

MALTA

Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

Valerie Sollars

University of Malta, Faculty of Education, Msida

Citation suggestion:

Sollars, V. 2024. "Malta – ECEC Workforce Profile." In *Early childhood workforce profiles across Europe. 33 country reports with key contextual data*, edited by P. Oberhuemer and I. Schreyer. Munich: State Institute for Early Childhood Research and Media Literacy. www.seepro.eu/English/Country-Reports.htm

Funded by:



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth



State Institute for Early Childhood
Research and Media Literacy



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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

About the author

Valerie Sollars is a full-time professor and resident academic at the University of Malta within the Faculty of Education Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education. A former Dean of the Faculty, she was appointed Pro-Rector for Strategic Planning and Sustainability in July 2023. She has various research interests in ECEC but has been particularly involved in policy development and quality issues which impact early years services.

Introductory note: Overview

Administrative responsibility for childcare services catering for under threes was transferred from the Department for Social Welfare Standards, within the then Ministry for the Family & Social Solidarity, to the Ministry for Education and Employment on July 1st 2016. This was a laudable move which brought all services associated to early childhood education and care under one entity. However, thus far this has resulted in it being merely an administrative shift, where childcare services have been added on to the responsibilities of staff within various departments at the Ministry for Education.

Shifting the administration of childcare settings to the Ministry for Education was in part motivated by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (MEDE 2012) which foresaw an early years cycle that promotes the education and care for 0 to 7 year-olds. Bringing all services under one ministry had also been a recommendation in policy documents (MEDE 2013) in line with one of the OECD (2001) conclusions. However, in what appears to be an absence of a conceptual understanding of what the early years cycle implies in relation to the potential benefits of high-quality settings requiring highly trained staff skilled in managing, leading and working with young children and families, a decade later the ECEC services in Malta still comprise three distinct stages, namely:

1. Non-compulsory childcare services for under threes
2. Non-compulsory kindergarten settings for 3 to 5 year-olds and
3. The first two years of compulsory school, for 5 to 7 year-olds, traditionally and currently still part of the six-year compulsory primary cycle¹.

The distinct nature of the three stages is reinforced by policies and practices which contribute to fragmentation, making it difficult to establish a unified early years sector.

1. No single directorate is explicitly tasked with all matters related to ECEC.
2. Regulations for licensing a childcare setting are different to those which apply for kindergarten settings. Licences to operate a kindergarten are identical to those applied to schools.
3. Unlike childcare settings, most kindergarten settings are located within primary schools and this has had an impact on how kindergartens are perceived and how they operate. Despite childcare and kindergarten services being non-compulsory, the latter has been and continues to be perceived as a downward extension of compulsory school. In addition, the length of the 'school day', holidays, certain practices and routines, the sharing of physical resources (such as playgrounds), pedagogies associated with 'schoolification' and academic work and expectations about what kindergarten children should achieve before compulsory school, have all impacted the functioning of kindergartens.
4. Staff qualifications and working conditions are another example of the dissonance across the early years provision. Qualified, graduate teachers (EQF 6 and EQF 7) are recruited to work with children from the age of 5 whereas in childcare and kindergarten, EQF Level 4 qualifications are the norm. As will be illustrated elsewhere in this chapter, minimum qualifications required of staff within kindergarten settings are beginning to improve with an EQF Level 5 qualification being the minimum expected since 2021. An EQF Level 6 qualification in early

¹ For the purpose of this report, attention will be given to the workforce engaged with the under 5 year-olds. Where necessary and to help readers contextualise and position the information about childcare and kindergarten practitioners, salient differences between the non-compulsory and compulsory sectors of the Early Years Cycle will be included.

years is also available for kindergarten educators (KGEs) but this is not recognised as a teaching qualification and therefore salaries for staff employed at kindergarten, even with an EQF Level 6, are lower than those who have an EQF Level 6 teaching qualification.

5. Top-up courses offered by different entities are providing practitioners already in employment the opportunity to improve their qualifications. Such improvements lead to mobility away from childcare settings towards kindergarten and even primary school, where working conditions, salaries and career path mobility are more attractive.

The rapid growth in the number of childcare settings for under threes which has occurred in the last decade is set to continue. The introduction of the Free Childcare Scheme in April 2014 targeted children and families where parents were working or studying. This was explicitly motivated by labour force demands and the need to increase female participation in the work force. In reporting to the Parliamentary Committee for Family Affairs (2023b), the CEO of JobsPlus claimed that the desired increase has definitely been achieved: from 51.7% of 20–64 year-old women in employment in 2014, there are currently 75.2% of women in the labour market, leading to a situation where not only has this 23.5% growth been achieved in just under ten years, but Malta currently surpasses the EU27 average by over 5% points. Free childcare provision is expected to be available for everybody. One of the electoral proposals made by the Labour Party in its March 2022 manifesto (MLP 2022, 68) relates to making childcare freely available to any child, irrespective of parents’ economic activity. Once again in the history of early childhood education services in Malta, the sector will experience a situation where primary consideration is given to availability and accessibility of services without due attention being given to the quality of the learning experiences being offered or to ensuring that highly qualified staff are available.

Retrieving data about the staff and the qualifications of Childcare and Kindergarten Educators (KGEs) remains a challenge since relevant data are maintained by different entities. Within the childcare system, where staff turnover is a regular feature, there is no obligatory reporting system in place for staff mobility or termination of employment. Data about childcare employees are collated by the managers ahead of the annual external audit and reviewed by Education Officers (EOs) within the Education Review Section (ERS) at the DQSE during their visit. Data about KGEs are collected by the Education Resources Department within the Directorate for Educational Services (DES). Information is collected annually at the beginning of each scholastic year from the State and the two non-State sectors (Church and Independent (Private) schools) to compile the School Statistical Returns (SSR) report. Schools must provide information about all employees, irrespective whether they are new or continuing members of staff.

Most of the data used for this report were obtained between May 2021 and July 2022 and were made available upon request. The assistance offered by staff from several departments and entities is gratefully acknowledged (see Chapter *Acknowledgements* at the end of this report).

Abbreviations used in this report

| | | | |
|-------|--|-------|---|
| BA | Bachelor of Arts | MEYR | Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation |
| B.Ed. | Bachelor in Education | MFED | Ministry for Education |
| CACHE | Council for Awards in Health, Care and Education | MFHEA | Malta Further and Higher Education Authority |
| CCPA | Childcare Centre Providers Association | MFSS | Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity |
| CDEC | Centre for Child Development, Education and Care Studies | MQF | Malta Qualifications Framework |
| CDAU | Child Development Assessment Unit | | |

| | | | |
|-------|--|-------|--|
| CoPE | Community of Professional Educators | MQRIC | Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development | MTL | Master in Teaching and Learning |
| DES | Directorate for Educational Services | MUT | Malta Union of Teachers |
| DQSE | Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education | NCFHE | National Commission for Further and Higher Education |
| EO | Education Officer | NSSS | National School Support Services |
| ERD | Education Resources Department | NOS | National Occupational Standards |
| ERS | Education Review Section | POMA | Protection of Minors Act |
| ETC | Employment Training Corporation | RPL | Recognition of Prior Learning |
| FES | Foundation for Educational Services | RCS | Regulatory and Compliance Section |
| GDPR | General Data Protection Regulation | SMT | Senior Management Team |
| IfE | Institute for Education | SSR | School Statistical Returns |
| IPE | Initial Professional Education | UHM | Union Haddiema Magħqudin |
| KGE | Kindergarten Educator | UM | University of Malta |
| LRP | Legally Responsible Person | | |
| LSE | Learning Support Educator | | |
| MCAST | Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology | | |
| MEDE | Ministry for Education and Employment | | |

1. ECEC governance in Malta

The Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) has overall responsibility for educational direction, policy development and decision-making. Within the Ministry, directorates relevant for ECEC include:

1. The Directorate for Educational Services (DES) which, among others, includes a department for Educational Resources and a department for National School Support Services (NSSS). The latter includes psycho-social services and inclusive education support. These services are available for children of all ages and their families in any education sector (Church, State and Independent schools); and
2. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) which acts as the regulatory body for all educational institutions (State, Church and Independent) at all levels of education, from childcare and kindergarten through compulsory primary and secondary school (0–16) and is responsible for establishing quality standards. This Directorate comprises two sections relevant to the early years, namely the Regulatory and Compliance Section (RCS) and the Education Review Section (ERS) (DQSE 2023a).

Childcare services

According to the latest list of childcare settings (January 2024) there are currently 191 settings for under threes including 11 registered and 180 licensed settings which can cater for a maximum of 7,815 children (DQSE 2024). By the end of October 2023, 188 settings could cater for 7,825 children but only 5,500 children were reported to be making use of these services (Jobsplus)². Elsewhere, staff from DQSE reported that a total of 5,744 children were attending

² CEO of JobsPlus reporting to the Family Affairs Committee, Parliament of Malta, 5th December 2023

childcare centres in 2023 (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023a). The list of settings is updated regularly as is the status of the settings which are given their license by the DQSE. With the implementation of the Education Act Cap 605 in 2021 (Ministry of Justice 2023*), childcare centres are now recognised as educational institutions. Legislation has finally made it mandatory for all childcare services to be licensed and therefore be regulated by the DQSE Standards, irrespective of whether settings benefit from the Free Childcare Scheme. 13 childcare settings, of which 12 are currently in operation, are government subsidised and managed through the Foundation for Educational Services (FES 2023). Five settings operate within workplaces where priority is given to the children of the employees. Five operate through public-private partnerships (DQSE to the Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023a). The remaining childcare settings (N=169; 88.5%) are privately-owned and managed. These settings are respectively referred to as ‘work-based’ and ‘centre-based services’ where the premises are equipped and solely used for childcare (MFED 2021a, 10). In 2023, there were 3,529 new entrants into childcare services. By the end of October 2023, 8,627 children had used childcare services during this year (JobsPlus to the Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b). Setting up a childcare setting involves two separate processes: an application with the Planning Authority (PA) followed by the Registration Process with the DQSE (2024). Consultation between the PA and DQSE ensures that proposed plans are according to the *National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3 years)*³ (MFED 2021a) and the *Registration Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3 years)* (MFED 2021b). A temporary licence is given to settings where an initial on-site visit does not result in full compliance. This becomes a provisional licence when pending issues are addressed and resolved to the satisfaction of the DQSE. According to information communicated to operators of childcare settings via a letter circular (DQSE 2022), “*the new Education Act Chapter 605 Articles 21–31, published in September 2021 states that all childcare centre providers are to be in possession of a valid licence to operate. To this effect, from 2022 a licence to operate childcare facilities will be issued/renewed by the DQSE, following the outcomes of external review process/es based on both Quality Area 1 and Quality Area 2 of the National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3)*”.

Kindergartens

The DQSE is also responsible for the regulation of all **kindergarten services** irrespective of whether these are within State, Independent or Church schools.

1. The State sector is the largest of the three as kindergarten settings are attached to every primary school. State primary schools are available in every town/village in Malta and the island of Gozo. There are 68 state primary schools, organised within ten Colleges⁴, 64 of which offer KG services, together with the first three years of compulsory primary school for 5 to 8 year olds (MEYR 2023). The remaining primary schools offer education services for the final three years of compulsory primary education (8 to 11 year-olds). Kindergarten

³ This will be referred to as the National Standards in this document.

⁴ Government schools have been organised into College networks since 2005. There are nine State Colleges in Malta. Each College consists of approximately 4 or 5 primary schools from villages/towns in relatively close proximity together with the middle and secondary schools which children from the cluster of primary schools in the College will attend as they progress through the education system. The 10th College is the Gozo College which constitutes all 11 primary schools and the two secondary schools.

settings which cater for children between the ages of 2 years 9 months to 5 years 6 months⁵, have been under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education since 1987⁶.

2. Kindergarten provision is available in 19 Independent (private) schools. Among the Independent sector, ten settings started out as childcare services, gradually extended their operation to include kindergarten services. In the remaining independent settings, kindergarten services are established within schools which also offer compulsory education (DQSE 2023b).
3. Among the Church schools with kindergarten facilities, most welcome children from the age of four rather than at the age of three. There are 18 Church schools in Malta and five in Gozo with kindergarten services (Archdiocese of Malta 2022a, b).

According to data from the Education Strategy and Quality Assurance Department, at the end of February 2024, the proportion of kindergarten children attending state and independent schools amounted to 73.6% and 15.7% respectively; 10.7% attended church schools. 3 year-olds accounted for most children in state and independent schools, whereas in church schools, children were mostly 4 and 5 years old. 9,523 children were attending kindergarten settings during academic year 2023/2024.

Table 1

Malta: Distribution of children in kindergarten by age and sector

| Class level | Academic year 2023–2024 | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | State | Church | Private | Total |
| Kindergarten 1 (3 year-olds) | 4,108 | 299 | 797 | 5,204 |
| Kindergarten 2 (4 year-olds) | 1,897 | 721 | 701 | 4,319 |
| Total Pre-Primary Level | 7,005 | 1,020 | 1,498 | 9,523 |

Source: personal email communication of the Research Unit at the Office of The Director General, Education Strategy and Quality Assurance Department, 23 February 2024

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Two main categories of staff work directly with children within the non-compulsory early childhood education and care settings: **Childcare Educators**⁷ are the core practitioners working with

⁵ Compulsory education starts in the year a child turns 5. Children are admitted to school at the start of the scholastic year, end of September/beginning October.

⁶ Between October 1975 (when State kindergarten settings were introduced across the island) and 1987/88, responsibility for kindergarten shifted twice between the Ministries of Social policy and Education.

⁷ The main carer used to be referred to as a “Childcare Worker” or “Childcare Assistant”. The term changed to “Childcare Educator” with the *National Standards for ECEC (0–3 years)* (MFED 2021a). Since “this is an official document which was launched nationally the new title is recognised” (email communication with Director QA, 9th June 2022).



the under 3 year-olds in childcare settings; and **Kindergarten Educators**⁸ (KGEs) work as core practitioners in kindergarten settings with 3 to 5 year-olds.

Other staff in childcare settings acknowledged in the National Standards (MFED 2021a) include the ‘Legally Responsible Person’ (LRP), ‘Centre Managers’ and ‘Childcare Assistants’. Although responsibility for ensuring structural, process and outcomes quality in an ECEC centre rests with the LRP, the day-to-day running of centres is often delegated to a Centre Manager. In some small settings, one person takes on multiple roles.

In **kindergarten** settings, in addition to the KGE, there may also be ECEC teachers and KGEs employed as relievers or supply staff. There are also Learning Support Educators (LSEs) who are assigned to statemented children. LSEs do not have any specific training or qualification in early years. They may be responsible for individual children or assigned more than one child depending on the needs of the children.

Staff in childcare settings⁹

Although the National Standards (MFED 2021a) refers to the LRP, the Centre Manager and the Childcare Educator, the updated National Occupational Standards (NOS) (MFHEA March 2022a, b) address the knowledge and skills expected of Childcare Educators with an MQF Level 4 qualification and the knowledge and skills expected of Centre Managers, who, in some settings are referred to as supervisors or co-ordinators and who are expected to be in possession of a MQF Level 5 qualification. *Table 3* summarises the broad criteria identified in the NOS for the main staff working in childcare.¹⁰

Table 2

Malta: National Occupational Standards for Childcare Educators and Centre Managers (MFHEA, March 2022a, b)

| NOS for Childcare Educators MQF Level 4 (MFHEA 2022a) | NOS for Childcare Centre Managers MQF Level 5 (MFHEA 2022b) |
|--|--|
| Understanding child development | Understanding child development |
| Protecting and promoting children’s rights | Protecting and promoting children’s rights |
| Engaging in quality interactions and developing positive relationships | Developing and maintaining a safe, secure, and healthy environment |
| Implementing child-centred, inquiry, and play-based learning and care programmes | Collaborating with all stakeholders |
| Meeting physical development and care needs to support healthy development | Working in partnership with parents |
| Reflecting on practice and developing professional competences | Leading to enhance the quality of learning and care |
| Promoting positive behaviour | Promoting the centre’s inclusiveness in the social, physical, and learning environment |
| Embracing diversity | Establishing ongoing professional growth |
| Supporting inclusive early childhood education and Care | Implementing and monitoring an internal review process |

⁸ Staff working with 3 to 5 year-olds were referred to as Kindergarten Assistants since the introduction of State KG in 1975. This was a misnomer as kindergarten staff never assisted anyone. It was rectified with the Government-MUT sectorial agreement (MEDE 2017).

⁹ Details about the roles of staff in childcare are taken from the *National Standards for ECEC (0–3 years)*

¹⁰ The publication of these revised NOS was communicated to all service providers via an email and an announcement uploaded to the MFHEA website (MFHEA 05/2022; 14th March 2022) which states that with immediate effect, courses and programmes of study for staff should reflect these NOS (MFHEA 2022c).



| NOS for Childcare Educators MQF Level 4 (MFHEA 2022a) | NOS for Childcare Centre Managers MQF Level 5 (MFHEA 2022b) |
|--|--|
| Working in partnership with parent ¹¹ | Meeting regulatory requirements |
| Developing and maintaining a healthy, safe, and secure environment | |
| Meeting and maintaining regulatory requirements | |

Childcare Educators working within the centre are expected to contribute to the day-to-day running of the centre, implement policies and procedures that reflect high quality provision of learning experiences. Childcare Educators are expected to plan, monitor, assess and respond to children’s interests and needs, by interacting with children and providing a language-rich environment which promotes both English and Maltese. Finally, they are expected to collaborate with parents, other members of staff and other stakeholders.

Childcare Educators are expected to be at least 18 years or over and in possession of a minimum MQF Level 4 qualification with at least 60 ECTS in Early Childhood Education and Care; a pass at MQF Level 3 in Maltese or Maltese as a Foreign Language and English; a valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid and a valid Food Handling Certificate.

Childcare Assistants

The National Standards (MFED 2021a) allow for the employment of Childcare Assistants. They are expected to (a) work in collaboration with the Centre Manager, the Childcare Educator being assisted as well as parents; (b) assist and support the Childcare Educator in the provision of care, learning and play; and (c) ensure that the children are in a safe and comfortable environment and receive the personal attention required to promote learning, respectful care, and children’s holistic wellbeing. Childcare Assistants were initially introduced to childcare settings in January 2018, at a time when managers and owners complained that they were unable to recruit suitably qualified staff and had therefore been informed that anyone over the age of 25 could be employed as an ‘assistant’ to manage a group of children. However, the revised National Standards (MFED 2021a) expect Assistants to be 23 years or over and show evidence of enrolment with an accredited institution licensed with MFHEA to offer training in childcare theory and practice at MQF Level 3 with at least 30 ECTS that is specifically organised for the Assistant to the Childcare Educator. They need to be able to communicate effectively in Maltese and English and have a valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid and a valid Food Handling certificate. This requirement goes some way to modifying and addressing the introduction of ‘assistants’ in the workforce.

Data held by the DQSE (2022) recorded a total of 1,260¹² employees across the childcare settings in operation classified in the following way:

- 15% (N=189) as Centre Managers, supervisors, co-ordinators, assistant managers;
- 81% (N=1,023) as Childcare Educators of which 15% (N=188) are identified as ‘childcare educators in training’;
- 2.3% (N=29) as helpers/cleaners; and
- 1.3% (N=17) as the LRPs, owners or directors.

