

Malta's National **Strategic Action Plan** for Further and Higher Education

2022-2030



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Foreword

The Minister for Education, Sports, Youth, Research and Innovation

The Ministry for Education, Sports, Youths, Research, and Innovation supports sustainable and resilient providers of Further and Higher Education, and this Strategy is an important step towards that.

Our country is committed to bringing growth to our nation and our people. We must continue to work together to provide access to quality education for all. We must ensure and sustain a strong, ethical, high quality educational community to achieve development at both national and global level.

The Strategy places the students at the center and focuses on a robust quality assurance system and transparency. Having equitable further and higher education ensures that people irrespective of their socio-economic factors have an equal chance of educational attainment, retention, and completion.

Further and Higher Quality Education serves to enrich our modern society in many complex ways, and it is an integral part of our local and international communities. Our country requires a network of high-quality education providers that are ready to act as enablers for change, to respond to challenges while contributing to research, innovation, and excellence.

The strategy recognises the central role that further and higher education institutions have in the path towards sustainable growth, and the creation of a competitive island.

The key trends and drivers up to 2030 promises preparedness to shape a resilient society in the 21st Century. The relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research, as well as Strategic Internationalisation and Mobility will connect us and move us forward to advance and address the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our goal continues to be focused on personal and professional development through lifelong learning based on democratic values, and we need to invest in widening participation and adult learning.

The strategic plan provides a considered and informed basis for government policy on the development of further and higher education.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority and the stakeholders who have contributed time and expertise throughout the consultation stages.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clifton Grima".

Dr. Clifton Grima



Executive Summary

Recent world events have served to highlight the growing fragility of our planet and the vulnerability of our society to systemic crisis and sudden shocks. These challenging times of pandemic, conflict and the drive towards economic, societal and individual recovery call for innovative policy approaches to build resilience at all levels of society and the economy. Education must rise to this challenge by supporting learning in a range of emerging contexts through flexible formats and content, tailored for diverse communities, their needs and lifestyles. Education and learning need to become more responsive and anticipatory in this dynamic environment.

Indeed, education and learning are on the move just as much as society is on the move. We have embarked on pathways leading to major transitions, societal, demographic, digital, green and industry 5.0. These will generate new economic opportunities, new jobs, work locations, work framework and conditions. Preparing young people for the economy in 2030 requires anticipation of new career paths and skills needs in the private and public sectors.

This Strategic Plan identifies key trends and drivers up to 2030 and their relevance to further and higher education, with a view to mapping and tackling emerging opportunities and threats. The policy implications and recommended actions highlight the need for closer policy synergies between education, research, and industry /enterprise. This co-design of policies needs to extend to the digital, health and environment policy areas.

The review of Malta's performance to date in the education policy domain indicates that significant progress has been made in addressing EU and national targets. However, these efforts need to be sustained and remaining gaps to be addressed, for example by building a culture for quality and transparency, empowering stakeholders, as well as widening participation and reducing the number of early dropouts.

The Strategic Plan revisits the Vision and guiding principles for further and higher education to ensure they are future-ready for 2030 and beyond. The seven pillars for implementing the Vision focus on building a sound basis for more joined-up policies across government and with industry. The Plan envisages in the first instance the setting up of effective structures for policy co-design and the mechanisms for rolling out the required measures. A key priority across the seven pillars is the need to strengthen the evidence base for policy design, the setting of commonly agreed targets and effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

MFHEA Chief Executive Officer
Dr. Rose Anne Cuschieri

Introduction and emerging context

The challenges facing further and higher education up to 2030 are multi-faceted and complex and their resolution depends on the co-design of government-wide coordinated policy responses based on robust, forward-looking approaches. In this introductory section, the aim is to analyse and explore the emerging policy context for education, taking into account demographic, technological, socio-economic and geopolitical trends and drivers. Relevant EU and national policy developments will be mapped in order to identify issues of potential opportunity and concern, requiring national action.

This is followed by a review of Malta's performance in relation to key EU indicators and targets in education and training. This will help to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the national education ecosystem as well as emerging opportunities and threats. The aim is to provide a preliminary evidence base for prioritising and designing required actions and measures.

