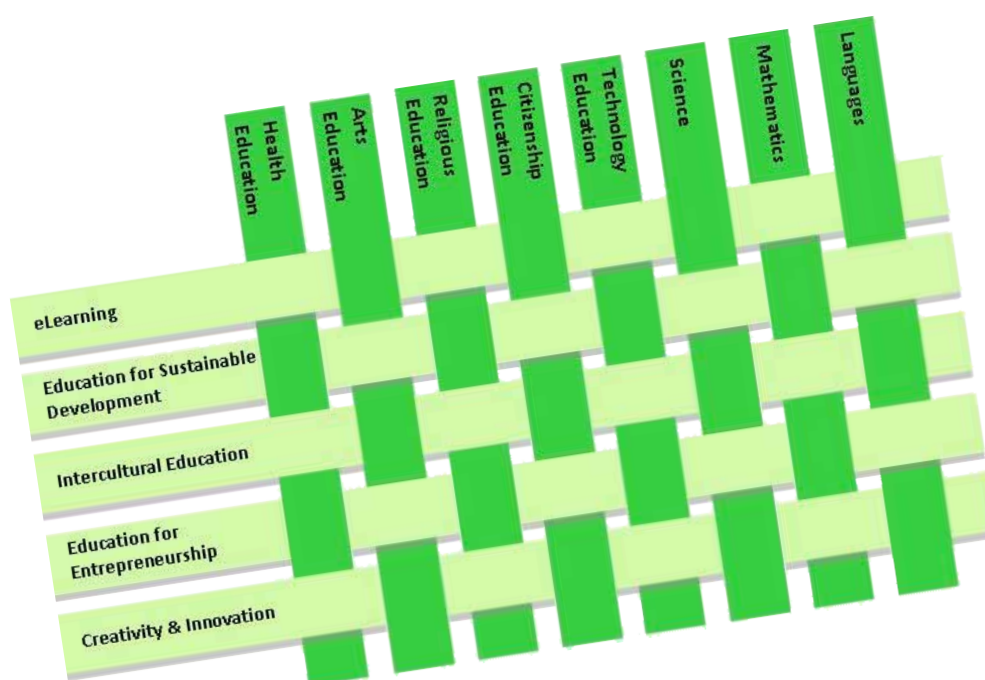

Figure 2.5: *The integration of whole school cross-curricular themes*

Conclusion

Section 2 highlighted three of the seven components which constitute the NCF. The general principles and aims incorporate the theoretical foundation of the framework whilst the learning areas and cross-curricular themes present a proposal of how the content can be meaningfully organised and presented to learners in a manner which makes learning relevant.

The successful realization of the theoretical foundation of the NCF can be achieved by taking into consideration another four crucial components, namely: effective learning and teaching; evaluation and assessment, parental and community involvement as well as support structures. Section 3 of this document considers recommendations for each of these components towards enabling colleges and schools to implement the curriculum framework.

Section 3

Pedagogy, Practice and Evaluation

Section 2 of this Document focused on the first three components of the NCF: the general principles, the aims of education and the learning areas. This section focuses on the remaining four components which are required for the successful implementation of the framework, namely effective learning and teaching; assessment and evaluation, parental and community involvement and support structures.
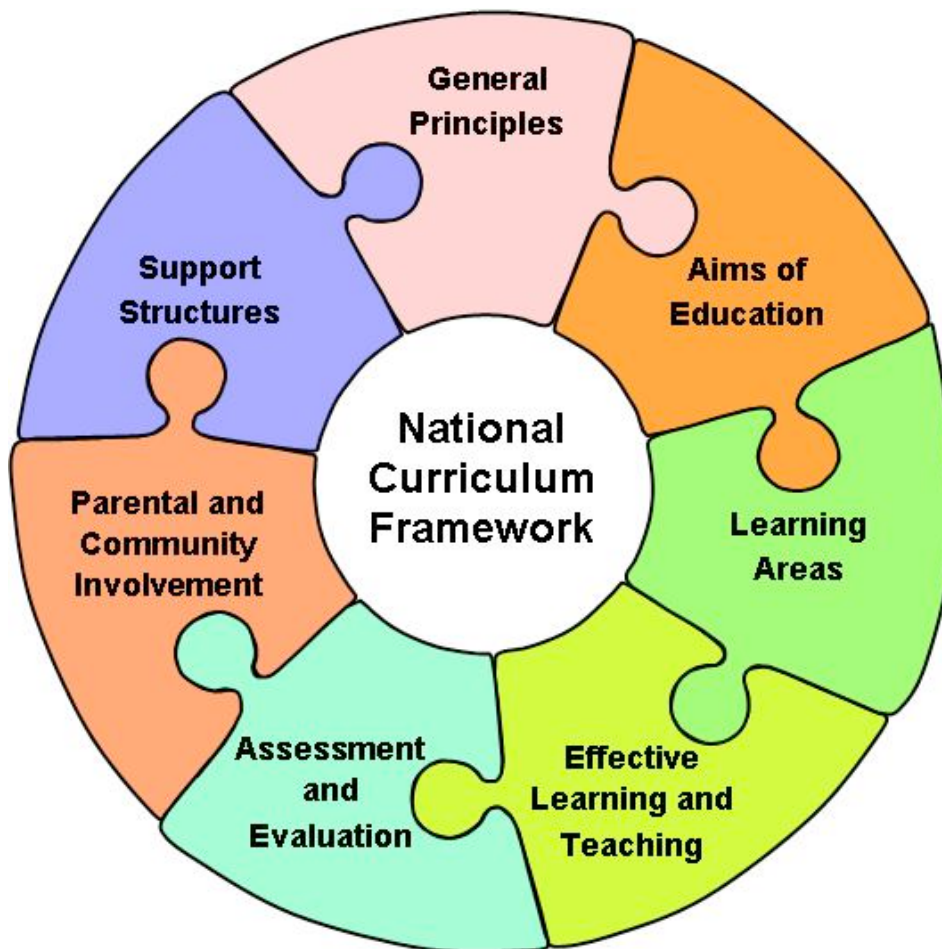

Figure 2.1: *Major interdependent components of the National Curriculum Framework*

Effective Learning and Teaching

Learning processes and effective pedagogies

The success of the curriculum proposals set out in the previous section will be directly dependent on the quality of learning and teaching in classrooms and other settings where learning takes place.

Current theories of learning are based on the constructivist perspective which combines cognitive and social constructivist approaches for effective learning and teaching. One of the main features of constructivist learning is that it is an active process during which individual learners construct their own meaning. It is most effective when learners are actively engaged in authentic, contextualised tasks. Social constructivism holds that learning is enhanced through co-operative and collaborative learning which promote the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The current understanding of learning … is characterised as … "constructive" as learners actively construct their knowledge and skills; "self-regulated" with people actively using strategies to learn; "situated" as best understood in context rather than abstracted from environment; and "collaborative", not a solo activity. (de Corte, 2010).

Teaching is most effective when learners are provided with opportunities to make sense of new knowledge in a context which allows them to interact with the teacher and other learners to discuss and negotiate their understanding. In this view, a teacher-dominated pedagogy, which relegates learners to a passive role, emphasizes memorization and limits interactions between learners, is unlikely to promote effective learning.

The process of learning needs to be challenging and engaging for all learners, including the lowest and highest achievers, and to help them develop their maximum potential as lifelong learners. Learning programmes need to be competence-based rather than knowledge-based, emphasising the process of learning over the mere acquisition of content, particularly in the context of a society where knowledge is readily accessible. In terms of curriculum design this could be achieved by considering three dimensions:

- **content and mastery** which involves having students explore and understand the whole breadth of ideas in a particular content area;

- **higher order thinking** which involves analysis, synthesis and evaluation of content and concepts in some depth, and applying them in different ways and in different contexts; and

- use of **overarching concepts and themes** to examine curriculum content through different lenses, for example change, systems, power, patterns and/or cause and effect.

