



**my**journey:

Achieving through  
different paths



EQUITABLE  
QUALITY  
EDUCATION  
FOR ALL



# INTRODUCTION

The Ministry for Education and Employment is proposing a more equitable quality secondary education which creates a legacy with the past, adapts to the present and tries to anticipate future challenges and opportunities in a globalised world. Education and training risks become irrelevant if tangible links with life beyond the school walls, remain sporadic and superficial. The intended inclusive and comprehensive equitable quality learning programmes for the compulsory secondary schooling structure is driven both by the values of inclusion, social justice, equity and diversity, and the four main targets of the *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024*<sup>1</sup>.

This evolved education system is also inspired by the philosophy of values-based education promulgated in the *Respect for All*<sup>2</sup> document and guided by the *Education for All*<sup>3</sup> audit report. It is very much in line with the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal 4 in ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”<sup>4</sup>.

*Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all*



<sup>1</sup> Ministry for Education and Employment. Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta: 2014-2024. Sustaining foundations, creating alternatives, increasing employability. Malta, 2014. Available from: <https://education.gov.mt/strategy/Documents/BOOKLET%20ESM%202014-2024%20ENG%2019-02.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry for Education and Employment and Employment. Respect for All Framework. Malta, 2014. Available from: <http://education.gov.mt/en/resources/News/Documents/Respect%20For%20All%20Document.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Education for All. Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta: External Audit Report. Malta, 2014. Available from: <http://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Special%20Needs%20and%20Inclusive%20Education%20in%20Malta%20%C2%AD-%20External%20Audit%20Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4>

# SUSTAINING QUALITY AND EQUITY IN LEARNING

It is in the national interest that we understand the basic trends which have formed the educational aspirations, policies and reforms which promoted learning that is relevant to personal, social and economic development. Our past and present experiences have helped identify areas of strength and limitations of standing practices, suggesting what should be sustained or improved, as well as where prevention or intervention are necessary to equitably promote values which help achieve the targets highlighted in the *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024*.

Malta has accrued a very strong tradition in general academic provision in compulsory and post-compulsory schooling. The Ministry for Education and Employment is committed to sustaining this educational journey whilst expanding it to increase accessibility to quality vocational training and provide opportunities for more applied learning programmes to all students ensuring parity of esteem and equivalence of qualifications. The Ministry is therefore proposing a single structure comprehensive and inclusive secondary school with equitable quality academic, vocational and applied learning programmes within the same school for all students. All programmes are to equitably provide quality learning with parity of esteem leading up to Level 3 of the Malta Qualifications Framework

(MQF). The learning programmes are also intended to provide a seamless progression from middle to secondary schools and subsequently to post-compulsory academic and vocational education, and eventually to the world of work. It learns from the past, but it is not a proposal for bringing back the previous, highly contested selective schooling system. The Ministry is proposing a significantly more adaptable, comprehensive schooling system made up of equitable quality learning experiences that better meet the educational needs of students with different learning styles and aspirations, and through different modes of assessment.

The proposed secondary school system is also the result of benchmarking our system against national, European and international successful systems. All learning programmes are to remain committed to high standards of learning which is relevant, effective and timely, respect diversity in a strong democracy founded on social justice, equity and economic growth. We need to ensure that all children develop into young people and adults equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to be active citizens, equipped with the necessary employability skills and to give valuable contributions in society.





## ACHIEVING FOUR TARGETS

The *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta: 2014-2024* is a manifestation of the Ministry for Education and Employment's commitment to provide present and future generations with opportunities to develop the necessary values, skills and attitudes for active citizenship and employability in the 21st century and increasingly close the gap between the world of education and the rest of the world, including the world of employment. Malta's compulsory schooling system can become even more relevant to the individual and the wider community by offering varied, high quality programmes tailored to individual capacities. To this end, the proposed evolution of the secondary school system is a practical attempt in reaching the Ministry's targets to:

- 1 Reduce the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools, and decrease the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence, and increase student achievement;
- 2 Support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, by reducing the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers;
- 3 Raise levels of student retention and attainment in further, vocational, and tertiary education and training; and
- 4 Increase participation in lifelong learning and adult learning.

*Provide present and future generations with opportunities to develop the necessary values, skills and attitudes*

# NO BUSINESS IS AS USUAL

Global education reforms stress the need for students to learn to adapt to and challenge new contexts, to acquire more transferable skills to avoid skills obsolescence, and to develop a socially just consciousness as a way of being.