1.1 Key Trends and Drivers up to 2030

This section focuses on current and emerging trends and drivers of key relevance for further and higher education in Malta up to 2030. As evidenced by current events in the Ukraine, the geopolitical context is emerging as a particularly strong driver with potentially destabilising effects on economic and social trends and drivers. The current crisis and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic highlight the need to keep track of a dynamic global context and to prepare society to cope with systemic crisis. The table below aims to flag emerging opportunities, challenges and threats in the local context which are opening up and the main policy implications for education.

TRENDS AND DRIVERS

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Demographic

In Europe, demographic change has been identified as a dynamic transformation process on a par with the green and digital transitions currently underway. Recently it has become apparent that more complex dynamics are emerging due to the interactions between demographic change and the twin green and digital transitions which often cause them to support or accelerate each other.¹

Another important driver is the mobility of young people in pursuit of career, education, training and business opportunities which is profoundly shaping Europe's demographic profile.²

In the last century Malta has been undergoing a gradual demographic transition, going from high birth and death rates to declining death rates due to an improving health care system, which led to population growth and improved life expectancy. The elderly population is expected to double by 2050³, increasing its dependence on the economically active population and requiring more carers and medical staff⁴. Emigration and brain drain have been complemented by inward migration flows, giving rise to social and educational challenges. Inward and outward flows of young people, students, workers, researchers, foreign workers and migrants are expected to increase in the coming decades.

These trends collectively require timely and effective policy responses and there is no one-size-fits-all. EU and national policies need to be tailored, based on sound analysis of how demographic change factors interact with local and national realities.

In order to counteract the effects of demographic and economic declines, the EU highlights the importance of developing closer interlinkages between education, research and innovation within the European Research Area.

The education ecosystem will need to be better prepared to manage these inward and outward flows of students and workers. It needs to be more resilient in the face of these disruptions and rather to embrace them as necessary transitions.

Policy co-design links between education, employment and innovation are critical for addressing the demographic challenge, particularly in the context of green and digital transitions. This will ensure that the required human resources and skills are in place and effective participation in the related EU initiatives.

Environmental

Environmental change is expected to continue on its upward spiral up to 2030 due to a growing incidence of natural and man-made hazardous events including droughts, desertification, floods, fires, earthquakes and dispersion of radioactive gases in the atmosphere. The combination of these is expected to generate major social, environmental and economic impacts.⁵

Climate change has become an independent driver of environmental change⁶ and its effects are expected to become more prominent up to 2030. Whereas in the past economic development has been a driver of climate change, in the future climate change is expected to create critical challenges for economic development and to test the resilience of economies and societies. Indeed the risks to human societies through impacts on livelihoods, health, food and water security, and biodiversity are a matter of growing concern. Climate change is expected to amplify existing risks and create new risks for natural and human systems and to test their resilience and ability to adapt. Combined with demographic change, it is likely to cause further disruption, e.g. in the Mediterranean increasing desertification could result in climate migration into Europe.

Global agreement and action to control climate change are expected to offset these challenges and risks. The EU's drive to promote a green transition will provide a stimulus in the right direction.

These trends highlight the need for policy action on a number of levels in terms of re-aligning education and training to meet the challenge of climate change and a green transition.⁷ This entails providing appropriately qualified teachers and staff, curricula⁸, content, methods and tools to equip learners with the skills and knowledge to act on the climate emergency, support the green transition and thrive in the green economy.

Education needs to play a more proactive role in changing attitudes and behaviour, by instilling values and a sense of responsibility towards the global commons, as well as supporting informed decisions on the part of policy-makers, producers and consumers.

Education policy needs to work hand in hand with environmental and R&I policies to empower all, in particular, young people to take action by exploring opportunities in the green economy and supporting green transition, and more sustainable lifestyles. Education needs to equip teachers and learners with a broad range of skills and competences from the development of multidisciplinary approaches and competences to anticipate and address climate change, from mitigation and adaptation, to disaster risk reduction and resilience.