Learning programmes that are not over-laden with inert knowledge can allow teachers to experiment with various teaching/learning strategies. Effective learning takes place when the teacher:

- elicits the learners' prior knowledge, builds on it or modifies it, and guides learners to an understanding of new knowledge;

- offers support to learners by scaffolding, that is, by using appropriate strategies to help individual learners progress;

- promotes deep learning by emphasising understanding and application of knowledge instead of surface learning with its emphasis on memory and recall of information;

- supports learners to become independent problem-solvers;

- organizes group tasks which help learners exchange ideas, co-construct knowledge and work collaboratively;

- uses a variety of learning experiences to provide learners with opportunities to practise and apply their skills; and

- provides timely feedback to learners based on a range of relevant evidence, that learners can then use themselves to improve their learning and increase their understanding.

Learning environments

Since children develop holistically and because learning and development do not occur in a sequential, linear fashion, Early Years practitioners and Primary and Secondary teachers are encouraged to set up learning environments which appeal to children's interests, are relevant to their day-to-day experiences and can be explored in innovative and challenging ways. Direct, hands-on experiences encourage interaction, engagement and involvement which in turn lead to improved understanding, recall and the development of mental representations. This approach supports children and young people as they move from concrete, tangible experiences to symbolic and abstract notions. As children develop their learning, dynamic learning environments provide a context for dealing with issues in depth and from multiple perspectives. Thorough and detailed observations, analysis, investigations, exploration and experimentation through projects, topics and themes fit in with children's and young people's curiosity and desire to discover the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of the world around them.

Setting up interactive learning environments which appeal to children and young people requires careful planning on the part of practitioners in order to ensure the promotion of the whole range of skills, attitudes, knowledge and values which children can acquire through well-thought and presented activities. Also important is the recognition and promotion of learner-initiated activity and enquiry. Such activity should be encouraged as it acknowledges learning as an on-going process where all involved make valid contributions.

Progression and differentiation in learning

Principles of diversity and inclusion underpin the NCF, which emphasises student-centred learning and focuses on teaching methods that show learners how to learn. This approach implies that at all stages, learners of all aptitudes and competences should experience success as well as a level of challenge, and obtain the necessary support to sustain their effort. They need flexible learning programmes providing diverse learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners and allow for different rates of progression as children and young people work through their school years. Appropriate use of ICT-based technologies can further support student-centred learning.

Different approaches are needed to address different learning needs. The professional teacher's role is to select suitable strategies that actively engage learners, motivating them to own and internalise their learning experiences. With the focus increasingly on the learner, and with more mixed-ability classes in schools, differentiated approaches are becoming

more important and teachers need to adopt strategies that build on pupils' previous learning and help them progress.

The proposed secondary years curriculum has a number of characteristics intended to facilitate the grouping of students in a way that promotes differentiated teaching. The NCF recommends that initially setting may be organized for the core subjects: Maltese, English and Mathematics. In the remaining subjects the grouping of students will need to be organized taking different factors such as subject options into account. The NCF further recommends that eventually the grouping of students will take on more differentiated scenarios as is the case in primary schools and in a number of secondary schools.

Transitions

While in the first two years of the primary cycle, the curriculum builds upon the foundations laid during the early years, in the later primary years it links closely with the secondary years to ensure a smooth transition. With the termination of the Junior Lyceum and the Common Entrance examinations from 2011, the NCF proposes a curriculum which facilitates the transition from the Primary to the Secondary years, in the context of the growing partnership between primary and secondary schools that is facilitated by the Colleges in the state sector and non-state schools with primary and secondary education provision. This is done through the reorganisation of subjects into learning areas and the progression of levels of achievement expressed as learning outcomes.

The NCF is proposing that:

• the transition from primary to secondary school should be smooth and offer progression in a way which supports learners as they learn to take more responsibility for their own learning;

• learning in the secondary years should consolidate and build on the learning experiences of primary education and prepare learners for the wider challenges they will have to face beyond compulsory education;

• the present system of two years in the junior secondary cycle followed by three years in the senior secondary cycle be retained for the State sector, although other schools are free to consider other alternatives.

The secondary years are an important period for personal development and learners should strive to have a strong platform for later learning and for successful transition to qualifications at the right level for them. In the later years of secondary education the relationship between the curriculum and certification becomes of key significance. By the end of secondary education, learners are entitled to an end of cycle certification which could include the Secondary School Certificate and Profile documenting their formal, informal and non-formal learning, and the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examinations or alternatives, all of which are recognised by the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC).

The NCF seeks to redress the absence of a vocational education component by incorporating it within the secondary curriculum rather than as a separate route in the education system

and providing recognized certification at the end of the process which facilitates the transition to different options in post-secondary education.

Issues related to the language of instruction

The NCF recognises the need for clear direction on the language of instruction and assessment[8] as part of a revamped National Language Policy. Such a policy is a complex matter which needs to address:

- *entitlement issues* – all students need to become proficient in Maltese and English and preferably in another language for their full social, cultural and economic integration;

- *cultural issues* – the rightful place of Maltese as an expression of our national identity; the preference for English as the first language of a minority of our population; the diverse nationalities of students in schools; overcoming prejudices or perceptions related to other languages and cultures;

- *implementation issues* – the use of language/s in different learning areas; language of assessment; the 1999 NMC recommendation that schools develop their own language policy according to their own needs;

- *professional issues* – teachers who are proficient in both English and Maltese; the development of resources in Maltese; the development of Maltese for specific purposes; the need to heighten interest in and access resources for other languages; and

- *economic issues* – the need to have proficiency in English for competitiveness in a globalised economic environment; the importance of foreign languages for the fostering of international relations.

Diversity of students

While the NCF embraces diversity and requires that this can be promoted through an inclusive environment, it acknowledges that these obligations present challenges for the development of an appropriate curriculum and a classroom culture whereby all students are accepted and supported in achieving their full potential.

The NCF acknowledges that every learner has diverse needs to be understood and addressed. In this context, the curriculum should address the needs of:

- learners with special educational needs[9] for whom the curriculum should be written in a way that allows the teachers to appreciate how every student can access the same curriculum in every learning area and allows for the assessment of a continuum of ability;

- learners with severe disabilities for whom the curriculum should offer an education based on a continuum of abilities expressed in terms of developmental phases;

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8   Refer to Appendix I

9   The reference to special educational needs here refers to the internationally recognised 18% of the school population who at some time in their school career may have a temporary or permanent barrier to their learning

- learners from disadvantaged social backgrounds for whom the school, in collaboration with key local and institutional stakeholders in the community, needs to up-skill and support families and the local community to provide an environment that is educationally rich and stable;

- learners from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds including children of refugees and asylum seekers for whom the curriculum should include access to an educational programme which is embedded within an emotionally and psychologically supportive environment that respects their individual circumstances; and

- gifted and talented learners for whom the process of learning needs to be sufficiently challenging to engage and motivate them to develop their talents.

The NCF recognises that a high quality education requires a supportive infrastructure that provides the conditions and opportunities for all learners to achieve their full potential and for teachers and administrators to implement the curriculum effectively. This infrastructure requires on-going support for teachers, including professional development, student services and human resources. In particular, the curriculum needs to be written in such a way that it allows teachers to appreciate how every student can access the same curriculum in every subject. Levels of achievement for each learning area need to be identified to enable students to work at different paces according to their different needs and challenges. 'Inclusive objectives' will be needed to divide the main objectives into more manageable steps of progression, since all students have the right to achieve all they are capable of and teachers need support to understand how this can be done.

To deliver an appropriate curriculum of this kind, teachers will need resources that are available and accessible for all schools, possibly through an intranet system. The work of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) will need to be reviewed especially at the secondary education level, where the NCF recommends alternative models for the deployment of LSAs (Appendix II). Finally, current student services, including the psycho-social services will need to be maintained and strengthened centrally as well as at the college, school, class and individual levels. The Directorate for Educational Services has a range of services intended to maximise the potential of all students.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and Learning

Assessment in pre-school and school settings makes an essential contribution to learning and progress at all levels. It should be seen as an integral part of the learning and teaching process, providing students and their parents with continuous, timely and qualitative feedback about children's progress, giving teachers information about their practice, and providing schools and colleges with information about their curriculum planning, learning and teaching. Assessment *for* learning (assessment for formative purposes) is a process carried out as learning is taking place. Learners and their teachers use the outcomes to find what learners know and are able to do in relation to planned learning. They use the information and evidence gathered to make decisions about how to focus and improve future learning. Assessment *of* learning (assessment for summative purposes) is usually

carried out at the end of a unit or periodically at the end of a module, mid-year or at the end of the year. Information and judgments about learning are pulled together in a summary form for purposes of reporting to parents and sharing information with other teachers in the next class or school. If learners are fully aware of what is expected of them (the learning intentions) and the success criteria against which their learning will be evaluated, they will then develop the self-evaluation skills which will help them become self-directed learners..