Malta is investing heavily in its education and training system and is taking measures to modernise curricula, improve teaching quality and promote digital skills (Education and Training Monitor 2016<sup>5</sup>). While the transition from education to the labour market results to be easier than in most other EU countries, the early school leaving rate (19.8%) remains the second highest in the EU (against an EU average of 11.0%), the tertiary educational attainment rate (27.8%) is still low against the EU average of 38.7%, and participation of low-skilled adults in lifelong learning is rather low (*ibid.*).

Evidence from the current secondary school system shows that one-size does not fit all and it emerges as marginalising learners who struggle and are deemed to have failed the current provision of general education curriculum. Compulsory schooling locally is often characterised by learning that is predominantly geared towards successful attainment in examinations, with aims and objectives that are more conducive to exclusively academically-oriented education routes. Vocational training and applied learning routes are

currently only covered marginally within the secondary schooling system and, as a result, the potential of a number of learners may not be fully developed. The trend within the current compulsory schooling model, in which quality and standards are mostly defined through one-size-fits-all standardised benchmarks, is that alternative learning programmes do not offer concrete opportunities for accredited learning up to MQF level 3, at times requiring students to forfeit their chances to attain an accredited level altogether.

Notwithstanding the contested legitimacy of and debates revolving on international assessments, there are arguably undeniable findings about educational systems in general and our local system in particular that we are determined to continue acting upon. In general, the overall rate of basic skills attainment among our children is still very low in such tests. For instance, Malta's 10-year old students have performed very poor in both Maltese and English reading, and in science and in the 2011 PIRLS and TIMSS studies respectively. According to the latter study, Malta was the country that dedicated the least amount of time to teaching science (39 hours per year, compared with an international average of 85). We need to increase the number of 10-year olds who reach Intermediate and Advanced International Benchmarks in reading, mathematics, IT, and science and technology

by offering relevant learning programmes and different modes of assessment that facilitate without usurping learning.

We also need to reduce the number of low-achievers in the basic subjects among 15-year olds. Our 15-year olds' performance on PISA 2009+ tests is markedly lower than the EU average in all subjects<sup>6</sup>.

The youth unemployment rate (11.8% in 2015) and the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (10.4 % of 15-24 year-olds in 2015) in Malta are below the EU average<sup>7</sup>. The employment rate of recent employees aged 20-34 is now the highest in the EU, at 91.6 % in 2015. Despite all this, the employability skills issue needs to be refined and developed further. We need to ensure that the learning experience at MCAST and the University of Malta is relevant to sustain and increase the current employment rate of our graduates (20-34 years), to

improve the link between the worlds of education and employment, and to improve the skills base of our 25 to 64 year olds.

Whilst building on our sound heritage, we can no longer act complacent with such issues and hence business in education should not be as usual. Our mission is to provide equitable quality academic, vocational and applied education and training to all our students.

*Evidence from the current secondary school system shows that one-size does not fit all*



<sup>5</sup> European Commission. Education and Training Monitor 2016, Malta, p.2. Available from: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-mt\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-mt_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The publication of the PISA 2015 results in December 2016 will provide a more up-to-date picture of Maltese 15-year olds' performance compared to other countries.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission. Education and Training Monitor 2016, Malta, p.6.

# TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL

The Ministry for Education and Employment is proposing an equitable quality learning provision in secondary schools<sup>8</sup> that respects all students' multiple intelligences and provides different learning programmes and different modes of learning assessments. This evolution is both inclusive and comprehensive, and challenges the current compulsory one-size-fits-all schooling system. The new secondary schooling system includes the provision of general academic education, vocational education and training, as well as applied learning. It aims to extend and widen the learning experience through learning programmes that lead to qualifications at MQF Level 3.

In secondary schools all students will have compulsory lessons in key competences<sup>9</sup>, including the option for functional subjects, and will also have the opportunity of selecting optional academic<sup>10</sup>, vocational<sup>11</sup> and applied<sup>12</sup> subjects. All compulsory and optional subjects lead up to EQF/MQF Level 3 as opposed to the current provision where there is no parity of esteem when it comes to remedial learning provision in comparison to traditional/academic mainstream learning programmes.