1 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/impact-demographic-change-europe#impacts-of-demographic-change>
 2 https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vlidcy9crrxu?ctx=vg9pjpw5wsz1&start_tab1=5 and <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC123046>
 3 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_structure_and_ageing&oldid=549185
 4 <https://www.inia.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/4.2.1-Measuring-and-Modelling-Demographic-Trends-in-Malta-pgs-78-90-Final.pdf>

5 <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/research-topic/natural-and-man-made-hazards>
 6 https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27654/GEO6_CH2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
 7 https://ec.europa.eu/education/news/greener-more-sustainable-europe-public-consultation_en
 8 https://www.uncclearn.org/wp-content/uploads/library/resource_guide_on_integrating_cc_in_education_primary_and_secondary_level.pdf

Socio-economic

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution impacts on socio-economic and demographic drivers with significant disruption to business models and labour markets, the fifth Industrial Revolution is set to ‘place trust in technology, ensuring that it is being used for the good of the world, not just for profit.’ Indeed, Industry 5.0⁹ is set to move beyond productivity, to re-orient industry with a new vision of contributing to society

This comes with a growing emphasis on worker wellbeing and research and innovation driving the transition “to a sustainable, human-centric and resilient European industry”.

New jobs and skills¹⁰ sets are expected to emerge, transforming work patterns with more home-based work and gender considerations.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted negatively on some key economic sectors and social groups, while opening new niche markets and business models. The full extent of the social impact on the poorer, weaker parts of society has yet to be captured. The social economy has played an important role in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. Its prime focus is on addressing societal challenges, “using sustainable and inclusive economic practices, and participatory and democratic governance, to generate economic activities with positive social impact based on local roots.”¹¹ By 2030, the demand for the social economy is expected to become greater, as a means for coping with the social disruption of demographic, green and digital transitions, by contributing to territorial cohesion, inclusive growth, social innovation and environmental sustainability.

The socio-economic drivers up to 2030 will create key challenges for education policy, as it is challenged to keep up with the disruptions in the labour market. The majority of primary school children have to be prepared for jobs which do not yet exist.¹²

The education system needs to work more closely with enterprises to develop education and training initiatives which support the future economy, in particular the social economy. This will entail actions to ensure that there is a stronger emphasis on values, and social economy principles, including self-responsibility, democracy and equality. These models must be taught at all levels (primary, secondary, university, vocational) in order to build competences, reinforce skills, and ensure that young people are prepared for future careers.

Action is needed at EU and national level to support the upskilling of workers for the future social economy in areas such as digitalisation, participatory governance and the green transition.

There is an opportunity to build on the attraction of the social economy for young people, and to invest in it through national actions, thereby opening up a range of opportunities from creativity, personal development and socially relevant skills, to new jobs linked to social innovation and community building.

A key driver of the social economy is that it offers potential for more equitable access to the labour market and jobs for young people. The social economy also has a resonating effect with younger generations¹³, keen on striving for more sustainable and equitable livelihoods and communities, based on active citizenship, solidarity and democratic values.

Technological

The evolving dynamics between technology and learning is challenging traditional roles, content and methods of education to meet the needs of new economy sectors (including green and digital) and a fast-changing labour market. The education market is in turn experiencing greater openness to online competition from global digital providers as well as opportunities for alliances to source content.

Key technologies with potential to revolutionise tomorrow’s learning are:

- Artificial intelligence (and big data)¹⁴, in particular learning analytics, the personalisation of learning content, and monitoring and control of learners’ behaviour;
- Augmented and virtual reality offer immersive learning, by increasing learners’ motivation and the retention of learning content with applications mostly in vocational education;
- Blockchain with applications in certification, recognition of degrees, tracking of academic content and work,
- Highly equipped and connected classrooms with digital equipment, access to digital content.

These technology trends are influencing and challenging education systems to make the transition to the digital age and to provide the soft and technical skills and competencies for the future global labour market and jobs that may not yet exist. This entails rethinking education to support social inclusion and equal participation of citizens in a digitalised democracy.¹⁵

Effective education policies are needed for the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem. This will depend on gearing up education providers for technology-assisted learning through provision of appropriate support in the form of guidelines and standards (data protection), online infrastructure (including platforms), capacity development (access to expertise and training), digitally competent teachers/staff; and high-quality content.

Digital education policies have evolved through three generations¹⁶ from (i) infrastructure development to (ii) teacher and student competence building and training to the current drive towards (iii) systemic integration of digital education into the overall educational settings.