Well-designed and appropriately implemented, the classroom assessment process can:

- support learners to use self-assessment to gauge their learning, identify their strengths, their learning needs and their next steps;

- encourage learners to support one another's learning through peer assessment;

- help teachers to understand children's learning better, use evidence to monitor learners' progress, reflect on their practice and adapt or match their teaching to their learners' needs;

- help teachers plan for the learning of individuals and groups and ensure that all children receive appropriate attention;

- support parents to share their children's learning experiences, interpret assessment information and follow their children's educational development.

Assessment in Early Years settings

Assessment in the Early Years is a means of finding out what children are interested in as well as finding ways of recording and documenting their progress. For assessment to be effective and meaningful for young children, documenting narrative, illustrated accounts of their achievements can provide a more holistic reflection of what each child is truly capable of doing. Assessment in early years is as important for the children as it is for the adults, especially for practitioners. Assessment based on careful observation and a responsive and reflective attitude informs practices. Observing and documenting children's achievements helps adults to capture the learning processes as well as the outcomes.

Assessment in the Primary years

Throughout the Primary years, formative approaches to assessment should continue to support learning, helping both teachers and the learners themselves to reflect on each child's learning and plan for further learning. Formative approaches also help teachers to evaluate practice, to reflect on the learning of individuals and groups of pupils, and to record and report on each child's overall performance in a consistent way. Everyday interactions between teachers and pupils in oral and written work and other activities, and interactions among the pupils themselves, provide valuable information about each child's strengths and needs. Assessment accumulated over the year takes into account the children's overall progress and development against a learning outcomes framework. This information helps the teacher obtain a better understanding of the children's needs and plan appropriately. It can also be shared with parents and colleagues and provide information about how well the school is helping pupils reach expected levels of achievement. For children experiencing

learning difficulties in the core areas of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, the NCF considers the checklists developed for Years 1, 2 and 3 as part of the *National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education* (2009) as useful diagnostic tools for ensuring the necessary support throughout the primary years. Students following individual learning programmes may be assessed using alternative forms of assessment. Particular care should be taken to ensure that the approaches adopted pay attention to building children's confidence and self esteem and that individual learning programmes do not become isolated learning programmes. These issues should be considered in the assessment policy.

From Years 3 to 6 the NCF recommends school-based assessment, incorporating the assessment of oral/aural skills in Maltese and English. The assessment process provides parents, teachers and the school administration with an overview of each child's development in terms of levels of achievement. From Year 4 the process becomes more formalised with the introduction of examinations in conjunction with other forms of assessment. The combination of approaches should help parents, teachers and school management to obtain a clearer picture of the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of individual pupils in the different learning areas.

The moderation of school-based assessment and marking of examinations will ensure consistency in the application of assessment criteria across schools and colleges. Moderation may consist of vetting of the school/college based examination papers, which will take place prior to the administration of the examination, followed by moderation of marking at school, college and central levels as is already the practice.

At the end of Year 6, a national end of primary benchmark in Mathematics, Maltese and English will be set and marked centrally to provide national benchmarks. Whilst these asessments are compulsory for children attending State schools, schools in the Church and Independent sectors may also participate. These methods of assessment will be used to record the achievement of pupils at the end of the primary education years and provide important information to receiving secondary schools about the learning of individual pupils.

Assessment in the Secondary years

The general principles of assessment also apply at the secondary level. Classroom and school assessment for formative and summative purposes will inform all stakeholders about the quality and effectiveness of their efforts to help learners acquire a quality education. At the classroom level, assessment for learning provides information about progress and informs learners and classroom teachers about progress and actions that may be needed to improve learning, helping learners to acquire knowledge and develop skills, including skills in self-evaluation. Teacher assessment is also useful in assessing skills and attitudes that cannot readily be assessed through conventional tests and examinations. Evidence of learning may come from written and practical work, project work, field work and other similar practical learning activities.

Assessment as part of learning and teaching should remain central to the process. This is an essential part of promoting students' active participation and helping to identify students

who need support and attention. Similarly, assessment of coursework done in school under the teachers' supervision can ensure that it is the students' work and that students are given support when necessary. Both class work and coursework carried out at school promote collaborative learning and develop each student's identity as a learner and as part of a learning community. Assessment of the students' achievement for summative purposes should not be dependent on one-off performances in tests and examinations. There is much to gain from considering information obtained through multiple approaches to assessment carried out over a scholastic year. This leads to a more valid assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes within the different learning areas.

Coursework carried out outside the classroom allows students to devote more time to research and creative work and engage with tasks in different ways. Care should be taken not to overload students with work that may be so elaborate that it requires them to seek help to complete the tasks. One way of avoiding overload is for teachers from different subjects within a learning area to cooperate in setting projects through which students demonstrate knowledge and skills.

Assessment of subjects offered in the vocational area is based exclusively on coursework. The validity and reliability of this assessment will initially be ensured through the built-in quality assurance mechanisms of the BTEC model.

Setting coursework across more than one subject or even across more than one learning area also leads to less fragmentation in the curriculum. In addition, students are given the opportunity to apply and transfer skills across contexts. This approach requires coordination and monitoring managed at school level, so that different teachers' judgments about the quality of students' work in relation to agreed criteria are consistent. This can be addressed by local college moderation, agreeing success criteria and monitoring their consistent application with all students. Communication and agreement about expectations among the different teachers involved in assessing the students' work increases the reliability of the assessment. For State schools, it is recommended that a more flexible approach towards annual examinations is adopted whereby in some year groups the examinations may continue to be organized centrally, whereas in others they may be organized at a college level. Students following individual learning programmes may be assessed using alternative forms of assessment. This should also be considered in the assessment policy.

The NCF recommends the development of an assessment policy at the school and college level to monitor progress during the year. The policy should seek to enhance the quality of assessment and how it is reported to parents and other stakeholders such as examination boards and employers. It should also take into consideration the frequency, duration and timing of oral tasks and listening comprehension tasks in languages, and practical work and other types of coursework in the different learning areas, including the vocational subjects. For the State sector, the policy should also establish in which year groups the examinations will continue to be centrally set. For those year groups where the examinations will be college-based, the Educational Assessment Unit needs to monitor standards across the different colleges.

Evaluation: Quality Assurance Mechanisms

The NCF recommends that schools are encouraged and supported to constantly develop their capacity to be communities of reflexive practice through:

- the process of school development planning, that has inbuilt mechanisms for self-evaluation;

- mentoring;

- the Performance Management and Professional Development Plan (PMPDP); and

- external reviews carried out by the Quality Assurance Department within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

Prior to the 2006 amendments of the Education Act, there were already important quality assurance tools available to schools and the State to ensure that all learners got their educational entitlement. These were:

- School Development Plans (SDPs), which were introduced in 1996 and which became mandatory with the publication of the 1999 NMC;

- the Performance Management Profile (PMP) used by all teaching and administrative staff in State schools which identifies the professional's role in implementing the schools' SDP. Several schools in the Church and Independent sectors also use performance management structures; and

- regular classroom visits by the subject Education Officers, which had both a supportive and a monitoring role.

Ensuring consistently high standards in learning and teaching begins within the schools themselves. Schools need to be encouraged and supported to constantly develop their capacity to be communities of reflexive practice, that is to:

- plan purposefully for learning and teaching according to shared beliefs, criteria and targets;

- implement these plans critically and flexibly;

- set standards based on the assessment and review of practice and improvement;

- review their own planning and the school's development planning according to this feedback, keeping in mind the possibility of reviewing their shared beliefs, criteria and targets.

In the evolving model of quality assurance, schools continue to be supported in their capacity to develop and implement School Development Plans (SDP) that have inbuilt mechanisms for self-evaluation. This self-evaluation component focuses on the extent to which projected actions have been carried out and the extent to which planned improvements have been

achieved. The SDP builds upon progress to date and incorporates other priorities and realities that must be addressed.

