

NATIONAL EDUCATION STRATEGY 2024-2030

Feedback by The Malta
Chamber of Commerce,
Enterprise & Industry



FEEDBACK BY THE MALTA CHAMBER

National Education Strategy 2024-2030

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Introduction

The education sector in Malta is confronted with **challenges** which are unique to our socio-cultural and economic context. Being a resource-limited island nation, the country depends on significant investment in human capital to spur economic growth. Key issues include aligning educational outputs with the dynamic needs of critical economic sectors like technology, finance, tourism, managing linguistic diversity while maintaining national identity. Addressing educational attainment and early school leaving and integrating students from diverse backgrounds due to its Mediterranean migration nexus are two major important factors. These aspects highlight the **need** for Malta to adopt innovative, flexible, and inclusive educational strategies to ensure the sector supports the country's development and prosperity.

The Malta Chamber welcomes the **bottom-up approach** adopted when drawing up such a strategy that will determine how the educational system will function in the coming years. Very often, changes in the education system were brought about in a top-down fashion with educators complaining that the bureaucrats and academics driving the change were cut off from the classroom reality. On the other hand, The Malta Chamber notes that the strategy lacks an in-depth **analysis based on our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as a country**. This places the strategy at risk of not being fully attuned to the unique socio-cultural, economic and geographic realities that characterise the Maltese education landscape. Such renders the articulation of solutions to the specific challenges inherent to our country's limited resource environment, the balancing act between fostering linguistic diversity and the required adaptation of the education system to the demands of key economic sectors problematic or too generic, hence not sufficiently targeted to meet the unique needs of Maltese students, educators and the broader community.

General

The importance attributed to **emotional intelligence, which is the crux of teaching and learning** stands out within the strategy. Without it, educators and learners struggle to function and maintain focus. The Malta Chamber acknowledges that without emotional regulation, students and educators struggle to experience growth and empowerment. These two elements are fundamentally interwoven and rely on each other for effectiveness.

The Malta Chamber certainly notes therefore a determined inclination to enhance the **wellbeing of teachers and students** in schools. Such is certainly a valuable consideration; however, it notes that the strategy falls short in putting emphasis on **education at the Middle and Secondary Levels** where many students disengage. The problems in these sectors extend to curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies, which go beyond the National Curriculum Framework and Learning Outcomes Frameworks discussed in Pillar 2.

The Malta Chamber also notes that the document is weak on **governance and proper leadership**. More impetus is required on this front to explain how things will be introduced or changed in a chronological order, against which timeframe and by whom. Governance and leadership are two central dimensions that are crucial for the strategy to succeed. There needs to be alignment between vision, strategy, policies and targets/outcomes. This is, unfortunately, fundamentally lacking.

The strategy unfortunately also fails to address the reasons, methods and processes by which **Heads of the College Network and Heads of Schools** will be empowered to reorganise their respective institutions. There is a lack of detail regarding the autonomy they will be granted for this restructuring. Schools will be expected to address all concerns that the education authorities present them without a measures' prioritisation against an implementation timeframe. More importantly, professional development for school leadership is severely lacking. As the educational landscape evolves with rapid technological advancements, changing societal expectations and increasing diversity in student populations, school leaders are required to navigate complex challenges and drive improvements in teaching and learning. Training is required in areas such as adaptive leadership, data-informed decision making and inclusive practices that foster equity and excellence.

The **exclusion of the private education industry from the strategy policies** is a matter of concern for The Malta Chamber. Education policies should be all-encompassing and open to both public and private providers. Education is a sector that should transcend political boundaries and be accessible to all, involving all stakeholders. It is recommended that education policies actively involve the private education industry in their development to create a more comprehensive and effective approach. Collaboration between public and private providers can lead to innovative solutions and broader educational opportunities, benefiting both providers and adult learners in the sector. As a result, private providers should be included throughout.

The Malta Chamber asserts that the strategy could have included **more specific initiatives for fostering creativity, critical thinking and real-world problem-solving skills**, which are essential in a rapidly evolving world, as well as an increased focus on entrepreneurial skills, fostering a mindset of innovation and self-sufficiency in learners. This suggests a gap in the strategy's approach to fostering a comprehensive skillset that includes not only technical competencies but also the ability to innovate, think critically, and approach problems creatively. This is unfortunate since efforts were previously made to consolidate notions of creativity.



More emphasis should have been placed on **experiential learning to ensure that education remains relevant and engaging**. The document notably lacks any reference to '21st Century skills,' an omission that is critical. Including these skills is essential for fostering a shift in the mindset of our educators and other school staff, aligning with the evolving educational needs of our time. Assurance should be given that skills are integrated into the curriculum as an intrinsic part of the teaching methodology, rather than being treated as an add-on or an alternative programme within the educational framework. Of crucial importance is its flawless alignment with its assessment methodology. We believe that there should have been a stand-alone pillar titled 'Future Skills', explicitly dedicated to the cultivation of critical 21st-century competencies. This pillar would underscore the importance of integrating digital skills, as mentioned, alongside other essential skills like creativity, critical thinking, and entrepreneurship, thereby ensuring a holistic approach to education that prepares students for the complexities of the future.

The **role, advantages, and limitations of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education** are not emphasised enough. On the other hand, The Malta Chamber acknowledges that Government intends to publish a document on Digitisation of Education to implement a diffused use of technology within educational pedagogies.

A significant overhaul of the **purchasing procedures** is also required. Many purchasing decisions seem to be done at a high level, detached from individual realities or needs in the classroom. The Malta Chamber feels that a more de-centralised approach could lead to significant benefits. By allowing a broader range of approaches and resources to be deployed, better research and awareness of which resources work best in specific scenarios is possible, positively impacting purchasing decisions at scale later.

Cognisant of the measures and initiatives proposed, The Malta Chamber asserts that **alignment to other European strategies** should be ensured with resources deployed towards, particularly:

- [The European Education Area and the 2030 strategic framework for education and training](#), which sets out the vision, objectives, principles and actions for European cooperation in education and training, based on six dimensions: quality, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, teachers and trainers, higher education and research, and geopolitical dimension.
- [The European Strategy for Universities](#), which proposes four flagships to boost the European dimension in higher education and research: European Universities, European Research and Education Areas, European Degree, and European Knowledge Hubs.
- [The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030](#), which presents the OECD Learning Framework 2030, a vision and a set of design principles for the future of education systems, based on three transformative competencies: creating new value, reconciling tensions and dilemmas, and taking responsibility.
- [The Future of Jobs Report 2023](#), which analyses the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the twin green and digital transitions, and the changing skills demand on the labour market, and provides insights and recommendations for education and training policies and practices.

On **Vocational learning**, The Malta Chamber collaborates and works with both MCAST and the University. However, we acknowledge that it is not easy because ambitions and expectations at the two ends tend to be very different. In a nutshell, academic institutions are geared towards providing qualifications whereas employers are desperate to develop competences. There are different



timeframes, varying degrees of flexibility and adaptability and divergent views on what is important into this equation.

Employers do not have a crystal ball, but The Malta Chamber members and industry **can anticipate the future needs of their industry** better than educators because of their day-to-day experience and exposure to the workplace and business environment. However, the country needs to start addressing what is required now and build the ability to learn over time what may be required in future. It is pointless trying to guess what will be required in future when industry is not finding what it requires presently.



First Pillar – Wellbeing

This strategy stands out for its treatment of various aspects of education, especially in how it **intertwines the teaching and learning processes with the well-being of educators and learners**. The emphasis on empathy, emotion regulation and emotional intelligence is particularly commendable.

To effectively align with **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, it would be beneficial to develop a multi-layered roadmap that outlines specific measures and initiatives chronologically. Doing so will ensure that our efforts are in harmony with other global initiatives spearheaded by the UN, fostering a more cohesive and impactful approach to achieving these vital objectives. That said, it is essential to have a **robust system in place for execution and to provide ongoing support to all stakeholders**, especially educators. Integrating these initiatives as interconnected components of a single, cohesive project within our educational system, and implementing them at various stages, is crucial to ensure the delivery of quality work.

Involving educators in this process is key to ensure ground-level insights and practicality in policies and their creation. The systematic involvement of educators in policy development is a positive step towards transparency and inclusivity.

Reducing administrative burden aligns with trends in **leveraging technology** to streamline educational processes, however, effective integration of technology without disrupting existing systems will be a challenge. It is crucial to provide **sufficient training and support for educators** to adapt to new technologies. The success of this initiative depends on its user-friendliness and relevance to educators' daily tasks.

Targeted **promotional campaigns and the Profession Promotion Plan** are commendable for attracting diverse candidates to the teaching profession. Ensuring that these campaigns realistically represent the challenges and rewards of the profession is important for attracting the right candidates. An increase in teachers' wages would be the first step forward in attracting the good-quality candidates to such an important role in our educational system, but we cannot stop there.

The introduction of **comprehensive support programs** like the Outreach Programme and Wellbeing Programme are crucial for educator satisfaction and retention, while having a focus on mental health and professional development which align well with global best practices. The challenge lies in effective implementation and ensuring these programs are responsive to the dynamic needs of educators. It is therefore likely that teacher morale and effectiveness will improve. Such will directly impact student outcomes, but on the other hand, more emphasis on competitive compensation could be added to further boost job satisfaction. It is essential to ensure that these initiatives are not just formalities but are actively engaging and beneficial to educators. Regular evaluation and adjustment based on feedback are key. Bridging the gap between the Ministry and educators is of paramount importance. Furthermore, shifting to a **Peer Support Programme for Newly Qualified Teachers** promotes community and shared learning, but should complement, not replace, formal training.

The **teaching profession** needs to be further promoted. This is not a local phenomenon but part of the global issue of teacher shortages. Malta needs to elevate the teaching profession's status; however, this depends heavily on public perception and media cooperation which should go beyond the question of "*What's in it for me*". Introducing **professional supervision for educators** facing challenges is a proactive step, however, it is important to clearly define the scope of these services and ensure they are accessible and well-publicised among educators.



Addressing a **revised framework for behaviour** is of utmost importance, perhaps the most crucial. Teachers are increasingly fatigued due to daily behavioural challenges in the classroom, which hinders their ability to teach effectively. Frequent disturbances not only consume valuable time but also detract from the learning experience of students who are eager to learn. It is important to recognise that behavioural issues are often manifestations of underlying emotions. Therefore, tackling these root emotional causes is key to reducing disruptive behaviours. This concept, which is a focal point in the Educational Neuroscience workshops, emphasises understanding and addressing the emotional triggers behind students' behaviours for more effective classroom management. Enhancing student well-being through training teachers, parents, and the students themselves in emotion regulation could be a significant step towards reducing misbehaviour and behavioural challenges. It is important that this framework is flexible and adaptable to different school environments and student needs. Involving educators in the development of this framework can provide valuable insights.

The Malta Chamber notes that the connection between **education and fostering responsible citizenship** could have been further highlighted. Digital literacy and citizenship skills should be integrated into the core curriculum, not only as an extra-curricular activity, to ensure equity and equip all students for the digital age. Despite our inclination towards industry readiness, we favour a system which leads to the development of responsible citizens prior to anything else.

Finally, a Long-Term Modernisation Plan for School Infrastructural is urgently required in certain schools, with Heads of Schools responsible and accountable for necessary restructuring.

Second Pillar – Growth and Empowerment

A central and pivotal element underpinning this pillar should be the **continuous professional learning and development of educators**. To actualise this, a **reevaluation of our governance structures** is imperative, transitioning from a transactional to a transformational approach.

A system fostering **greater autonomy for colleges/schools is essential**, shifting from contractual accountability to a more responsive and reciprocal form.

The Malta Chamber notes that strategy does not provide a clear pathway for increased **devolution of responsibilities and budgets to college and individual school level**. We believe that such devolution, giving individual colleges more say in critical decisions about learning resources and methods would significantly boost diversity of learning and teaching approaches. This devolution would need to be accompanied with significant increase in discretionary budgets.

It is paramount to establish a strong connection between autonomy, responsibility and accountability. To achieve this we must incorporate **measures and initiatives that transform Colleges/schools into Professional Learning Communities**. This transformation is crucial for redesigning learning experiences for all educators, with school leaders such as heads, assistant heads, and heads of departments functioning as educational leaders. Embedding teacher learning within the job context is therefore emphasised, as advocated by international studies from organisations like the OECD (e.g., TIMSS, PISA). Successful nations prioritise schools evolving into communities of practice, with leaders actively engaged in four domains of transformational leadership, which are (a) Setting Direction, (b) Building Relationships and Developing People, (c) Developing the Organisation to Support Desired Practices, and (d) Improving the Instructional Program.

Most certainly, Professional Development & Training needs a more accentuated focus on **digital literacy and technology-enhanced learning** and be mandatory at all levels. This will certainly help educators and students in preparation for their digital future and promote responsible digital citizenship. Furthermore, it is vital for school leaders to have diverse learning opportunities, allowing them to collaborate, share best practices, and address shared challenges as a cohesive team or cluster. Balancing digital technology integration with skills like emotion regulation and metacognition is crucial for both students and educators in a digital world. A resource pack for integrating digital literacy across the curriculum needs to be supported by teacher training, as many educators are not yet conversant with digital literacy.

Large Language Models, such as ChatGPT has sent shockwaves through academic institutions because it necessitates that we radically change the way we assess students. Whereas tools such as ChatGPT can help in providing students with easy access to instant information, which is logically presented and well-structured, the education system needs to educate students on how these tools should be used to get maximum benefit and correct outcomes. The education system should be preparing students in assessing real life situations.

There are **other specific domains** where further enhancements could align the strategy more closely with evolving educational paradigms and the exigencies of a rapidly changing world.

- The strategy's discussion on digital literacy and citizenship falls short of addressing the need for a dedicated core subject focused on digital competencies covering all the years of compulsory education. Such a subject should encompass a broad spectrum of skills, including online safety, ethical technology use, computational thinking, emerging technologies, and



effective use of digital tools for learning and problem-solving. Reference to existing frameworks and programs like the European Commission's DigCompEdu, UNESCO's initiatives, and the #DQEveryChild and 1 Billion Digital Skills Project underlines the global recognition of the importance of digital competencies in modern education.

- The strategy lacks depth in embracing emerging technologies like AI, gamification, VR, and AR. These technologies hold the potential to create immersive, interactive learning experiences that can significantly enhance student engagement and the acquisition of complex skills. Integrating these technologies requires infrastructure investment and a pedagogical shift towards more experiential and inquiry-based learning models.
- The strategy highlights the importance of a holistic educational approach, yet it stops short of fully embracing the benefits of personalised learning. The integration of adaptive learning platforms and AI-powered tools can revolutionise educational delivery by tailoring content and pedagogical approaches to individual learning styles and paces. Such technologies are not merely futuristic add-ons but essential in fostering an education system that responds dynamically to students' diverse cognitive and emotional needs. Personalised learning environments facilitate deeper engagement and have been shown to improve learning outcomes significantly.
- The strategy lacks a strategic framework for the robust incorporation of online and blended learning models. In the post-pandemic era, these models have proven not only viable but essential in providing flexible, accessible, and varied learning experiences. A more comprehensive strategy would include detailed plans for infrastructure development, teacher training, and curriculum design that supports a seamless integration of in-person and digital learning environments. This would prepare students for a digitally interconnected world and ensure continuity of learning in any future disruptions.

The urgency of a **revised National Curriculum Framework** which reflects the needs and challenges of the future is evident, however, we really need to be a lot smarter. The truth is that knowledge is at everybody's fingertips through the internet, as already explained. It is quite pointless filling students' days with long lists of facts that need to be memorised. What students really need is the ability to read (or hear) and understand the knowledge they can access; the crucial ability to reason which of that knowledge makes sense and which is to be ignored; and the ability to synthesise that knowledge in a way that they can retain it, apply it, and transfer it to others. Their learning needs to be predominantly skills-based rather than knowledge-based because there is nothing intelligent anymore about being able to memorise a lot of information. Computers do that for us now. This renders the emphasis on a revised National Curriculum Framework pivotal for addressing future challenges. Such needs to be aligned perfectly with its methods of assessment to enhance PISA scores which sets global standards of relevance, irrespective of whether PISA is public or private, especially in Maths to foster analytical skills. However, focusing solely on Maths and MATSEC seems restrictive amidst significant literacy challenges. **Broadening the curriculum and assessment and acknowledging diverse qualifications like International Diplomas**, could offer a more inclusive, comprehensive educational system, resonating with global educational trends and catering to diverse student needs. It is therefore commendable that the strategy stresses the need to shift from a content-based curriculum to a value and skill-based curriculum (with green and digital transition skills basics blended within). Focus should be more on analytical skills, adaptability, and 21st century skills instead of content.



Emphasis on adaptability and future preparedness could be enhanced by outlining a more dynamic, **continuous approach to curriculum and teaching method updates, thus creating a live curriculum**. This should include mechanisms for regularly integrating future skills needs, technological advancements and societal changes into the educational framework.

Added impetus is required to move to **more authentic assessments** or include performance elements. “Authenticity”, “performance”, the creative aspect... all things that point towards more applied, closer to real life assessment situations, that are certainly more challenging and time-consuming to construct, but far more relevant to learning and more engaging for students.

The Malta Chamber believes that **Financial Literacy** is crucial in the development of sustainable financial wellbeing and should have been assigned more attention. It is not merely a necessity but critical in an increasingly complex financial world. Financial literacy is a core life skill, empowering young adults to make sound decisions, managing their current and future income to gain increased control over their financial position. It is one of the best investments in people’s future as the retirement savings gap is widening not only in Malta, but in most European countries. The topic should first and foremost be in line with the [Joint EU/OECD-INFE financial competence framework for children and youth](#) aimed to establish a shared understanding of the essential financial literacy skills for children and teenagers at different stages of their lives, to enable them take well-informed personal finance decisions immediately and later in life. This framework can support the development of financial literacy policies, programmes and teaching material by public, private and not-for-profit stakeholders. It is directed to learners, to build responsible financial behaviour across the different stages of their financial lifecycle irrespective of primary, secondary or tertiary. It is also worth mentioning that fiscal morality and tax is missing at secondary school level when we compare to other EU countries.

The Malta Chamber requests more clarity HOW the strategy ensures **coherence and alignment** between the different levels and sectors of education, from early childhood education and care to higher education and lifelong learning, between education and other policy domains, such as health, social, economic, and environmental policies.

Education goes beyond schooling. Provision of **After-Schools Programmes** with clear learning outcomes and effectiveness criteria ingrained within quality assurance mechanisms is required, coupled with **extending school hours**, integrated with robust learning outcomes and quality assurance. Such could greatly benefit from Public-Private Partnerships. This approach allows leveraging private sector expertise, ensuring high-quality service delivery. By setting stringent quality criteria and opening the space for private organisations, a competitive, quality-driven environment is fostered. Allowing parents to choose from a range of quality-assured services, potentially with financial support, can drive service excellence and cater to diverse educational needs, breaking away from a one-size-fits-all model. Additionally, regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms for these After-School Programmes can ensure continuous improvement and alignment with educational goals. Engaging parents and students in the evaluation process can provide valuable insights, fostering a collaborative approach to enhancing the quality and relevance of the programmes.

The Malta Chamber, however, expresses concern regarding any measure that might seek to align **extra curricular and non-formal education** to be more in line with formal education outcomes. Formal and non-formal approaches to education should remain separate and distinct. Unfortunately, past attempts at creating a qualitative framework for non-formal education courses and providers tended



to push them towards a more formal education approach, rather than to find ways to celebrate and recognize the unique qualities that good non-formal education can provide.

The acknowledgment of the **critical role of family and community in education** needs also to mirror successful models in other countries. Local execution can be complex due to the involvement of multiple key stakeholders and there is a risk of this not being able to take off as a result. Integrating courses on Educational Neuroscience for parents into this programme is essential. Such courses, grounded in the study of the brain, will equip parents with the knowledge to positively influence their children's behaviour by understanding and leveraging brain functions.

Prioritising **early identification mechanisms in early childhood** and primary education is essential to prepare students for secondary education and workforce skills, with a focus on enhancing early life experiences with improved pedagogies. **Manual Development for School Mental Health** would also help if incorporating fundamental knowledge of neuroscience, particularly focusing on emotion regulation, to help schools comprehend the interconnection between basic brain functions, emotions, emotion regulation, and overall mental health.

Having **all the children, irrespective of their Economic Social Cultural Status, possessing a basic level of literacy** is a measure which is welcomed. Employing gamification and VR in teaching can significantly enhance engagement, leveraging the digital nativity of today's students. This approach not only makes learning more appealing but also supports varied learning styles, fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment. Integrating technology thoughtfully ensures that literacy education is both contemporary and relevant. On similar lines, more efforts are required to encourage **play-based learning** incorporated into more elements of the strategy execution, especially in pre-compulsory settings.

To further enhance this measure, **partnerships with tech firms and educational content creators could be fostered to develop bespoke literacy programmes**. Additionally, incorporating adaptive learning systems that personalise content based on individual progress could make the learning experience even more effective and enjoyable. This would ensure that literacy education is not only engaging but also dynamically tailored to each child's learning pace and style. Highlighting the need for an asynchronous learning space which would allow a personalised approach together with group work. Students work at different pace and requirements so a more personalised approach would cater for different needs, but this should be accompanied by group and class work where students touch base with others.

The learning gap at Primary School level can be narrowed by creating an 'AppStore' for educational programmes. This platform could serve as a repository for innovative, evidence-based learning solutions, both digital and traditional. By incentivising the development of targeted, need-specific resources, this approach could significantly contribute to personalised, effective learning experiences, thereby addressing diverse educational needs and facilitating targeted support where it's most needed. This should follow **Improved quality in pre-compulsory settings**. Integrating feedback mechanisms from parents and caregivers to tailor services more closely to community needs can be considered.

Provision of **alternative and supplementary learning pathways in compulsory schooling** as a preventive measure for Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) can be done by introducing summer apprenticeships and job shadowing as part of compulsory schooling. Mirroring the German model's integration of academic and work-based learning, this approach, of applied learning, could



offer students a more holistic education. It not only provides practical experience and skills relevant to their future careers but also keeps them engaged and motivated by showcasing the real-world application of their studies. Additionally, in line with the European Commission recommendation in the 2020 Action Plan, students should undergo at least **one practical experience in entrepreneurship**.

The **closure of trade schools** 20 years ago created a gap in education, particularly affecting students inclined towards manual skills and trades. The discontinuation of trade schools left a void for students with a knack for trades, not adequately filled by the later introduction of vocational subjects in secondary education. The offerings of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), intended to fill in this void, needs to be more dynamic to cater to the needs of the economy. **The Malta Chamber is in favour of improving what we have, through a more focused and robust set up rather than opting to a new trade Institute.** In this context, a micro-credentials system is required to promote careers in the traditional and modern trades.

Overall, The Malta Chamber welcomes initiatives which are commendable in addressing the skills gap and **changing perceptions of trade careers**, however, it is crucial that the needs analysis is comprehensive and regularly updated to remain in sync with evolving industry demands. Additionally, any campaigns should be well-executed to effectively convey the message of the institute's significance in today's workforce.

Germany and Switzerland, where vocational education is highly valued, can provide insights for implementing a successful trade-focused educational model. For instance, Germany is renowned for its **dual system of VET** which combines both apprenticeships in a company and also vocational education at a vocational school in one course. Malta's strategy could benefit from a stronger emphasis on similar programs as VET, especially in trades and technical education.

Other recommendations on improved **synergy between education and industry** include:

- Monitoring the implementation and impact of the National Basic Skills Guidelines to guarantee that they translate into improved basic skills among students.
- Encouraging active industry participation in shaping vocational programmes and consider offering incentives for industry involvement.
- Continuously evaluating and adapting funding opportunities for adult learners based on evolving needs.
- Regularly updating the Apprenticeship Database and make it accessible to both employers and students.
- Focus on making the Job Exposure Experience relevant and insightful for students by collaborating closely with businesses.
- Using the results of the mapping exercise on green skills to drive the development of targeted training programmes.
- Ensuring that the Strategic Foresight Unit operates transparently and engages in meaningful dialogue with industry and social partners to shape future workforce strategies.



The Malta Chamber notes that the strategy primarily concentrates on school-level education, potentially overlooking the significant contributions and needs of **tertiary education institutions** in shaping future-ready graduates.

A **revised and improved higher and further education system** which is relevant to today's global and industry needs to include **more private institutions**. A voucher system could revolutionise student choice and incentivise all public and private institutions to elevate their offerings. This, alongside curriculum alignment with industry needs and targeted investments in areas like STEAM and sustainability, will create a dynamic, competitive environment that not only meets current industry demands but also prepares for future challenges. Scholarships should go beyond STEAM and green skills alone because while these fields are crucial, it is essential to understand that gaps are across the board, such as accountants and carers. Scholarships should therefore be comprehensive and flexible, reflecting the diverse demands of various industries.

The strategy's acknowledgement of **lifelong learning** needs to be extended into a comprehensive framework that promotes continuous learning and upskilling, particularly for educators. This is crucial in an educational landscape with constant pedagogical and technological advancements. A lifelong learning framework should encompass partnerships with industry and ongoing professional development opportunities that align with current and future job market demands.

There is now opportunity to incorporate micro-credentials into the educational framework at all levels. **Micro-credentials** allow for innovative combinations of subjects, catering to diverse interests and career paths, and are particularly suited to the evolving nature of the job market and lifelong learning. By integrating micro-credentials, the strategy can move away from traditional, high-stakes examinations towards a more continuous and practical assessment of skills and knowledge. This shift would enhance student motivation and provide a more accurate representation of their abilities and readiness for the future. The implementation of micro-credentials requires a strategic partnership between educational institutions, industry, and accreditation bodies to ensure relevance and quality. This approach would greatly contribute to a dynamic, skills-oriented education system, making it more adaptable and aligned with both student aspirations and market needs.



Third Pillar – Equity and Inclusion

Inclusion remains a **significant challenge for teachers**, particularly as they encounter an increasing number of students with diverse learning difficulties and neurodevelopmental disorders in their classrooms. This change is contributing to increased demands within our local educational system. One of the critical issues is the minimal support available, primarily due to a shortage of human resources. Children from poor social backgrounds or those coming from abusive family situations further compound the difficulties faced in classrooms, and unfortunately, these cases are also on the rise. Such socio-economic and familial challenges can significantly impact a child's ability to engage with and benefit from educational opportunities.

Teachers, who are at the forefront of this scenario, often find themselves **ill-equipped and unsupported in their efforts to effectively deliver the planned curriculum and skills**. The lack of necessary support structures not only hinders their teaching efficiency but also negatively impacts their ability to address the diverse socio-emotional needs and educational requirements of children with learning difficulties or neurodevelopmental disorders.

The consequences of this lack of support extend beyond the classroom, creating a ripple effect of **inequity in education**. This disparity can lead to significant long-term consequences, particularly in the labour market. The Malta Chamber notes that students who do not receive adequate educational support are often less prepared for higher education and employment opportunities. This lack of preparation can limit career options, leading to a workforce that is less diverse and less equipped to handle the demands of a rapidly changing global economy. Moreover, societal inequity is perpetuated as these individuals may not have the same opportunities for economic and personal advancement as their more advantaged peers. While the strategy recognises the need for equity and inclusion, detailed measures are lacking to tackle educational inequality comprehensively. This is particularly important considering the disparities which widened by the pandemic. Strategies to address inequality should include targeted interventions, resource allocation, and policy measures aimed at ensuring all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to high-quality education.

Reinforcement of the **Maltese Language** as a core subject could broaden reach and engagement, particularly among the younger demographic, however, the importance of **English language proficiency**, especially considering the global nature of our economy and the frequent use of English in professional settings, is not addressed, and should be attributed heightened importance. Let us keep in mind that educators in Malta are facing realities of integrating foreign students who arrive without any proficiency in English. These students, often coming from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds are placed in classes based on their age, regardless of when they join during the academic year. This placement policy means that they are expected to immediately adapt to and follow the existing syllabus, which is primarily delivered in English. The situation presents a dual challenge: firstly, for the students, who must grapple with learning in a language they do not understand, and secondly, for the teachers, who are expected to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate these students without necessarily being provided with additional resources or support. This lack of support can lead to several adverse outcomes.

The root of the issue is the need for a **more structured and supportive approach to the integration of non-English speaking students**. This approach could include:

1. **Language Support Programmes**: Before being placed in age-appropriate classes, foreign students could benefit from intensive English language courses to help them reach a basic level of proficiency.



2. Ongoing Language Assistance: Continued language support, such as English as a Second Language classes, should be integrated into their regular schooling.
3. Teacher Training and Resources: Teachers need training and resources to effectively support non-English speaking students. This training could include strategies for teaching English language learners, cultural competency, and ways to adapt the curriculum to be more inclusive.
4. Cultural Integration Initiatives: Schools could implement programmes or activities that promote cultural understanding and inclusion, helping foreign students feel more connected to their new community.
5. Collaboration with Families: Engaging with the families of foreign students can provide additional support and foster a more inclusive school environment. Let's keep in mind that initiatives here would sync with the Integration Strategy which Government published during 2023, for consistency and overcoming fragmentation.

As explained above, the strategy's focus on wellbeing is a strong foundation, which can be built upon by incorporating a more comprehensive approach to **Social-Emotional-Learning (SEL)**. Integrating SEL into the curriculum is critical in developing empathy, resilience, and emotional intelligence skills, which are increasingly recognized as vital for personal and professional success. SEL is not just about supporting students' emotional health; it's about equipping them with the skills to navigate a complex, interconnected world.

The absence of a clear focus on **global collaborative learning** in the strategy is a missed opportunity. In an increasingly globalised world, the ability to engage with diverse cultures and perspectives is invaluable. Encouraging collaborative projects and cultural exchanges through technology can foster global competencies among learners, preparing them for a world where cross-cultural communication and collaboration are the norm.

In our consideration, Inclusivity and **Special Needs Education** are areas which are still developing locally. Germany serves as a valuable benchmark for Malta in establishing a sustainable model for inclusion and the development of learning support centres.

Addressing **Radicalisation** is necessary in today's global context, but it is a sensitive topic requiring careful handling and expert input, something which needs to be given the time it deserves.

There is unfortunately a noticeable **lack of attention to gifted children** – those whose intelligence and knowledge significantly surpass their peers.

By addressing these needs, Malta's education system can better support foreign students' integration, ensuring they **can succeed academically and socially**, which in turn enriches the educational experience for all students. Addressing the above-mentioned challenges requires a **concerted effort** to provide adequate resources, support, and training for educators, as well as a commitment to ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or abilities, have equal access to quality education.

Conclusion:

The success of this strategy will largely depend on effective **governance, implementation, funding, and continuous adaptation to emerging educational needs** and global trends, not to mention **consistency and effective management** which often government seems to fail on.

It is not clear HOW the strategy balances the need for **flexibility and adaptability to the changing needs and contexts of learners, educators, and society**, and the need for stability and continuity in the provision and quality of education.

More information is required on HOW the strategy fosters the **development of transversal skills and competences, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and citizenship**, and HOW it **integrates them across the curriculum and the assessment system**.

Supplementary information is also required on HOW the strategy **promotes and protects the European democratic values, such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights**, and how it prepares learners to engage in active and global citizenship, especially in the face of the rise of populism, nationalism, and extremism.

As explained above, **we should NOT be reinventing the wheel in education** but creating a holistic and future oriented education system based on lessons learnt from:

1. Japan: Which emphasises discipline, community, and a strong work ethic. Japanese system could inspire Malta's approach towards fostering social responsibility and respect in education.
2. Germany: Known for its dual education system, blending academic and vocational training. Malta could incorporate elements of this to strengthen practical skills and employability.
3. Switzerland: As a multilingual country it offers a broad range of language learning opportunities at an earlier age.
4. South Korea: Whose focus is on high academic achievements and technological advancement. Malta might consider similar emphasis on STEAM education and innovation.
5. Singapore: The system is highly advanced in nurturing critical thinking and problem solving through specialised programmes and curricula.
6. United States: Entrepreneurship is often embedded in school curricula with practical projects and partnerships with local businesses.
7. Scandinavian countries: Which prioritise child-centric, stress-free learning environments. Malta could also adopt aspects of this to enhance student wellbeing and motivation. This strategy acknowledges sufficiently its importance. Denmark integrates it more deeply into everyday classroom activities.
8. Italy and France: Both have a long tradition of deeply integrating arts into their educational systems.



9. Australia: Which emphasises sports and physical well-being more extensively in their school programmes.

To conclude, The Malta Chamber believes that National Education Strategy for Malta 2024-2030 **approach is comprehensive, however, there is room for deeper integration** and more extensive implementation of these components. The government may benefit from drawing inspiration from the above-mentioned international examples.

Whilst The Malta Chamber thanks all its members for the substantial contribution provided towards this strategy, particularly its Education Thematic Committee members, **it reaffirms its disposition to cooperate as required in favour of a robust ecosystem that nurtures future skills from a young age and prepares students more effectively for the community.**



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