*The new secondary schooling system includes the provision of general academic education, vocational education and training, as well as applied learning*

<sup>8</sup> Secondary Schooling is being defined as the last three years of compulsory schooling – Years 9, 10 and 11 (Forms 3, 4 and 5) aimed at preparing learners up to MQF level 3 and leading to Upper Secondary Schooling in its varied propositions and to the world of work.

<sup>9</sup> Key competences might include Maltese, English Language and an option of a foreign language, Mathematics, Science, Digital Literacy, Religious Studies / Ethics, Personal, Social and Career Development, Physical and Health Education, and Humanities (Geography, History and Social Studies).

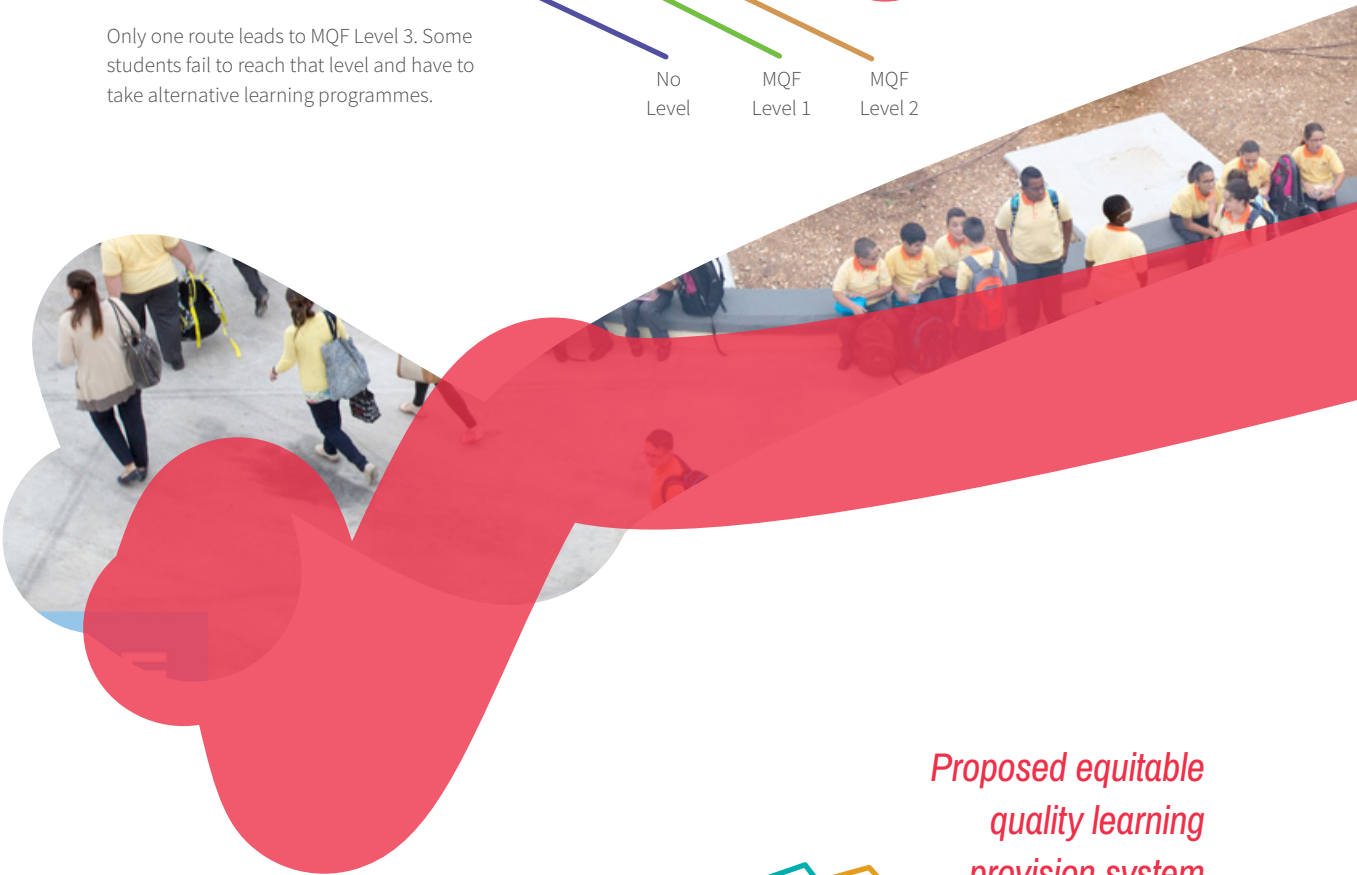
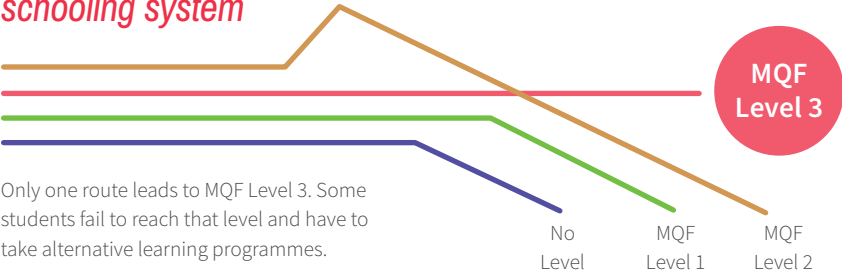
<sup>10</sup> Current traditional academic subjects include Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Accounting, Business Studies, History, Geography, Social Studies, Environmental Studies, European Studies, and Computer Studies. Subjects like Design and Technology, Graphical Communication, Home Economics, Art, Music and Physical Education are considered as academic subjects under the current system while the latter list of programmes may under the proposed system be classified as vocational subjects.

