



**THE MALTA CHAMBER**

## **Annex E 3**

### **Post-COVID19 Education & Training Think Tank Round Table**

**This exercise was carried out between June and July 2020.**



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## Report of Round Table Meetings

- Meetings held:** 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2020 at 1500hrs (Zoom Meeting)  
8<sup>th</sup> June, 2020 at 1430hrs (Zoom Meeting)
- Participants:** Jo Caruana (JC) Chair, Rachel Falzon (RF), Beverley Cutajar (BC), Juanito Camilleri (JC), Andrew Naudi (AN), Morgan Parnis (MP), Fabianne Ruggier (FR), Stephen Vella (SV), Robyn Pratt (RP)
- In Attendance:** Diana Miceli (DM), The Malta Chamber



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## A. Briefing Note

The Education & Training Round Table discussed the sector thoroughly in its entirety and through this document it aims to propose both generic recommendations as well as specific recommendations for the various categories for the sector.

The Round Table did not make use of the Excel Tool as a means of discussion, but rather focused on the questions proposed on Slide 13 of the Presentation delivered by the Think Tank lead. The process involved creating a Google document where most participants put forward their ideas after the first meeting. Followed by a second meeting that was split into 2 breakout rooms one group focusing on Education and the other on Training, after which the ideas emanating from the breakout rooms were discussed as one group to ensure the consolidation of recommendations as found in this document.

### A.1 Main Concerns

The following are the concerns raised by the Education & Training Round Table:

1. **“Demand (Consumer)”** in the Sector of Education & Training applies to local students attending independent private schools or investing in fee-based skills or professional training, and international students coming to Malta for short-term (e.g. EFL) or long-term courses (school borders, higher- and tertiary-education diplomas/degrees).
  - a. Some parents will no longer afford to send their children to independent private schools if there are significant job losses and if recession sets in.
  - b. Although there are many subsidy schemes for training most beneficiaries get refunded after they graduate, this means that some people will not have the cash in hand to afford to wait for reimbursement.
  - c. A global recession compounded with the proliferation of COVID internationally will dampen demand from international students.
2. **Students** are deprived of classroom interaction, and they clearly miss it.
3. **Independent Schools** (Junior & Senior) have a number of concerns, namely:
  - a. Lack of space and rent costs, due to social distancing.
  - b. Teachers are already in high demand, and having teachers unable to go back to work if their own children are not in school will be a problem.
  - c. The subsidies granted to such schools in the period of lockdown was crucial to allow schools to retain their staff and pass on savings to parents. Subsidies ought to be put in place to ensure that no student changes school due to economic constraints at home.
4. The Sector of **Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul** (MROs) is already not accepting interns for on the job training, which means that some of the courses currently on offer cannot actually take place, because internships are part of their technical training through the MRO.



5. The **EFL Sector** will be severely impacted especially with the junior and teen segment markets, as opposed to the adult segment, since parents are unlikely to send their children abroad alone in the short to medium term. In 2019 under 17s accounted for 49.5% of incoming EFL students<sup>1</sup>.
6. **Training Scenario**
  - Under the Training umbrella it is expected to see companies outsourcing work instead of recruiting and any training personnel.
  - Training companies will need to make more and better use of online facilities to provide training.
  - Individuals will need to be comfortable with taking training online.

## B. Scenarios & Recommendations

### B.1 Scenarios

The scenarios were thoroughly discussed and challenged by the participants for instance if:

1. “Social Distancing” is “Partially Retained” then one assumes that this means that Schools will not simply open their doors in October 2020. In other words, the scenarios in the study presented may prove to be over optimistic:
  - Once Schools and Higher Education Institutions reopen physically, one cannot assume that the risk of illness and spread will remain low to moderate and moreover that the health system will be in a position to cope with contact tracing and mitigation measures.
  - The Moneyval report is likely to impact Malta’s reputation internationally very badly – marketing Malta to foreign students and as a destination for Education and Training will be harder if the brand ‘Malta’ continues to be tainted.
  - Irrespective of what happens in Malta, one needs to assess the impact of a global recession or at least the impact of a recession in counties which have been the source for international students travelling to Malta.
  - Moreover, the mental health aspect is not being taken into account, this will also impact the scenarios.
  - In the event of a second wave and subsequent school closure, working parents with young children will be once again home schooling and expected to be productive. One of the parents may have to stop working which will impact overall disposable income.
2. In the case of “Health Intervention” being “Fully Contained” then all educational institutions must be kept physically shut and must continue to operate digitally as they are now.

Nonetheless, after further discussions the **Education** category chose **Scenario 2** with a caveat being that there is no reduction in incentives like the Get Qualified Scheme (and possibly improving it to have

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<sup>1</sup> Source NSO News Release dated 12 March 2020 vide: [https://nso.gov.mt/en/News\\_Releases/Documents/2020/03/News2020\\_042.pdf](https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2020/03/News2020_042.pdf)



payments after milestones are achieved using a credit system, not at the end of the course) and Independent Private Schools continue to receive Government support to mitigate the extra costs incurred. Moreover, institutions targeting international students need to refocus their target market, as otherwise, they will go bankrupt.

On the other hand the **Training** category chose Scenario 4. This was mainly due to low demand, since there is a lack of investment from corporates in training at the moment, and because in-person training is currently limited. People tend to prefer face to face rather than online training so this is impactful. So far it is estimated that 75% of business has been lost in this area. Of course, this does depend on the sector a training company is specialised in. For instance, hospitality has been severely impacted, whereas gaming is less so. A company purely focused on hospitality training, would be more likely to become insolvent. However, other training companies will not be impacted as much and it is unlikely that they become insolvent.

## B.2 Recommendations

Support for Education Institutions (Including: Independent Schools, Church Schools, MCAST, UoM, ELT and other Further and/or Higher Education Institutions)

1. *Back to School within the New Norm:* The Round Table participants agreed and recommended that schools are to reopen gradually and not *en masse* and with strict protocols. Thus aiming to retain social distancing restrictions within Educational Institutions, by having a smaller number of students at school. This may be done by initially inviting students back physically for two days a week (having a roster) with the rest of the week being carried out through distance learning, this measure may be relaxed further, gradually, if things go well. This means that there will be less staff and students in the school on any one day, thus facilitating social distancing. It is worth noting however, that some schools will have issues of space and will require adequate support to maintain their operations within their existing environment and existing space. Moreover, it is expected that:
  - a. *Strategy for the Second Wave:* In the case of a second wave of COVID-19, it is important to have a plug and play strategy with Crisis Plans that are clearly thought out and effectively communicated with Procedures, Lessons learnt, How Educational Institutions should tackle health issues as well as prevention and mitigation of mental wellbeing.
  - b. *Premises:* Classrooms and Lecture rooms, Foyers and all School premises are regularly sanitised to a higher standard of rigour and disinfectant hand wash as well as alcohol hand rubs are to be made available to all staff and students in each classroom.
  - c. *A Hybrid Mode of Education:* It is recommended that the Government devises a plan of action for a hybrid modality that would blend physical and online education. This would enable students to attend school both physically and online on different days. Moreover, financial aid for the training of administration staff to coordinate and handle this hybrid modality is also required.



- d. *Monitoring Health:* Each school should have a means to monitor students' health, this should include:
- i. **Checking the temperature** for each student and each member of staff before entering the school premises;
  - ii. Having one or more **healthcare officer/s or nurse** at the school knowing exactly how to deal with situations, such as Covid-19 and others, that may arise;
  - iii. Each Education Institution should also **send circulars** and emphasise that students are to stay home if they exhibit any symptoms of Covid-19.
  - iv. Each School should have a **protocol** in case any student or member of staff (or any of their family members) are infected: This may include:
    1. shutting down a class or section of the school for deep cleaning;
    2. Testing students in an infected class or section of school requiring testing;
    3. Temporarily reverting to online learning until the situation is contained.

Going back to School will obviously increase overheads to ensure that **adequate measures** are upheld, in this context, it is recommended that the Government supports all schools with the necessary funds or grants to ensure they survive this period.

- e. *Equipping our Teachers for Online Teaching:*
- i. Most teachers require the right **training** and support to continue to upgrade their skills in coordinating and **delivering educational curricula on-line** using digital means and in blended learning modes, thus enabling them to become more technically savvy and comfortable to carry out classes online. Teachers therefore, require the means and the skills to be able to have interaction within a flipped digital classroom.
  - ii. Teachers should also be given the **right tools** such as iPad Pro or Touch Screen Laptops instead of a board which would be visible to students, when the teacher is writing and conducting a class online.
  - iii. Teachers also need to prepare for a **hybrid mode of teaching** which needs to be planned thus, segmenting the student population of a school when attending physically, by rotation, a couple of days a week, while the rest of their students stay at home on those days using online facilities. Teachers will also need to get used to having some students following their “physical class” digitally from home if they cannot attend physically.
- f. *Support for all Education Institutions to cope with Covid-19:*
- i. Financial support is also required in the form of grants or funds to support Education Institutions to adapt their **physical infrastructure to be COVID-safe**. The physical and logistical overheads required for a gradual “come back to school” will require Government support and subsidy as part of an effective “Economic Policy Response”. This will require the Government to support schools financially with: space limitations to ensure a safe distance, classrooms and classroom furniture which needs to be adapted, deep cleaning and regular



- disinfecting of premises, supply of sanitisers in all rooms, enhanced food safety measures in canteens and any additional equipment as required.
- ii. It is recommended that the Government provides financial support to all Education Institutions to strengthen their **digital infrastructure** and educational technology to cater for on-line and blended learning environments, as well as research and digital educational content. It is also recommended that the Government provides the schools with the flexibility to top up such equipment and platforms financially, should they wish to opt for more specific features, that will further help the teachers and students with the education experience.
  - iii. Financial support is also required to ensure that **all mainstream students have laptops and WiFi**, to ensure that no one is left behind.
  - iv. Financial support is also required for Education Institutions to invest in the **necessary human resources** to facilitate digital learning and ensure that a plug and play system is in place should a second wave of Covid-19 take place. This would require a holistic approach to enable on-line education including Online Learning, Question Time, Curriculum Development, and Assessment Methods.
- g. *Educating our Students on Disease Prevention:* Government should encourage teachers to educate students and enable the students to advocate for disease prevention and control at home and with their friends.
- h. *An Education for All:* It is recommended that the Government ensures that no student is to change school due to an economic downturn at home. Should this be the case, the Government will find itself in a situation whereby Government schools will be flooded with new students which would in turn cripple private schools. Financial support measures for Private schools are therefore required to alleviate parents that suddenly find themselves in a difficult financial situation and are unable to pay their children's school fees.
- i. *Human Resources:* Schools require more teaching and lecturing staff, at the moment there is a dearth of teaching professionals in mainstream education and the EFL sector and a worrying trend of teachers moving out of the teaching profession due to low salaries, increased stress, demands, and workload. It is therefore recommended that the Government takes stock of the current situation and incentivise students to pursue the teaching career by improving salaries and working conditions. It is also worth considering setting up a fast-track teaching certification to offer reskilling opportunities to individuals who have been made redundant and have a lot to offer the education sector in terms of knowledge and specialist skills.
- j. *Support to Parents:* In a scenario where the schools remain closed and both parents work, flexible working patterns and arrangements should continue to be incentivised to ensure that home schooling continues.





- k. *Education Reform:* The Government is recommended to take this opportunity to start spearheading a longer-term reform in education and training, curricula, and methods of examination. The Education Reform is recommended to be brought about by liaising with the private sector to ensure that students are educated in such a way as to develop the right skills and capabilities that enable them to be proficient for tomorrow's jobs and careers.

### Higher Education

1. *Local Higher Education:* Higher Education should be further encouraged in such times by improving schemes like **Get Qualified** by improving the disbursement of costs incurred by the student. Therefore, receive payments from the Government upon meeting key milestones such as completed credits. This measure would both help the beneficiary and Higher Education Institutions not become insolvent.
2. *Tertiary Education:* Tertiary educational levels should not return to the pre-COVID way of thinking and teaching methods. Tomorrow's professionals should be open to new skills, new ways of thinking, learning, understanding and operating. It is therefore recommended that the Government strengthens the sector through financial incentives to further encourage the uptake of a holistic digitalisation strategy going forward.

### Re-Skilling

**Skilling and reskilling** is expected following the drop of the wage subsidy scheme and as a result of job loss. However, if such individuals do not have the money to invest in education, it will be a problem. It is therefore recommended that the Government should incentivise such persons using the Wage Subsidy Scheme to encourage reskilling the workforce. The Government may opt to further incentivise **reskilling training** or **specialised education** in areas of great need such as healthcare, education and enforcement specialists in various sectors such as construction and financial services among others.



## Education Malta

Further investment and resources are required in the Public Private Partnership known as **Education Malta**, to operate better brand Malta through a centralised international marketing campaign promoting Malta as a Mediterranean Hub for Education.

Education Malta should also be mandated and given the necessary legislative powers to set a coherent **International Strategy** and set up a one-stop-shop offering a complete service to attract International Students to Malta. This would include offering of scholarships, provide better career assistance to international students, engage with reputable international students' recruitment agencies, safeguard quality education, offer the right information about Malta and its education system, facilitate the application process and lessen bureaucracy.

## Training

1. *Stimulating Online Training:* Online training requires the right impetus for it to kick off clearly communicating that training can be attended and provided very well online. Such training should be encouraged and incentivised for persons made redundant due to Covid, therefore going hand in hand with the Skilling and Reskilling recommendation, thus provisioning the benefits of learning and growing, even outside the workplace when the employer is not paying for it. It is also recommended for the Government to incentivise employers to think beyond traditional working hours and norms, and also invest in the upskilling of their teams by using an online classroom using the Investing in Skills Scheme.
2. *Investing in Skills:* It is recommended that this scheme adopts a new approach, whereby the Training Service Provider is paid directly by the government for the training thus making it easier for the company to pursue such training. Moreover, there should be a faster process for payments to be settled by the Government as soon as possible, as the training service provider cannot afford to be out of pocket. The scheme should be as easy as the Covid Wage Supplement.
3. *Data to be Made Available:* It is recommended that the Government makes available clear labour data and intelligence highlighting skills and employment gaps locally for the training professionals and institutions to align their service offering as required by the different sectors facing a lack of human resources, even within Government entities.
4. *Support for Training Service Providers:* It is recommended that the Government makes available incentives for training providers to:
  - a. help them invest in online platforms for training delivery.
  - b. enable local trainers to internationalise and tap into a wider market.
  - c. specialise in a niche area of training to fit with a speciality area that Malta is to become known for (example: gaming), to give local trainers a niche that will gain international recognition.

It is also recommended that all training schemes are simplified for training professionals to be able to understand, promote, and take advantage of existing and new schemes. Beyond that, it is recommended



that a National PR Strategy should be launched to promote the benefits of up-skilling to both business leaders and employees, to foster an appreciation for lifelong learning.

### International Students

1. *Visas Extensions due to Covid-19:* It is also recommended that Visas are extended to those already granted a VISA prior to COVID-19 and never made it to Malta. CVU, Immigration and Malta HC/Embassies should assist them in extending their VISA rather than asking them to re-apply, as other countries are adopting this same measure.
2. *International Strategy for Non-EU Students:* The Government should invest in devising a well structured International Strategy, that would offer a range of incentives to attract students to travel and study in Malta. The strategy would need to include a seamless process offering:
  - a. A streamlined Visa Acquisition Process with the support of the respective High Commissions and Embassies to accelerate the process;
  - b. Easier access for students to apply for temporary work permits while studying;
  - c. Support and incentives for students lodging arrangements;
  - d. The possibility of Visa and Work Permit extension following student graduation;
  - e. Support and incentives for internships;
  - f. Availability of the right jobs after graduation;
  - g. The possibility to apply for a Residency Permit studies are concluded and have the option to stay in Malta.
  - h. Clear communication and direction is required for Educational institutions to have the possibility to plan ahead.

The strategy would also need to include **one set of clear Guidelines** that would include the requirements of the Ministry of Foreign affairs, the Central Visa Unit and the Immigration Office, to monitor and control students entering Malta for alternative reasons. At the moment, Identity Malta has become too stringent, and is not encouraging this sector. It is therefore important to strike the right balance to safeguard the sector while ensuring that institutes adhere to and report students that do not turn up for the courses. This needs to be standardised.

3. *Targeting International Students for Key Sectors:* It is also recommended that given the fact that the new enrolment of international students will be low, the Government should attract international students to niche areas like **medicine** and **allied healthcare** professions where the worldwide demand outweighs the current supply. Another area would be **hospitality**, therefore, Malta should further aspire to become an international hub for the provision of online academies for hospitality professionals.
4. *Online Training Provision Guidelines:* It is recommended that the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) issue **clear guidelines** to all education institutions as regards **Online Training Provision**.



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### English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

It is important for EFL Schools to promote themselves as COVID-safe, keeping classroom density low however, smaller numbers and/or price increases may not be feasible as it is a highly competitive industry locally and globally. In this context, the Government should consider setting up a **Rescue Plan** for this sector given its importance and impact on the local economy. Such a plan requires a holistic approach as EFL students come to Malta for the multinational experience and local setting as well as the weather. It is worth noting that online EFL teaching is not in demand.

### Chamber Recommendation

Business and Education should work better together for re-skilling purposes.