Two important tools available to State schools in support of their efforts to be communities of reflexive practice are mentoring and the Performance Management and Professional Development Plan (PMPDP). The structures for mentoring were made possible through the 2006 amendments to the Education Act, and mean that teachers can be professionally supported at critical points in their career, starting from their induction into the profession, at school or college level according to need. The PMPDP is a development of the PMP, and is intended as a tool that documents teachers' ongoing efforts at sustaining and improving their professional practice in line with their lifelong learning needs and their contribution to the School Development Plan.

The internal quality assurance measures that have been described are complemented by external measures aimed at ensuring support and external validation as well as accountability. These focus on the effectiveness of leadership, teaching and learning in fulfilling the educational entitlement of learners, in terms of the school's own Development Plan. External reviews are not normative: they do not measure schools against some ideal school. The evaluation assesses the school's performance and efforts against its own assessment of its needs. Recommendations for further improvement are meant to inform the school's self-evaluation process and affect its development planning.

National monitoring of achievement

It is the responsibility of the Directorate for Quality and Standards (DQSE) to evaluate curriculum implementation, innovation and emerging trends, through external assessment at national and international level, through end-of-year examinations, moderation of school-based assessment, monitoring achievement in the different learning areas, national benchmarks, surveys of literacy and numeracy; SEC examinations, PISA[10], PIRLS[11], TIMSS[12] and other surveys. Assessment at the national level using agreed standards is essential for ensuring that the students' entitlement for a quality education is being respected.

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10 PISA: Programme for International Student Achievement. It is an internationally standardised assessment that was jointly developed by participating economies and administered to 15-year-olds in schools. PISA assesses how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society. In all cycles, the domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy are covered not merely in terms of mastery of the school curriculum, but in terms of important knowledge and skills needed in adult life. In the PISA 2003 cycle, an additional domain of problem solving was introduced to continue the examination of cross-curriculum competencies.

11 PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study is a five-year cycle of assessment that measures trends in children's reading literacy achievement and policy and practices related to literacy. The international population for PIRLS includes students in the grade that represents four years of schooling, providing that the mean age at the time of testing is at least 9.5 years.

12 TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study is a four year cycle of assessment. It measures trends in student achievement in mathematics and science. It is administered to students at the fourth and eighth grades.

The success of assessment at the national level depends on a number of requirements that should be in place including:

- assessments that closely link to the Learning Outcomes Framework of each learning area;

- The Educational Assessment Unit (EAU) within the DQSE is responsible for assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning. Among other tasks, the unit is entrusted with the organization, implementation and monitoring of assessment in the different learning areas during the scholastic year to ensure consistency in the application of national levels of achievement, the moderation of set coursework, and the setting of the national benchmark at the end of the primary years.

- The introduction of external monitoring in all learning areas using samples of schools and students over a cycle of five years.[13].

- The relative weighting of the coursework and examination could be different for different subjects but there should be agreed weightings. Assessment in languages should assess speaking, listening, reading and writing while assessment in subjects which require practical, creative and problem-solving skills should include the assessment of these skills during authentic tasks set and monitored during the school year. The use of papers which relate to the levels of achievement. Students' achievement in the different subjects will be interpreted in order to guide individuals towards further subject choices, and subsequently, career choices.

- At the end of the secondary years, besides the Secondary School Certificate and Profile[14], all students should be able to qualify for certificates by an external agency, which show their achievement in the learning areas. Currently, the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examination of the MATSEC Board awards certificates that are accredited at Levels 2 and 3 of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). The BTEC qualification in the vocational subjects is comparable to the same MQF levels.

- There is also the need to develop a complementary system of external certification that encourages students, who currently end secondary education without external certification, to obtain qualifications at Level 1 of the MQF alongside the Secondary School Certificate and Profile as recommended in the MATSEC review (Grima et al., 2005).

Parental[15] and community involvement

Learning should be contextualised within the surrounding community, the borders of which extend beyond the immediate environs of the school. Formal educational structures should

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13   Details about this recommendation are available in the document, *Transition from Primary to Secondary* (2008).

14   The Secondary School Certificate and Profile includes assessment of the students' formal education, non-formal education, informal education, personal qualities and attendance (Grech, 2009a, 2009b).

15   Throughout this document any reference to parental involvement in education includes legal guardians and significant adults recognised as having a parenting role in the life of the child. This definition is without prejudice to the legal obligations of schools.

be sensitive and responsive to the realities and opportunities of the learners' environment. Additionally the community (parents, businesses/industries, local councils) – within which learners interact – should acknowledge its major role of investing in and promoting a high quality education. This section discusses first the role of parenting and then the role of the community in schooling.

Schools and Parents

Research shows that parental interaction with schooling is one of the most important factors for learners' successful educational development (Desmond & Elfert, 2008; UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2008; Bastiani, 2002; Williams, Williams & Ullman, 2002; Hornby, 2000). Since the introduction of school councils in the 1988 Education Act, parental involvement has grown in importance and in the variety of forms it takes. Currently, four types of parental interaction exist locally:

- *Home-school links:* These links include the parents' attendance at school ceremonies and functions. The links are mediated through notes, circulars and correspondence or communication notebooks, as supported by digital technology. It also includes face-to-face interaction during parents' days and meetings to discuss, the selection of subject options or SEC Paper A/B examinations. Coordination of home and school strategies to improve behaviour, homework and scholastic performance are all examples of interactive links.

- *Parental participation:* Participation includes assistance in events as requested by the school. Services such as Library or Classroom Assistants, in Reading Groups or in the organization of school events or outings are all examples of parental participation.

- *Parental involvement:* With involvement, parents take a lead in the decision-making processes of the school because they can influence the agenda of what needs to be done. Service in Parent Teacher Associations, School Councils, School Board of Governors, and local, national or international parent associations are all examples of parental involvement.

- *Parental lifelong learning:* In parental lifelong learning, parents recognize that the school can be a site and/or an opportunity for their personal growth. Parental presence can be either reactive, such as attending talks or educational activities organized by the school, or it can be more proactive. Examples of the latter include the training of parents to review their life goals through the Lifelong Learning Portfolio (Spiteri & Galea 2007), and the training of Parent Leaders to empower other parents within the school and local community (Mayo 2007) and IT courses for parents in schools.

Home-School Links, *Parental Participation* and *Involvement* as well as *Parental Lifelong Learning* are different entry-points for parents who are encouraged to consider more and more diverse forms of parental interaction with schools. The four categories are important for parents, their children and schools to ensure the most holistic educational development of all the stakeholders concerned.

The NCF recommends the development of a national policy to be developed by the Directorates with other stakeholders to formalise the different forms of participation and strengthen

parents' active involvement in their own and their children's educational development.

Schools and the Community

The relationship between the schools and the community has four dimensions:

a) The local community is a useful resource for the school to contextualise learning. This can be done through, for example:

- visits to sites of national relevance;

- school hosting persons or organisations related to curricular learning;

- orienting the school curriculum to include site visits, participation in events and contribution of personalities.

b) The school can be a locus for lifelong learning for the community. This is being achieved through evening classes and through programmes of parental support to learning and parental empowerment courses. As the resources available to schools are significantly enhanced through the current extensive school building and upgrading programme in schools, the potential for greater service to the community has significantly improved.

c) The community can assist schools to prepare learners for the world of work. Work orientation experiences have been introduced by many secondary schools, exposing learners to the real work environment whilst also giving a taste of the work ethic and entrepreneurship in context. Such programmes ought to be an intrinsic part of secondary schooling in all schools.

d) Schools respond to societal demands through specific curricular foci and ad hoc educational experiences. Debate within civil society suggests the need for education in specific content areas to bring about a particular culture change in contexts that are in urgent need of improvement. Typical examples include care for the environment, sexual health awareness and the need for physical fitness.

In effect, the NCF recommends that:

- schools establish strong ties with the various members, groups and agencies within the community as this will help extend learning within the community and bring learning into the school(s); and

- colleges establish partnerships with the business sector and explore different forms of engagement that can be of benefit to students and educators alike.