<sup>11</sup> As from scholastic year 2015-2016, vocational subject areas have been included among the options of secondary education. These include Engineering Technology, Health and Social Care, Hospitality, Information Technology and Agribusiness. The Learning Outcomes Framework (2012) include also the following five vocational subjects: Artisanship, Construction, Textiles & Fashion, Hairdressing & Beauty, and Media Literacy.

<sup>12</sup> There are a number of applied subjects being taught in both the Alternative Learning Programme schools for 15 year olds and in a number of secondary State schools for low-performing students. The new secondary school system shall provide applied quality learning programmes to all secondary school students, that may include Engineering, Science, Hospitality, Information Technology, Agribusiness and Gardening, Retail, Construction, Artisanship, Business, Creative Arts.



*Current compulsory  
one-size-fits-all  
schooling system*



*Proposed equitable  
quality learning  
provision system*



The new secondary schooling system includes the provision of general academic education, vocational education and training, as well as applied/practical learning. It aims to extend and widen the learning experience through learning programmes that all lead to qualifications at MQF Level 3.

# EQUITABLE LEARNING PROGRAMMES

Learning programmes could be broadly defined to fall under either a transitional and/or a qualification stream. The former stream prepares students to further their studies after secondary schooling both in academic or vocational institutions, while the latter prepares students with employability skills which can be used actively in employment. Both streams are complementary and essential for the Maltese labour market due to current and foreseeable skills shortages. According to the National Employee Skills Survey (2016)<sup>13</sup> vacancies were mostly available for clerical support workers and professionals. Clerical support workers and service/sales workers were recorded as hard-to-fill vacancies, and vacancies for craft and related trade workers, professionals, technicians and service/sales workers took longest to fill.

General academic learning programmes fall under the transitional stream and aim to prepare students to further their studies in post-compulsory institutions, including the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) for programmes at MQF Levels 3-4, Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology<sup>14</sup> (MCAST)

for programmes at MQF Level 3-4, or any other institution providing MQF Level 4 programmes (and eventually higher), providing also the opportunity to achieve employability skills needed to enter into the labour market.

Applied learning provides practical hands-on learning in a dynamic and progressive learning environment. It falls under the qualification stream which gives students employability skills necessary for the world of work whilst allowing them the option to progress to post-compulsory educational institutions providing programmes at MQF levels 1-3 as may be required or to higher programmes at MQF 4 (and possibly eventually even higher).

Vocational programmes facilitate learning of technical skills and knowledge and falls under both the transitional and the qualification stream. Vocational education allows students to progress to post-compulsory educational institutions, namely MCAST, ITS and other post-compulsory educational institutions providing further and higher education programmes whilst giving the necessary employability skills.

The proposed learning programmes provide flexibility for the students in either enrolling in one of the three learning domains (i.e. academic, vocational or applied), or opting for option subjects from more than one domain.



<sup>13</sup> National Commission for Further and Higher Education, Malta Enterprise, Erasmus+, Jobsplus. National Employee Skills Survey (2016). Malta, 2016. Available from: <https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/content/national-employee-skills-survey-malta>.