9 https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/industrial-research-and-innovation/industry-50_en

10 <https://reports.weforum.org/future-of-jobs-2016/chapter-1-the-future-of-jobs-and-skills/>

11 <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/social-economy-and-the-covid-19-crisis-current-and-future-roles-f904b89f/>

12 <https://reports.weforum.org/future-of-jobs-2016/chapter-1-the-future-of-jobs-and-skills/#view/fn-1>

13 https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/civsocdays_2021_ws_2.pdf

14 https://iite.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Steven_Duggan_AI-in-Education_2020.pdf

15 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation#1>

16 EPRS Study (2019)

In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic has played a significant catalytic role in forcing the transition from traditional learning towards more technology-enabled and on demand learning. By 2030, smart technologies in the classroom, will facilitate hyper- personalized learning based on individual needs and appropriately tailored educational approaches and content. Adaptive learning technology such as intelligent tutoring systems can detect students' knowledge or gaps in knowledge and design appropriate steps for learning through new curricula, exercises and forms. Social robots will be increasingly used for learning purposes.

Sustainability pressures on travel may change the international student model with a higher digital content combined with shorter international experiences on campus.

The shift to third and next generation policies calls for closer collaboration between Ministries responsible for education, employment, digital and R&I to develop coordinated, forward-looking policies.

Malta's strong digital footprint opens up a range of viable opportunities in the digital education and serious gaming sector.

Geopolitical

Emerging geopolitical trends and drivers up to 2030 and beyond are expected to have a profound impact on education, particularly in terms of educational systems and markets, as well as goals, values, approaches and content.¹⁷

Governance is shifting as key policies are being influenced by global events and agenda-setting. Climate, R&I and education priorities are increasingly being shaped and determined by global and European agendas, for example the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals¹⁸ and EU Next Gen¹⁹.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, worrying geopolitical developments were causing some EU Member States to adopt more nationalistic policies to address sovereignty concerns. The pandemic has highlighted further the growing vulnerability to external shocks and the need to protect the EU's assets and value systems and its ability to set its own policies, defend its strategic interests and to play a globally responsible role. The open strategic autonomy (OSA)²⁰ approach adopted by the EU in 2020 aims at reinforcing the EU's independence and resilience in defense, trade, industrial, digital, economic, monetary, health, energy and technological policy.

Ongoing shifts of power to Asia and the emergence of new global players highlight the need to reduce the EU's dependence on foreign innovation providers by investing more in its "own economic, research and innovation capabilities, its labour market and its education system in order to avoid being taken over by emerging economies".²¹

Increased citizen activism is evident against 'foreign' educational installations on national soil which compete for scarce local resources.

Geopolitical developments are already having important ramifications for education policy, since old policy assumptions about the global context and international cooperation are being challenged.

There are indications that education could become a more globally contested commodity and market, as technology and digital assets become more subject to protection. Global players are expected to engage more extensively in the strategic use of cross-border education initiatives and to include such initiatives, as part of their foreign investment approach.

The EU is becoming more vigilant of the use of foreign educational investments as a means for wielding economic and political influence and gaining access to industry-relevant knowledge and R&I capabilities in the locality and EU-wide. A key ongoing EU policy drive is the European Universities Initiative²², which supports the emergence of bottom-up alliances of universities across Europe on a particular theme, as a means for promoting common European values and a strengthened European identity and supporting a significant leap in quality, performance and competitiveness.

The policy implications at national level highlight the need for Malta to invest more in education and R&I in order to reduce dependence on foreign providers and to keep attracting foreign students and global talent. This will put Malta on a par with other EU member states that are implementing OSA policies.

In turn, a rethinking of Malta's internationalization approach in this sector will be needed to take strategic advantage of emerging opportunities and mitigate potential risks.

17 https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/ESPAS_Report.pdf

18 <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>

19 https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en

20 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7e1bcf73-06e2-11ec-b5d3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

21 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/funding/documents/ec_rtd_horizon-europe-strategic-plan-2021-24.pdf

22 https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/european-universities-information-session-2022-call-proposals_en



1.2 Benchmarking Malta's education sector

Over the last decade, Malta has managed a significant transformation of the education sector as a whole. This is evidenced by impressive progress recorded on key EU education indicators, as indicated in the EU Education and Training Monitor (2020).²³ A key factor supporting this transition is the level of national public expenditure on education which is above the EU average, both as a proportion of GDP (5.2% compared to EU-27 4.6%) and as a proportion of total general government expenditure (14.2% compared to EU-27 9.9%). Malta also compares well with OECD countries, where total public spending on primary to tertiary education as a percentage of total government expenditure averages 11%, ranging from around 7 to 17%²⁴. This scale of public expenditure needs to be weighed up against timely achievement of targeted outcomes and impacts and the appropriate allocation of public expenditure on education in line with national priorities. Determining the effectiveness of public spending in education requires careful consideration of a complex of policy objectives and contextual factors requiring more in-depth analysis. In this context, the OECD Indicators Report recommends that Malta undertakes a careful evaluation of the effectiveness of the current allocation of resources and takes into consideration other measures.

Education at a Glance 2021 – OECD Indicators

The way resources are allocated across the different levels of education varies widely across countries. While countries such as Australia, Greece, Korea, Latvia and Lithuania devote a larger share of public funds to education compared to the proportion of students in pre-tertiary levels, the opposite is observed in the majority of other countries where a disproportionate share of resources (after excluding research and development expenditure) are devoted to tertiary education levels. This is particularly striking in countries such as Denmark where generous student grants are provided.

In terms of its performance in achieving education goals and targets, Malta has recorded progress on a number of fronts. In particular, the advance in **educational attainment** is reflected in an increase in the population with tertiary level education from 10.3% to 28.0% over the period 2005-2020.²⁵ Participation in **lifelong learning** exceeds the EU27 average. Improvements in education levels have to be assessed in the context of social changes underway in recent years linked to the growing role of women and foreign workers in the labour market. Important reforms to attract women to higher education account for approximately 56% of the increase in tertiary educational attainment over the same 15-year period. However, there is a persisting gender gap which is evident in particular fields of study, so while female participation in general has increased, there is still female under-representation in STEM programmes at the higher education level.

Another important achievement is the drop in the rate of **early school leavers** from 33.0% to 16.7% over the period 2005-2020. However this figure remains higher than the EU benchmark of 10% and the challenge of equipping early school leavers with basic qualifications and skills remains a key concern for the education system. On the EU structural indicators linked to early school leaving, Malta is among six EU Member States (Ireland, Greece, France, Cyprus and Austria) that have set quantitative targets for widening participation in 2021. On the achievement of basic skills, a key

23 <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/en/>

24 <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/b35a14e5-en.pdf?expires=1641821138&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=2A973992012F25CEA26BAD84BE4C2CFA>

25 <https://www.centralbankmalta.org/site/Publications/Economic%20Research/2021/policy-note-educational-attainment-in-Malta.pdf?revcount=4564>

aspect is the additional support provided for schools with disadvantaged students, including funds for additional staff, enhanced professional development opportunities in the delivery of inclusive education and career advice services. The Eurydice Background Report highlights Malta's initiative to set up a scheme providing additional support to disadvantaged students.

A study on **dropouts** 2015-16 conducted by MEDE's ESLU²⁶ identified key factors accounting for student decisions to drop out from post-secondary education, including course content not matching their expectations, the course being too difficult to follow, and to a lesser extent financial, family and transport constraints. The study recommended enhanced career guidance services, dedicated support for students with specific needs, customized programmes, including stand-alone and short courses, enhanced facilities (social space) and pastoral care and welfare. The public tertiary education providers have stepped up their efforts in this respect. The University of Malta's strategic plan (2022-25)²⁷ prioritises as one of its core strategies the provision of enhanced academic and pastoral support to students, in particular for disadvantaged students. It includes an emphasis on welfare and improved facilities and increased empowerment in terms of student involvement in planning and decision-making. MCAST in its strategic plan 2022-2027²⁸ includes student engagement and retention as the first transversal theme and sets as a smart target 2027, a student retention at the College of 70%. This will be implemented through the provision of holistic support, a dedicated space for students, enhanced student representation in decision-making structures, mobility support and enhanced access to key skills, enterprise and research and innovation.

Malta performs relatively well on the EU's structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems and the call to action in the Commission's Communication, 'Supporting growth and jobs: An agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems'.²⁹ Malta has prioritized both policy goals relating to increasing and widening participation, and improving the quality and relevance of higher education. According to the Eurydice Background Report on Structural Indicators, Malta has taken action to address four of the five structural indicators developed in relation to the headline target on education within the Europe 2020 growth strategy, namely:

- quantitative targets relating to the social dimension of higher education
- monitoring of the socio-economic characteristics of the student body.
- recognition of informal and non-formal learning on entry to higher education
- completion rates as a requirement in external quality assurance

The fifth indicator which focuses on performance-based funding mechanisms which financially reward higher education institutions for meeting defined social objectives, has yet to be implemented by the majority of European countries.