Support Structures

The NCF recognises that a high quality education requires a supportive infrastructure that provides the conditions and opportunities for all learners to develop their full potential and for teachers and administrators to implement the curriculum effectively. This infrastructure requires on-going student services, human resources, professional development, mentoring

and support for teachers and strong educational leadership.

Student services

Although teachers primarily rely on their own experience and expertise, the commitment in favour of diversity and inclusion promoted by this NCF requires the availability and accessibility of additional services in the students' interests. These services range along a continuum from the personal/pastoral to the curricular. For example, the support of a school counsellor may be more of a personal nature, whilst the support of a specific learning difficulties support teacher may be more of a curricular nature[16]. The following underlying principles govern the delivery of the services:

- all services start from the reality of the learner incorporating a personal/pastoral component;

- all services need to address the implications of the particular service on the learner's educational entitlement and development;

- such services need to be given in the context of diversity, implying that they address the learner's current/actual level of competence with a view to subsequent progress and achievement;

- the services facilitate teachers' access to appropriate information, skills and complementary provision enabling them to address a learner's educational entitlement effectively; and

- services that require temporary withdrawal from the classroom are effective to the extent that they lead to the reintegration of the learner into the mainstream class, and the up-skilling of classroom teachers to ensure the sustainability of such reintegration[17].

Human resources

Over the years a number of teachers have been enrolled to support the learners' curricular needs in particular areas in various schools. This provision came to be known as the peripatetic service. The developments suggested by the NCF necessitate a review of this service with the aim of supporting the curriculum at its various levels of implementation.

The NCF is setting a clear direction as to the responsibilities of staff for the teaching of specific learning areas is to be carried out. The framework stipulates that Primary School teachers will be responsible for the teaching of Maltese, English, Religion, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Citizenship, and Health Education including Physical Education. Cross curricular themes will be embedded in the different lessons rather than appearing as discrete subjects on the timetable. Within this scenario, four levels of support are envisaged:

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16   A detailed list of services provided is included in Appendix II

17   Behaviour management services which incorporate Nurture Groups and Learning Support Zones are provisions which aim at reintegrating the learner and up-skilling the classroom teacher.

- Curricular Support teachers whose aim is to support classroom teachers in the teaching of Science, Technology, Physical Education and I.T.. These teachers will ensure that learning is effective by assisting the classroom teachers in the planning of, and where necessary, delivery of lessons. They will also provide suggestions and educational resources aimed at improving the quality of teaching in these subject areas. These subject specialist teachers will work together with College Principals, Education Officers and Heads of Department and will be assigned to specific primary schools.

- The teaching of art, music, dance and drama, Personal Social & Health Education (PSHE) and the awareness programmes in foreign languages, necessitates specific skills that not all teachers may possess. Consequently the teaching of these areas will be taken over by Subject Specialist teachers who have the necessary skills, attitudes and knowledge to focus on these areas and who will replace the classroom teacher for these specific lessons. These teachers will also be assigned to specific primary schools usually by college.

- Cross-curricular themes require planning sessions as well as regular monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice. This type of support will be offered at a college and national level, depending on the theme. Examples include Education for Sustainable Development (including EkoSkola) and support teachers at the eLearning Centre.

- Schools need to be supported in the implementation of specific policies through a whole school approach. This can be achieved by a team of teachers, functioning at a national and college level, who visit schools on a regular basis to support the school in its policy development and implementation. Moreover, these teachers will help schools in the development of educational material and in the running of professional development programmes. Examples include literacy and numeracy support teachers.

In both the Primary and Secondary years, the support of the Heads of Department and the Education Officers is to be maintained and strengthened.

On-going professional development

The ongoing professional development of teachers to update their knowledge and skills-base should be viewed as indispensable for the continued effectiveness of the profession. Teaching professionals ought to develop their professional and pedagogical work with learners on the basis of contemporary perspectives on research, theory, content knowledge and teaching practices and on their understanding of the learners. They should consider themselves as critical and reflective professionals who engage with contemporary theory and practice. Professional development occurs in a variety of ways including:

- induction courses;

- mentoring and peer observation;

- school professional development;

- in-service training;

- short term courses;

- certificate/diploma/degree/post graduate courses;

- formal and informal dialogue with colleagues and peers;

- professional learning networks including local and international professional associations; and

- personal initiatives where educators engage with professional material and relevant, recent publications or even through attendance and presentations at workshops and conferences.

Mentoring

Mentoring supports professionals at various stages of their career. Newly qualified teachers and others facing new roles, challenges and responsibilities benefit greatly from structured support by more experienced and specifically trained peers. Mentoring is also beneficial when a practitioner is experiencing challenges that require professional support. The mentor's principal role is to help an individual to reflect purposefully on his/her professional practice in order to improve it.

Over the past few years, various initiatives across sectors have been taken in order to support teachers during their induction years. These will be further developed through the setting-up of a mentoring structure to be provided at college and school levels. The necessary up-skilling for national service provision and eventual quality assurance will be provided by the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE).

Legal and psycho-social services for teachers

Since 2007 State school teachers have been able to avail themselves of psycho-social and legal services provided free of charge by the Directorate of Educational Services (DES). These services have proved popular, and especially in the psycho-social area the great demand has led to moves to increase the service further. Some Independent schools have also developed pastoral care teams that support teachers in the psycho-social sphere. The NCF reinforces such structures of support.

Leadership of key practitioners

Everyone appreciates the value, necessity and importance of leadership. However, agreement is more tenuous when people begin to discuss what it is. There are hundreds of definitions of leadership each having a different theory about its source, process and outcome. Leadership can be described as the influence, the process of persuasion or example by which individuals or teams induce a group or the organisation to pursue identified objectives. Leadership can therefore be summarised as the performance of actions that enable participants in a community to release potential within a trusting environment, inquire into practice, create stories, understand and evaluate them and create meaning.

Defining leadership incorporates 'purpose', 'direction', 'individuals', 'groups', 'culture and values', 'shared strategic vision', 'priorities', and 'planning change'. The emerging view of

leadership is a constructivist one where leadership is recognised as a reciprocal process that enables participants in an educational community to construct meanings, leading towards a shared purpose of schooling. Learning and leading are intertwined because these concepts arise from understandings of what it is to be human. To be human is to learn and to learn is to construct meaning and knowledge.

In a context where change is a permanent process the best organisations are those that find a way not only to cope with change but to use it as a driving force for excellence. Lashway (2006) describes learning organisations as surfers: whilst they cannot control the wave they are riding, they continually adapt to it, using its energies to get them where they want to go. In this process, vision is crucial. Organisations may never arrive at where they think they are heading but having a vision keeps them focused as the journey unfolds. In the local context, organising State schools into college networks can develop into effective entities which support innovation and development.

Networks promote the dissemination of good practices, enhance the professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate centralised and decentralised structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organisations and systems (Hopkins, 2003, p.154)

The NCF encourages a leadership model that promotes distributed forms of leadership. In such a context, whilst school leaders play both a visionary and strategic role, they also need to focus on developing a collaborative culture which draws upon the full range of professional skills and expertise to be found among the members of the organisation. Varied opportunities can be created within the college network system and in other sectors to allow educators to engage in critical discourse, to address curricular matters and improve the quality of learning and teaching. This model of leadership is applicable in different ways in the Early Years, Primary and Secondary years.

Support for Curriculum Development and Implementation

The DQSE, in liaison with colleges, schools and the Faculty of Education has a key role in the further development and implementation of the NCF which includes the development of:

- learning areas;

- respective learning outcomes framework which involves the re-writing of the current syllabi;

- corresponding level descriptors;

- learning strategies that embrace diversity;

- assessment procedures that ensure individual progression of learning; and

- summative assessment pegged to national levels of achievement.

Decisions related to the curriculum, pedagogy, choice of learning and teaching materials, equipment and resources should become more and more the outcomes of collaboration between DQSE curriculum development staff, Senior Management Teams (SMTs) and teachers within schools. The DQSE supports colleges and schools in the development of both tailor-made and in-house courses which address specific needs, as well as training that addresses national educational priorities. The DQSE is also responsible for moderation and monitoring of school-based assessment and the development and/or monitoring of summative assessment in colleges and schools.

Conclusion

This document presented the theoretical considerations together with the seven components of the NCF to provide readers with detailed information about the conceptualisation and implications for change envisaged as a result of the proposals and recommendations.

The seven components of the NCF cannot be considered in isolation but each component has a distinct and unique contribution towards the development and implementation of a seamless curriculum and a coherent framework which spans learners' experiences from the early years through to the end of secondary school.

The subsequent document presents a proposal for the interpretation of the framework at each of the three education cycles experienced by children in Malta, namely the Early, Primary and Secondary years.

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Appendix I:

Need for a National Language Policy

The Context

Maltese and English are both official languages enshrined in our Constitution while Maltese is also the National Language. Both are taught throughout the whole course of compulsory education. Nonetheless, at the end of secondary education a percentage of the student cohort still does not manage to pass the SEC examinations in these languages or even attempt sitting for them[18]. There are also concerns over the proficiency of both Maltese and English in further and higher education institutions, where the perception is that proficiency in both languages has decreased over the years.

The 'inferior' status that Maltese had for hundreds of years until the 19th century had the advantage of preserving and protecting the language from extinction. But the price for this preservation was that the language developed in a restricted number of registers and contexts. This legacy of positioning and limitation is still evident in the way Maltese is used in our schools. There are, indeed, a variety of ways in which Maltese and English are employed. In most schools Maltese is mainly used as the medium of instruction, communication and social interaction, whilst in some schools the preferred medium is English. Textbooks, continuous assessment and examinations in most of the subjects of the curriculum are in English. Teachers tend to switch from Maltese to English in a complementary way during explanations in class. This is leading to a situation where most technical terms are learnt in English with the result that Maltese is neither being developed to a high degree nor is it being used to develop new registers in the different subjects/learning areas.

Although over the years Maltese has expanded its usage to an increasing range of formal and informal situations, English remains the dominant language of the economy and our passport to communication with most of the world. However, the exposure to and use of English has changed as well over the years. The variety of English used by most Maltese adults has crystallized into a post-colonial, increasingly localised 'Maltese-English'. Maltese-English has distinct characteristics with respect to grammar, intonation and vocabulary, but does not include code-switching or code-mixing.

At the same time, Malta is not immune to the linguistic implications of globalization. Increasingly diverse forms of 'English' are significantly impacting the communication expectations and behaviours of Maltese young people, mainly through both spectator and interactive electronic media. Apart from the near-hegemony of American-English in cinema, SMS and electronic social networking are redefining the distinction between formal and informal code, between writing and speaking, and are challenging the very notion

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18 Research shows that this is partly due to our schooling structures that prior to the recent transition reforms from primary to secondary, differentiated our students too early and too often. This resulted in an inequitable distribution of resources and impaired self-esteem that led to regressive cycles of self-fulfilling prophesy (Grima & Farrugia, 2006). But it may also be partly due to a lack of a proper bilingual grounding in the primary cycle of schooling.

of 'correctness' in communication. Reading habits are changing significantly as more and more reading in English is taking place in electronic contexts such as games, sites and blogs. This democratization of authorship has opened up vast new communication possibilities, but at the same time sharpens the issues of what it means to be 'literate'.

The issue of Maltese and English as media of instruction was addressed by the 1999 NMC. It had divided the subjects in two sets and recommended that: (1) Maltese, Social Studies, History, Religion and PSD be taught in Maltese, while (2) the rest be taught in English. *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien tal-Malti* believes that this recommendation has unintentionally reinforced the idea that the language of prestige is English (Dec 2009)[19]. Furthermore, the 1999 NMC allowed code switching for pedagogical purposes. The obligation laid down by the NMC that all schools should formulate a language policy and that this should be an item of the School Development Plan has not been followed consistently by all schools. Neither have the consolidation programmes envisaged for students with difficulties in Maltese and English by the NMC been implemented in all schools or with equal effectiveness.

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19   *Il-bilingwiżmu fl-edukazzjoni ta' pajjiżna. X'inhu l-aħjar għal uliedna.* Seminar jointly organised by the Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti & DQSE. 5th December 2009.

Consultation Document 2: Rationale and Components

Appendix II:

Support Services and Inclusion

A. Support Services

The Student Services Department within the Directorate for Educational Services hosts and co-ordinates the operation of a number of services which ensure that student needs are being met as well as ensure access to the National Minimum Curriculum. The development of psycho-social aspects of students throughout their formal education, fall within the realm of the psycho- social services within this same department. Service provision can be identified at various levels mainly:

At central level by services hosted within the Student Services Department

- Students have access to Communication and Technology Unit (ACTU) whereby support is provided to various stakeholders including student, teachers, LSAs , parents, health professionals, SMTs and others to find an augmentative or alternative mode of communication for students with severe communication difficulties as well as access to technology especially in relation to accessing the curriculum.

- The Autism Spectrum Support team supports students with autism spectrum disorders as well as their parents/carers, class teachers, LSAs. The team provides support at home and at school and advice on resources according to individual needs.

- The support peripatetic teachers in the early intervention service work specifically with children from birth to five years of age who experience developmental, medical, psychological, physical, learning and other difficulties. They support parents/carers in the planning and implementation of an education programme that is structured according to the child's individual needs.

- The peripatetic teachers for visually impaired students offer services in mainstream schools depending on the requirements of the specific case and other exigencies. The particular abilities and needs of each student, his/her age, the opinions of other professionals and the wishes and views of both parents and students are taken into consideration.

- The peripatetic teachers for hearing impaired students offer services in mainstream schools. To the extent possible, such services promote and advocate for full inclusion of hearing impaired students with some adjustments as necessary.

- The home tuition teachers support students between the ages of 5 and 16 years who due to long term illness or medical conditions cannot attend school.

- Child safety services provide intervention and prevention services to students, parents and schools for children who experienced abuse.

- The anti-substance abuse service provides assistance to schools whenever cases of alleged substance abuse occur. In addition staff provide information on the use of illegal and inappropriate use of substances.

- The good behaviour and anti bullying service provides assistance to schools whenever cases of alleged bullying occur. In addition, staff works towards a whole-school approach to address these issues, and also provide relevant information and training.

- The School Psychological Services work for the provision of a healthy psychological environment that facilitates the learning and development of children and the provision of an effective therapeutic service as and when required.

- The School Social Work section works for the provision of an effective social work service to all students of compulsory school attendance age in support of their education and personal growth, working within the students' educational, family and social environment.

- The Unit *Għożża* provides a support service and an educational programme to school-aged pregnant students, leading them to adopt a positive attitude towards motherhood while empowering them to pursue their career path.

- The Education Medication services promote an efficient health-promoting lifestyle and environment in the educational system and respond to student and staff medical needs in educational institutions. Staff also facilitate primary and secondary prevention of disease and disability.

At College level by services provided to the ten colleges on the Maltese Islands.

- The career guidance service provides curricular guidance including subject options and choice of courses and facilitates transition of students from primary to secondary, from secondary to post-secondary, from post-secondary educational institutions to other educational institutions and/or work.

- The counselling service provides on-going service leading to the holistic development of students.

- The Inclusion Co-ordinators participate in the development of a college-wide Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy and provision in collaboration with the SMT and College Principal. They ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of this policy and related action in order to ensure equitable access to a relevant curriculum for students with Individual Educational Needs (IENs) as well as overseeing implementation and review of IEPs amongst others.

- Nurture groups, and learning support zones and centres have been set up to support students with social and emotional difficulties, with a clear focus for the reintegration of service users are quickly as possible.

At classroom level

• Learning Support Assistants support and collaborate with the class teacher and other colleagues and who under the teachers' guidance assist in the education of all pupils in class especially those with individual educational needs so that their individual curricular entitlement is ensured and their learning needs are catered for. LSAs also have an important role in participating fully in MAPs, IEPs and Individual Transition plans amongst others.

At individual level

• Students who are identified as having a statement of needs from the Statementing Moderating Panel are eligible for an IEP. This is developed for the student with a disability and describes the modifications and adaptations for a student's educational programme and services necessary to ensure full access to the educational entitlement. This is in accordance with the Inclusive Education Policy regarding students with a disability (Ministry of Education, 2000).

• Special examination arrangements for students with learning difficulties. This is supported by the School Psychological Services and the Specific Learning Difficulties Service.

B. Inclusion and the NCF

Philosophy of Inclusion

The concepts of diversity and inclusion have evolved over the years. The National Minimum Curriculum (1999) presented inclusion as one of the core characteristics of schooling in Malta. In that document it was mainly understood as the mainstreaming, where possible, of learners with special needs and disabilities, for the holistic educational benefit of all the learners involved. On the other hand diversity was mainly understood in terms of the richness and acceptance of different social and culture backgrounds.

The prevalent paradigm of inclusion led to an emphasis on the identification of needs by the Statementing Moderating Panel and the provision of facilitators, now called Learning Support Assistants (LSAs).

The Spiteri Report (2005) problematised this dramatic increase in the numbers of LSAs that was not necessarily always resulting in better learning and teaching for the students concerned. It explored a wider concept of inclusion and its implications for curriculum development for all learners. With the proposed NCF, diversity is being understood as a core characteristic of the curriculum because it is a core characteristic of the learners themselves.

Diversity of students

We currently have a two-track approach with regard to the policy of inclusion. Whilst most of the learners are receiving their education in mainstream schools, a small number of

learners attend Resource Centres[20] where their individual educational needs are best met in these purposely equipped sites.

Beyond this reality, today we are recognising that Malta's student cohort is a truly diverse one, and efforts are increasing to explore pedagogical approaches which are responsive to differences including cultural, ability, religious, linguistic and socio-economic background. A classroom culture needs to be created whereby students regardless of ability, class, cultural or linguistic background belong and are supported to be given the best opportunities to learn.

With regard to students from disadvantaged social backgrounds and in collaboration with key local and institutional stakeholders in the community, the school should primarily seek to up-skill and support families and the local community to provide an environment that is as educationally rich and stable as possible. Concurrently, in the knowledge that such efforts will be less than satisfactory for some of the children, it should seek to develop compensatory structures and mechanisms that aim at filling, in the best way possible, the critical lacunae which arise when the child does not have an educationally stimulating and stable environment at home. This may imply addressing basic needs such as food and rest, providing a nurturing environment to address behaviour management, and employing alternative learning mechanisms from the traditional one that relies on homework.

Equal attention needs to be given to gifted and talented students. The process of learning needs to be challenging enough to engage them and help them develop their maximum potential. In terms of curriculum design this could be achieved by considering effective practices in three dimensions:

- **content and mastery** which involves having students move as rapidly as they effectively can through a particular content area;

- **higher level processing** which features in-depth examination of the content related to the subject, and

- use of **overarching concepts and themes** whereby students examine the subject content through the lenses of change, systems, power, patterns and/or cause and effect.

Another reality at a local level involves students who have diverse social and cultural backgrounds including students of refugees and asylum seekers. Support to this group of students includes access to education and transition for entry into mainstream schools, planning the educational programme for students according to the individual needs and year group, identifying strategies to overcome language barriers as well as emotional and psychological support.

The Directorate for Educational Services has a range of services intended to maximise the potential in all ability levels of the students. Detailed information is given in Section A of this Appendix.

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20 Prior to the Special School Reform launched in 2010, learners with special educational needs (SEN) were served by Special Schools, which were originally differentiated according to the degree and type of support the learners required. The Reform transformed the Special Schools into Resource Centres, which will provide support to mainstream schools and provide SEN learners with the experience of transitioning from one school to another as they grow up, in a manner analogous to mainstream schooling.

Collaboration between Teachers with Learning Support Assistants

The working relationship of LSAs with the class teacher involves collaborating with and supporting the class teacher in:

- assisting in the education of all learners in class, in particular with learners with special educational needs so that their individual curricular entitlement is ensured and their learning needs are catered for;

- developing and implementing an Individual Educational Programme (IEP) by adapting the mainstream schemes of work, lesson plans and resources;

- preparing and writing the IEP document of every student with a statement in class;

- assisting in the preparation of educational materials and playing an active part in all the components of the instructional and educational process in class under the direction of the class teacher; and

- participating in the observation, assessment and documentation process of the performance and behaviour of included learners.

The level of collaboration between LSAs and the teacher also depends on the level of support determined by the Statementing Moderating Panel for the individual learner. There are four levels of support:

1. **Full-Time Support on a one-to-one basis:** The LSA should dedicate all her/his time to support that particular learner.

2. **Full-Time Support:** The learner requires the full support of the LSA but not on a one-to-one basis. The LSA is present in the classroom throughout the whole day and can support more than one student in the same class provided that only one of the students is in need of full time support.

3. **Shared in the Same Class:** The student requires the shared support of the LSA who is in the classroom throughout the whole day. This type of support is determined by the students' statement. The Learning Support Assistant can support a maximum of two students in the same class.

4. **Shared Support:** (half day support) The learner does not require support throughout the whole day. This type of support is determined by the statement. The LSA may either be assigned responsibility of up to three learners who are in the same class and/or support up to two learners who require shared support but are not in the same class. In the latter case equity is recommended.

At the end of the primary years, the relationship between the LSA, the teacher and the learner necessarily undergoes a change. This is both because of the learner's changing developmental and socio-emotional needs, as well as because of the teaching reality in secondary schooling which involves multiple teachers. Therefore, learners with a statement of needs moving on to secondary undergo a transition programme and an IEP, describing

in detail the abilities and needs of the learner. The secondary school is then responsible for the implementation of the recommendations as stated in the 'statement of needs'.

The present system of support in secondary schools has its advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that LSAs:

- support the identified learners enabling them to give undivided attention to the learner/s;

- develop a good working relationship with their assigned learners and their family;

- devote more time to prepare individualised programmes, monitored by the subject teachers, for the learners who are not able to follow the class curriculum;

- concentrate on the creation of resources needed by the learner/s under their care;

- prepare daily schedules denoting the type of modifications needed during the various lessons; and

- regularly update students' files.

The disadvantages are that:

- as learners develop into young adults, they feel uncomfortable being constantly accompanied and assisted by their respective LSA;

- learners often resent the labelling being given to them by peers;

- independent skills needed may not be encouraged;

- dependant skills develop, thus not preparing the learners to face the challenges life brings after compulsory education;

- learners find difficulty coping on their own when the LSA is not at school and consequently they do not participate during lessons;

- in certain classes, for example, Basic Skills classes, schools are ending up having three or four adults in class with twelve learners. This is unacceptable since support is being duplicated and LSAs are not utilised in the best possible manner;

- learners are not being offered the opportunity to learn to work with different adults/ LSAs as they are always working with the same LSA (2 years, sometimes more) and then find it hard to work with another adult/LSA;

- LSAs never have time to specialise in one or more core subjects (Maltese, English and Mathematics) as they have to support the learners in all subjects;

- sometimes there are two or more LSAs in class (Options or Basic skills classes); and

- peers are not being encouraged to support fellow learners.

In order to address the difficulties identified in the present situation, support in secondary schools needs to be re-thought. It is proposed that LSAs be 'attached' to either subject teachers or subjects or particular classes/settings. There is no prescribed model as each secondary school has its own realities. Two models are being suggested below allowing Heads of School the freedom to adopt the model best suited to their school.

Two models for the deployment of LSAs in secondary schools

Model 1

LSA attached to Sets

This model can be used in those secondary schools where there is core subject setting across particular year groups. This means that all the sets in which there are learners with a statement of needs, will have the identified subject at the same time. It is immaterial how many sets there will be because the LSA can primarily be attached to the set where there are learners with a statement of needs.

In sets where there will be learners with a statement of needs, the LSA responsible for support within that set, will prepare the necessary resources needed for the learner/learners and a common daily schedule for the learners. (This will later be given to the LSA responsible for the learning needs of the learners in other subjects)

For the rest of the subjects, the LSAs will be attached to 'identified' learners as in the present scenario, responsible for the IEPs and the updating of the student's file. LSAs will offer support in a maximum of 18 lessons as five lessons a week will be identified as preparation periods for LSAs (preferably during subjects where learners do not need support).

Scenario

School Timetable	37 (35 lessons + 2 Afternoon Activity lessons)
Form	1
Classes	5
Students with a statement of needs	14 (2 of whom receiving 1-to-1 support)
Learning Support Assistants	8
Sets for Maltese, English, Maths	6 (all 6 sets for a particular subject timetabled simultaneously)

Classification as per present model:

LSA	Student/s	Lessons
1	A + B + C (Class 1.1)	37
2	D (Class 1.2) + L (Class 1.5)	37
3	E* (Class 1.2)	37
4	F + G (Class 1.3)	37
5	H (Class 1.3)	37
6	I + J (Class 1.4)	37
7	K* (Class 1.4)	37
8	M + N (Class 1.5)	37

* 1-to-1 support

Classification as per model 1:

LSA	Maltese, English, Maths	Other Subjects	Time for Preparation
1	Set 1 x 14 lessons	x18 lessons with students A, B, C	x 5 lessons
2	Set 2 x 14 lessons	x18 lessons with students D, L	x 5 lessons
4	Set 3 x 14 lessons	x18 lessons with students F, G	x 5 lessons
5	Set 4 x 14 lessons	x18 lessons with student H	x 5 lessons
6	Set 5 x 14 lessons	x18 lessons with students I, J	x 5 lessons
8	Set 6 x 14 lessons	x18 lessons with students M, N	x 5 lessons
3	Whole Day with student E		
7	Whole Day with student K		

Advantages

- LSAs will be working with the same ability group in all three core subjects, making it easier for him/her to prepare resources and daily schedules. When availability permits that an LSA is attached to a set where there are no learners 'with a statements of needs' the LSA will not need to prepare daily schedules.

- LSAs are in class to support all learners as they will be attached to the set.

- Learners' independent skills are encouraged through realisation that especially for the core subjects the LSA is more attached to the set rather than a particular learner.

- Learners will get used to working with different adults. *'Set' LSA will not be the same one attached to the learner.*

This model can be applied on a regular basis every year and with every year group in the secondary schools implementing setting for different subjects across the forms. When the number of LSAs is not enough to support the whole cohort, then Heads of School can assign LSAs to the most vulnerable set/s or those sets attended by learners with a statement of needs. It is a very flexible model enabling Heads of Schools to use it according to the realities of the school.

Model 2

LSAs attached to teachers

In this model an LSA will be attached to a particular core subject teacher. This can be done across the whole school or in particular year groups, depending on the number of LSAs available (preferably English, Maths and Maltese plus one other subject/s).

The same LSAs will then become Key LSAs for learners with a statement of needs. Each LSA will be responsible for two to three learners as at present.

In this scenario, each LSA will be attached to the subject teacher of the identified subjects.

The LSAs will also act as Key LSAs when not working with the subject teacher, supporting two to three learners in other subjects when and if needed.

The subject teacher and LSA will work as a team, between them teaching and supporting ALL the learners in class. The LSA will prepare resources and Daily schedules which will then be entered in the Student's File

Key LSAs will need to make sure that the Students' Files are updated and that the IEP recommendations are being implemented and adhered to.

Scenario

School Timetable	37 (35 lessons + 2 Afternoon Activity lessons)
Teachers of English	4
Teachers of Maltese	4
Teachers of Maths	4
Teachers of ICT (School's choice)	2
Teachers of D&T (School's choice)	4
Classes	15
Students with a statement of needs	36 (1 on a 1-to-1 basis)
Learning Support Assistants	18

Classification as per model 2:

LSA	Teacher	Students for subjects other than Maths, Maltese, English, ICT and D&T	Time for Preparation
1	Teacher of Maths 1 x 20 lessons	A + B x 12 lessons	5 lessons
2	Teacher of Maths 2 x 20 lessons	C + D x 12 lessons	5 lessons
3	Teacher of Maths 3 x 25 lessons	E + F x 7 lessons	5 lessons
4	Teacher of Maths 4 x 25 lessons	G + H x 7 lessons	5 lessons
5	Teacher of Maltese 1 x 20 lessons	I + J x 12 lessons	5 lessons
6	Teacher of Maltese 2 x 20 lessons	K + L x 12 lessons	5 lessons
7	Teacher of Maltese 3 x 20 lessons	M + N x 12 lessons	5 lessons
8	Teacher of Maltese 4 x 12 lessons	O + P x 20 lessons	5 lessons
9	Teacher of English 1 x 25 lessons	Q + R x 7 lessons	5 lessons
10	Teacher of English 2 x 25 lessons	S + T x 7 lessons	5 lessons
11	Teacher of English 3 x 20 lessons	U + V x 12 lessons	5 lessons
12	Teacher of English 4 x 20 lessons	W + X x 12 lessons	5 lessons
13	Teacher of ICT 1 x 15 lessons	Y + Z x 17 lessons	5 lessons
14	Teacher of D&T 1 x 16 lessons	AA + BB x 16 lessons	5 lessons
15	Teacher of D&T 2 x 16 lessons	CC + DD x 16 lessons	5 lessons
16	Teachers of D&T 3 x 14 lessons	EE + FF x 18 lessons	5 lessons
17	Teachers of D&T 4 x 12 lessons	GG + HH x 20 lessons	5 lessons
18[21]			

21 LSA will be attached to the student requiring 1-to-1 support and will be engaged with him/her for 37 lessons a week.

The number of subjects that each particular school chooses to support, besides Maltese, English and Maths, depends on the number of LSAs available. The subjects chosen also depend on the school keeping in mind the educational preferences of their learners.

In a scenario where there are 'extra' LSA/s, these can be deployed to Literacy and Numeracy classes, so that they can support learners in need of intense numeracy and literacy support under the guidance of class teachers. They can follow suggested reading and numeracy programmes on individual/pair basis. These sessions will be identified during the IEP meeting with full agreement with the parents as this will mean withdrawal from certain subject/s.

The 'extra' LSA/s can also be deployed to support classes where there are behavioural issues/SEBD issues, under the guidance of Learning Support Zone staff (if LSZ is available) or SEBD specialists supporting the school.

They can also be attached to teachers where classroom management can be difficult or with teachers who teach other unsupported subjects in vulnerable classes.

Advantages

- Teacher and LSA work together as a team ensuring that all learners are getting their educational entitlement;

- Teachers will only need to share their schemes of work, forecasts, lesson plans and resources with one LSA;

- Teachers will have support when adopting strategies enhancing differentiated teaching;

- Teachers will have the support of the LSA when preparing resources;

- LSA will strengthen his/her knowledge of that particular subject at all levels;

- LSA will prepare one daily schedule per class when needed (in those classes where there are learners with a 'statement of needs');

- LSA will prepare resources which will/can be used at different levels;

- LSA will be assisting in the education of all pupils in class, in particular pupils with special educational needs so that their individual curricular entitlement is ensured and their learning needs are catered for;

- Key LSA will support two to three identified learners, preferably in one class, keeping their file updated and ensuring that if needed, support is given in other subjects not being catered for by subject LSAs;

- Learners' independent skills are developed;

- Learners will not have 'their' LSA all the time, but different ones will be supporting them; and

- Learners will learn to work with different adults.

For the rest of the lessons, the LSA will be attached to those classes where there are learners with a statement of needs catering for all the learners IEP needs and keeping the Students' file updated. The LSA will have learners to cater for as is stipulated according to circular HRD/46/2009[22] or any other superseding that circular.

Advantages

- The teachers will work with one LSA and not have to share schemes of work and forecasts with a number of LSAs;

- Teamwork is enhanced;

- LSAs will become more proficient in the core subject they will be supporting;

- LSAs will have more time to work on other subjects as they will only have one core subject to cater for;

- LSAs will act as Key LSAs during subsidiary subjects; and

- Learners will adapt themselves to working with different adults, thus avoiding dependency.

In both models it is of utmost importance that:

- Staff discussions are held prior to implementation;

- Parental meetings are held to advise the parents of learners with a statement about the changes and reasons behind such a move;

- IEPs must carefully reflect the learners' needs;

- Trainee INCO support is provided as they will in turn support all human resources involved; and

- SMTs can use any model/models according to the requirements of their school.

Heads of Schools can adopt either model, adopt both simultaneously, or retain the present scenario for certain year groups and use one of the proposed models with the remaining year groups. Alternatively, the Head may decide that neither of these models can work in his/her school and opt to retain the current system.

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22 http://www.education.gov.mt/edu/letter_circulars/lc_2009pdf/hrd/HRD46.pdf