<sup>14</sup> MCAST has recently set up 3 Colleges with the intention of creating focused strategies that address the specific needs of students at different levels while maintaining a healthy dialogue with all interested stakeholders from employment and industry in order to provide the best programmes for the needs of society and of the local industry. This corporate structure includes the Foundation College (MQF Levels 1, 2 and 3), the Technical College (MQF Level 4) and the University College (MQF Levels 5 to 7).

# PROGRESSION FROM THE MIDDLE TO THE SECONDARY SCHOOL AND BEYOND

The current State College system clusters primary and secondary State schools geographically with students attending schools and progressing from the primary to the middle and then to the secondary school within their region.

It is being proposed that while supporting the Colloège System, every secondary school provides learning programmes within the three domains (academic, vocational and applied). It is suggested that in this evolved context, State secondary schools would best be clustered so as to ensure that each cluster of schools provides all specialised learning areas (for example Sciences, Languages, and Business and Commerce). In this case, students will progress from the middle to the secondary school according to their opted specialised learning areas and learning programmes (for example Biology, French, and Business Studies), which may be provided within the same College or in other secondary schools of the other two Colleges in the cluster.

Successful and well thought-out transitions to the different levels within formal education, namely middle to secondary to post-compulsory schooling, as well as to further and tertiary education and/or to employment, help reduce risks of early school leaving, dropout from education and/or training. This is also reliant upon an effective national career service that links the students' dispositions,

*Address problems related to skills deficit, unemployment, underemployment and progression after secondary schooling*

attitudes, skills and achievements to the three domains (academic, vocational and applied), learning areas and learning programmes. Whilst upholding the centrality of the individual and the developmental approach, the three learning domains and learning programmes should address problems related to skills deficit, unemployment, underemployment both a horizontal and vertical mismatch between their educational attainment (including skills, attitudes and values necessary for active citizenship and lifelong learning) and their progression after secondary schooling.

As has been evidenced through local and international practice, it is advisable that every secondary school partners with post-compulsory general academic and vocational institutions and the industry to facilitate a seamless lifelong journey and progression for all their students.



# PHASING-IN THROUGH A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

In 2014 the Ministry published its framework for the education strategy for Malta covering the years from that of publication to 2024. Two years later the evolved State secondary school system is being launched with the aim of implementing it in the first year of secondary schooling in 2019-2020 with the first students' cohort reaching the end of their secondary school cycle scholastic in year 2021-2022 in alignment with other national initiatives in the field.

The identification of the learning areas of specialisation in State secondary schools should be flexible enough so as to respect the State College and school's autonomy and readiness within the established national framework for the education strategy. The introduction of a single comprehensive and inclusive secondary school system requires the provision of teacher training preparation programmes in the teaching of vocational and applied learning in secondary schools.

A mind shift in teacher preparation, induction and in-service professional development is similarly required to ensure that leadership and teaching respond to the proposed equitable quality secondary school system in all three learning domains. Our commitment is to facilitate greater autonomy paralleled with the desired accountability at classroom and school levels in decisions related to curriculum and assessment in order to improve the students' experience and performance. Teachers need support to depart from

technocratic models which risk reducing them as mere administrators of heavily loaded syllabi with prescribed knowledge and content, and increasingly become empowered facilitators and specialists for learning skills, attitudes and values. The proposed evolution in professional preparation and development, grounded in existing internationally esteemed professional training programmes, supports a shift from teachers and school leaders as knowledge experts to learning and assessment experts.

It also requires learning outcomes, learning programmes and assessment programmes for all learning areas and domains, together with adequate school infrastructure, facilities and resources that, according to the clustering model, facilitate the teaching of academic, vocational and applied learning.

This intent requires legal redefinition of the functions of the central authorities and the distinction between service provision, regulatory and assessment authorities, while re-establishing the development of autonomy, authority and accountability at State College, school and teacher levels. This implies due acknowledgement within the new Sectoral Agreement between the Government of Malta and the Malta Union of Teachers that aims at providing the necessary working conditions that support, amongst others, the introduction and implementation of the proposed inclusive and comprehensive secondary schooling system.

# FEATURES OF THE INCLUSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL

There are a number of characteristics that distinguish the proposed inclusive and comprehensive secondary schooling from the current general one-size-fits-all secondary schooling system. The new system builds on the current one but ambitiously moves forward in democratising academic, vocational and applied learning for all students within a framework of parity of esteem. It retains key competences and sustains traditional academic learning programmes. Complementarily, vocational subjects and applied learning programmes lead up to MQF Level 3, are also made available to all students and are provided within the school.