On the Eurydice Mobility Scoreboard for higher education³⁰, Malta has recorded a level of relative success on a number of the indicators compared to the other member states, in particular: foreign language preparation, portability of public grants and loans, and recognition of qualifications for learner mobility. Further efforts are needed to improve guidance for outward mobility and the

26 <https://researchandinnovation.gov.mt/en/Documents/ESLU%20E2%80%9320Study%20on%20Dropouts%202015-16.pdf>

27 <https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/strategy/UMStrategicPlan2020-2025.pdf>

28 https://www.mcast.edu.mt/wp-content/uploads/MCAST-Strategy-22-27_CONSULTATION_SPRING-2021.pdf

29 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/structural-indicators-monitoring-education-and-training-systems-europe-2021_en

30 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0f751de6-5782-11ea-8b81-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-120474453>

monitoring and evaluation of personalized services and participation of disadvantaged learners in mobility programmes.

		Malta		EU-27		
		2009	2019	2009	2019	
Education and training 2020 benchmarks						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)		25.7%	16.7%	14.0%	10.2%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)		21.9%	37.8%	31.1%	40.3%	
Early childhood education (from age 4 to starting age of compulsory primary education)		94.6%	95.3% ¹⁸	90.3%	94.8% ¹⁸	
Proportion of 15 year-olds underachieving in:	Reading	36.3%	35.9% ¹⁸	19.3%	22.5% ¹⁸	
	Maths	33.7%	30.2% ¹⁸	22.2%	22.9% ¹⁸	
	Science	32.5%	33.5% ¹⁸	17.8%	22.3% ¹⁸	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-8 (total)	92.9%	93.1%	78.0%	80.9%	
Adult participation in learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	6.2%	12.0%	7.9%	10.8% ⁹	
Learning mobility	Degree mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	9.4% ¹⁸	:	4.3% ¹⁸	
	Credit mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	5.3% ¹⁸	:	9.1% ¹⁸	
Other contextual indicators						
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	5.4%	5.2% ¹⁸	5.1%	4.6% ¹⁸	
	Expenditure on public and private institutions per student in € PPS	ISCED 1-2	€7 446 ¹²	€6 722 ¹⁷	€6 072 ^{4, 12}	€6 240 ^{4, 16}
		ISCED 3-4	€12 614 ¹²	€8 352 ¹⁷	:	€7 757 ^{4, 16}
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Native-born	26.0%	15.4%	12.6%	8.9%	
	Foreign-born	:	27.0%	29.3%	22.2%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)	Native-born	21.9%	32.7%	32.0%	41.3%	
	Foreign-born	22.1% ⁴	50.3%	25.1%	35.3%	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4	88.6%	88.8%	72.2%	75.9%	
	ISCED 5-8	97.0%	95.0%	83.7%	85.0%	

Detailed overview of performance

AREA	MAIN FINDINGS
Early childhood and school education	Participation in early childhood education remains around the EU average for children under 3 years of age. Pupils attending private schools perform better. However, the figure is decreasing for the older age group. Over the period 2013-2019 Malta has slipped from 99 to 91% ³¹ in relation to the EU target - at least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education participating in early childhood education by 2030. Strong efforts will be required to reverse this negative trend.
Early leavers	<p>In relation to early leavers from education and training, Malta has over the years improved its performance on this indicator, reducing the percentage of early leavers from 17.1% to 12.6%³². However, this remains higher than the majority of member states. Malta has to improve its efforts if it is to achieve the EU target of reducing the percentage of early leavers below 9% by 2030.</p> <p>Average levels of basic skills are low and a large percentage of pupils fail to achieve minimum proficiency levels. Malta will need to invest in significant efforts to achieve the EU target of reducing the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science from round 30%(2018) to less than 15%, by 2030.³³Efforts are being made to make the system more inclusive but challenges remain. The COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate educational inequalities and low levels of basic skills if its impact is not fully assessed. Better support for students' learning needs is key to achieve higher quality. Improving students' well-being could contribute to better learning outcomes and to reducing early school leaving.</p>
Vocational education and training (VET)	<p>Following a decline in 2017, enrolments in upper secondary VET increased from 27.1% to 28.5% in 2018. The proportion of VET learners at upper secondary level enrolled in programmes involving work-based learning rose to 35% in 2018 from 32% a year earlier, continuing the upward trend recorded in the past five years. This coincided with the entry into force of the Work-based Learning and Apprenticeship Act,³⁴ providing an effective framework for work placements, apprenticeships and internships, and the rights and responsibilities of trainees and employers, including the right to an income for trainees.</p> <p>The new secondary school system (European Commission 2019b) will help increase enrolment in vocational and applied paths, by making them more attractive.</p> <p>Efforts have been made to make vocational education more responsive to technological developments and to promote excellence in the provision of innovative technical and tertiary vocational education (VET). MCAST and ITS have introduced programmes focused on innovative practices and blending team delivery, and technological innovation. VET centres have continued to conduct lectures through distance learning, while practical sessions have been postponed.</p>

31 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/educ_uoe_enra21/default/table?lang=en

32 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/edat_ifse_14/default/table?lang=en

33 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDUC_OUTC_PISA__custom_1935163/default/table?lang=en

34 <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/576/eng/pdf>

<p>Higher education</p>	<p>In relation to the EHEA 2025³⁵ targets, Malta has registered a marked improvement in the percentage of 25 to 34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education, with an increase from 31.1% in 2013 to 40.1% in 2020³⁶. It will need to step up its efforts to meet the European target of 45% by 2030. Tertiary educational attainment has improved largely due to the arrival of EU nationals in the labour market. A large attainment gap exists between native-born (32.7%) and foreign-born individuals (50.3%), with a considerable difference between people from non-EU countries (45.8%) and EU nationals (63.7%). This highlights Malta's high reliance on foreigners to meet skills shortages and sustain economic growth (European Commission, 2020a). This may account for the increase in new entrants to tertiary programmes up to 2018. This together with the rise in part-time courses could also have a positive impact on participation trends provided that COVID-19 does not have a long-term impact on early school leaving or on university dropout rates. Lessons and exams have been held online and admission criteria have been reviewed to ease the transition from secondary level.</p> <p>Efforts are underway to better align higher education with labour market needs. Despite the very high employment rate of recent tertiary graduates (95% v 85% at EU level in 2019), skills shortages remain an issue at all levels. As Malta's economy is heavily reliant on tourism and services, temporary business closures during the pandemic are likely to affect overall employment levels, including those of recent graduates with least work experience. Difficulties in finding and retaining specialised skilled workers is one of the main challenges expressed by employers (European Commission 2020a). The significant increase (+85%) in the number of new entrants into ICT fields between 2015 and 2018 may help better match labour market needs in the future.</p>
<p>Adult learning</p>	<p>Participation in adult learning among the low-qualified remains low. A strong drive is required to meet the European target of at least 60% of adults participating in learning by 2030. Malta's high proportion of low-qualified adults continued to decline but the need for upskilling and reskilling remains. Malta is making efforts to improve the quality of adult learning. In line with the national lifelong learning strategy 2020 and as part of the migration of adult educators' training to the University of Malta, a new diploma course in Adult Education and Training with a unit on online teaching was introduced in February 2020 and the pandemic has prompted a complete shift to online teaching at the Lifelong Learning Centre. This may help overcome the resistance to converting learning from traditional in-person delivery to blended adult learning courses, which represents a key challenge in the promotion of digital education in Malta.</p>

<p>Policy evaluation</p>	<p>Strengthening policy monitoring and evaluation will ensure more effective education policies, including better student learning outcomes.</p> <p>The adoption³⁷ of a number of strategy and policy documents to address specific aspects of education, including compulsory education needs to be backed up by monitoring and evaluation of implementation and targeted results (particularly ESL/ELET reduction and TIMMS/PIRLS improvements). Improved data collection, dedicated reviews and tracer studies covering compulsory, further, higher education to employment) would allow the development of more informed analyses.</p>
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Malta ranks 6th among EU member states in the EU Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI),³⁸ performing well on human capital (11th) including ICT graduates (6% v. EU 3.9%) and ICT specialists, although less well on female ICT specialists (11% v. EU19%). Malta will need to step up its efforts to meet the Digital Decade¹⁰ target of 80% of population with at least basic digital skills by 2030. Indeed, the 2021 report highlights the need for Malta to sustain its drive to provide basic digital skills society-wide in line with “the good positioning achieved in terms of advanced and specialised digital skills and in other digital-related dimensions. Efforts are also important in order to close the existing gender gap in the digital sector and match the growing demand for skilled labour force, which may increasingly represent an obstacle to further progress in digitalisation of the economy and public administration”.