¹¹ Refers to any primary caregiver

¹² The data are reviewed and updated regularly. Some records were eliminated from the original data file where notes indicated that individuals had moved within or away from the sector but whose mobility had not been traced.



Table 3

Malta: Designation of staff in childcare settings

| Designation ¹³ | Number of staff | Designation | Number of staff |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Educators</i> | | <i>Managers and associated staff</i> | |
| Senior childcare practitioner | 2 | Centre Managers | 161 |
| Assistant carer | 1 | Centre co-ordinator | 3 |
| Carer/co-ordinator | 1 | Centre Manager in training | 5 |
| Carer and operations | 1 | Centre Manager/assist coordinator | 1 |
| Carers awaiting trade test result | 3 | Centre Manager/carers | 4 |
| Carers | 831 | Centre manager/LRP | 3 |
| Carers in training | 184 | Centre owner/manager | 2 |
| <i>Helpers</i> | | Centre supervisor | 1 |
| Attendant/helpers | 23 | Child carer supervisor/KG Reliever | 1 |
| Cleaner | 6 | Assistant Childcare Manager | 1 |
| <i>LRPs, owners</i> | | Assistant Director | 1 |
| Owner | 2 | Admin | 1 |
| Centre Director | 2 | Supervisors | 2 |
| LRP | 4 | Administrative Assistant | 1 |
| LRP Assistant | 1 | <i>Other</i> | |
| LRP/Owner/Director | 7 | Nurse | 1 |
| LRP/Owner/Director/Childcarer | 1 | Relievers | 3 |

Source: DQSE 2022

Staff in kindergarten settings

With some exceptions, **Kindergarten Educators (KGEs)** work within a school structure and in these circumstances, KGEs are the sole persons responsible for a group of children assigned to their classroom. The Head of School has the overall responsibility for the kindergarten setting in addition to overseeing the management and leadership of the primary school where the kindergarten is located. In large schools, an Assistant Head of School is frequently assigned the responsibility of overseeing the kindergarten section. This delegation of responsibility depends on the school population and the distribution of roles determined by the Head. Neither the Head nor the deputy/assistant Heads of schools are expected to have any qualifications specifically related to the early years and most of them would have had a teaching career and experience in a primary or secondary school. Within kindergarten settings which operate independently of any school, a Kindergarten Manager with the role of setting head does not require any qualifications but only a clean police conduct and the POMA (Protection of Minors Applications) clearance.

KGEs are responsible for working directly with the children. State and Non-state schools follow the same rules and procedures for the engagement of Educators. The *Collective Agreement between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT)* (MEDE 2017) for State schools and the *Collective Agreement between the Church Authorities and the MUT for Education Grades in Church Schools and in the Secretariat for Catholic Education* (Archdiocese & MUT 2018)¹⁴ entertain the possibility of an Early Years Teacher.

¹³ The nomenclature in some instances is not officially recognised (example "Senior Childcare Practitioner" or "Senior Childcarer") and would have been flagged in the official database maintained by the DQSE.

¹⁴ Independent schools have separate Collective Agreements with the Union or no Collective Agreement with any Union. In this chapter, subsequent references to these documents, will refer to the Collective Agreements 2017/2018).

“The parties agree that Kindergarten education will be covered by the grade of teachers as per clauses in section 26. In the absence of a sufficient complement, Kindergarten education may be provided by Kindergarten Educator III” (Article 25.2, 30).

Individuals eligible for employment as kindergarten teachers would have a teaching qualification in ECEC (EQF Level 6) which would have included at least one practice placement in the compulsory education years (with 5 to 7 year-olds), thus making them eligible for a teaching warrant in accordance with the Education Act. For a relatively short period of time (2009–2017), the University of Malta (UM) offered a B.Ed. (Hons) in ECEC aimed at applicants who in line with the NCF (MEDE 2012)-would want to work as qualified teachers with kindergarten children or with 5 to 7 year-olds in the first two years of compulsory education¹⁵. This qualification would have put staff in kindergarten on a par with teachers in primary and secondary schools. However, most of the graduates from the B.Ed. (Hons) in ECEC were deployed to work in primary schools rather than with the non-compulsory kindergarten years and bar a couple of exceptions, this practice persisted. Since October 2016 the Faculty of Education at UM discontinued all its B.Ed. (Hons) programmes replacing it with a Master’s degree in teaching and Learning (MTL) for prospective teachers wanting to teach at primary or secondary level. Ministerial direction at the time was to introduce a BA (Hons) in ECEC for prospective KGEs. The BA (Hons) is currently the highest non-teaching qualification for practitioners wanting to work with kindergarten children. However, it is not mandatory for prospective KGEs to have an EQF Level 6 qualification to gain employment in kindergarten settings.

The Collective Agreements (MEDE 2017, Archdiocese and MUT 2018) do not provide a specific description for a “kindergarten teacher” but the description for a ‘teacher’ (Article 26) is collated under one section irrespective of the age group of children the individual would be responsible for.

The duties of KGEs are described as follows in the Collective Agreements.

“... to provide appropriate, relevant, stimulating and engaging learning experiences for all learners under his/her care at kindergarten level as part of the Early Years Cycle. The KGE is expected to collaborate with other educators who may be supporting this endeavour within or beyond the classroom, under the leadership of the school’s Senior Management Team, also by engaging in the development of a Community of Professional Educators, including through School Development Planning. ... the KGE is to:

- (i) keep abreast of developments in the Early Years Cycle, including but not limited to curriculum, pedagogy and recording/reporting of developmental progress*
- (ii) create optimal conditions which facilitate a child’s holistic development according to guidelines provided by the national and local designated authorities*
- (iii) plan, create and evaluate a stimulating, enjoyable and positive environment conducive to learning through a variety of experiences, striking a balance between educator and learner led activities, which predominantly include structured learning through play, and informal creative play strategies*
- (iv) assist, record and report children’s language, physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual development by planning relevant and stimulating, challenging but achievable experiences and activities that meet the individual learners’ needs*

¹⁵ The course was initially offered as a 180 ECTS five-year part-time programme to attract practising KGEs (2009–2016) and between 2013–2017 it was offered as a 240 ECTS four-year full-time programme. EQF Level 5 graduates from MCAST were allowed to join the BEd (Hons) course for a max of 120 ECTS. In all, 131 individuals graduated from this BEd (Hons) (ECEC) programme (data provided by the University of Malta 2022).



- (v) *broaden the child's knowledge and understanding of the world around him/her and the ability to respect diversity, also through the creation of opportunities for communication and establishment of social routines*
- (vi) *give full attention to children's language and literacy efforts and arranging environments which are symbol rich and interesting.*" (Para 25.1, 30)

Despite identical roles and duties, KGEs have a designation of KGI or KGII or KGIII. The different designations are associated to the initial professional qualification and correspondingly imply different salary scales. Staff designated as KGI have a qualification pegged at EQF Level 5 with 30 ECTS; KGII staff have a qualification at EQF Level 5 with 60 ECTS and KGIII refers to staff who have an EQF Level 6 (BA (Hons) qualification) of 180 ECTS. These are the minimum qualifications expected since 2021. As will be shown elsewhere in this section, most KGEs in employment have an EQF Level 4 qualification, this being the minimum qualification requirement until 2020.

Within the State sector, apart from the regular KGEs with a full-time appointment, 147 KGEs are employed as Relievers. The latter take over a group of children when the regular KGE is away from school; or when there is non-contact time/curriculum time. KGE Relievers are sent to every College and in turn, Colleges assign Relievers to a school according to needs. All state schools can make use of the services of KGE Relievers. The qualifications of Relievers are identical to those of the regular KGEs. Responsibilities for kindergarten classrooms are assigned according to seniority. Senior educators (having longer years of service) are assigned classes whilst the junior KGEs take up roles as Relievers. A senior educator can work as a Reliever by requesting this via a deployment circular. Where the school has a considerable population, Relievers may be attached to one school. In small schools, KGE relievers are usually shared between two schools.

There are no Relievers employed with the non-state sector¹⁶.

In addition to the ECEC Teachers, KGEs and Relievers, there are currently three Supply KGEs in the State sector. Within the State sector, the call for supply KGEs has not been issued for some time. This is in sharp contrast with the situation in Independent schools where close to 39% are supply staff. These could include supply graduate teachers (individuals with a university qualification not in ECEC) or Supply KGEs who do not possess any qualification or whose pre-university qualifications are not associated to ECEC.

Table 4

Malta: Distribution of main staff in non-state kindergarten settings (absolute numbers)

| | ECEC Teachers | KG | KGEI | KGEII | KGEIII | Supply KGE | TOTAL |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Church Sector | 4 | 8 | 1 | 46 | 12 | 2 | 73 |
| Independent Sector | 2 | 3 | 14 | 38 | 9 | 39 | 105 |
| TOTALS | 6 | 11 | 15 | 84 | 21 | 41 | 178 |

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Table 5 shows the main contact staff in childcare services and kindergartens and the profiles of core practitioners according to previous SEEPRO studies (see Box at end of section).

¹⁶ Director Education Resources, email communication July 3rd 2022



Table 5

Malta: ECEC contact staff in centre-based settings

| Job title | Main ECEC workplace settings and age range | Main roles and positions | Main age-range focus of initial professional education | Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Childcare services | | | | |
| Childcare Manager / Coordinator <i>Profile:</i> Social/Health Care Professional | Childcare settings Under 3 year-olds | Core professional with management responsibilities, sometimes also working with children | Depends on the awarding body; 0–2 years ¹⁷ 0–4 years | One or two years at a further education college Applicants must have a minimum of one years' work experience as an educator in the early years. <i>Awards:</i> Diploma in Leadership for Health & Social Care Children & Young People's Services (England) Children & Young People's Management ECTS credits: 60 ¹⁸ EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 5 |
| Childcare Educator <i>Profile:</i> Social/Health Care Professional | Childcare settings Under 3 year-olds | Core practitioner with group responsibilities | 0–2 years | One-year course at further education college (MCAST – Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology) <i>Award:</i> Children's Care, Learning and Development certificate ECTS credits: 60 EQF Level: 4 ISCED 2011: 4 |
| Kindergartens | | | | |
| Kindergarten Educator (KGE) <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional | Kindergarten setting located in primary school 3 and 4 year-olds (youngest possible starting age 2 years 9 months) | Core practitioner with group responsibility | 3–4 years | <i>From 2021:</i> Top-up courses for Level 4 qualification holders for three levels: KGE I: 6-month course KGE II: 1-year course KGE III: 3-year study programme at university |

¹⁷ **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: In the case of Malta, the relevant formats are **0–2** and **3–4** years, since children usually start school when they are 5 years old.

¹⁸ Until 2022/2023, MCAST provided a level 5 course (120 ECTS) entitled *Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in The Early Years* which qualified students as Kindergarten Educators OR to join the 3rd year cohort at university to complete a BA degree. However, MCAST is now offering its own BA (ISCED 6, 180 ECTS credits).

| Job title | Main ECEC workplace settings and age range | Main roles and positions | Main age-range focus of initial professional education | Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level |
|-----------|--|--------------------------|--|---|
| | | | | <i>Awards:</i> Certificate (KGE I) <i>or</i> Certificate (KGEII) <i>or</i> Bachelor (KGE III) which may be awarded by the University of Malta, MCAST or smaller private education institutions <i>ECTS credits:</i> KGE I: 30 KGE II: 60 KGE III: 180 EQF level: 5 (KGE I + II), 6 (KGE III) ISCED 2011: 5 and 6 |

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Centre Managers are responsible for the day to day running of the childcare service. In line with the NOS, the National Standards document (MFED 2021a) emphasises that managers are responsible for the overall organisation and management of the childcare setting; to oversee the children’s learning and well-being; liaise with parents and other stakeholders; manage staff members and matters linked to professional development.

Centre managers are expected to be at least 21 years of age, have a minimum of one years’ work experience as an Educator in the early years. They must be in possession of a minimum MQF Level 5 qualification with at least 60 ECTS in Early Childhood Education and Care, including pedagogy, leadership and management; a pass at MQF Level 3 in Maltese or Maltese as a Foreign Language and English; a valid Certificate in Paediatric First Aid and a valid Food Handling Certificate.

The Legally Responsible Person (LRP): Despite not needing specific formal qualification requirements, according to the National Standards (MFED 2021a) “ensuring structural, process and outcomes quality in an ECEC centre rests with the LRP”. However, the LRP “may delegate responsibilities at a day-to-day level to the Centre Manager” (p. 12). The document only states that *it is desirable that the LRP has some knowledge about ECEC theory and practice*. In reality, in several



entities, the LRP is quite far-removed from the childcare setting with the responsibilities being delegated to the Centre Manager.

The responsibilities of the LRP are associated broadly with the smooth running of the childcare setting and the National Standards document defines the role of the LRP as follows:

The LRP must be 18 years or over (and over 21 years of age, if the LRP is also the Centre Manager), and in possession of a valid and clean Police Conduct Certificate. The LRP is to ensure that the:

- *Functions of the centre are in line with national strategies, policies, and legislations and subsequent updates*
- *Physical premises are in compliance with national standards, legislations and any subsequent updates*
- *Members of staff recruited meet the eligibility criteria.*

They must:

- *Assume legal responsibility for the provision of children’s learning and care, as prescribed by the national standards, national strategies, policies, legislation and any subsequent updates; represent the registered childcare centre and has the power of attorney*
- *Assume accountability for the proper management of finances*
- *Oversee that the centre performs effective internal review processes*
- *Oversee that the recommendations identified by the DQSE are being implemented.*

There are no Centre Leaders in kindergarten settings. For kindergarten settings which are located within primary schools, the Head of School is responsible for the compulsory age groups as well as the running of the kindergarten.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Some childcare settings employ **Senior Childcare Educators**. This person would be a childcare educator who has completed or is in the process of completing an EQF Level 5 course and who, from time to time, could take over the responsibility for the childcare setting if/when the manager cannot be present. For example, Senior Childcare Educators are being appointed in childcare settings which are offering extended hours of service and where the appointed Childcare Manager cannot work beyond contractual hours.

There are no centre-based posts of responsibility in kindergarten settings.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

As indicated in *Chapter 2.1*, Centre Managers are responsible for co-ordination and supervisory duties in childcare settings.

In kindergarten settings attached to schools, the Head of School in smaller schools or a delegated Assistant Head of School in bigger schools would be responsible for all matters associated to the administration and management of the kindergarten section in the school.

2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialist support staff within childcare and kindergarten varies.

The National School Support Services (NSSS) is responsible for Educational Services in all school sectors, that is State, Church and Independent. Church schools have their own service such as counsellors, psychologists and an autism spectrum support team but they can resort to NSSS on a consultative basis should further support be required.

There are two departments within the NSSS: the *Educational Psychosocial services* and the *Inclusive Education Support*. Child Safety Service is the only service offered by the psychosocial



team at kindergarten. With regard to *Inclusive Education*, services for the hearing impaired, the visually impaired and Early Intervention support are provided to children from birth. The Early Intervention service offers support services for children with developmental disabilities and/or delays in the first five years of their life (NSSS 2023). Children up to the age of 3 years, and their families, are supported either in their home or in the childcare centre they attend. Early Intervention Teachers visit children in settings. Where children are being followed by the Child Development Assessment Unit (CDAU), specialists from this Unit could visit centres or refer cases to the Early Intervention team. If the preschool child is spending most of the day in childcare then the Early interventionist (not necessarily a teacher) provides support at the childcare setting, with the parents' consent. Visits by specialist staff, such as Speech Therapists, Psychologists or Paediatricians tend to be carried out on a needs basis. Unless coming via the Early Intervention service or CDAU, visits of support staff to settings could be financed directly by the parents. Within the 12 **childcare settings** managed by FES, an Inclusion Co-ordinator is available to support the children, families and staff in these settings with all matters associated to inclusion. The support could relate to difficulties in child development; challenges which arise with cultural differences and language barriers as well as social difficulties which include abuse, poverty, racism and neglect.

In the **kindergarten** years, Early Intervention practitioners adopt a whole school approach, supporting educators in the planning and implementation of their educational programme with regard to the inclusion of all the children in class, and more specifically with the Individual Educational Programme of the child who is experiencing developmental difficulties. In class, support to children who are experiencing significant challenges is given when needed. Children in State, Church and Independent educational institutions are supported by the Early Intervention team. The team is made up of KGEs and Education Support Practitioners, Senior Education Practitioners and Principal Education Practitioners, with these categories of practitioners mostly coming from the field of Education, Psychology and Speech and Language Pathology. Parents who visit specialists privately would foot the bill where follow-up visits are conducted in kindergarten.

Teaching support or specialist staff focused on the curriculum or curricular subject areas are not found in kindergarten settings in State schools because peripatetic teachers were trained to teach primary and/or secondary school students. In the state schools, the Physical Education unit has recently offered physical education lessons to kindergarten classes, delivered by subject teachers who accepted to take on this role. In Independent schools, the situation varies: in some schools the KGE is responsible for the entire programme offered, whereas in others the services of specialist teachers for some curriculum areas may be arranged. In Church schools, there are subject teachers who also work with kindergarten children. These could be teachers for music, drama, ICT and/or STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics). The subject teachers employed in Church schools vary – different schools may have different subject specialists. Subject teachers who do give input in kindergarten settings would not generally have initial professional education in early years.



3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Gender and ethnicity in the ECEC workforce

The presence of men in both childcare and kindergarten settings is negligible. Early childhood education and care is overwhelmingly staffed by females. Of the 1,260 members of staff included in the childcare staff data (DQSE 2022, May 2022), 14 men (1%) and 1,246 (99%) females make up the workforce. JobsPlus, which is responsible for managing the Free Childcare Scheme, indicated that by the end of October 2023, there were 1,875 (93.3%) female and 135 (6.7%) male Childcare Educators across the childcare settings. In addition, there were 144 (91.1%) female and 14 (8.9%) male childcare managers (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b).

Similarly, men employed in kindergarten settings are in the minority. Of the 178 members of staff in the non-state sectors (Church and Independent sectors), only 3 men are on record.

Table 6

Malta: Staff employed in State Kindergarten settings (June 2022)

| Type | Gender | | Grand Total |
|--------------------|------------|----------|-------------|
| | Female | Male | |
| KGE | 626 | 3 | 629 |
| Reliever | 144 | 3 | 147 |
| Grand Total | 770 | 6 | 776 |

Source: Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (email communication 30 June 2022)

Table 7

Malta: Staff employed in kindergarten in all three sectors (July 2022)

| Sector type | Females | Males | Totals |
|--------------|------------------|---------------|------------|
| State | 770 | 6 | 776 |
| Church | 72 | 1 | 73 |
| Independent | 103 | 2 | 105 |
| TOTAL | 945 (99%) | 9 (1%) | 954 |

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Whilst there are no data about the nationality of staff working within kindergarten settings, according to the DQSE (2022) records, 15% (N=184) of the workforce in childcare settings is made up of persons with a non-Maltese nationality.