*The new system builds on the current one but ambitiously moves forward in democratising academic, vocational and applied learning for all students within a framework of parity of esteem*



*All academic, vocational and applied learning programmes lead up to MQF Level 3*

# CHARACTERISTICS OF CURRENT AND PROPOSED SECONDARY SYSTEMS

CURRENT	PROPOSED
One-Size-Fits-All System	Inclusive and comprehensive equitable quality system
Traditional academic education as mainstream education	Traditional academic education, vocational training and applied learning as mainstream education with parity of esteem
Vocational subjects offered to relatively academically high-achieving students only	Vocational subjects offered to all students as part of the options exercise including key competences and behavioural skills
Only a selection of two or three vocational subjects are made available to selected students	All optional areas from the academic, vocational and applied learning programmes are made available to all students including key competences and behavioural skills
Generally alternative and applied learning is rarely accredited beyond MFQ Level 1 and thus there is no parity of esteem between academic and vocational education, with low-achieving students being channelled towards the alternative and applied learning programmes	Applied learning is comparable and equivalent to the academic and vocational education and accredited up to MQF Level 3 and is not available only to low-achieving students
Teaching prescribed syllabuses for summative testing	Teaching towards learning outcomes
Teaching prevails learning	The emphasis is on learning and acquiring the right sectoral and behavioural skills
High-stakes, standardised and summative examinations in general education	Different modes of assessment with a balanced approach towards assessment of, for and as learning, including in general education
No progression from the alternative and applied learning to the current mainstream education that could easily lead to dead-ends	A comprehensive system offering a flexible time-table that allows the option for learning programmes from more than one domain, and progression to post-compulsory and/or work is seamless and with no dead-ends
Secondary schools working in isolation from the community	All secondary schools to develop partnerships with post-compulsory educational institutions, vocational institutions and industry to provide quality learning in all three-routes – increased possibility for apprenticeships and work-based learning
Standardised number of student population in classes	Different student class population to reflect learners' needs and type of programme
Initial teacher training, in-service training and continuous professional development related to the areas of academic education	Initial teacher training, in-service training and continuous professional development related to the areas of academic, vocational, and applied learning will be provided
Learning outcomes, learning programmes and assessment programmes mainly for subjects in the general education	Learning outcomes for all learning programmes in all three learning domains
Career guidance inclined to promote the traditional/ academic route and the professions	Career guidance facilitate a seamless progression for the students in furthering their academic, vocational and applied learning or towards the world of work. Guidance related to current economic sectors and job openings will be available in all schools.
School facilities designed with the teaching of academic subjects in traditional classrooms in mind	School facilities and resources redesigned to facilitate quality learning in the academic, vocational and applied learning

*We are rightfully recognising  
that life is a learning  
experience at all stages*

## CONCLUSION

Malta shall be able to reach the aims which we have set ourselves to attain if the learning that we plan to offer to our students in general academic, vocational and applied learning is relevant to acquiring skills for life and skills for work which we firmly believe are complimentary and furthermore inherent to each other.

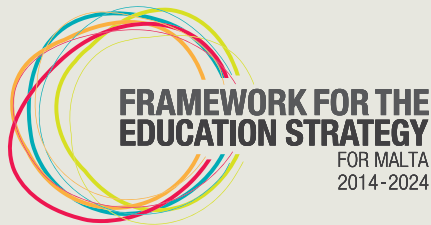
The evolution in the secondary school system sets to link the world of education with that of the broader life beyond the classroom, including but not limited to the work place by providing the skills necessary for a meaningful engagement in democratic life and an active, emancipatory participation in the labour market. Whilst sharing similar responsibilities including that of equipping younger/older members of the community with the required employability as well as personal and social development skills, the worlds or formal education and employment still speak different languages and use different approaches to learning and working. As technology develops, learning becomes lifelong and learning environments increasingly alternate from schools to other contexts including workplaces and vice-versa. We are rightfully recognising that life is a learning experience at all stages.

## Timeline Plan



*For further details  
kindly send an e-mail on*  
[myjourney@gov.mt](mailto:myjourney@gov.mt)

[myjourney.edu.mt](http://myjourney.edu.mt)



MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT