

TOWARDS A QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

The National Curriculum Framework 2011

Consultation Document 1 Executive Summary



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Quality Education
For All**

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**Consultation Document 1
The Executive Summary**

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Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Document 1: The Executive Summary | 9 |
| The Process of the Curriculum Review | 9 |
| Document 2: The NCF - Rationale and Components | 11 |
| Background | 11 |
| Rationale | 11 |
| Main Tenets of the NCF | 12 |
| The Components of the NCF | 13 |
| General Principles | 13 |
| Aims of Education | 13 |
| Learning Areas | 14 |
| Pedagogy, Practice and Evaluation | 15 |
| Assessment and Evaluation | 17 |
| Parental and community involvement | 19 |
| Support Structures | 20 |
| Document 3: The NCF in Practice. The Three Cycles: The Early, Primary and Secondary Years | 23 |
| The Early Years | 23 |
| The Primary Years | 24 |
| The Secondary Years | 26 |
| Document 4: The NCF - The Way Forward | 29 |
| Consultation for the Implementation of the NCF | 29 |

Message

Hon. Dolores Cristina

Minister

Ministry of Education,
Employment and the Family



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dolores Cristina

Message

Prof. Grace Grima

Director General

*Directorate for Quality
and Standards in Education*



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

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

Document 1: The Executive Summary

Document 2: The National Curriculum Framework - Rationale and Components

This document includes a detailed introduction to the theoretical background against which the proposals of the national curriculum framework were conceptualised.

Document 3: The National Curriculum Framework - The Three Cycles: The Early Years, The Primary Years and the Secondary Years

This document presents details of how the national curriculum framework envisages the learning programme to be offered to children and young people in the early years, the primary years and the secondary years. This document focuses on the application of the framework in schools and colleges.

Document 4: The National Curriculum Framework - The Way Forward

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

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

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

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

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

The consultation process itself is divided into three phases:

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

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

Grace Grima

Document 1:

The Executive Summary

The Process of the Curriculum Review

This curriculum review stems from Part II of the Education (Amendments) Act, 2006 which focuses on the constitution and functions of the Directorates of Education. Essentially, it puts the onus on the Directorate for Quality and Standards for:

- updating the National Curriculum Framework (NCF);
- its implementation (taking into consideration issues such as syllabi design, assessment and training needs);
- quality assurance mechanisms; and
- reviewing the implementation process at regular intervals.

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

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

Document 1: The Executive Summary

Document 2: The National Curriculum Framework - Rationale and Components includes a detailed introduction to the theoretical background against which the proposals of the NCF were conceptualised. The first section concludes with a summary of the main tenets of the NCF summarising the major changes and challenges envisaged by the framework. The second section presents the aims and general principles upon which the NCF is developed and which can be achieved and realised through the proposed learning areas and cross-curricular themes. The third section invites the reader to reflect upon the implications which the proposed organisation of the curricular learning areas has for effective pedagogy, practice and evaluation procedures.

Document 3: The National Curriculum Framework in Practice. The Three Cycles: The Early, Primary and Secondary Years presents details of how the NCF envisages the learning programme to be offered to children and young people in the three cycles. This document focuses on the

application of the NCF in schools and colleges.

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

Document 2:

The NCF - Rationale and Components

Background

This document builds on the principles of entitlement and quality education which were emphasised in *Tomorrow's Schools* (1995) and *Creating the Future Together* (1999). Like previous documents, it addresses the holistic development of all learners and advocates a quality education for all. It provides a long-term vision for the educational entitlement of all learners in pre-school and compulsory education in Malta and Gozo within a wider lifelong learning perspective.

Devolving responsibilities to the school site was proposed by *Tomorrow's Schools* (1995) and *Creating the Future Together* (1999). In *For all children to succeed – a new network organisation for quality education in Malta* (2005) the concept of decentralisation was implemented through the concept of networking of schools.

This process is evolving following the setting up of State colleges backed by the legal mechanism of Part V of the Education (Amendments) Act, 2006.

Against this background, the proposed NCF allows for flexibility within which colleges and schools determine particular aspects of the curriculum in order to address specific needs and to build upon strengths within the context of their learning communities, thus contributing to developing and nurturing their identity. Wherever possible, the concept of flexibility is promoted throughout the entire framework.

The proposed NCF is also influenced by other review documents that have been completed since 2000. It is also the first curriculum framework to be adopted since Malta joined the EU in 2004 and hence it has taken into consideration important policy-related documents issued by the European Commission.

Rationale

Against the background of our historical development, and on the basis of the local and EU directives, the proposed NCF seeks to provide strategic direction by rationalising the necessary changes and their implications for area/subject content, pedagogies and assessment. The NCF is presented within a lifelong learning perspective and celebrates diversity by catering for all learners at each stage of their education. It treats early childhood, primary and secondary education with the same importance. The NCF seeks to present a seamless curriculum which reflects smooth transitions, building and extending on the firm foundations in early childhood education. In essence, the NCF aims at providing a quality education for all learners, reducing the percentage of early school leavers and increasing their enrolment in further and higher education.

Main Tenets of the NCF

The NCF assumes:

- a paradigm shift away from a prescriptive curriculum towards a framework which allows for some degree of internal flexibility;
- a move away from stand alone subjects to learning areas that form the entitlement of all learners;
- the continuous development of all practitioners, and ongoing support to enable them to interpret the framework and adapt it to meet the needs of their learners; and
- that all stakeholders in the State, Church and Independent sectors take responsibility for the proposed changes.

Hence, the NCF promotes:

- a clear focus on improving the quality of education and raising the level of student achievement;
- a readiness to depart from traditional curriculum structures and practices that may restrict learning;
- guidelines which allow for some a greater degree of choice to suit the interests and capabilities of individual learners within nationally accepted parameters;
- flexible learning programmes providing diverse and integrated learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners;
- learning programmes that focus on understanding and emphasise the process of learning and the active co-construction of meaning rather than the mere acquisition of content;
- learning programmes that empower teachers to implement innovative teaching/learning strategies especially through the use of eLearning;
- a move away from an exclusively subject-based approach that favours fragmentation and compartmentalisation of knowledge to a more cross-curricular, thematic, interdisciplinary and collaborative approach that reflects real life situations and encourages transfer of skills from one learning area to another;
- an assessment policy that values and assesses both the processes and the products of learning;
- initial teacher education and further opportunities for training and support in the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity;

- professional development that is congruent with the availability of opportunities within the extended reality of the EU; and
- the development of the school as a learning community of reflective practitioners.

The Components of the NCF

There are seven components which constitute the NCF, namely: General Principles; Aims of Education; Learning Areas; Effective Teaching and Learning; Assessment and Evaluation; Parental and Community Involvement; Support Structures. These are presented in a general manner in Document 2 and then developed further with specific relevance to the Early Years, Primary and Secondary Cycles in Document 3.

General Principles

The NCF is founded on six general principles, namely:

Principle 1: Entitlement

Principle 2: Diversity

Principle 3: Continuum of Achievement

Principle 4: Student-Centred Learning

Principle 5: Quality Assurance

Principle 6: Teacher support

These are derived from the values expressed in *Tomorrow's Schools* (1995) and *Creating the Future Together* (1999) and affirmed in the *Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta: A review* (2007) document as well as in national and EU directives.

Aims of Education

In harmony with the principles outlined above, the NCF aims at developing:

- Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as life-long learners;
- Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work; and
- Learners who are engaged citizens in constantly changing local, regional and global realities.

Learning Areas

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

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

Learning in the Early Years and the eight learning areas proposed for the Primary and Secondary Cycles as the entitlement for every child and young person have been derived from the aims identified for this NCF. Similar learning areas are identified in national curricular documentation from other countries, such as Scotland (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008) and New Zealand (2007) as well as in EU directives.

The proposed NCF presents a brief description of each learning area outlining the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes which learners are expected to acquire. More detailed and comprehensive descriptions of each learning area and the respective outcomes at both primary and secondary levels will be developed by curriculum experts and content area specialists. These in turn will be translated into syllabi and schemes of work which can be used directly in all teaching/learning contexts. Within each learning area, the mandatory core school curriculum will be identified as well as the flexible components that allow for different learning programmes to match the individual needs of learners.

The learning areas are:

- **Languages** (Maltese and English; Foreign Languages);
- **Mathematics**;
- **Science**;
- **Religious Education** (Catholic Religious Education. The NCF proposes an Ethics Education programme for those who opt out of Catholic Religious Education);
- **Citizenship Education** (History, Geography, Social Studies, Environmental Studies and aspects of Personal, Social and Health Education and Home Economics);
- **Technology Education** (Design and Technology, Digital Literacy);

- **Arts Education** (Art, Music, Drama, Dance); and
- **Health Education** (Physical Education and Sport, aspects of Personal, Social and Health Education and Home Economics).

The NCF also proposes five cross-curricular themes:

- **eLearning;**
- **Education for Sustainable Development;**
- **Intercultural Education;**
- **Education for Entrepreneurship;** and
- **Creativity and Innovation.**

These are considered essential components for a holistic education and they are meant to be embedded in the different learning areas and to provide connecting strands across the learning areas.

Pedagogy, Practice and Evaluation

Effective Learning and Teaching

Within a differentiated learning and teaching environment, teachers need to adopt approaches that build on the students' current knowledge and that help them progress. The NCF is proposing that practitioners adopt a constructivist perspective to learning which combines a cognitive and social constructivist approach for effective teaching and learning.

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

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

- **content and mastery** which involves having students explore and understand the whole breadth of ideas in a particular content area;
- **higher order thinking** which involves analysis, synthesis and evaluation of content and concepts in some depth, and applying them in different ways and in different contexts; and

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

Learning environments

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

Progression and differentiation in learning

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

The professional teacher's role is to select suitable strategies that actively engage learners, motivating them to own and internalise their learning experiences. With the focus increasingly on the learner, and more mixed-ability classes in schools, differentiated approaches become more important and teachers need to adopt strategies that build on pupils' previous learning and help them progress.

Transitions

While in the initial years of the Primary Cycle, the curriculum builds upon the foundations laid during the Early Years, in the later primary years it links closely with the Secondary Cycle to ensure a smooth transition. With the termination of the Junior Lyceum and the Common Entrance examinations from 2011, the NCF proposes a curriculum which facilitates the transition from the Primary to the Secondary Cycle through the reorganisation of subjects into learning areas and the progression of levels of achievement expressed as learning outcomes.

The NCF is proposing that :

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

- learning in the Secondary Cycle should consolidate and build on the learning experiences of primary education and prepare learners for the wider challenges they will have to face beyond compulsory education;
- the present system of two years in the junior Secondary Cycle followed by three years in the senior Secondary Cycle be retained for the State sector, although other schools are free to consider other alternatives.

The consideration of characteristics of effective teaching and learning, as outlined above, spurs the urgent need to develop two policies related to (a) the teaching of language, including language of instruction, and (b) diversity and inclusion. In this respect, the NCF highlights some crucial issues which need to be addressed through evidence-based policies together with the views of stakeholders.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and Learning

Assessment in pre-school and school settings makes an essential contribution to learning and progress at all levels. It should be seen as an integral part of the teaching and learning process, providing students and their parents with continuous, timely and qualitative feedback about children's progress, giving teachers information about their practice, and providing schools and colleges with information about their curriculum planning, learning and teaching. Assessment **for** learning (assessment for formative purposes) is a process carried out as learning is taking place. Learners and their teachers use the outcomes to find what learners know and are able to do in relation to planned learning. They use the information and evidence gathered during learning to make decisions about how to focus and improve future learning. Assessment **of** learning (assessment for summative purposes) is usually carried out at the end of a unit or periodically at the end of a module, mid-year or at the end of the year. Information and judgments about learning are pulled together in a summary form for purposes of reporting to parents and sharing information with other teachers in the next class or school. If learners are fully aware of what is expected of them (the learning intentions) and the success criteria against which their learning will be evaluated, they will then develop the self-evaluation skills which will help them become self-directed learners. .

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

- support learners to use self-assessment to gauge their learning, identify their strengths, their learning needs and their next steps;
- encourage learners to support one another's learning through peer assessment;
- help teachers to understand children's learning better, to use evidence to monitor learners' progress, to reflect on their practice and to adapt/match their teaching to their learners' needs;
- help teachers plan for the learning of individuals and groups and ensure that all children receive appropriate attention;

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

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

Evaluation: Quality Assurance Mechanisms

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

- the process of school development planning, that has inbuilt mechanisms for self-evaluation;
- mentoring;
- the Performance Management and Professional Development Plan (PMPDP); and
- external reviews carried out by the Quality Assurance Department within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

National monitoring of achievement

Monitoring at the national level using agreed standards is essential for ensuring that the students’ entitlement for a quality education is being respected. It is the responsibility of the Directorate for Quality and Standards (DQSE) to evaluate curriculum implementation, innovation and emerging trends, through external assessment at national and international level, through end-of-year examinations, moderation of school-based assessment, monitoring achievement in the different learning areas, national benchmarks, surveys of literacy and numeracy; SEC examinations, PISA¹, PIRLS², TIMSS³ and other surveys.

1 PISA: Programme for International Student Achievement. This is an internationally standardised assessment that was jointly developed by participating economies and is administered to 15-year-olds in schools. PISA assesses how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society. In every 3-year cycle, the domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy are covered not merely in terms of mastery of the school curriculum, but in terms of important knowledge and skills needed in adult life. In the PISA 2003 cycle, an additional domain of problem solving was introduced to continue the examination of cross-curricular competencies.

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

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

Parental⁴ and Community Involvement

Learning should be contextualised within the surrounding community, the borders of which extend beyond the immediate environs of the school. Formal educational structures should be sensitive and responsive to the realities and opportunities of the learners' environment. Additionally the community (parents, businesses/industries, local councils) – within which learners interact – should acknowledge its major role of investing in and promoting a high quality education.

Schools and Parents

Since the introduction of school councils in the 1988 Education Act, parental involvement has grown in importance and in the variety of forms it takes. Currently, four types of parental interaction exist locally:

Home-school links: These links include regular correspondence and documentation to parents and the parents' attendance at school ceremonies and functions.

Parental participation: Participation includes assistance in events as requested by the school through different services.

Parental involvement: Parents take a lead in the decision-making processes of the school because they can influence the agenda of what needs to be done.

Parental lifelong learning: Parents recognize that the school can be a site and/or an opportunity for their personal growth.

The four categories are important for parents, their children and schools to ensure the most holistic educational development of all the stakeholders concerned. The NCF recommends the development of a national policy to formalise the different forms of participation.

Schools and the Community

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

- The local community is a useful resource for the school to contextualise learning. This can be done through, for example, visits to sites of national relevance; the school/ hosting persons or organisations related to curricular learning; orienting the school curriculum to include site visits, participation in events and contribution of personalities.
- The school can be a locus for lifelong learning for the community. This is currently being achieved through evening classes and through programmes of parental support to learning and parental empowerment courses.
- The community can assist schools to prepare learners for the world of work. Work orientation experiences have been introduced by many secondary schools, exposing

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

learners to real work environments whilst also giving a taste of the work ethic and entrepreneurship in context.

- Schools respond to societal demands through specific curricular foci and ad hoc educational experiences. Debate within civil society suggests the need for education in specific content areas to bring about a particular culture change in contexts that are in urgent need of improvement.

Schools can be turned into communities of learning as they identify various and unique ways of learning that sees members engaged with different members of the school and local community.

In effect, the NCF recommends that:

- schools establish strong ties with the various members, groups and agencies within the community as this will help extend learning within the community and bring learning into the school(s); and
- colleges establish partnerships with the various sectors of the economy and explore different forms of engagement that can be of benefit to student and educators as well as the project partners .

Support Structures

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

Student services

The commitment in favour of diversity and inclusion promoted by this NCF requires the availability and accessibility of services in the students' interests. These services range along a continuum from the personal/pastoral to the curricular. The following underlying principles govern the delivery of the services:

- all services start from the reality of the learner incorporating a personal/pastoral component;
- all services need to address the implications of the particular service on the learner's educational entitlement and development;
- such services need to be given in the context of diversity, implying that they address the learner's current/actual level of competence with a view to subsequent progress and achievement;
- the services facilitate the teachers' access to appropriate information, skills and comple-

mentary provision enabling them to address a learner's educational entitlement effectively; and

- services that require temporary withdrawal from the classroom are effective to the extent that they lead to the reintegration of the learner into the mainstream class, and the up-skilling of classroom teachers to ensure the sustainability of such reintegration⁵.

Human resources

The NCF is setting a clear direction as to how the teaching of specific learning areas is to be carried out, and, in the case of primary schools, indicates the responsibilities of class teachers and subject specialist teachers. The developments suggested by the NCF necessitate a review of the peripatetic service aimed at supporting the curriculum at its various levels of implementation. In both the Primary and Secondary Cycles, the support of the Heads of Department and the Education Officers is to be maintained and strengthened.

On-going professional development

The ongoing professional development of teachers to update their knowledge and skills-base should be viewed as indispensable for the continued effectiveness of the profession. Teaching professionals ought to develop their professional and pedagogical work with learners on the basis of contemporary perspectives on research, theory, content knowledge and teaching practices and on their understanding of the learners. They should consider themselves as critical and reflective professionals who engage with contemporary theory and practice, and who actively seek specific professional development opportunities to ensure their effectiveness as educators. This NCF supports a wide range of opportunities available for professional development of practitioners in schools and colleges and the Education Directorates.

Mentoring

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

Legal and psycho-social services for teachers

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

Leadership of key practitioners

Leadership is a key component to the whole reform process and needs to serve as a fulcrum for development at all levels. The NCF recommends:

⁵ Behaviour management services which incorporate Nurture Groups and Learning Support Zones are provisions which aim at reintegrating the learner and up-skilling the classroom teacher.

- a leadership model that promotes distributed forms of leadership. Within the network experience, whilst school leaders play both a visionary and strategic role, they also need to focus on developing a collaborative culture which draws upon the full range of professional skills and expertise to be found among the members of the organisation. Varied opportunities are to be encouraged within the college network system and in other sectors to invite educators to engage in critical discourse, to address curricular matters and improve the quality of learning and teaching; and
- that Senior Management Teams⁶ dedicate effective, quality time to work together as they lead the schools and to provide varied opportunities for themselves to engage with teachers and other support staff to enhance the quality of education being provided.

This model of leadership is applicable in the Early Years, Primary and Secondary Cycles.

Support for Curriculum Development and Implementation

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

- learning areas;
- respective learning outcomes framework which involves the re-writing of the current syllabi;
- corresponding level descriptors;
- learning strategies that embrace diversity;
- assessment procedures that ensure individual progression of learning; and
- summative assessment pegged to national levels of achievement.

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

⁶ For the purposes of curriculum development and implementation, Senior Management Teams are composed of the Head of School, Assistant Heads and Heads of Department or equivalent.

Document 3:

The NCF in Practice. The Three Cycles: The Early, Primary and Secondary Years

The Early Years

In Document 3, the NCF proposes an Early Years curriculum that focuses on children's experiences and provides for the nurturing of positive dispositions towards learning which are to be extended in later years. It encourages programmes of activities which move away from specific subject or content teaching in favour of pedagogies which enhance curricular links and thus facilitate learning processes that respond to children's interests and prior knowledge, respect young learners' cognitive maturity and preferred learning patterns, stimulate curiosity, instil an interest for learning, promote exploration, discovery and creativity, and foster environments which promote communication and interactive styles of learning. Through programmes which seek children's active involvement and experiential learning, children are expected to acquire social, communicative and intellectual competences in an environment which fosters personal well-being and positive learning dispositions.

This NCF advocates:

- broad outcomes which are all-encompassing and not exclusively focused on academic achievement;
- pedagogical approaches which respect children's age and developmental level;
- unlimited content which is to be presented to children in ways which engage their attention and secure their direct involvement and participation; and
- highly trained and skilled staff who are sensitive to the characteristics of young learners and in tune with the learning processes of toddlers, infants and young children in the early stages of formal schooling.

The NCF also endorses the position recommended by the NMC (1999, p.57) which regards the first two years of primary schooling as a continuation of the two-year Kindergarten period.

The NCF identifies the following five competences for the Early Years:

(1) Well-being; (2) Social competences; (3) Communicative competences; (4) Learning dispositions; and (5) Intellectual competences.

These competences can be translated into learning outcomes which young children are expected to achieve by the time they are moving from the Early Years to the later primary

school years. The holistic development of children contributes to successful achievement of the following outcomes:

Outcome 1: Children develop a strong sense of identity;

Outcome 2: Children gain a positive self-image;

Outcome 3: Children are socially adept;

Outcome 4: Children are effective communicators; and

Outcome 5: Children nurture positive attitudes towards learning becoming engaged and confident learners.

The Primary Years

The NCF is proposing that:

- The Primary School curriculum views learning as an on-going, continuous process, builds upon the sound foundation laid during the Early Years stage and links closely with the secondary schools to ensure smooth transitions between the levels;
- the implementation of pedagogies be founded on a socio-constructivist approach that respects individualised learning patterns, addresses all children's needs and successfully develops children's full potential;
- the Primary Curriculum assist children to develop into confident learners who have a positive self-image, high self-esteem and are socially adept; critical and innovative thinkers who are capable of generating new ideas which are then put into practice; proficient users of Maltese and English; learners who are numerate and have a firm foundation in mathematical reasoning and concepts; learners who are scientifically literate and capable of engaging in enquiry that inculcates the love of exploration and wonder; learners who are digitally literate, capable of using and adapting to new technologies; and learners who are physically active, capable of making choices in favour of a healthy life-style;
- children are grouped in mixed ability classrooms throughout the primary years;
- primary school teachers be responsible for the teaching and learning that takes place in: Maltese, English, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Religion, Citizenship and Health (including Physical Education);
- subject specialist primary school teachers are to replace class teachers to teach Art, Music, Drama, Personal, Social, and Health Education, and the awareness programmes in foreign languages;
- curricular support teachers for Science, Physical Education, Technology and IT are to assist class teachers in the school to develop the curricular area and to offer assistance

with content and resources, as may be required;

- support is to be offered at a college and national level in the planning, implementation and evaluation of cross-curricular themes, and in the implementation of specific policies through a whole school approach;
- the current peripatetic system is revised as necessary;
- different forms of assessment **for** learning in all primary years and assessment **of** learning from Years 4 to 6 are indicative of the learners' progress in the achievement levels. School-based assessment, incorporating the assessment of oral/aural skills in Maltese and English provides parents, teachers and the school administration with an overview of each child's development in terms of levels of achievement throughout. In addition, from Year 4 the process becomes more formalised with the introduction of examinations in conjunction with other forms of assessment. The combination of approaches should help different stakeholders to obtain a clear picture of the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of individual pupils in the different learning areas during the Primary Cycle.
- at the end of Year 6, a national end-of-primary benchmark in Mathematics, Maltese and English⁷ is set and marked centrally to provide national benchmarks. Whilst these assessments are compulsory for children attending State schools, schools in the Church and Independent sectors may also participate. These methods of assessment record the achievement of pupils at the end of the primary education cycle and provide important information to the receiver secondary schools about the achievement of individual pupils. Information available through the Benchmark examinations shall not be used for a comparison in the public sphere of the results of individual schools.

The Proposed Timetable for the Primary Years

The range of activities in the first two years of the Primary Cycle (Years 1 and 2) should be similar to those provided in the Early Years. A topic/thematic-based approach is recommended for the first two years in primary: such an approach enriches the development of each learning area. Science, Religious Education, Citizenship Education, Arts Education and Health Education as learning areas all support the development of oracy, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills. Although an indication of how the school day may be distributed for primary schools is being proposed, no fixed recommendation for the Year 1 and Year 2 children is being made.

With regard to the timetable for Years 3-6, alternatives which allow for some degree of flexibility at school/college levels are presented for consideration during the consultation process. However, the following criteria are common to all options:

- it is assumed that on average, in a school year there are approximately 800 teaching/learning hours. This figure does not include assembly time, break-times or examination time;

⁷ The national end-of-year examinations include assessment in oral/aural skills for both English and Maltese.

- lessons may vary in duration allowing for flexible timings which are child-friendly. In general lesson time varies between 30 and 60 minutes;
- Physical Education/Sport activities are allotted an average of 30 minutes a day during the time allotted to Health Education. In addition, schools are encouraged to organise sports activities during mid-day break. After-school activities at school/college level, in collaboration with the wider community and the *Kunsill Malti għall-Isport* are also to be promoted;
- the recommended distributions (learning area weighting) allow for a well-balanced programme of activities which permits sufficient time for the different learning areas; and
- schools are to ensure that 1.5 hours per week is spent on teacher planning sessions.

In line with the flexibility which the NCF is proposing, one of the time-table models sets aside one hour per week (approximately 32 hours per year) for Heads and Schools to decide how this time is to be spent. With younger children, where there is no foreign language awareness programme, the school has an added degree of flexibility in each of the alternatives. It is hoped that flexibility in the timetable will increase over time.

The Secondary Years

The NCF is proposing that:

- the transition from primary to secondary school should be smooth and offer progression in a way which supports learners as they learn to take more responsibility. It has to consolidate and build upon the learning experiences of primary education and prepare learners for the wider challenges they will have to face beyond compulsory education;
- the present system of two years in the junior Secondary Cycle followed by three years in the senior cycle is retained for the State sector, although other schools are free to consider other alternatives;
- a number of timetable models are considered that maximize learning time, offer schools a measure of curricular flexibility, and ensure regular time for the school professional community to discuss and/or address school-related and professional development issues;
- schools may consider offering other foreign languages apart from Arabic, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish, should this be sustainable and educationally viable. Moreover, schools may design curricular programmes for students who are still experiencing difficulties in the core languages;
- Core Science is given to all students in Forms 1 and 2. In Forms 3, 4 and 5, students who do not wish to specialise in Science continue with Core Science leading to a SEC examination. Students who wish to specialise in Science can opt for two or three of the following: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Materials Science;

- Accounts and Economics is re-introduced to the list of subjects that students may opt for at the end of Form 2;
- the spectrum of educational opportunities is widened to cater for the interests and aptitudes of all students in compulsory education by means of the introduction of four initial vocational subject areas, namely *Engineering, Hospitality, IT Practitioner, and Health and Social Care* to the list of subjects that students may opt for at the end of Form 2;
- initial vocational options are piloted in a number of State and non-State schools as from September 2011 and the national implementation of initial VET by 2013;
- a more flexible approach towards annual examinations is adopted by the State sector where it is established in which year groups the examinations will continue to be centrally set. For those year groups where the examinations will be college based, the Educational Assessment Unit (EAU) within the DQSE, will monitor standards across the different colleges;
- the college assessment policy allows students following individual learning programmes to be assessed using alternative forms of assessment. The policy needs to also take into consideration the frequency, duration and timing of assessments such as oral and listening comprehension tasks in languages, practical work and other types of coursework. The policy will also seek to enhance the quality of different forms of assessment and how they are reported to parents and other stakeholders, such as examination boards and employers;
- syllabus designers take into consideration the interconnections within each learning area, and the actual time on task available to allow for meaningful learning arising from effective teaching;
- schools develop into sites of effective, diversified learning to the extent that practitioners learn to co-ordinate all the possibilities inherent in the NCF to co-construct autonomous teaching and learning opportunities that are truly learner-centred and that address the realities of their students.

The Proposed Timetable for the Secondary Years

In secondary schools, a number of criteria need to be considered to ensure that the NCF is put into practice in a timetable which maximizes learning time. Such a timetable needs to:

- cater for a minimum of 38 lessons per five-day week since this is the minimum amount of lessons to ensure accessibility to the eight learning areas;
- allocate regular timetabled time for day-to-day and special assemblies, use of school lockers and Form time;
- have a reasonably long mid-day break to strengthen the presence of sport and non-formal learning activities;
- allow for lessons of between 40 and 45 minutes each, and preferably not less than 42

minutes when taking travel time between lessons into consideration, to provide enough time for effective time-on-task in the classroom;

- ensure regular time for the school professional community to discuss and/or address school-related and professional development issues; and
- be structured on the principle that teacher time is wholly dedicated to actual teaching or related professional duties and not for any supervision - extra payment should be made available for such supervision.

Currently, there is no single timetable that meets all the above criteria. Whilst the actual diversity within and between the State, Church and Independent sectors needs to be respected, different timetables are being proposed in this document in an attempt to address various priorities and realities. The advantages and disadvantages of each of the proposed models are presented for discussion purposes.

Document 4:

The NCF - The Way Forward

Consultation for the Implementation of the NCF

An over-riding concern in the drafting of these documents has been that of ensuring that the NCF and the proposals targeting every stage of the learners' education address their current needs whilst preparing them to face the challenges beyond compulsory school age, in further and higher education and in active citizenship within their community. The challenges ahead require the concerted effort and the collaboration and participation of all stakeholders if the proposals of the NCF are to be accepted, understood and implemented successfully.

Document 4 summarises the recommendations being proposed in the NCF and examines the implications of such recommendations. It is acknowledged that a meaningful strategy for the implementation of the NCF can only be developed once the recommendations are debated and the full impact of their implications understood. In order to achieve this as a reflective community that is learning together, the process of consultation needs to include all stakeholders in a professionally engaging manner. Moreover, the consultation and implementation strategies need to be based on the full understanding of a change management process.

The consultation process is divided into three phases:

Phase 1: Reflection *for* action from May 2011 to August 2011

This phase will serve to present the NCF and prepare the various stakeholders for the consultation process. In addition, this phase allows all participants sufficient time to read through the documents and consider in some detail their content and implications.

Phase 2: Reflection *in* action from September 2011 to November 2011

This phase will provide stakeholders with opportunities to share and consolidate their ideas within and across different institutions. The aim of this phase is to invite and encourage stakeholders to participate actively in generating a national, reflective professional discussion and debate about the NCF proposals, thus initiating a process of sharing critical and constructive feedback in preparation for the final version of the NCF.

Phase 3: Reflection *on* Action from November 2011 to December 2011

This phase will bring together all the stakeholders and the feedback offered by the various institutions with the aim of discussing suggestions from different perspectives.

Once the proposed NCF is reviewed in light of the feedback received, a final NCF document will be submitted to the Minister for the approval of Cabinet/Parliament.

The major purpose of this draft NCF is to launch the process of reviewing, and updating the curriculum. Ultimately, the success or otherwise of the process will be determined by the extent of the on-going commitment of all stake holders in their unstinting efforts to ensure that the proposals can be successfully translated into daily classroom practices. These will in turn impact on the quality of the educational experiences provided in schools and the relevance of such practices for learners, as expressed in their short and long term achievements within a life-long learning context.