Table 8

Malta: Nationalities of staff employed in childcare settings

| Nationality | No. of staff members | Nationality | No. of staff members |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Albanian | 3 | Lithuanian | 2 |
| Armenian | 2 | Macedonian | 6 |
| Brazilian | 3 | Maltese | 1,076 (85%) |
| British | 33 (2.6%) | Nepalese | 2 |
| Bulgarian | 2 | Pakistani | 2 |

| Nationality | No. of staff members | Nationality | No. of staff members |
|---|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Colombian | 4 | Peruvian | 4 |
| Czech | 3 | Philippines | 8 |
| Hungarian | 6 | Scottish | 2 |
| Indian | 6 | Serbian | 19 (1.5%) |
| Italian | 27 (2.1%) | Spanish | 11 (0.9%) |
| Kazakhstan | 2 | Ukrainian | 6 |
| Kenyan | 4 | Venezuelan | 2 |
| Latvian | 2 | | |
| And 1 each of the following nationalities: Bosnian, Canadian, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, Egyptian, Ethiopian, French, Georgian, German, Greek, Icelandic, Irish, Israeli, Japanese, Korean, Maltese/English, Mexican, Romanian, Russian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Sri Lankan, Thai. | | | |

Source: DQSE May 2022

This is particularly important considering that the National Standards (MFED 2021a) expect Childcare Educators to “provide a language-rich environment, ensuring the balanced provision of both Maltese and English” and simultaneously “support children and their families who are bilingual, multilingual or whose preferred language is not Maltese or English.” (p. 18). According to the National Standards, even the Assistants to the Childcare Educators are expected to have a working knowledge of Maltese and English (p. 19); like the main Childcare Educators, Assistants are expected to have the “ability to communicate effectively in Maltese and English”.

Most of the staff with a non-Maltese nationality are employed as Childcare Educators (N=122) or Educators in training (N=33); ten are attendants/cleaners/helpers and 16 are Childcare Managers, one of whom was in training at the time data were collected.

Qualifications of staff in childcare settings¹⁹

According to the data from DQSE (2022), 21.9% (N=276) of staff working in childcare settings do not have qualifications relevant to their roles. 55.5% (N=699) have an EQF Level 4 qualification and 17% (N=215) have an EQF Level 5 qualification relevant to their roles. Some members of staff are in possession of higher qualifications. Several employees and employers in childcare settings are in possession of qualifications which are not relevant or related to early years²⁰. However, the data available are rather sketchy and not reliable. The Director at DQSE claimed that the turnover of staff employed in childcare is very high with the sector being described as ‘very fluid’ (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023a). At the time, the DQSE reported 231 qualified managers and 24 people in training who were following a Level 5 in childcare. There were 1,179 Childcare Educators with an EQF Level 4 qualification and a further 468 people who were still in training.

The minimum requirement of qualifications with 60 ECTS at EQF Level 5 for Childcare Managers and 60 ECTS at MQF Level 4 for Childcare Educators has been set by the National Standards (MFED 2021a). An implementation plan to ensure that everyone has these minimum qualifications is still to be discussed at ministerial level (Director DQSE, email communication, 17th June

¹⁹ Data need to be interpreted with caution in the absence of any rigorous manner of collecting it. Data collection is based on the reporting which is initially collated and provided by Centre Managers ahead of external audits. The data are subject to verification by EOs at the time of the audit and transferred to a spreadsheet for the scrutiny, review and checking of staff from ERS and RCS. The inevitable time-lapse and regular turnover of staff make this a laborious and, in the long run, an unsustainable activity.

²⁰Data from the DQSE database (DQSE, May 2022) indicate diplomas in hairdressing; health and social care; gender studies; undergraduate degrees in Computing, Management, European Studies, Nursing



2022). To date any EQF 4 or 5 course deemed relevant to the field, irrespective of the amount of ECTS has been accepted as appropriate for employability purposes.

Table 9

Malta: Qualifications relevant to roles of staff employed in childcare settings (N=1,290; May 2022)

| Qualification (by EQF/MQF Level) | Number | Per cent |
|----------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Level 3 qualification | 24 | 2 |
| Level 4 qualification | 699 | 55.5 |
| Level 5 qualification | 216 | 17 |
| Level 6 qualification | 24 | 2 |
| Level 7 qualification | 15 | 1 |
| Insufficient information | 2 | 0.2 |
| No relevant qualifications | 276 | 21.9 |
| TOTAL | 1260 | 100 |

Source: DQSE May 2022

Among staff with relevant qualifications, six have a BA (Hons) in Early Years from the University of Malta. Other relevant qualifications at EQF Level 6 and 7 were obtained from higher education institutions in Mexico, Colombia, England, Italy, Spain and Greece²¹. Among the EQF 5 and EQF 4 qualifications, several are home-grown courses but others are designed by foreign entities²². Details about several courses will be provided in a subsequent section of this report.

Table 10

Malta: Main qualifications of staff in childcare settings²³

| Title of qualification/award | No of holders of award | Entity offering qualification |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| BTEC National Diploma in Children’s Care Learning & Development | 14 | MCAST ²⁴ |
| BTEC National Diploma in Children’s Play, Learning & Development | 18 | MCAST ²⁵ |
| MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years | 18 | MCAST |
| MCAST Advanced Diploma in Childcare, Learning & Development | 55 | MCAST |
| Diploma in Child Development, Education & Care Studies (0–5 years) | 20 | CDEC ²⁶ |
| Award in childcare, well-being, development and learning | 17 | Outlook Coop |

²¹Qualifications from foreign institutions include the University of Cassino and Università di Palermo in Italy; University of Ioannina, Greece; Universidad El Bosque, Colombia; University of the Basque country and Rey Juan Carlos University in Spain; Universidad Católica Andres Bello in Venezuela; University of Sheffield, Leeds Beckett University in England.

²² Among its roles, the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) provides accreditation to further and higher educational institutions and programmes or courses of studies at further and higher education levels.

²³ Other qualifications not listed included undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications from UM and foreign institutions. In addition to the ‘blank’ entries, there were also entries for no qualifications or inappropriate qualifications (i.e. not relevant to childcare). It was also difficult to record some data because of the vague entries about the title of the qualification.

²⁴ MCAST (The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology) is a vocational education and training institution in Malta which was established in 2001.

²⁵ Having staff with BTEC qualifications from MCAST reflect the introductory courses offered when MCAST was first established. BTEC courses were gradually replaced with home-grown courses.

²⁶ Centre for Child Development, Education & Care Studies (CDEC) was a small private institution which ceased to operate in 2022.



| Title of qualification/award | No of holders of award | Entity offering qualification |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Certificate of Competence Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning for Child Care Workers (0-3 years)/Award in Childcare Work – Trade Test | 150 | NCFHE/ETC; MFHEA/Jobspus |
| Jobs Plus/ETC VET Award in Childcare (0–3 years) or (0–5 years) | 156 | ETC/Jobs Plus |
| Certificate in Childcare Work for Children Aged 0–3 | 17 | Future Focus |
| NCFE CACHE Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce (England) | 97 | CACHE through Future Focus |
| NCFE CACHE Diploma for the Early Years Workforce (Early Years Educator) | 207 | CACHE through Future Focus |
| NCFE CACHE Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England) | 102 | CACHE through Future Focus |
| No information available | 279 | |

Source: DQSE May 2022

Qualifications of staff in Kindergarten settings

Kindergarten staff in the state sector

Table 11

Malta: Qualifications of the workforce in State kindergarten settings (September 2021)

| Qualification | EQF Level | Number of KGEs | % of KGEs |
|---|-----------|----------------|------------|
| MTL ²⁷ in Early Childhood and Primary Education | 7 | 2 | 0.3 |
| BA in Early Childhood Education and Care | 6 | 92 | 13 |
| MCAST Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies for Early Years ²⁸ | 5 | 36 | 5.1 |
| MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Play, Learning and Development | 4 | 20 | 2.8 |
| NCFE Cache Level 5: Diploma for the Early Years Senior Practitioners – Future Focus (2022c) | 4 | 32 | 4.5 |
| Level 4 Certification – no additional info provided | 4 | 511 | 72.3 |
| Advanced Levels – no specialist qualification | 4 | 14 | 2 |
| TOTAL | | 707 | 100 |

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Although the available data does not provide specific information about the qualifications which most KGEs have, the majority is in possession of an EQF Level 4 qualification. This is not surprising considering that this was the minimum entry requirement for KGEs until 2021. On the other hand, considering that the first cohort of graduates with a BA (Hons) in ECEC graduated in 2019, it is encouraging to note that within the State sector, 13% of the staff have an EQF Level 6 qualification.

²⁷ Master in Teaching and Learning

²⁸ The MQF Level 5 MCAST–BTEC Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years was replaced by the home-grown MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years from 2016 onwards.

Kindergarten staff in the non-state sector: Church school settings

There are 23 Church schools which provide kindergarten facilities (Archdiocese of Malta 2022a, b), employing 67 KGEs, 4 ECEC teachers, one graduate supply teacher and one supply teacher²⁹ for a total of 73 Educators working directly with children. *Table 13* illustrates the qualifications of the staff employed in kindergarten settings within Church schools.

Table 12

Malta: Qualifications of the workforce in Church kindergarten settings (July 2022)

| Qualification | EQF Level | Number of staff | % of staff |
|--|-----------|-----------------|------------|
| MA in ECEC (Roehampton University) | 7 | 1 | 1.4 |
| BA (Hons) ECEC – University of Malta | 6 | 12 | 16.4 |
| B.Ed. (Hons) ECEC – University of Malta | 6 | 4 | 5.5 |
| MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced studies in the Early Years | 5 | 3 | 4.1 |
| BTEC National Diploma in Early Years/MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children’s Care Learning & Development/ MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children’s Play, Learning & Development ³⁰ | 4 | 11 | 15.1 |
| CACHE Diploma for Children & Young People’s Workforce | 4 | 11 | 15.1 |
| Certificate of Achievement (210 hours) | 4 | 2 | 2.7 |
| Pre-school Education Certificate/Diploma | 4 | 15 | 20.5 |
| ETC Diploma in Childcare | 4 | 5 | 6.8 |
| Diploma in Child Care Managers | n.d. | 1 | 1.4 |
| CACHE Level 2 Diploma in Pre-school Practice | 3 | 1 | 1.4 |
| No qualification/not relevant to early years | n.d. | 7 | 9.6 |
| TOTAL | | 73 | |

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Kindergarten staff in the non-state sector: Independent school settings

19 independent institutions are licensed to offer kindergarten services³¹. The kindergarten classrooms in nine of these institutions are housed within schools which offer primary and secondary education too. The remaining ten settings started out as childcare centres and are now accepting kindergarten aged children. Just over 100 members of staff are employed in kindergarten across all 19 settings.

Table 13

Malta: Qualifications of the workforce in Independent kindergarten settings (July 2022)

| Qualification | EQF Level | Number of staff | % of staff |
|---|-----------|-----------------|------------|
| MA in ECEC (of which 3 are from the University of Sheffield) | 7 | 4 | 3.8 |
| B.Ed. (Hons) ECEC | 6 | 2 | 1.9 |
| BA (Hons) ECEC from the University of Malta | 6 | 6 | 5.7 |
| Bachelor degrees in Preschool Pedagogy (foreign institutions) | 6 | 5 | 4.8 |
| MCAST-BTEC qualifications | 5 | 1 | 1 |

²⁹ Education Resources Dept, email communication June 9th 2022 and July 13th 2022.

³⁰ Courses offered by MCAST were initially BTEC courses until home-grown programmes were developed. Over the years, adjustments to the titles of the programmes were made.

³¹ <https://education.gov.mt/en/dqse/Documents/School%20Licensing/Independent%20Schools.pdf>

| Qualification | EQF Level | Number of staff | % of staff |
|--|-----------|-----------------|------------|
| MCAST-BTEC qualifications | 4 | 5 | 4.8 |
| NNEB/CACHE Diploma for Children and Young People's Workforce | 4 | 36 | 34.3 |
| Preschool Education Certificate (Malta) | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| Child Development Education & Care (CDEC) (Malta) | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| ETC/Jobspplus Certificate of Competence in Child-Care/Award in Childcare/Trade Test/ (Malta) | 4 | 18 | 17 |
| Diploma Montessori | n.d. | 4 | 3.8 |
| Undergraduate qualifications in an unrelated area | 6 | 5 | 4.8 |
| Diplomas in vaguely related/unrelated areas | n.d. | 9 | 8.6 |
| 'A' Levels | 4 | 8 | 7.6 |
| TOTAL | | 105 | 100 |

Source: Education Resources Department (email communication 13/14 July 2022)

Within the sector, not only are the majority of employees qualified with an EQF Level 4 certificate but the qualifications are identical to those obtained by individuals working or following courses leading to employment in childcare, making them eligible to work with under threes. The data clearly illustrate how the somewhat better conditions in kindergarten settings, lures people away from childcare.

Having 22% of the childcare employees with minimal, no or unrelated qualifications (*Table 10*) and not knowing details about the EQF Level 4 qualification of the majority of staff in state kindergarten settings (*Table 12*) are challenges which need to be addressed.

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

Changes are underway with the initial professional education courses and the qualifications considered appropriate for staff working with the under threes in childcare settings and for staff seeking employment in kindergarten. Concerns about these changes will be shared in *Chapter 10* of this report.

To date, Childcare Educators were expected to be in possession of a relevant qualification at EQF/MQF Level 4 whilst Supervisors/Managers should be in possession of a qualification at EQF/MQF Level 5. The challenges thus far have been two-fold:

- (i) Ensuring that there is a minimum number of ECTS both across Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications which are considered appropriate for employability. There were discrepancies in the number of ECTS associated with available programmes and qualifications.
- (ii) Having to resort to employing staff without any (relevant) qualifications. In the National Standards (MFED 2021a), reference is made to “a minimum of MQF Level 5 qualification with at least 60 ECTS in Early Childhood Education and Care, including pedagogy, leadership and management” (p. 16), for childcare managers and “a minimum of MQF Level 4 qualification with at least 60 ECTS in Early Childhood Education and Care or comparable” (p. 18) for Childcare Educators. Both roles also require a pass at MQF Level 3 in Maltese or Maltese as a Foreign Language and English.

With regard to KGEs, since 2021 and as a result of the Collective Agreements (MEDE 2017, Archdiocese and MUT, 2018), the EQF Level 4 qualification is no longer considered appropriate for prospective KGEs. The minimum requirement is EQF Level 5 (30 ECTS) for a KGI designation and EQF Level 5 (60 ECTS) for a KGII designation. Staff are appointed at the level of KGE III when in possession of an EQF Level 6 (180 ECTS) qualification relevant to the early years. *Table 15* outlines the eligibility requirements for KGEs and progression within respective salary scales.

Table 14
Malta: Eligibility requirements for KGEs, pre and post 2021

| Eligibility Requirements – 2019 till 2020 and progression | Eligibility Requirements – 2021 onwards |
|---|---|
| In possession of a recognised full qualification (Degree) at MQF Level 6 or higher (subject to a minimum of 180 ECTS/ECVET credits, or equivalent, with regards to programmes commencing as from October 2003) in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable professional qualification – KGE III – Salary Scale 10 progressing to Salary Scale 9 on completion of 5 years’ service in the grade of KGE III | In possession of a recognised full qualification (Degree) at MQF Level 6 or higher (subject to a minimum of 180 ECTS/ECVET credits, or equivalent, with regards to programmes commencing as from October 2003) in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable professional qualification – KGE III |
| In possession of a recognised full qualification (Diploma) at MQF Level 5 (subject to a minimum of 60 ECTS/ECVET credits, or equivalent, with regards to programmes commencing as from October 2003) in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable professional qualification – KGE II – Salary Scale 12 progressing to salary Scale 10 on completion of 5 years of service in the grade of KGE II | In possession of a recognised full qualification (Diploma) at MQF Level 5 (subject to a minimum of 60 ECTS/ECVET credits, or equivalent, with regards to programmes commencing as from October 2003) in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable professional qualification – KGE II |
| In possession of a recognised award at MQF Level 5 (subject to a minimum of 30 ECTS/ECVET credits or equivalent), in Early Childhood and Care or a comparable qualification. Provided that a full qualification (Diploma) at MQF Level 4 (subject to a minimum of 120 ECTS/ECVET credits or equivalent), in Early Childhood Education and Care or a comparable qualification shall also make candidates eligible for application into the grade of KGE I. For the purposes of paragraph 4.1 (v), the Childcare Training Programme (0-3 years) together with the Certificate of Competence (0-5 years), or the Vocational Education and Training Award in Childcare (0-5 years), are considered as equivalent to the Diploma, at MQF level 4, in Early Childhood Education and care. – KGE I Salary Scale 15 progressing to salary Scale 14 on completion of 5 years of service in the grade of KGE I and progress further to Salary Scale 13 after another 5 years of service in the grade. | In possession of a recognised award at MQF Level 5 (subject to a minimum of 30 ECTS/ECVET credits or equivalent), in Early Childhood and Care or a comparable qualification – KGE I Progression is the same as in 2019/2020 since from same agreement. |

Source: HR Recruitment, Strategy & Support Department (email communication June 2021 & June 2022)

Information about EQF Levels 4, 5 and 6 courses available at the time this chapter was drawn up is provided in subsequent chapters.



4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

There are two further and higher education entities which offer professional courses for prospective early years educators. Courses are offered on a full and part-time basis. Programmes targeting 16 year-old school leavers are offered by MCAST whilst the University of Malta recruits 18 year-olds who have completed EQF Level 4 education and are eligible to join University³². Mature students are also accepted upon turning 23 on the basis of a successful interview process to ensure that the student would be able to follow the course beneficially. Information about courses was obtained from the prospectus of the institutions, both of which are self-accrediting.

Table 15a

Malta:-Kindergarten Educator

| Job title in English: Kindergarten Educator Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional |
|---|
| <p><i>Route 1:</i></p> <p>Kindergarten Educator III (KGE III)</p> <p>Entry requirements: University of Malta general requirements for admission as specified in the Admissions Regulations of the University, in possession of a pass at Advanced Matriculation Level at Grade C or better in any one subject. Mature students and others who are accepted via RPL are also accepted. Students are also accepted for the 3rd year of the UM programme if they are from MCAST and have successfully completed the Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years (a top-up year).</p> <p>Professional Studies: 3 years' full-time study at University leading to an undergraduate degree. In addition to courses in educational theory, early years pedagogies, critical issues, reflective practices, there are opportunities to for weekly classroom visits and tutorials as an induction to life in schools followed by two teaching practice study units.</p> <p>Award: BA (Hons) (ECEC)</p> <p>ECTS credits: 180 ECTS</p> <p>EQF level: 6</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 6</p> <p>Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergartens for 3 to 5 year-olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) schools or Independent kindergartens.</p> <p><i>Route 2:</i></p> <p>Kindergarten Educator III (KGE III)</p> <p>N.B. This qualification route is available from the academic year 2023/2024.</p> <p>Entry requirements: MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development or 2 A-Level passes and 2 Intermediate Level passes. Two subjects from Mathematics, English or Maltese are compulsory at either Advanced or Intermediate level. A pass at SEC/O-Level in the subject that is not presented at Advanced or Intermediate level is also compulsory.</p> <p>Professional Studies: 3 years' full-time study at MCAST leading to an undergraduate degree (MCAST 2023). Learners cover different components of the required learning to become practitioners with further specialisation in more specific areas. Placements are included to progressively become adept at working with a group of children using the emergent curriculum approach.</p> <p>Award: BA (Hons) (ECEC)</p> <p>ECTS credits: 180</p> <p>EQF level: 6</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 6</p> |

³² Compulsory education is from 5 to 16. Successful completion earns students the school-leaving certificate (EQF 3). Students planning to pursue further studies may follow a further two-year programme (post-secondary) and successful completion leads to the Matriculation Certificate (EQF 4). University also accepts mature students (who have reached the age of 23) and adult students who apply for RPL (recognition of prior learning).



Job title in English: Kindergarten Educator

Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergartens for 3 to 5 year-olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) schools or Independent kindergartens.

Route 3 (phased out from end of academic year 2022/23):

Kindergarten Educator II (KGE II)

Entry requirements: MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children’s Care, Learning and Development **or** 2 Advanced Level passes and 2 Intermediate Level passes. For compulsory Advanced Level or Intermediate Level – 2 subjects from Mathematics, English, Maltese. Applicants need to be in possession of a pass at SEC/Ordinary Level in the subject that is not presented at Advanced or Intermediate Level.

Professional studies: 2 years. Study units are designed to provide a strong link between theoretical concepts and hands-on practice during internships. Lectures focus on guiding the undergraduates on how to make learning for young children stimulating and fun, in a safe and healthy environment (MCAST 2021a, 128).

Award: Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years offered by MCAST

ECTS credits: 120

EQF level: 5

ISCED 2011: 5

Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergartens for 3 to 5 year-olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) primary schools or Independent kindergartens.

Note:

Students who successfully complete the 120 ECTS can be admitted to UM to join the 3rd year of the BA programme (top-up course) and therefore if successful, graduate with a BA (Hons) in ECEC.

Route 4 (Universität Malta 2014–2019):

ECEC Teacher

Note: This programme is no longer offered by the University of Malta. Only 4 of the 131 students who graduated with this EQF 6 teaching qualification between 2014 and 2019 are employed in kindergarten settings in the Non-State Sector.

Entry requirements: General university entry requirements or, in the case of mature students, interviews to assess work experience, motivation, attitude and any qualifications. Proficiency in Maltese and English is required of all students. At the time the course was available, ECDL³³ was also a requirement.

Professional studies: 4 years’ full time (or 5 years of part time) study at University leading to an undergraduate degree. The programme included three teaching practices (TP), each of six weeks’ duration. One TP session was held in kindergarten and at least one TP was held with 5 to 7 year-olds in the first two years of compulsory education. Students also conducted research and presented a dissertation in their final year of the programme.

Award: B.Ed. (Hons) (ECEC)

ECTS credits: 240 ECTS for the full-time programme; 180 ECTS for the part-time programme

EQF level: 6

ISCED 2011: 6

Main ECEC workplaces: The first two years of compulsory education (5 to 7-year-olds) and Kindergartens for 3 to 5 year olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) schools.

³³ European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) is a computer literacy certification programme, now known as IC DL (<https://www.icdleurope.org/>)



Table 15b

Malta: Childcare Educator

| Job title in English: <i>Childcare Educator</i> Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional |
|---|
| <p>Entry requirements: MCAST Diploma in Health and Social Care or MCAST Diploma in Sport or MCAST Diploma in Performing Arts or MCAST Diploma in Art and Design or 4 SEC/O-Level/SSC&P (Level 3) passes Compulsory: English Language, Maltese, Mathematics. Post-secondary students can enrol at MCAST when compulsory education is completed at the age of 16.</p> <p>Professional studies: 1 or 2 years' full time (see note re award at exit after one year) at MCAST.</p> <p>Award: Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development (MCAST 2021b, 2021c) <i>or</i> BTEC Award in Children's Care, Learning and Development</p> <p>ECTS credits: 120 ECTS <i>or</i> 60 ECTS</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 4</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p> <p>Note: On successful completion of the first year of the course, students can be awarded an MCAST Award in Children's Care, Learning and Development Level 4 (ECVET 60) which would enable learners to work in a professional capacity with children between 0 to 3 years old within a childcare centre. This award provides the skills, knowledge and understanding required for one to work effectively within a childcare environment.</p> |

Table 15c

Malta: Childcare Manager

| Job title in English: <i>Childcare Manager/Coordinator</i> Profile: Social/Health Care Professional |
|---|
| <p>Entry requirements: MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development and SEC/O-Level passes in Mathematics, English and Maltese <i>or</i> MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children's Play, Learning and Development and SEC/O-Level passes in Mathematics, English and Maltese <i>or</i> 2 A-Level passes and 2 I-Level passes Compulsory A-level or I-level: 2 subjects from Mathematics, English, Maltese.</p> <p>Professional studies: 2 years full-time study at MCAST.</p> <p>Award: MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years (MCAST 2021d, 2021e)</p> <p>ECTS credits: 120</p> <p>EQF level: 5</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 5</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years <i>or</i> Upon successful completion of the programme, students with this qualification can join UM and join the BA (Hons) (ECEC) cohort of students in their 3rd and final year of the programme to graduate with an EQF 6 qualification.</p> |

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Tables 16a to 16n highlight the competencies, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for EQF Level 3, 4, 5 and 6 courses for (i) Assistants to Childcare Educators, (ii) Childcare Educators, (iii) Childcare Managers and (iv) KGEs respectively. Information has been compiled from websites in the public domain. The information includes courses offered by UM, MCAST and a host of private entities licensed by the MFHEA and which have had their programmes of study accredited. Apart from UM and MCAST, there is currently another private institution accredited by

MFHEA which offers Level 6 programmes in early years (MLI 2023)³⁴. UM was the first institution to offer a top-up programme for EQF 5 MCAST students who wanted to proceed to EQF 6, thus earning a BA (Hons) (ECEC). However, since January 2022, and following a memorandum of understanding between MCAST and the Institute for Education (IfE), another 60 ECTS top-up qualification at Level 6 is available (MCAST 2021f, 2021g; IfE and MCAST 2021).

Table 16a

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 6 IPE

Provider: University of Malta (2022a); Qualification: BA (Hons) (ECEC)

| Competences | Curricular areas ³⁵ |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understanding the diversity of young children's growth and development – Developing an awareness of the impact of the social, cultural and life experiences on children's learning and development – Broad pedagogical knowledge to understand how young children learn – Ability to plan, develop and implement developmentally appropriate activities based on their interests through the most effective way, thus applying theory to practice – Awareness of a range of professional issues which impact directly on the management of and relationships amongst a group of learners – An array of skills, attitudes and dispositions to become competent and committed professionals through the practical aspects of the course – Awareness of the ethical issues implicit in the professional role – Commitment to social justice and democratic participation in an education where children's rights, voices and an ethics of care are valued – Understanding that teaching and learning are complex processes that involve working with multidisciplinary professionals, parents and multiple practitioners – Acquisition of specialised knowledge of early childhood education-related aspects in psychology, pedagogy, professional practice, creative activity and professional issues. | <p>1st Year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Child development (6 ECTS); – Emergent curriculum in early years: planning and implementation (4 ECTS) – Becoming an Early Childhood Educator (4 ECTS) – Young children exploring their physical and human environment (6 ECTS) – Introduction to early years settings: observation and experience (6 ECTS) – Children in society (4 ECTS) – Pedagogies of early childhood education (4 ECTS) – Quality matters in ECEC (4 ECTS) – Academic reading and writing in English (2 ECTS) – Play and its contribution to early years development (4 ECTS) – Psychological perspectives on children's learning in the early years (4 ECTS) – Music in the early years (4 ECTS) – Movement & Physical activity in early years (4 ECTS) – Health and Well-being for Children (4 ECTS). <p>2nd year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The reflective professional (4 ECTS) – Enabling environments: using indoor and outdoor spaces, resources and materials (4 ECTS) – Language, literacy and communication development in young children (4 ECTS) – Sharing responsibilities with families and pluralistic communities in early childhood education (8 ECTS) – <i>L-Użu tal-Lingwa Maltija fis-Snin Bikrin</i> [The Use of the Maltese Language in the Early Years] (4 ECTS) – Field placement in ECEC 1 (6 ECTS) – Observation, assessment and children's participation in early years settings (4 ECTS) – Nurturing the spiritual, moral and religious dimensions (4 ECTS) – Enjoying English in the early years (4 ECTS) – Children's early experiences of mathematics (4 ECTS) – Tapping on funds of knowledge (4 ECTS) – Becoming symbol literate (4 ECTS) – Creativity and arts-based pedagogies in early childhood (6 ECTS). |

³⁴ The info on the MLI website shows 0 students for the undergrad course in ECEC which it promotes.

³⁵ Where available, the number of ECTS for each study unit/module is included.



| Competences | Curricular areas ³⁵ |
|---|---|
| | <p>3rd Year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using digital technologies to promote 21st century learning in ECE (4 ECTS) – Leadership in early years settings, (4 ECTS) – High potential, emerging abilities and giftedness in young learners, (4 ECTS) – The emergent curriculum in action (4 ECTS) – Including learners with developmental disabilities in early years (4 ECTS) – Children’s understanding of the world through environmental education (4 ECTS) – Second field placement in ECEC (8 ECTS) – Addressing diversity in early years (4 ECTS) – Critical debates in early childhood education and care (4 ECTS) – The early childhood practitioner (4 ECTS) – Transitions in the early years (4 ECTS) – Implications of children's rights and legal issues for early years practitioners (4 ECTS) – Social issues in early education (4 ECTS) – Promoting positive behaviour in the early years (4 ECTS). |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: A variety of methods, including lectures, workshops, tutorials, observations, fieldwork and practical field placements, where students will have the opportunity to experience first-hand working with young children in school contexts.</p> | |

Table 16b

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 5 IPE

Provider: MCAST (2021e); Qualification: Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Innovative underpinning knowledge, understanding and skills for success in employment within the early years sector – Experiences to link theory to practice in order to develop skills and competences as well as personal qualities and attitudes essential for an early years’ professional – Engagement in pedagogical critical discussions and field internships which will help with leadership skills thus providing young children with the appropriate opportunities in their development – Conduct research in the Early Years sector – Maintain health and safety standards in child | <p>1st year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sociology of childhood (3 ECTS) – Philosophical issues in early years pedagogy (3 ECTS) – Development of young children (6 ECTS) – Communicating values and leadership in an early years environment (3 ECTS) – Emergent curriculum 1 (6 ECTS) – Nurturing a practice of imagination (3 ECTS) – Multimodality in young children (3 ECTS) – Designing spaces conducive to Learning 1 (Work placement) (6 ECTS) – Research methods in early years education (3 ECTS) – Early years mathematics (6 ECTS) – Physical education in the early years (3 ECTS) – Documenting the narratives of young children (3 ECTS) – Continuing professional development (3 ECTS) – Developing play in the early years curriculum (3 ECTS) – Designing spaces conducive to learning 2 (work placement) (6 ECTS). <p>2nd year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Research project in early years education (3 ECTS); Creative arts in ECE (6 ECTS) – English for young learning (Key skill) (6 ECTS) – <i>Il-Malti għat tfal iż-żgħir</i> [Maltese for young children] (Key skill) (6 ECTS) – Childcare management (3 ECTS) |

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|---|--|
| care and kindergarten settings – Enhance managerial and pedagogical competences – Provide an adequate educational environment for young learners. | – Designing spaces conducive to learning 3 (work placement) (6 ECTS) – Promoting positive relationships within families and the community (3 ECTS) – Positive behaviour in early years settings (3 ECTS) – Contemporary issues in child health (6 ECTS) – Promoting language development (6 ECTS) – Promoting knowledge and understanding of the world (6 ECTS) – Designing space conducive to learning 4 (work placement) (6 ECTS). |
| Pedagogic approaches: The study units provide a strong link between theoretical concepts and hands-on practice during internships. Lectures focus on guiding the undergraduates on how to make learning for young children stimulating and fun, in a safe and healthy environment. | |

Table 16c

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 6 (top-up course)

Provider: University of Malta (2022b); Qualification: BA (Hons) (ECEC) Top-up degree

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|---|---|
| – The ability to plan, develop and implement developmentally appropriate activities based on children’s interests – Applying theory to practice – An awareness of a range of professional issues which impact directly on the management of and relationships amongst a group of learners – An array of skills, attitudes and dispositions to become competent and committed professionals through the practical aspects of the course – An awareness of the ethical issues implicit in the professional role and a commitment to social justice and democratic participation in an education where children’s rights, voices and an ethics of care are valued – An understanding that teaching and learning are complex processes that involve working with multi-disciplinary professionals, parents and multiple practitioners. | 3rd Year: – Leadership in early years settings (4 ECTS); The emergent curriculum in action (4 ECTS) – Third field placement in ECEC (8 ECTS) – Children’s understanding of the world through environmental education (4 ECTS) – Critical debates in early childhood education and care (4 ECTS) – Transitions in the early years (4 ECTS) – Implications of children’s rights and legal issues for early years practitioners (4 ECTS) – Promoting positive behaviour in the early years (4 ECTS) – Using digital technologies to promote 21st century learning in ECE (4 ECTS) – High potential, emerging abilities and giftedness in young learners (4 ECTS) – Including learners with developmental disabilities in early years (4 ECTS) – Fourth field placement in ECEC (6 ECTS) – Addressing diversity in early years (4 ECTS) – Nurturing the spiritual, moral and religious dimensions (4 ECTS) – The early childhood practitioner (4 ECTS) – Social issues in early education (4 ECTS). |
| Pedagogic approaches: A variety of methods, including lectures, workshops, tutorials, observations, fieldwork and practical field placements, where students will have the opportunity to experience first-hand working with young children in school contexts. | |

Table 16d

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 6 (top-up course)

Provider: MCAST & IfE (MCAST 2021f); Qualification: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Early Years, Learning and Care (Top-Up)

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|--|--|
| – Implementing learning activities using the Emergent Curriculum approach to foster children's learning; | – Microteaching (3 ECTS) – Leadership and classroom management (6 ECTS) – Everyday science for young learners (3 ECTS) – Action research and the reflective practitioner (3 ECTS) |



| Competences | Curricular areas |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Applying early years pedagogy and practice in relation to the holistic development of the child; – Demonstrating positive leadership skills in an Early Years Environment; – Carrying out action research to further develop early years competence. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Outdoor learning through nature for young learners (2 ECTS) – Children’s Rights and Legislation (3 ECTS) – Critical engagement of the early years practitioner (6 ECTS) – Digital citizenship: enriching learning through web-based applications (3 ECTS) – Social Issues in the early years (6 ECTS) – Emergent curriculum in practice (10 ECTS) – Children’s emotions and well-being (3 ECTS) – Dissertation (12 ECTS). |
| Pedagogic approaches: Blended programme | |

Table 16e

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 6

Provider: Malta Leadership Institute (MLI 2023); Qualification: Bachelor of Education (Honours) in Early Years³⁶

| Competences | Curricular Areas |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Demonstrate the ability to acquire knowledge pertaining to the Early Years (EY) educational field within the Maltese educational context, including an understanding of the common challenges present in the content, design and implementation of various legislations, policies and frameworks – Manage the practice placements creatively, show initiative and take responsibility for decision-making in the unpredictable EY educational context, whilst continuously reflecting on the practice throughout – Manage one’s own learning to creatively learn about what constitute 21st-century skills and the strategies that can be implemented to help young learners develop such skills – Demonstrate initiative in learning about the correct way of observing young learners within an educational context – Demonstrate the ability to create, prepare and implement lesson plans and associated resources (activities) according to the developmental needs of young learners – Develop the learning skills necessary to learn independently about what constitutes the emergent curriculum, debunk current myths about it and design an EY classroom environment that promotes and allows for proper implementation of the emergent curriculum – Demonstrate a high degree of autonomy in learning about how Maltese and English literacy, and numeracy, develops in young learners in line with their development, and implement effective strategies for young learners to learn literacy and numeracy – Develop the learning skills necessary to learn independently about the characteristics of the Reggio approach and the Project approach to learning in the EY and their implementation in the EY classroom | <p>1st year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Introduction to the Maltese education system – legislation, policies and frameworks (4 ECTS); – Development as a professional educator: reflective practice (4 ECTS) – Practice in the kinder classroom – part 1 (7 ECTS) – Teaching and learning in the 21st century (4 ECTS) – Child development as a means to understanding children’s needs (6 ECTS) – The emergent curriculum (6 ECTS) – Observation, planning and assessment in early years (8 ECTS) – Fostering literacy skills in young children – learning the Maltese language (5 ECTS) – Fostering literacy skills in young children – learning the English language (5 ECTS) – Introducing mathematics in the early years (5 ECTS) – A project approach in early years (6 ECTS). <p>2nd year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Critical issues in early years pedagogies: a psychological perspective (6 ECTS) – Practice in the kindergarten classroom – Part 2 (7 ECTS) – Critical issues in early years pedagogies: a sociological perspective (6 ECTS) – Critical issues in early years pedagogies: a philosophical perspective (6 ECTS) |

³⁶ The table shows an excerpt from the list of competences included in the website (MLI 2023)

| Competences | Curricular Areas |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Show creativity and initiative in managing activities and tasks related to pedagogies in EY and in promoting holistic child development in an EY context – Demonstrate responsibility to evaluate the impact of the different pedagogies that can be used taking into consideration the wider picture of the secondary socialisation of young learners and show initiative in acknowledging the increase in cultural and identity pluralism, in the evaluation and application of EY pedagogies – Show autonomy in learning about the various philosophical approaches and inquiries which underpin EY education, debunk common myths related to such approaches and sustain arguments related to how the EY cycle provides philosophical reflections on the role of society, people and knowledge – Demonstrate a high degree of autonomy in learning about what constitutes digital literacy and how it can be implemented within the EY setting to create meaningful learning experiences for young learners – Demonstrate creativity in learning about effective ways of communicating with young learners, with the ultimate aim of developing positive relationships conducive to learning; – Show creativity and initiative in learning about what constitutes sustainable development (SD) and about the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and in implementing Education for SD in an EY educational setting – Demonstrate the ability to manage knowledge on what constitutes STEM education and what role this has within the EY setting – Show autonomy in learning about the various digital tools available for young learners which support early learning in STEM and be able to design an EY classroom environment that allows for STEM education to take place – Demonstrate the ability to design an EY classroom environment that allows for creativity to take place through the use of effective strategies – Demonstrate the ability to design an EY classroom environment that allows for humanities and democracy education to take place – Develop autonomy in gaining the necessary skills to be able to implement strategies targeted at fostering supportive and caring learning environments for the benefit of young learners. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Digital competencies in the early years classroom (4 ECTS) – Educating for sustainability in the early years (4 ECTS) – STEM in the early years (4 ECTS) – Fostering creativity in the early years (4 ECTS) – Moral and inclusive religious education for young learners (4 ECTS) – Humanities and democracy for young learners (4 ECTS) – The heart in early education: creating caring learning environments (6 ECTS) – Principles of classroom leadership and management (6 ECTS). <p>3rd year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rethinking children’s spaces and places: experiential learning (6 ECTS) – Rights, equity and justice in education (4 ECTS) – Practice in the kindergarten classroom – Part 3 (6 ECTS) – Collaboration in the early years (6 ECTS) – Society, health and wellbeing of young learners (4 ECTS) – Educating young children with disabilities: theory and practice (6 ECTS) – Multiculturalism in the early years (4 ECTS) – The professional development of the early years educator (4 ECTS) – Quality assurance in early years education (4 ECTS) – Physical activity in early years (4 ECTS) – Giftedness in young learners (4 ECTS) – Transitions in early years (4 ECTS) – Academic reading and writing (3 ECTS). |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: Delivered through blended learning, with 50% of contact hours delivered online and the other 50% of contact hours delivered face-to-face</p> | |



Table 16f

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 IPE

Provider: MCAST (2021c); Qualification: Advanced Diploma in Children's care, learning and development

| Competences | Curricular areas ³⁷ |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Plan activities for babies, toddlers and children in the early years – Maintain health and safety standards in early years settings – Implement activities and construct resources for children – Monitor and record the development of children. | <p>1st year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Positive relationships for children's care, learning and development (6 ECTS) – Positive and safe environment for children's care, learning and development (3 ECTS) – Promoting children's development (3 ECTS) – Supporting children's language, pre-literacy and numeracy skills 0-3 (6 ECTS) – Safeguarding and promoting children's rights (6 ECTS) – Children's learning activities and play (6 ECTS) – Meeting additional requirements for children's settings, learning and development (6 ECTS) – Planning and reflecting on developing practice and children 1 (9 ECTS) – Developing and managing a registered childcare service (3 ECTS) – Malti (6 ECTS) – English (6 ECTS). <p>2nd year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Diet, nutrition and cooking activities for children (6 ECTS) – Physical activities for children (3 ECTS) – Psychological perspectives on children's behaviour (6 ECTS) – Environmental science for the early years (3 ECTS) – Design and technology for the early years practitioner (6 ECTS) – Contemporary issues in early years (6 ECTS) – Supporting children's language, literacy and numeracy Skills 3-5 (6 ECTS) – Planning and reflecting on developing practice for children 2 (9 ECTS) – Introduction to the emergent curriculum (6 ECTS) – Creative arts for the early years (3 ECTS) – Employability and entrepreneurial skills (4 ECTS) – Community social responsibility (2 ECTS). |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: Students are exposed to the most innovative teaching techniques and are also trained on observation techniques required to monitor the development of children. There is a major emphasis on the practical components carried out in this course. The course includes placements in early years settings.</p> | |

Table 16g

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 IPE

Provider: Learning Works (2023); Qualification: Award in Child Care (0–3 years)

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understand child development in children aged 0 to 3 years including physical, intellectual, language, social and emotional development – Be fluent with relevant national legislation and regulatory requirements with a focus on protecting and fostering children's rights and following health and safety procedures – Develop an awareness of the need to develop positive relationships and partnerships with children and their families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Health and safety at the workplace and the outdoor environment (4 ECTS) – Teamwork and communication (4 ECTS) – Communicating with parents and carers of children (4 ECTS) |

³⁷ The first 60 ECTS listed in the curricular areas pertain to the MCAST Award in Children's Care, Learning and Development Level 4, ECVET 60.

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Plan and implement meaningful learning experiences that enable optimal development in babies, toddlers and young children – Identify and meet the diverse needs of children with additional needs to cater for cultural, linguistic, learning or physical differences – Adopt a reflective practice approach to their daily work to continually improve their own practice for the benefit of children’s outcomes – Apply child development theories into practice – Work collaboratively in a team and promote positive relationships between all stakeholders – Plan, develop and facilitate play and learning experiences for children aged 0 to 3 years – Provide care of children’s daily needs including those with additional needs; Support and communicate with parents/legal guardians within an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and welcomes all families – Maintain a healthy and safe environment where children can be cared for and educated respectfully and safely – Report and document the daily occurrences, incidents and interactions as required for the safe upkeep and running of a childcare centre according to the National Standards – Work and behave responsibly and professionally with the integrity and respect needed to adequately care for young children – Follow and uphold the policies, procedures and standards of a child care setting and work in collaboration with the management and the staff for a smooth running of the centre – Create and maintain positive relationships with children, their families and the staff at the centre for the benefit and optimal development of children under their care – Increase awareness and understanding of the need for care that is of high quality, non-discriminatory and inclusive – Develop critical reflective skills to engage in reflective practice as part of own professional development. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Value of play and recreational activities for children (4 ECTS) – Children's development and learning (14 ECTS) – Work placement/Portfolio of evidence (30 ECTS). |
| Pedagogic approaches: Lectures, group activities and discussions | |

Table 16h

Malta: Competencies, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 IPE

Provider: AVANZA (2022); Qualification: Award in Early Years development, education and care

| Knowledge, skills, competences | Curricular areas ³⁸ |
|---|--|
| <p>Knowledge: Students will be exposed to the theoretical and practical features of early years child development, early years learning and forms of best practice. Students will learn factual and theoretical knowledge on how to implement, maintain and sustain early years learning and development within a <i>high-quality</i> early years childcare provision.</p> <p>Skills: Students will master a range of developmental, cognitive and practical skills to provide solutions to day-to-day specific issues in early years settings.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National Childcare Standards, health and safety at work (6 ECTS) – Safeguarding children, child protection and rights (6 ECTS) – Infant/child development and learning (6 ECTS) – The holistic child and importance of play (6 ECTS) – Early years language, literacy numeracy acquisition (6 ECTS) – Fostering prosocial positive attachment behaviour (4 ECTS) – Equality, diversity and inclusive practice (4 ECTS) |

³⁸ Where available, the number of ECTS for each study unit/module is included.



| Knowledge, skills, competences | Curricular areas ³⁸ |
|--|---|
| <p>Competences: Students will be able to exercise self-management within the context of early years provision. Students will be able to implement specific strategies, conducive to the needs of young children under their care. They will be competent and fully aware of the importance of providing a responsive, caring, safe and nurturing environment, whereby the educational activities on offer for children will be age appropriate and designed to scaffold early years learning and development.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Early years assessment and observation (4 ECTS) – Effective communication, colleagues and parent partnership (4 ECTS) – Professional reflective practice (2 ECTS) – Registered Early Years Service, responsibilities and legal requirements (2 ECTS) – Work placement (10 ECTS) <p>All modules are mandatory to qualify for this MQF Level 4 Award.</p> |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: During the course, students will be encouraged to engage in pedagogical critical and reflective discussions, whilst work-based learning experience will help students to acquire the required leadership skills needed to provide young children with the appropriate developmental opportunities.</p> | |

Table 16i

Malta: Competences, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 IPE

Provider: Outlook COOP (personal communication); Qualification: Award in Childcare, Well-being, Development and Learning for Early Years

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Demonstrate personal and interpersonal qualities and skills required for caring in relation to the needs of young children aged between 0 and 3 years – Understand the importance of the role of the child care worker – Study children’s rights and improve key competences in relation to diversity – Examine health aspects as part of the holistic wellbeing of children – Study psychology and its relevance to childcare work – Study relevant laws and regulations to childcare work – Establish safe practice consistently – Have a solid knowledge and ability to recognise the needs of children – Evaluate the contribution of different professional experiences related to child care work – Be affirmed as a child care worker in an interdisciplinary professional team – Evaluate one’s own learning through the use of reflective practice. | <p>Module 1: Child Development and Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Principles of early education – Children’s developmental milestones – The role of play in children’s learning – Child study and observation – The childcare worker. <p>Module 2: Child Protection, Safety and Well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Equal opportunities / disability issues – Nutrition, hygiene and food handling – Child welfare – Multi-agency networking – Health and safety – First aid – Focus on the child care worker. |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: Lectures delivered in an interactive manner to encourage student participation. Theory presented in an applied manner, including examples from practice. Opportunities to engage in group discussions and team work. The practical placement is a major learning opportunity.</p> | |



Table 16j

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 4

Provider: Jobsplus (2020), Qualification: VET Diploma in Childcare 0–3

| Competencies | Curricular areas |
|--|--|
| No specific information is provided in the course material but the module titles and competences identified for each follow the National Occupational Standards for childcare educators published by MFHEA. <i>Learners are expected to acquire all the competences enlisted in the National Occupational Standards for Childcare Educators</i> ³⁹ . | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Child development (88 hours)⁴⁰ – Development of Communication, Imagination and Creativity (62 hours) – Physical care of the child (67 hours) – Nutrition and hygiene (32 hours) – Health and safety (33 hours) – Children’s rights, equality and inclusion (38 hours) – Supporting a child with disability or individual educational needs, (50 hours) – Report writing (18 hours) – The child-led approach (30 hours) – Self-reflection, self-development and placement (512 hours – including 500 hours for placement); – First aid (16 hours) – Paediatric first aid (9 hours). |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: Mainly through lessons delivered by the trainer, who will engage learners in class discussions and role-play activities. To facilitate the learners’ apprehension, the trainer will also use PowerPoint presentations.</p> <p>Learners will be undergoing practical training that will be carried out in a licensed childcare centre. During the practical training, learners have to prove their competence in putting the theory learnt into practice. They will have to follow the policies adopted by the respective childcare centre.</p> | |

Table 16k

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 4

Provider: Future Focus (Future Focus 2022a; NCFE CACHE 2022a); Qualification: CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Workforce

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|---|--|
| No information is provided about the overall competencies expected to be addressed and achieved by students who register for this short course. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support healthy lifestyles for children through the provision of food and nutrition – Support healthy lifestyles for children through exercise – Support physical care routines for children – Promote children’s emotional well-being – Understand how to support children who are unwell – Understand legislation relating to the safeguarding, protection and welfare of children – Use legislation relating to the health and safety of children – Follow legislation relating to equality, diversity and inclusive practice – Working in partnership – Engage in professional development – Understand the value of play in Early Years – Plan, lead and review play opportunities which support children’s learning and development – Promote enabling play environments – Developing children’s emergent literacy skills; Developing children’s emergent mathematical skills – Support children’s transition to school – Develop children’s cognitive skills |

³⁹ Confirmed via email 11th August 2022⁴⁰ Hours indicated on the course documentation sheet show that these hours associated to each module include one or two hours for assessment. Module 10 which includes the placement is an exception.

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promote children’s speech, language and communication – Promote children’s physical development – Promote children’s personal, social and emotional development – Support children with additional needs – Use observation, assessment and planning to promote the development of children – Use longitudinal studies to observe, assess and plan for children’s needs. |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: Participants participate in a diverse programme that includes theory, hands-on-learning, small group work, observation and field based practical experience.</p> | |

Table 161

Malta: Competences and curricular areas for Level 4

Provider: Apex Academy (2023), *Qualification: Pre-tertiary certificate in Early Childhood Education & Care*

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Describe the main roles and responsibilities of a child carer to assist children in their learning and development from early years childhood – List and discuss the different health and safety practices to be taken into consideration when working within childcare – Recall the various theories of learning, development and play which are crucial knowledge for the child carer – Identify the need and the importance of promoting inclusion, anti-discriminatory practice and equality of opportunity at the childcare centre – List and describe various requirements and need to be able to care effectively for children under the age of 3 – List various recreational activities and discuss how these are important and crucial to assist children in development and learning – Recall the importance of promoting positive behaviour – Describe the role of reflective practice in childcare – Identify the importance of safeguarding, child protection issues and procedures and legislation – Demonstrate ability to assist children in their development and learning experience – Plan for and mitigate risks regarding health and safety which are relevant for children aged 0–3 years – Demonstrate understanding of different theories of learning, and development and the different stages of development of children – Prepare recreational activities, play and experience for children to support development and learning – Promote independence in basic needs of children such as potty training, nutrition, and others – Practice effective child caring techniques for basic requirements of children including nutrition, nap times, play times and others – Apply effective reflective practice techniques to always ensure high quality service and experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Roles and responsibilities of child-care worker (6 ECTS) – Health and safety practices in a childcare centre (6 ECTS) – Theories of child development and learning (6 ECTS) – Promoting inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice (6 ECTS) – Caring for babies and children (0–3 years) (6 ECTS) – Promoting professionalism and positive behaviour at the workplace (6 ECTS) – Theories of play and recreation in early years (6 ECTS) – Reflective practice in childcare (3 ECTS) – Work placement (15 ECTS) |



| Competences | Curricular areas |
|--|------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Communicate effectively with different stakeholders including children, their parents/guardians and other fellow child carers – Promote positive behaviour at the place of work – Prepare for and implement an inclusive practice. | |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: Face-to-face lectures and hands-on practice. This programme aims to equip learners with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively work within a childcare setting, providing children between the ages of 0–3 with the most effective quality care. Learners will be exposed to different theories and different skills that they need to acquire to work effectively within the sector, as well as being provided with a placement opportunity to further learn and put theory to practice.</p> | |

Table 16m

Malta: Competences and curricular areas Level 5 IPS

Provider: Future Focus (2022b); Qualification: CACHE Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People’s Services (England); Children’s and Young People’s Management (NCFE CACHE 2022b)

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|---|--|
| <p>This qualification provides learners with the skills and knowledge needed to manage practice and lead others in health and social care and children and young people’s services.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Safeguarding and protection – Managing care services – Supporting development and partnership working – Contributing to broader activities such as change programmes and recruitment – Complying with quality systems and continuously improving quality – Developing and carrying out policy – Promoting and developing best practice – Care management. |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: No information provided</p> | |

Table 16n

Malta: Competences and curricular areas Level 3 IPE

Provider: Institute for Education; Qualification: Award in Assisting the Childcare Educator (IfE 2023)

| Competences | Curricular areas |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use child development theories to understand children’s needs – Care for children’s physical needs – Implement learning experiences that sustain children’s’ progress – Actively sustain inclusive learning environments – Follow all pertinent Health and Safety regulations – Employ positive behaviour management systems – Encourage parental involvement in children’s learning and assessment – Foster collaboration and healthy working relationships with all stakeholders – Reflect on one’s daily practices – Implement sustainability concerns in children’s learning experiences. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understanding child development and caring for children’s physical needs (4 ECTS) – Creating learning experiences that sustain progression (4 ECTS) – Sustaining inclusive learning environments in the early years (4 ECTS) – Health and safety in early years settings (4 ECTS) – Core themes in early years education (4 ECTS) – Practice placement in the early years (10 ECTS). |
| <p>Pedagogic approaches: Most lectures are held online with some face-to-face sessions. Forum discussions, portfolios, reflection and practical assignments are included in the assessment procedures of the modules. A practicum of 200 hours is also included.</p> | |



4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Alternative routes refer to any IPE for the early years workforce personnel offered at MQF/EQF Level 3, 4, 5 and 6 by institutions which have been licensed/approved by MFHEA⁴¹. These programmes are accredited according to the MQF level rating. MFHEA maintains a register of accredited further and higher educational institutions in Malta through a database⁴². This includes detailed information of the licenced education providers and of those who are self-accrediting⁴³. Achieving recognition and thus approval to be employed without formal qualification is possible through the Trade Testing System (Jobsplus 2022). Trade Testing was set up in order to assess individuals who have acquired knowledge, skills and competences in a particular occupation but do not possess a formal qualification. A trade test therefore validates non-formal and informal learning. Through trade testing, a person is assessed by an interview, a theoretical and a practical test. Successful candidates are awarded a certificate in a particular occupation. In order to sit for these assessments, a candidate must be proficient in written English. With regard to childcare, there are two Trade Tests, one focusing on Childcare Educators and another test for childcare managers/supervisors. The validation process is regulated by MFHEA, however Jobsplus carries out the assessment on behalf of the Sector Skills Unit. Over the past ten years, 340 females and three males were awarded the EQF/MQF Level 4 qualification as Childcare Educators through the Trade Test whereas 125 females and six males were awarded the EQF/MQF Level 5 qualification as Childcare Managers (JobsPlus CEO at the Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b).

Table 17a

Malta: IPE for KGEs via a further education institution

| |
|---|
| Job title in English: <i>Kindergarten Educator</i> Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional |
| Kindergarten Educator (KGE III) Entry requirements: MATSEC Level in English, Maltese, Maths and a fourth (4th) subject (which might also be the ECDL or equivalent or a proficiency test equivalent to MATSEC in the three subject areas (MQF Level 3) – (all minimum Grade 5); and Advanced Matriculation Level (minimum grade E) (MQF level 4) in one subject – or equivalent including VET qualification; (MQF level 4, 120 ECTS) and a valid First Aid certificate. Professional studies: Malta Leadership Institute 3 years part-time Award: Bachelor of Education (Honours) in Early Years – (MLI 2023) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten settings 3–4 years |

⁴¹ In 2021, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) was re-established as the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (<https://mfhea.mt/overview>), to seek to promote and develop further and higher education in Malta by means of regulation and by the promotion of best practices.

⁴² Database maintained in accordance with Subsidiary Legislation 607.03 on Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance.

⁴³ The University of Malta, for programmes up to and including level 8 of the MQF, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) for programmes up to and including level 7 of the MQF and the Institution of Tourism Studies (ITS) for programmes up to and including level 5 of the MQF are self-accrediting institutions by virtue of the Subsidiary Legislation 607.03.



Table 17b

Malta: Childcare Educator alternative entry qualifications

| Job title in English: <i>Childcare Educator</i> Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional |
|---|
| <p><i>Route 1</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: Candidates must be 18 years of age and in possession of a relevant MQF Level 3 accredited award related to childcare or have at least 5-years' experience as a childcare worker assistant in a Childcare centre, including a school leaving certificate. Candidates must be able to communicate in English and Maltese. A proficiency numerical and literacy skills test together with a Police Conduct Certificate will also be required. Should the students have qualifications or equivalent evidence in Numeracy and Literacy then they will be exempt from the required tests. Candidates are also required to obtain a paediatric first aid certificate prior to the start of this course programme. This is a prerequisite for Module 1: 'Health and Safety at the Workplace and Outdoor Environment'. Candidates may apply for recognition for prior learning (RPL) for up to 40% of the total credits of the award. The Maturity Clause will apply for those over 23 years of age, but such prospective students will be required to go through an interview. Candidates with foreign qualifications ...must get their qualification validated through MQRIC at NCFHE (Learning Works 2023).</p> <p>Professional studies: Includes 200 placement hours in childcare settings (12 ECTS). Placements are done over 8 weeks, 5 hours per day. The course, which is held over one year includes online and face-to-face sessions, held at the 'Learning Works' premises.</p> <p>Award: Award in Childcare (0–3 years) – Learning Works</p> <p>ECTS credits: 60</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 4</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p> |
| <p><i>Route 2</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: 16+ years of age and possess either – Minimum of 5 SEC O level subjects of which must include Mathematics, English (Lang or Lit), Maltese at Grade 5 or better and any other 2 O Level subjects at Grade 7 or better or Successful completion of a related MQF Level 3 Foundation/Certificate Qualification (for example, Health & Social Care/ Art & Design / Sports or Performing Arts) or Mature students (+23 years at the start of the academic year applied for), subject to proficiency and/or aptitude tests as directed by the Academy</p> <p>Professional studies: offered as a one-year full-time course. Includes a work-based learning placement within a registered 0–3 ECEC centre for a total of 250 hours.</p> <p>Award: Award in Early Years Development, Education & Care – AVANZA</p> <p>ECTS credits: 60</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 4</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p> |
| <p><i>Route 3:</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: Individuals who are at least 18 years of age and who show an aptitude towards working with young children; a clean Police Conduct and hold two MQF level 3 passes (grades 1 to 5) in either Mathematics, English or Maltese. Applicants who are mature in age (over 23 years) may be considered under the Maturity Clause if they can provide satisfactory evidence (such as previous experience in this field and testimonials of care giving) of their ability to pursue successfully the programme of study. An Assessment board will be set up to help determine whether each applicant has the right aptitude or not for the job. This will be done during a standardised interview prior to registering for the Award in Child-Care.</p> <p>Professional studies: Offered as a one-year part-time course, held entirely face-to-face at Outlook Coop's premises.</p> <p>Award: Award in Child Care, Well-being, Development and Learning for Early years – Outlook Coop</p> |



Job title in English: *Childcare Educator*
Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional

ECTS credits: 60

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2011: 4

Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

Route 4:

Entry requirements: 16 years of age or older; an MQF Level 2 qualification in Mathematics, English and Maltese and a clean Police Conduct Certificate. In the absence of an MQF Level 2 qualification, individuals can apply if in possession of other qualifications or relevant experience⁴⁴.

Professional studies: This course is of 945 hours' duration and consists of twelve modules; 500 hours are allocated for placement in Module 10.

Award: Vocational Education and Training Diploma in Childcare (0–3 years) – Jobsplus

ECTS credits: 60

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2011: 4

Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

Route 5:

Entry requirements: There are no entry requirements for this course but students are expected to have a good working knowledge of English.

Professional studies: offered as an 8-month part-time course; 360 hours of work experience/ practicum

Award: NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years workforce (Early Years Educator) – advertised by two local entities, Future Focus (2022a) and The Playhouse Institute (2022)

ECTS credits: 30

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2011: 4

Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

Route 6:

Entry requirements: 3 years of work experience with children in a childcare facility catering for children from 0–3 years in line with the L.N. 295 of 2012 which regulates the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning. These candidates need to present a reference letter by an employer, confirming the number of hours of this experience; a portfolio including a description of the responsibilities of a Childcare Educator, a description of the contributions the candidate made at the childcare centre where employed, testimonials of any formal and/or informal training undertaken and any certificates in relation to childcare and a CV

Professional studies: Process of validation of informal and non-formal learning. Assessment consists of a written test, a 4-hour practical test and attending an interview, besides submitting an activity plan during the practical examination. Candidates will be assessed on the criteria laid down in the NOS issued by the MFHEA.

Award: Award as Childcare Educator – Trade Test administered by Jobsplus (Jobsplus and MFHEA, 2022a)

ECTS credits: not applicable

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2011: 4

Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years

⁴⁴ VET Diploma in Childcare 0–3 years Top up Level 4 (7 ECTS) is offered to holders of the VET Award in Childcare (0–3 years) offered by Jobsplus from year 2017 onwards, or those who completed the VET Award in Childcare (0–5 years), which was offered by Jobsplus from year 2014. Students following the top-up courses follow the new modules (Modules 8, 9, 11 and 12) only.

| |
|--|
| Job title in English: <i>Childcare Educator</i> Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional |
| <p><i>Route 7:</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: 4 SEC Subjects including Maltese, English, Mathematics, and any other subject. Proficient in English and Maltese; Clean Police Conduct; at least 18 years of age at start of the programme</p> <p>Professional studies: Offered as a full-time 60 ECTS course, starting in October 2023, this course includes 7 modules of 6 ECTS each; one 3 ECTS module and the 300-hour placement module worth 15 ECTS.</p> <p>Award: Pre-tertiary certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care – APEX</p> <p>ECTS credits: 60</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 4</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p> |

Table 17c

Malta: Childcare Manager (alternative entry qualifications)

| |
|--|
| Job title in English: <i>Childcare Manager/Coordinator</i>⁴⁵ Profile: Social/Health Care Professional |
| <p>Route 1</p> <p>Entry requirements: Preference will be given to students who hold the CACHE level 4 diploma certificate or equivalent irrespective of age. Students who completed the Future Focus Level 3 certificate and wish to proceed directly to level 5 must be at least 23 years on date of application. Students who do not have a level 4 can apply if they are 23 years old plus have at least 3 years of continuous experience working as a child carer or as an LSE.</p> <p>Professional studies: 8 months; part time and generally online.</p> <p>ECTS credits: 45</p> <p>EQF level: 5</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 4</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p> <p>Route 2</p> <p>Entry requirements: Level 4 in Childcare</p> <p>Professional studies: 8 months + 50 hours work placement in a kindergarten setting; part time.</p> <p>Award: NCFE CACHE Level 5 Diploma for the early years senior practitioner – CACHE through Future Focus (2022c)</p> <p>ECTS credits: 45</p> <p>EQF level: 5</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 4</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years⁴⁶ or kindergarten settings⁴⁷</p> <p>Route 3</p> <p>Entry requirements: A Level 5 Diploma for the Early Years Senior Practitioner which carries 45 ECTS. Both courses together will make up for the required 60 ECTS to progress to KGE II.</p> <p>Professional studies: 15 weeks; part-time, online synchronous lectures for 5 modules and one module of 50 hours is allocated to practise in the kindergarten setting where the student is already employed.</p> <p>Award: Diploma ECEC Top-up – CACHE through Future Focus</p> <p>ECTS credits: 15 (this is a top-up programme and must follow from the 45 ECTS diploma)</p> |

⁴⁵ Some of the courses listed in this table are promoted as appropriate for KGEs.

⁴⁶ On its own, this course will no longer be a valid qualification when the National Standards (MFED 2021a) requirement of a minimum Level 5 with 60 ECTS for Managers becomes mandatory

⁴⁷ This qualification can be topped up with another 15 ECTS programme for students to have 60 ECTS total leading to KGEII (Future Focus 2022c).



| |
|---|
| Job title in English: <i>Childcare Manager/Coordinator</i>⁴⁵ Profile: Social/Health Care Professional |
| EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 4 Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten settings |
| Route 4 Entry requirements: Hold a valid First Aid Certificate that is recognised nationally. Be registered with the Food Safety Commission as a Food Handler. Have at least 3 years' experience in management of Child Care/ pre-school settings, catering for children from 0-3 years in line with the L.N. 295 of 2012 which regulates the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning. Be well aware of the relative legislature and regulations. <i>These candidates will also need to present the contact details of two referees that can confirm their experience and endorse skills claimed to the Assessment Board, prior to being assessed.</i> Candidates will need to present to the Assessment Board a Portfolio including a description of the responsibilities of a childcare worker, a description of the contributions made at the childcare centre where employed, testimonials of any formal and/or informal training undertaken and any certificates awarded, for any formal training in supervision, management and or related areas with regard to child care. A CV is also to be submitted. Professional studies: Process of validation of informal and non-formal learning for Childcare Managers and Supervisors in childcare centres. Assessment is composed of three components: written test; interview; and portfolio Award: Certificate of Competence MQF/EQF Level 5 and endorsed by the MFHEA (Jobsplus & MFHEA, 2022b) ECTS credits: not applicable EQF level: 5 ISCED 2011: 4 Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings, 0–3 years |

Formal opportunities for moving up the sector

UM and MCAST both offer top-up courses leading to an EQF 6 qualification (see *Chapter 4.2*). These top-up courses primarily target practitioners or students who would have completed the EQF 5 programme and have the possibility to progress in their studies or simultaneously continue their studies whilst in employment. The top-up course at UM is offered both as a one-year full time programme and as a two-year part-time programme.

Table 18

Malta: Top-up courses leading to EQF 6 BA degree in early years

| |
|---|
| Job title in English: <i>Kindergarten Educator</i> Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional |
| Kindergarten Educator (KGE III) Route 1: Entry requirements: (i) Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years (MCAST) or any other comparable and equivalent recognised qualification; (ii) passes at SEC level at Grade 5 or higher in English Language, Maltese and Mathematics; (iii) passes in proficiency tests in English and Maltese, approved by the Faculty. Professional studies: Two-years of part-time study (University of Malta 2022b). Award: BA (Hons) (ECEC) ECTS credits: 60 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten settings 3 to 5 year-olds |



| |
|---|
| Job title in English: <i>Kindergarten Educator</i> Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional |
| <i>Route 2:</i> Entry requirements: A Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years (MQF Level 5, 120 ECTS), or equivalent; <i>or</i> MCAST-BTEC MQF 5 Early Years Learning and Development; <i>or</i> MCAST-BTEC Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years Professional studies: 18 months part-time, blended approach (MCAST and IfE, 2021g) Award: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Early Years, Learning and Care (Top-Up) ECTS credits: 60 ECTS EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten settings 3 to 5 year olds |

Assistants to Childcare Educators

As mentioned earlier (*Chapter 2.1*), managers were formerly allowed to employ unqualified staff as Childcare Assistants. In light of the requirements for a minimum level of training according to the National Standards (MFED 2021a), letter circular (IfE45/2022) sent to childcare settings on August 1st 2022 by the Institute for Education⁴⁸, an invitation has been extended to these Assistants to follow a 30 ECTS EQF 3 programme for ‘Assisting the Childcare Educators’. The programme ran from October 2022 to mid-July 2023.

Table 18a

Malta: EQF Level 3 Award for Assistants to Childcare Educators (Institute for Education)

| |
|--|
| Job title in English: <i>Assistant to the Childcare Educator</i> |
| Entry requirements: Be 23 years of age; currently employed in a childcare setting Professional studies: 8 months; delivered online – IfE portal Award: Award in Assisting the Childcare Educator, Institute for Education ECTS credits: 30 (part-time) EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3 Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings |

According to the MCAST prospectus (MCAST 2023) a one-year diploma in early years will be available for prospective assistant childcare educators from October 2023 and seeks to prepare students who are interested in working in childcare settings. This course has attracted 94 students (MCAST reporting to Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023a).

⁴⁸ The Institute for Education was originally setup in April 2015 by virtue of Legal Notice 140 of 2015 as amended by Legal Notice 240 of 2015. The Institute was reconstituted as an agency by virtue of Legal Notice 243 of 2017. The Institute provides initial teacher training and professional development that inject 21st century skills and competences into the educators at all levels of leadership and infuse equity and social justice within all programmes. It aims to develop accredited programmes which are flexible and can be provided through different modes of delivery such as face-to-face lecture, online and blended learning. The Institute for Education is licenced by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) as a Higher Education Institution in accordance with the Second Schedule of Subsidiary Legislation 327.433.



Table 18b

Malta: EQF Level 3 Award for Assistants to Childcare Educators (MCAST)

| Job title in English: <i>Assistant to the Childcare Educator</i> |
|---|
| <p>Entry requirements: MCAST Foundation Certificate or 2 SEC/O-Level/SSC&P⁴⁹ (Level 3) passes</p> <p>Professional studies: Class based learning that provides introductory knowledge required to understand the basic practice of the childcare educator and sets a good foundation for learners wishing to embark on a career in Early Years Education and Care. The course also provides hands on practice through one placement.</p> <p>Award: Diploma in Early Years, MCAST</p> <p>ECTS credits: 60 (one year, full time)</p> <p>EQF level: 3</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 3</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Childcare settings</p> |

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Workplace/practice placements are not nationally regulated but are determined by the providers of the various programmes available. As illustrated in the subsequent sections, the amount of time students spend at kindergarten and childcare settings whilst following their initial professional studies varies. Similarly, the processes relating to the assessment of the practicum vary: some institutions have their own specifically-appointed examiners, others rely on staff at the childcare settings to monitor and supervise the students. To date, none of the staff employed or appointed for supervisory duties follow any mentoring course to prepare them for the role. Externally appointed assessors appear to have different roles as a number of institutions report that their assessor consults regular staff employed within the settings. These arrangements are applicable in particular to the EQF 4 courses which address Childcare Educators' qualifications and courses offered by private, independent institutions rather than the more established, government funded institutions which are nationally acknowledged as leading further and higher education.

Table 19

Malta: The professional practice component in EQF 4 programmes

| Learning Works | Avanza Training Academy | Outlook Coop | Jobsplus | Future Focus | MCAST | Apex Academy |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---|--|--|
| 200 hours 12 ECTS | 250 hours 10 ECTS | 400 hours | 500 hours | 360 hours (NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Workforce) | <i>Planning and Reflecting on Developing Practice and Children 1</i> (9 ECTS) and <i>Planning and Reflecting on Developing Practice for Children</i> | 300 placement hours 15 ECTS Assessed through Observation |

⁴⁹ Secondary school certificate and profiling (SSC&P) is the certificate obtained by students at the end of secondary school as proof of completion of compulsory education (<https://education.gov.mt/en/dqse/Pages/SSC-and-P.aspx>)

| Learning Works | Avanza Training Academy | Outlook Coop | Jobsplus | Future Focus | MCAST | Apex Academy |
|----------------|---|---|----------|--------------|--|--|
| hours a day. | with mentoring support from the respective Centre Owner/Manager | During the hours of placement, each student will have visits by the Centre Manager for assessment purposes. | | | 2 (9 ECTS). In the first study unit, no mention is made of the number of hours but the study unit description refers to two placements... <i>how to plan and implement activities with babies (0–14 months) and toddlers (14–36 months)</i> . In the second study unit, learners must attend a minimum of 150 hours of placement with children aged 2–3 years. | (40%) and Reflection Course documentation indicates 30 hours for supervised placement and practice. |

Additional information about the examination procedures concerning the practicum, together with any procedures linked to mentoring was obtained directly from the training institutions which offer the IPE courses.

Learning Works⁵⁰

The Course Tutor responsible for the modules *Child Development and Learning* and *Work Placement, Portfolio of Evidence and Reflective Report* is also the person currently responsible for the placements and the assessment of students. This programme of studies has not been established for any length of time, and thus far one person with experience in educational settings has been responsible for supervising, examining and mentoring students during their practicum. Students are visited twice during the practicum with the possibility of a third visit if the supervisor/mentor/assessor is not satisfied with the outcome. The Course Tutor is remunerated for each visit.

Other assessments during the practicum consist of

- A Portfolio of evidence, including the setting of childcare, personal philosophy about 'Child care education', weekly plan, 2 activities planned by the student
- A *Placement evaluation form* which includes information about programme development, professionalism, work with children, family engagement and professional development. This form is completed by the Centre Manager where the practicum is taking place.
- A reflective journal consisting of two topics such as *Adopting a play-based pedagogy* or *Partnerships with parents and families*. The choice of topic is discussed with the mentor.
- Child observations.

⁵⁰ Information via email August 4th 2022



Outlook Coop⁵¹

There is one examiner who has several years of experience in the early years sector who assesses and examines students during the practicum. Each student gets two assessment visits over the 400-hour practicum duration – one visit for each of the 200-hour block practices. The examiner is remunerated for these visits.

On a day-to-day basis, students are supervised by Centre Managers or by their appointees. However, the training institute does not get involved in who, within the childcare centre is appointed or takes on the role of mentoring/supporting the students doing their practicum.

Jobs Plus⁵²

During the practical module, learners are required to write 15 journal entries highlighting what they have learned in class and how this was applied at the childcare centre. These can be observations made (for example during play time) or even things which they organised (for example an activity). They also need to highlight how they can further improve the activities (reflective practice). These journal entries are then corrected by a Jobsplus trainer, and the learners need to obtain a pass mark in order to pass from this module.

Learners are given a handbook through which they have to highlight the skills they practised at the childcare centre. The Centre Coordinator is responsible to grade the performance of the learner in each specific skill according to their performance during the placement. Placement monitoring visits are carried out by the Training Design and QA Unit and generally three visits are conducted so that Jobsplus gathers feedback at the beginning of the placement, halfway through the placement and towards the end.

It is up to the Centre to determine who should supervise the students during their practicum. Mentoring or coaching provided by the Centre is not remunerated as the agency sees this as something which ultimately the childcare settings will benefit from. Many of the students following this programme are offered a job before completing their placement. During monitoring visits, referred to earlier, feedback is sought from the students doing the practicum and the Centre Coordinators. The latter are reminded that students cannot merely observe but they must do the job. If there are instances where it is evident that either the trainee is not adhering to the Centre's policies or the Centre is not offering enough practical exposure to the learners, the training entity reserves the right to terminate the placement.

Practicum for EQF 5 IPE: Future Focus

With MQF5 courses that require a practicum, Future Focus allows learners to seek a placement within the related area of study. Once this is approved by the institution, the learner will conduct a specific number of hours of practice placement within the real-life setting. The practicum is internally supervised (by the particular Centre) and externally assessed by Future Focus on the place of work or via a professional discussion (depending on restrictions as per Covid measures). In both instances, Future Focus appoints a specialized tutor to assess the learner and draw up a report.

Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England) Children's and Young People's Management (45 ECTS) includes 120 practice placement hours in a programme.

Level 5 Diploma ECEC TopUp course (15 ECTS) 1 module of the 6 modules is a practicum. Students need to conduct 50 hours in the role of KGE. Practice placement is conducted at the place of

⁵¹ Information via email August 1st 2022

⁵² Information via email August 8th 2022



work, hence within the school where they are already employed as KGEs. The learner will be expected to be in full-time employment within this setting and will be required to validate 50 hours of practice for this mandatory placement (Future Focus 2022c). No further information is provided about the assessment of the practicum.

MCAST EQF 5 and EQF 6 Top-up courses

Practicum study units are included in both the first and second year of the 120 ECTS EQF5 programme. There are two 6 ECTS study units in the first year and a further two 6 ECTS study units in the second year for a total of 24 ECTS. Students following this programme of studies are assessed by examiners appointed by MCAST itself.

Although the programme of studies for the MCAST/IfE joint degree top-up refers to a placement (IfE and MCAST 2021) none of the individual study unit descriptions indicate a specific period for the practicum. One 10 ECTS study unit, *Emergent Curriculum in Practice*, refers to practice placements which the students would have undertaken in their EQF 5 programme of studies. Also, considering that the literature for this programme explicitly states that preference is given to applicants who are already employed as KGEs, it would seem that any reference to placements may refer to students trying out specific activities with a more reflective and critical stance.

Undergraduate course at the University of Malta (UM) (University of Malta 2022a)

Within the BA (Hons) (ECEC) programme offered at UM, students are introduced to life in schools and classrooms in the first year of the programme. This is done through weekly visits where students are assigned to a classroom and where they spend initial weeks observing the regular Kindergarten Educator. These visits are accompanied by weekly, small-group tutorials and from time to time, students are expected to plan, prepare and conduct specific activities with the children they would have been observing. Towards the end of this study unit, students have a three-week practice placement where they take over the classroom independently. This entire study unit is worth 6 ECTS with the final assessment equally shared to students' responses to focused tasks followed during the year-long tutorials and the practicum, which assessment takes into consideration the planning and documentation associated to the actual practice.

There are 6 ECTS in the first block teaching practice for the students following the full-time BA (Hons) in early childhood education and care at UM. This takes place in the 2nd year of the programme. Another 8 ECTS teaching practice study unit takes place in the 3rd year of the programme. University-appointed examiners with experience in early years visit students at least twice during their placements in a kindergarten setting. Teaching practice is assessed against a number of criteria. There is no formal mentoring programme but casual staff (i.e. not full-time resident academic members) who accept to participate in teaching practice have the opportunity to discuss the processes, criteria and documentation associated to teaching practice and its assessment. Casual part-time members of staff appointed to conduct TP visits are remunerated for each visit.

For students following the 60 ECTS top-up undergraduate course, a practicum is included in their studies irrespective of whether the students opt for the full or part-time course.

Undergraduate course offered by the Malta Leadership Institute (MLI 2023)

There are three practice placements for a total 20 ECTS of the 180 ECTS part-time course. Cumulatively these placements account for 435 hours: 150 hours for 7 ECTS in the first and second year of the programme and 135 hours for the 6 ECTS third year study unit. Each of these three study units has the same general learning outcomes and the same modes of assessment. Mode of assessment is divided to include 50% placement observations; 25% portfolio; 25% teaching practice file.



6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

According to the European Commission publication on *Structural indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2022, 13), Malta is one of nine countries where CPD is undertaken among staff working in pre-primary settings such as kindergartens but where there is no such requirement for staff working with the under threes in childcare settings. This is in sharp contrast with 22 countries where CPD is a professional duty or necessary for promotion for all who work in settings across the entire phase of ECEC, from birth to compulsory school age.

CPD for Childcare Educators

Where CPD is undertaken in **childcare settings**, this is done through the initiatives and arrangements within settings themselves. For example, Childcare Educators and Co-ordinators (Centre Leaders) employed with the 12 state-funded childcare settings managed by the FES have their own CPD sessions. Compulsory staff training seminars are organised twice yearly with more training sessions organised throughout the year for both groups. Training for Centre Coordinators has included seminars about General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) matters, principles for inclusion and health matters affecting babies. Childcare Educators have had PD sessions to address proficiency in spoken and written English.

Education Officers for Early Years have started visiting childcare settings for training where the DQSE has asked for such support⁵³.

Among the responsibilities that define the role of the Childcare Manager and based on the NOS, the National Standards for ECEC (0–3 years) (2021) expect the manager to “*provide and/or facilitate continuous professional development opportunities for staff members on a regular basis*”. (p. 16). As stated elsewhere, the implementation and follow-up of these standards, especially where new practices are being brought in, will be done gradually.

CPD for Kindergarten Educators

Regulation: For staff working within the State and Church **kindergarten** sectors, professional development/in-service training is regulated by the Collective Agreements (MEDE 2017; Archdiocese and MUT 2018). In lieu of the in-service training days, which used to be held at the beginning or at the end of a scholastic year, staff were given more leeway to have a say in their own professional development.

“... greater emphasis is placed on schools and individuals to seek the most appropriate professional development which best respond to the contextual, national and international needs with a particular focus on the respective communities’ learners, educators, and educational leaders. The concept of CPD is being widened to encompass all development opportunities that nourish the creation of a Community of Professional Educators (CoPE), which includes all initiatives that facilitate professional discussion and growth amongst community members, such as school development planning sessions, continuous professional development and links with the internal and external community” (MEDE 2017, 30).

Obligation/leave entitlement: In addition to the 40 compulsory hours of CoPE sessions, organised and managed by the school leadership/management team, members of teaching grades

⁵³ Email communication 1st July 2022



are encouraged to participate in self-sought CPD which may be followed during or outside normal school working hours. A maximum 80 hours of self-sought professional development can be claimed for career advancement. This can include a variety of activities which must be endorsed by the Head of school.

Despite the obligations for CoPE, sessions can be somewhat sporadic. Guest speakers may be invited to conduct presentations about their area of expertise and according to the needs perceived by the administration. However, when such presentations are not followed up and are reduced to awareness raising, or providing ideas and suggestions to try things out, and where the practitioners have not been given the opportunity to suggest where they would like more support, it is more challenging to engage with the practitioners or to follow-up on any subsequent development.

CPD providers: Compulsory CoPE sessions may consist of school based and national/central training which would be offered to all settings. CPD associated to school-based sessions can be quite diverse in the way the sessions are organised and conducted. The content, delivery, nature of the presentations and attendees for the sessions can vary. The school leadership team may be entirely responsible for organising PD depending on particular issues, projects or the vision for the school. PD sessions would also complement the school's School Development Plan for the specific scholastic year or cycle of two years and would have been included in the school's action plans. Since action plans lead to changes, be it curricular or structural, training is always imperative. PD sessions could include external interventions and presentations by, for example, staff working at University or within the Education Directorates who would be invited to address staff about specific issues of relevance. Issues vary and could focus on national innovations, curricular changes, the promotion or introduction of methodologies, school policies etc. The topic and content for school-based PD sessions could be decided exclusively by the school management team or arising from suggestions made by members of staff and which could be relevant to educators working with specific age groups or for the entire staff. At a time when the emergent curriculum and a learning outcomes framework are being promoted in early years settings, particularly kindergarten and the first two years of compulsory school, the three EOs responsible for the early years sector have focused their CoPE commitments on these topics. EOs can avail themselves of a maximum of 15 of the 40 hours and have organised three CoPE sessions per term in recent scholastic years. Training has been offered to teachers working with 5 to 7 year-olds whereas KGEs have continued to follow training and be monitored through curriculum time, at the request of the school leadership team. Some schools request specific PD session for their Educators, which EOs provide accordingly.

CoPE sessions are also held for staff in Church and Independent schools.

Irrespective of who takes any initiative for CPD, these initiatives should be considered within a wider context of actual practice with children and therefore be relevant to specific settings. In the absence of a wider strategy or vision, CPD activities risk becoming repetitive, or lack coherence and fail to lead to growth, change and development. Ideally, an infrastructure needs to be set up to enable and facilitate monitoring and support: it is futile to invite staff to attend CPD and expect participants to rapidly interpret, understand, adopt and adjust their practice and activities without further support, feedback or opportunities to reflect on their practice.

Content and quality assurance: Although nobody obliges schools to follow or choose the content or format of PD, schools are held accountable for PD sessions which are organised. A list of such sessions must be submitted to the quality assurance department, and the church school secretariat in the case of church schools, for review purposes. When school-based PD sessions are organised it is the responsibility of the Head of School, aided by the SLT members, to plan enough sessions in the year which would cover the required 40 hours. Evidence of each session



must be maintained, along with signed attendance sheets; the evidence is usually asked for during an external review visit from QAD auditors. Certification to denote attendance/participation could be given when professional development meetings, lectures, workshops and/or courses are followed. However, such CPD would be followed through the initiative of individuals and not part of the CoPE sessions.

Funding: Self-sought courses may be funded by the individuals who are following them. Upon completion, holders of the qualification could be entitled to rebates through the *Get-Qualified* scheme (Malta Enterprise 2021, 3): "*The scope of this incentive is to support the personal development of individuals who aim to achieve qualifications and certifications required by industry. The incentive is applicable to students following a course of studies leading to a certification, diploma, degree or post-graduate degree courses. On successful completion, the student will benefit from a tax credit, hence recovering part of the costs incurred*".

Career advancement: CPD which forms part of the CoPE sessions are not accredited as they do not reach established criteria of ECTS values and corresponding number of hours in training; neither would there be any assessment involved. On its own, CPD is not used as a tool for career advancement and whilst attending professional development courses and corresponding, relevant certification where applicable are generally listed in individuals' personal curriculum vitae and included in their portfolio in response to job applications, there is no system in place where such courses can replace or top-up the formal qualifications which are required.

Research, debates: To date, there are neither research projects focusing on the CPD received by ECEC personnel, nor has there been any funding allocated over the past five years to review issues associated to access, motivation or impact of CPD on practice, participation or professional engagement of practitioners. CPD for early years practitioners is not an issue which has arisen in any debate about early childhood education.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Early childhood educators were once described as the poor relatives of primary school teachers (Ayers 1989), considered an appendage, outside the teaching profession and unworthy of any particular attention. Although this may be a dated summary of perceptions about early years educators, it is certainly still reflected in the salaries and remuneration of staff employed in kindergarten and more so in childcare settings in Malta.

Childcare Educators

Information about salaries paid to Childcare Educators is rather sketchy. There are no national data available. Since most of the settings are privately owned, salaries are negotiated with the carers seeking employment. Some random requests sought from different sources yielded the following information.

Table 20

Malta: Information about employment conditions in childcare settings

| Setting A | Setting B | Setting C | Setting D | Setting E | Setting F | Setting G |
|---|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| Staff are employed on a full-time basis – a 40-hour week. With an EQF 4 they have a starting salary of €15,853 per annum (Scale 15). Over a number of years and depending on their performance, this increases gradually to Scale 13 (€18,074-€20,087). | The manager and carers are employed on flexible hours depending on their family arrangements and commitments. The Childcare Educators are paid €8 an hour and the managers are paid €8.50 an hour before any tax deductions. | Staff work on a full-time, 40-hour week basis. A max of 30 hours is direct contact time with children. Ten hours of non-contact time is expected for preparation and is available weekly. A manager earns a minimum of €20,889 up to a maximum of €31,211. Childcare Educators have a starting salary of €14,134 which goes up to a max of €22,438. | Two full-time and 3 part-time staff are employed. Working hours are 8 hours a day and remuneration is less than €10 an hour. Paid non-contact time is available. | Staff are on a full-time or full-time (reduced hours) contract. Staff work 5 to 8.5 hours a day. Paid on a monthly basis at the rate of €7.05 per hour (revised annually). Non-contact time is available for 2-3 hours a week and is allocated on certain days. Staff choose whether to plan together during non-contact time or use personal time for planning. | Staff work full time, for 5.5 hours a day. There is no allowance for non-contact time. Staff working with the under threes earn €1038 monthly. | Employs two Childcare Educators on a full-time basis; a helper works parttime. They work 4 hours a day (08.30 – 12.30). They are paid monthly, and are on salary scale 15, starting at €15,717. The Childcare Helper is on an hourly rate basis and gets €7/hour, depending on the number of hours worked. Not paid in July, August and September. |

Kindergarten Educators

The starting salary at the various grades applicable to staff in kindergarten settings is presented in *Table 21*. KGEs have salaries ranging from scales 15 (supply) to 9 (KGE III). Primary teachers' salaries range from scales 9 starting at €23,353 per year to scale 7 with a starting salary of €26,438. Thus, Primary school teachers earn considerably more than KGEs.

Table 21

Malta: Salaries for KGEs

| Designation | Starting Salary ⁵⁴ | Increments |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| KGE III EQF 6 | €21,950 with increments of €407,67 | Salary Scale 10 upon entry; progressing to Salary Scale 9 upon completion of five years of satisfactory service in the grade. |
| KGE II EQF 5 60 ECTS | €19,323 with increments of €354 | Salary Scale 12 upon entry; progressing to Salary Scale 10 upon completion of five years of satisfactory service in the grade. |
| KGE I ⁵⁵ EQF 5 30 ECTS | Scale 15: €15,717 with increments of €298 Scale 14: €16,865 with increments of €316.83 Scale 13: €18,074 with increments of €335.50 | Salary Scale 15 upon entry; progressing to Salary Scale 14 upon completion of five years of satisfactory service in Salary Scale 15 and to Salary Scale 13 after a further five years of satisfactory service in Salary Scale 14. |

As with childcare settings, some information sought randomly from five private/independent settings yielded the following information.

Table 22

Malta: Information about working conditions for KGEs in five private settings

| Setting A | Setting B | Setting C | Setting D | Setting E |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| KGEs employed on a full-time basis earn €1,280 per month (before taxes). They have four and a half hours of daily, direct contact with the children and an additional daily two hours of non-contact time. | KGEs work full time, with five hours of direct contact time with the children daily (08:00-13:00) and with a monthly salary ranging from €1079.67 – €1225.75 gross (this is revised yearly to reach government wages according to qualification). Non-contact time to be used for preparation, is an hour every day after the children leave. | KGEs working on a full-time basis work from 08:00-13:30 or 09:00-14:30. The monthly salary is worked out according to their qualifications. Non-contact activities are normally done during school hours, i.e. preparation during a free lesson, talking to parents after school, staff meetings are held once a term, on a half day. Weekly meetings with colleagues from same year | KGEs employed on a full-time basis for 5.5 hours a day. Paid €1,173 monthly. No non-contact time is available for preparation. | KGEs are employed on a full-time basis. Working hours are from 08:30-14:00, five and a half hours daily. Salaries vary, depending on the qualifications. Starting salary for KGE is at scale 15, i.e. €15,717 per annum in 2022 with annual increments of €298 per annum (depending on the number of years employed at the setting). |

⁵⁴ Collective Agreement for Employees in the Public Service 1st January 2017 – 31st December 2024 (Government of Malta 2017)

⁵⁵ A full qualification at MQF Level 4 in early childhood education and care recognised by the competent authorities shall also make candidates eligible for application into this grade, up to end of year 2020 (Article 25.4: p. 41; MEDE 2017).

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| | | group are held together with the Senior Management Team (SMT) | | The highest salary for a KGE is scale 9, which in 2022 was at €23,353 per annum with annual increments of €447.33 per annum. |
|--|--|---|--|--|

Across all settings it is customary for professional development/staff meetings and parents' days to be carried out on days when children are asked not to attend. These would be considered working days for staff.

It is worth noting that another electoral proposal in the March 2022 Malta Labour Party manifesto (MLP 2022, proposal 252, 76) refers to better salaries and working conditions in the forthcoming collective agreement for Childcare and KGEs.

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The data available (DQSE May 2022) indicates that 62% (N=775) of the **staff in child care** are working full time and a further 31% (N=391) are employed on a part-time basis. Another 5% (N=63) are recorded as “full time – reduced hours”. Others are listed as “casual” staff or working “flexible hours”.

Kindergarten staff within school settings who are employed on a full-time basis work 5½ hours a day or a 27½ hour week including mid-morning break. This applies from the fourth Monday in September to the 31st of May. Between the 1st of June and the 6th of July, the school working hours are 3¾ hours per day or an 18¾ hours week, including mid-morning break (DES 2010).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

There are no formal measures available either for induction or for mentoring and supporting newly-qualified staff. This applies to practitioners working in kindergarten settings as well as staff in childcare settings.

7.4 Non-contact time

In childcare settings operated by FES and in accordance with the Collective agreement with UHM, Childcare Educators work on a full-time basis. Of the 40-hour week, 10 hours a week are allocated for non-contact time. They are not obliged to spend these hours at the setting. Duties expected of Childcare Educators during non-contact time were initially specified in an appendix of the Union’s Agreement (FES-UHM⁵⁶) and some modifications have been made to reflect the pedagogical shift being promoted with the introduction of the emergent curriculum. Besides attending team meetings every three months and monthly meetings with the Coordinator other non-contact time duties of Childcare Educators include:

- Assessing the children for whom they are directly responsible
- Compiling learning journals accompanied with photos of children’s activities
- Developing the objectives to be achieved by the children and planning daily activities
- Evaluating the activities and seeking ways to improve them
- Drawing up a report on a prescribed template, about each child before s/he progresses to a kindergarten setting

⁵⁶ Union Ғaddiema Magħqudin – Voice of the workers



- Proposing actions for improvement of service to be discussed and agreed to with the Co-ordinator during the mentoring time as well as inform other colleagues at the setting
- Seeking professional training in addition to the bi-annual sessions, directly by FES
- Meetings with parents every six months.

In the privately-owned and managed **childcare settings**, non-contact time is at the discretion of the owners. Some allocate non-contact time for their staff but this does not seem to be widespread. For example, one setting reported that the Childcare Educators are with the children all the time; another setting offers Educators 4 hours a week of non-contact time which is divided over two occasions each of two hours' duration.

In **kindergarten settings**, following the Collective Agreement (MEDE 2017) arrangements had been planned for non-contact time. "For non-compulsory schooling years, all KGEs and Teachers serving at Kindergarten level, shall be entitled to 60 minutes per week of non-contact/curriculum time as from scholastic year 2018/2019 to reach a maximum of 90 minutes per week of non-contact/curriculum time from scholastic year 2019/2020. This time shall be covered by Learning Support Educators or KGE Relievers (who may include Students performing practicum as part of further and higher education studies in a related area)." Although some schools tried to adhere to these arrangements when/where possible, because of COVID-19 pandemic, non-contact time was put on hold because Relievers were assigned duties to replace regular staff who were on sick leave.

Church schools were encouraged to maintain non-contact time even during the pandemic. Some schools found it more efficient to accumulate the non-contact time for monthly rather than weekly meetings when children would not be in school. Weekly non-contact hours were more challenging to adhere to in the absence of Relievers or suitable replacements as approved of by the Union agreement.

7.5 Current staffing issues

Whilst there are no official data about shortage or ease of recruitment, within **childcare settings** there continues to be a steady turn-over. Childcare providers claim to have difficulties in employing qualified Childcare Educators since staff prefer to work in kindergarten settings where working conditions are better. This claim seems to be reinforced by teaching staff at MCAST who reported (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b) that despite the possibility of Childcare Educators to be accredited with an EQF Level 4 after their first year of the two-year Advanced Diploma, most students pursue the second year of studies. The current EQF Level 4 cohorts (2023–2024) include 76 first year and 43 second year students.

When vacancies arose within KG settings, Childcare Educators understandably saw this as an opportunity for a better salary and improved job security. The extent to which this mobility and trend will continue remains to be seen. On the one hand, the move away from being a Childcare Educator with an EQF 4 qualification to becoming a Kindergarten Educator with the minimum of EQF 5 (30 ECTS) or EQF 5 (60 ECTS) may still be perceived as a good opportunity worth investing in. For Childcare Managers, the enticement to move to kindergarten is going to be greater since an EQF 5 with 60 ECTS is the minimum requirement for managers and for KG II educators. However, the stumbling block might actually be the saturation of the kindergarten market. As mentioned earlier in this report, within the state sector Relievers are identified from the same pool of qualified KGEs. The older/more experienced practitioners are assigned a group of children while the younger ones are Relievers. This implies that the younger graduates are increasingly less likely to find a full-time position at kindergarten level with responsibilities for their own group of children. MCAST staff reported that despite a healthy intake of students for their 180



ECTS, EQF Level 6 Bachelor degree (early years) programme, the market is saturated and vacancies/calls for Kindergarten Educators are absent (Parliament of Malta, Family Affairs Committee 2023b). MCAST officials believe that many of their students will pursue further studies and apply for the two-year, 120 ECTS Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) offered for Primary School Teachers at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

One reform which has come about follows from the Collective Agreements (MEDE 2017; Archdiocese and MUT 2018) about the organisation of kindergarten staff as KGE III, KGE II and KGE I. Categorising KGEs in this way has led to a raise in the minimal level of entry qualification for KGEs from EQF 4 to EQF 5 from 2021. KGE III are holders with a BA (Hons) (ECEC) who started graduating from UM in 2019; and KGE II and KGE I are expected to have an EQF 5 with 60 ECTS or 30 ECTS respectively. This therefore implies that EQF 4 programmes, which were previously and until recently the minimal level of qualification for KGEs, are no longer accepted. Being in possession of EQF 5 or 6 qualifications and the corresponding designation of KGE I, II or III is reflected in the salary scales and progression. There is no distinction in duties amongst KGEs, irrespective of their initial professional education and subsequent qualification. According to the European Commission publication on *Structural indicators for Monitoring Education and Training Systems in Europe*, of the 35 countries which were reviewed, Malta is one of only eight countries with no compulsory requirement for at least one member of staff to have a tertiary (Bachelor-level) qualification in education sciences (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2022, 13).

At the time of writing this report, a second reform which is still awaiting Ministerial discussion and confirmation refers to the excerpt in the *National Standards for ECEC (0–3 years)* (MFED 2021a) which seeks to establish that Childcare Educators and Childcare Managers have an EQF Level 4 and 5 respectively with a minimum of 60 ECTS. If this position is accepted and implemented, having Childcare Educators with an EQF 4 qualification consisting of 60 ECTS will actually promote shorter courses than previous EQF 4 qualifications which were offered over two years of full-time study for a maximum of 120 ECTS.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

There are no national or large scale projects planned, commissioned or driven by the Ministry of Education or the DQSE which focus on the workforce, or the professional needs of the workforce in the sector. Small-scale research which included ECEC staff as the main participants has shed light on some crucial issues, even where workforce issues may not have been the main focus.

Reflecting on ‘quality’ in early childhood education: practitioners’ perspectives and voices

Source: Sollars 2022a (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Participants were invited to reflect upon, discuss and define quality.

Methods: Data included responses from over 400 practitioners from Malta and Gozo employed as KGEs in 34 State, Church and Independent settings, together with Childcare Educators and some Managers from 16 childcare settings via semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions.

Selected findings: Data indicates that the practitioners themselves, the work they do and the potential impact their professional relationships and experiences have on children are not characteristics which feature prominently in the participants’ considerations about quality issues.

Implications: Practitioners do not acknowledge themselves or their professional work as central to the quality of services offered in early years settings. This suggests a lack of awareness about the potential impact which their professional and/or pedagogical knowledge and competences, have on the quality of the learning experiences. Such findings are of concern in light of earlier research which resulted in significant correlations between higher teacher education and qualifications with higher quality ECEC environments including the programme structure (Manning, Wong, Fleming, and Garvis 2019).

“There’s always room for improvement”: Practitioners’ perspectives on challenges to quality in ECEC settings

Source: Sollars 2022b (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Participants were invited to identify challenges they face when attempting to offer quality services.

Methods: Data were collected from 460 practitioners across Malta and Gozo who were employed as KGEs in 34 State, Church and Independent settings, together with Childcare Educators and some Managers from 16 childcare settings via semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions.

Selected findings: Responses given by practitioners yielded three broad categories of challenges: work-related; challenges arising from the nature of the relationships with stakeholders, including children, parents, colleagues and the leadership staff; and professional challenges which arose from the practitioners’ perceptions about their profession and other issues associated to pedagogies and practices.

Implications: Practitioners cannot address work-related challenges single-handedly. Systemic shortcomings need to be strategically addressed, especially to give staff the confidence to make them articulate and assertive when discussing, defending and deciding what constitutes quality early years programmes and environments. A disheartened workforce which perceives itself as a voiceless profession requires professional support and development, adequate resources and facilities which collectively would contribute towards a concerted effort to improve quality services in the early years.

Introducing curricular changes in Maltese kindergarten settings. A comparison of stakeholders’ perspectives

Source: Portanier 2022 (unpublished Master’s dissertation) (see *References* for full details)

Aims: Data were collected in 2018–2019 at the time when the emergent curriculum was being introduced and professional development sessions were organised for the senior management/leadership teams and the KGEs across all settings.



Methods: The inquiry was conducted with two Education Officers, four Assistant Heads with responsibilities for the kindergarten setting in their State school and thirteen practitioners working with 3 to 4 year-olds. Through interviews, participants were asked to discuss what they knew about (i) the learning outcomes framework (DQSE 2015) which had been developed for the early years following the publication of the National Curriculum Framework (MEDE 2012) and (ii) the emergent curriculum which they were expected to adopt and implement during that scholastic year.

Selected findings: Thematic analysis of the qualitative data led the researcher to conclude that *“rather than being informed about the curricular changes and implementing decisions taken by external sources, practitioners at the coalface need to be involved at the development stage of any policy in order to own the process and implement it effectively”*.

Implications: The researcher noted that there was a gap between the intended curriculum and the enacted curriculum and the differences in the views expressed by the participants indicated that stakeholders, *“did not appear to have been adequately prepared to adopt or translate it to best practice and appropriate pedagogy”*.

COVID-19 and education in Malta (Cov-EM) study

Source: Bonello, Camilleri, Deguara, Milton, and Muscat 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: A research report focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on the personal and professional lives of kindergarten educators, childcare educators and learning support educators during the first and second waves of the pandemic (2019/2020; 2020/2021).

Methods: Data were collected through two online surveys, which included open-ended questions. 201 kindergarten educators, 30 childcare educators and 29 learning support educators participated in the first survey and 58 kindergarten educators and 11 learning support educators took part in the second survey.

Selected findings: Early years pedagogies for the under-fives were reshaped within online and off-line environments. In addition to the uneven start to online learning, early years practitioners did not use daily online interactive, live sessions creating a sense of detachment among parents and young children. Shifting to online activities had some benefits (such as more parent engagement) but did not come without its challenges shedding doubt on the extent to which online learning environments are successful learning spaces for young children.

Implications: Among the recommendations proposed in the report, the researchers propose strengthening the technological preparedness of early years educators for online learning spaces to capitalise on children’s learning. They also advocate for increased curriculum time for early years educators to promote collaborative, critical, reflective practices and professional growth; increased monitoring and support for educators and early years leaders.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Malta continues to face several challenges in relation to the early years workforce including initial professional education (IPE) and continuing professional development (CPD); monitoring and support of practices during IPE and in employment; and recording, maintaining and evaluating data about the settings, the services and the work-force.

Initial professional education of Childcare and Kindergarten Educators

The issues around IPE, qualifications and CPD are multifaceted. In the first decade of the 21st century the primary challenge focused on ensuring that early years educators have a qualification at a time when unregulated childcare settings were beginning to flourish. A two-year full-time course was one of the first to be introduced in 2001 when MCAST was set up. This BTEC course was offered before home-grown programmes became available. It targeted students seeking employment in childcare settings but, with some additions to what was referred to as the ‘extended practice placement’, it gradually replaced the two-year full-time course for KGEs which used to be offered by the Education Department between 1993–2003. Simultaneously, private institutions and public entities such as the Employment Training Corporation (ETC)⁵⁷ introduced a variety of courses directed at women seeking to (re)join the labour market. The duration of the programme, number of ECTS and depth of content covered was somewhat sporadic but courses received their EQF rating once the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) was set up in 2012 with a specific mission to oversee ‘the regulation of the Further and Higher education sector in Malta, making sure that the Malta Qualifications Framework is respected throughout’ (NCFHE and MEDE 2016, 5).

Gradual changes and adjustments have been introduced in a piecemeal fashion. The focus has been on the EQF level irrespective of the variation in the number of ECTS attributed to courses considered as appropriate, formal qualifications. Little consideration seems to have been given to the content of these courses. Task permeability has been allowed merely by virtue of accredited EQF 4 courses and with the lure of better working conditions in kindergarten settings. Staff initially trained to work with under threes have been employed in kindergarten settings without much consideration attributed to the different roles and responsibilities assigned to an early years workforce engaging with very young children at different stages of development. The content of the courses offered by various institutions, together with the philosophy and didactic-pedagogic practices promoted, need to be reviewed at the same time as taking initiatives to harmonise and strengthen the early years initial and continuing professional development.

As mentioned earlier, the EQF 4 course offered by MCAST has always included 120 ECTS. However, in the ongoing process of establishing standardised minimal qualifications at both EQF 4 and 5 levels, courses having a minimum of 60 ECTS are now the qualifications required for employment for Childcare Educators or Managers respectively (MFED 2021a), and an EQF 5 worth 30 ECTS is now the minimum required qualification for KGEs. There are several concerns arising from these changes:

1. Despite the attempts to harmonise the minimum qualifications of staff, the duration of the mandatory initial qualification is being curtailed, transmitting a message that getting qualified to work in ECEC is a relatively short journey. If EQF Level 4 and 5 60 ECTS courses are acceptable qualifications what motivation would students have to pursue a longer programme of studies? Top-up courses are already underway for holders of a EQF5 with 120 ECTS to proceed to an undergraduate degree. This in itself is praiseworthy but the downside of this upgrading is that qualified personnel continue to be drawn away from working with the youngest children.

⁵⁷ The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) was established in August 1990 through an act of Parliament entitled the Employment and Training Services Act. Its primary functions were those of providing a public employment service and training persons to improve their skills to find employment. Its training function focused on the provision of training courses and the management of apprenticeship schemes. In June 2016, an act of Parliament brought about the change in name from Employment and Training Corporation to Jobsplus (2023).



2. With a reduction in the length and therefore duration of the course content, students will have less opportunity to engage with key, critical issues affecting their practices in early years settings. New recruits in both childcare and kindergarten settings will have less background knowledge and fewer theoretical insights.
3. Since the EQF 5 worth 60 ECTS is now the minimal qualification for Childcare Managers and this coincides with the necessary qualification to be employed as a Kindergarten Educator (KGE II), when programmes of study will be again considered interchangeable to admit individuals to either professional role, irrespective of the content of the programme, it seems evident to conclude that staff may not be adequately trained to address the roles and responsibilities they will be assigned⁵⁸.
4. If working conditions remain unchanged, working in childcare settings will continue to be the introductory stepping stone in one's career and consequently, the least qualified staff will remain in childcare with an EQF 4 of 60 ECTS.
5. The NOS for Childcare Educators and Managers present criteria against which to address the content of the IPE courses applicable to staff at childcare but there are no established criteria for staff in kindergarten settings and which could offer a common framework for programme accreditation.
6. A mapping exercise needs to be undertaken to ensure that the expectations of the NOS are actually being addressed and met with programmes developed for childcare staff; a similar exercise needs to be done to compare the skills, knowledge and understanding which prospective KGEs are offered in their IPE. In the absence of criteria which would allow for comparisons, IPE programmes will continue to be developed and promoted without any shared vision, underlying philosophy, theoretical understanding or professional insights prospective practitioners would have acquired about ECEC and which they would be expected to promote through their practices.
7. Having KGEs qualified to various EQF levels, without any distinction in the assigned roles when employed in kindergarten settings (differences in designations are reflected in the salary of KGE I, II or III), does not motivate individuals to improve their understanding, development and theoretical perspectives; nor does this situation help to promote a sense of collegiality among staff. Educators with higher qualifications are not assigned tasks to lead and support their colleagues when/as needed. In a context where Educators with an undergraduate qualification are not assigned leading roles, where the immediate support of the school leadership team could also be absent, and when three EOs for the entire early years sector in Malta are unable to meet the needs of the staff, not investing in KGE III personnel to share their insights and knowledge is sadly a wasted resource.
8. The absence of any national and/or longitudinal study to investigate the impact which early years services and the early years workforce are having on children's short, medium and long term achievements is long overdue. There are concerns about achievements in children's later school years: both PISA (2018) and PIRLS (2016) reports about Maltese students reading achievements indicate that Maltese students' reading levels are well below the international

⁵⁸ Compiled information about IPE indicates that several recent (no longer available) and current courses serve/d as initial qualification routes for the ECEC workforce. The qualifications of the workforce as identified in *Chapter 3* illustrates that despite programme documentation claiming to prepare participants for either childcare or kindergarten, courses initially introduced for childcare, have been accepted as an appropriate qualification for kindergarten, irrespective of the content or the occupational roles and responsibilities. Judgement of the suitability of a qualification for employability was/is based on the EQF level, the number of credits and the professional practice placement component with little consideration about the content of the modules/study-units.



average. Malta still ranks among the top six EU countries having higher numbers of early school leavers than the average EU target (Eurostat 2021), although inroads have been registered and the number of early school leavers has been reduced over the past years. A document entitled *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024: Sustaining Foundations, Creating Alternatives, Increasing Employability* (MEDE 2014a) seems to have been shelved despite the promise of ‘*a strategic document which will outline the plan for the next 10 years, starting from early childhood education and care...*’ (p. 8). Another document – *A Strategic Plan for the prevention of early school leaving in Malta*, had recommended that “*MEDE to monitor the nationwide provision of free childcare to ensure that it is a quality experience for staff, children and parents, and that it contributes to the children’s development as they prepare themselves to get into early childhood education*” (MEDE 2014b, 21). Eight years on, this recommendation has not been taken up. Moreover, this recommendation betrays a misunderstanding of ‘early childhood education’ and suggests that childcare is some ‘preparatory’ phase before early childhood education!

A review of IPE programme content could also shed light on requirements for CPD. If CPD is to have maximum impact on the workforce and their practices, the content needs to be directed at the identified needs and gaps which Educators would demonstrate in their practices and in their abilities to reflect and discuss the work they do with children, families and colleagues.

Continuing professional development for Childcare and Kindergarten Educators

CPD for Childcare Educators and managers is limited and offered upon request. The EOs within the DES have started offering CPD to childcare settings which are flagged by DQSE. CPD for KGEs within schools is somewhat more organised. One challenge concerns the relevance of the CPD sessions for staff working with kindergarten-aged children. The dilemma arises whether to do CPD sessions specifically for KGE or invite KGE to follow CPD identical to/with primary school teachers simply because they are located within a primary school and therefore kindergarten staff would feel that they belong and are an integral part of the educational system rather than simply an appendix to the primary school setting. However, KGEs often complain that the professional development sessions dedicated to discussing and agreeing on action plans which the school sets out for the subsequent scholastic year are driven by the needs of the primary school and its expectations about achievements of older children. Some suggest that this impacts the work they are expected to do with kindergarten children in preparation for primary school. The content of the CPD would also be expected to be more relevant where educators are invited to suggest, identify and participate in decisions about their CPD rather than simply attend sessions because the rest of the school has PD days (in the case of KGEs working within schools) or when the CPD time is taken up by issues identified as being of national priority or where the school administration determines what the school priorities are with minimal consideration about how this is relevant and applies to kindergarten staff and children.

The work-based components of any IPE are crucial for the students and are a vital learning experience when appropriately supervised and mentored. Currently, there is no programme for mentors who are monitoring, supporting and assessing students during their practicum. Especially in childcare, there seem to be very few appropriately qualified and experienced examiners/supervisor/assessors or mentors who can follow students and assist them in their professional development. In situations where Managers of childcare settings, may find themselves mentoring and supervising students on their work placements despite having minimal qualifications, practice and understanding or work experience with children, the placement experience would be reduced simply to a matter of clocking up hours.



The importance of carefully monitored and assessed practice placements during IPE courses becomes more crucial in the absence of any induction, mentoring or support for newly qualified staff either in childcare or kindergarten settings. Induction periods, mentoring and support measures need to be addressed to ensure that responsive and sensitive carers plan, prepare and deliver appropriate activities and experiences for children.

Monitoring and support systems need to be established especially when newly qualified staff are recruited and where placement supervision during IPEs may be weak. Staff who mentor, monitor, support and have a lead role in early years settings, should have a clear vision about early childhood education and care and its benefits for children and families and should themselves be well-informed about pedagogical approaches which can best be adapted to suit young children. Monitoring and support cannot be offered by colleagues who have limited knowledge, insights and understanding about early years education or the challenges faced by the educators.

Recording, maintaining and evaluating data about settings and services

The Directorates which are responsible for the childcare and kindergarten settings require data collection procedures and systems which ensure that vital information about all members of staff employed in early years settings together with their employment history can be easily traced. Upon employment, staff should be bound to provide accurate information about their qualifications as well as be obliged to inform the appropriate sources of their termination and/or engagement of duties elsewhere within the sector. Having incomplete or inaccurate data does not capture the true strengths of the workforce.

Service providers and personnel involved in recording data about qualifications need to be instructed and assisted to ensure that information is reported accurately and thoroughly. Having to go through individual files to retrieve data pertaining to the initial professional qualifications or trying to make sense of data inputted independently by the administrative staff from every school or setting makes this process cumbersome and subject to inaccuracies, therefore becoming less reliable.

Concluding remarks

Despite repeated discourse about the importance of early childhood education and care, the increase in services and the continued attempts to make settings more affordable, there has not been any attempt to take stock of the situation from a holistic perspective and to address the crucial issues, namely how the quality of children's learning experiences impact their achievements and progress in later years through the contributions of highly qualified staff.

Raising the profile of the early years workforce is a delicate balancing act: the entry requirements expected when accepting students for IPE; the depth of knowledge and understanding acquired through the IPE; support through induction and mentoring together with opportunities for CPD; employability prospects; decent conditions of work and the reduction of staff turnover are interlinking challenges which have to be addressed. Resolving the different aspects satisfactorily requires a well-researched and well thought out policy which includes an equally insightful strategy to ensure its successful implementation.



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Acknowledgements

Compiling the report⁵⁹ was possible with the assistance of several individuals who kindly provided me with requested data and patiently replied to several queries which I raised from time to time. To all, thank you very much. Your assistance was invaluable and highly appreciated.

Church School Secretariat

Ms Marika Abela, Service Manager Training and Mentoring, Secretariat for Catholic Education
Dr Ian Mifsud, Director for Curriculum & Standards, Secretariat for Catholic Education

Heads of schools, childcare and kindergarten settings

Ms Svetlana Amato from Sagħtrija Childcare Centre
Ms Tamara Baldacchino Briffa from St Cecilia's Childcare Centre
Ms Annemarie Carabot, Head of St Michael's School
Ms Daniela Demicoli, Head of St Francis Primary School
Ms Annelise Domenici & Ms Stephanie Grech from St Edward's College
Ms Antonella Ferrante, Head of Mosta 'A' Primary School
Ms Erika Galea from Chiswick House School
Ms Johanna Gatt, Head of Childcare services at the University of Malta
Ms Tami Mac an Bhaird, Head of Thi Lakin School
Staff at Vista Coop

Faculty of Education, University of Malta

Dr Jonathan Borg, formerly Early intervention teacher
Ms Audrey Galea, formerly Head of Church School

Foundation for Educational Services (FES)

Mr Jefflyn Grech, Inclusive Education co-ordinator

Jobsplus

Mr Raphael Scerri,
Ms Alexia Vella, CEO
Ms Doriana Bezzina, Head of Division – EU & International Affairs, Research & Intelligence
Ms Graziella Caruana, Unit Manager – EU Affairs
Ms Mariella Vella, Dept Manager

Malta College for Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST)

Ing Philip Dalmas,
Ms Maria Pace, Registrar
Mr John Vella, Deputy Registrar

Malta Further & Higher Education Authority (MFHEA)

⁵⁹ The data were compiled between September 2021 and May 2023. The designation of individuals listed was accurate at the time data were being collected.



Mr Lawrence Azzopardi, Head Accreditation, Licensing, Validation and Quality Assurance

Malta Union of Teachers (MUT)

Mr Marco Bonnici, President of the MUT

Ministry for Education

Mr Emile Vassallo, Director General, Directorate for Educational Services (DES)

Ms Lucienne Calleja, Director Education Resources

Ms Denise Gatt, Director Quality Assurance, DQSE

Ms Josanne Ghirxi, Director, National School Support Services (NSSS)

Ms Jackie Scerri, Assistant Director (People Management), HR Directorate

Ms Jeannine Vassallo, Senior Manager, Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning & Employability

Ms Josette Bezzina, Education Officer Early Years

Mr Louis Grech, Officer, Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning & Employability

Mr Saviour Grech, Education Officer, Non-State Schools

Dr Carlos Grima, Education Officer, ERS within DQSE

Ms Claire Mamo, Research Support Teacher, Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning & Employability

Ms Tania Mangion, Education Officer Early Years

Ms Maria McNamara, Officer Grade 4, Department for Education Resources

Ms Bernardette Mercieca, Education Officer, ERS within DQSE

Staff employed in centres offering IPE

Charlo Bonnici and Joe Balzan, Learning Works

Dr Diana Busuttil, Future Focus Ltd.

Mary Ann Vella, Outlook Coop