The EU Innovation Scoreboard (EIS)³⁹ compares Malta's performance with EU member states on key R&I-related indicators, including higher education and employment. Based on 2020 data, the EIS 2021 indicates an overall improvement in Malta's ranking as a moderate innovator. This can be attributed to strong improvements in human resources, employment impacts and in particular attractive research systems with the highest rate of performance increase (47%). Malta is strong on Environmental sustainability, Use of information technologies and Intellectual assets. Compared to the EU benchmark, Malta excels on Employment in knowledge-intensive activities and has improved performance significantly on foreign doctorate students, and Innovative SMEs collaborating with others.

In terms of global benchmarks, Malta ranks favourably on key indicators related to the provision of transnational education (TNE). According to the British Council global gauge database⁴⁰ which benchmarks countries on TNE, international student mobility and international research engagement, Malta ranks third (out of 57) in terms of doing most to embed TNE in the national system. It ranks 7th on recognition of TNE qualifications by local labour law. It ranks 13th both in relation to facilitating inward student mobility and in allowing the setting up of international branch campuses. According to a study⁴¹ conducted in 2018 on Malta's viability as an international education hub, “the country possesses a strong set of factor conditions - e.g. the wide use of English, the quality of human capital, and high-quality IT infrastructure – that create a positive environment for the development of TNE and generally the presence of foreign higher education institutions. ...In conjunction with the welcoming environment for foreign investments, the favourable factor conditions and firm rivalry create the prospects for innovative forms of TNE (i.e. combining different forms of TNE, exploring blended modes).”

37

38 <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-malta>

39 <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/45925>

40 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/knowledge-centre/global-landscape/global-gauge>

41 http://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/33220/1/10657_Tsiligiris.pdf

35 https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/eea-factsheet-sept2020_en.pdf

36 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT_LFSE_03__custom_1930080/default/table?lang=en

1.3 Assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

European structural indicators and scoreboards provide an important overview of the extent and variety of policy measures currently being implemented at European level. This includes indications of innovative policy approaches and good practices and the countries which are leading these initiatives. These policy tools provide important insights for benchmarking and assessing the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of national policies and actions in further and higher education. They are less helpful in connecting the effectiveness of these measures to expected outcomes and longer-term impacts. This calls for more in-depth qualitative analysis.

The scoreboards indicate that significant progress has been achieved in further extending the scope and depth of Malta's policy approach in further and higher education. National policy, while framed by the local context and national needs, continues to be shaped primarily by the current drive of the European Union to implement the European Education Area and synergies with the European Research Area, the Higher Education Transformation Agenda, including European Universities and more broadly the twin green and digital transitions.

In summary the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Malta's further and higher education ecosystem up to 2030 are identified below:

Strengths:

Malta's small size has proven a strength for the education ecosystem and its steady development, as it facilitates communication and a level of policy coherence across sectors. The appointment of a single authority, the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA), responsible for quality assurance, accreditation, MQRIC, vocational education, higher education, further reinforces policy synergies and coherence. The Authority has developed a wealth of structural and policy knowledge and research capacity in its areas of responsibility, with active participation in EU initiatives and is well perceived by stakeholders.

By prioritizing education as a pivotal national policy and maintaining high levels of public expenditure on primary, secondary and tertiary education, Malta has developed an increasingly robust education and knowledge ecosystem. A strong legislative and quality assurance framework is in place, with effective monitoring and corrective mechanisms. Effective deployment of policies on a number of fronts is underway including tackling early school leaving, widening participation and lifelong learning, industry relevance and digital education. EU membership, allowing access to transnational mobility, research and structural funding programmes and participation and contribution in EU policy development /learning fora, has allowed a further strengthening in the effective provision of education for all, on a par with international and EU standards.

Malta has continued in its efforts to provide an enabling knowledge ecosystem, for education providers in the public and private sectors, serving as an important bridge into both research and innovation and the workplace and industry. By working with and mobilizing key stakeholders in the co-design of customized approaches, it has been possible to spearhead new policies and measures as well as legislative and institutional reform and to strengthen strategic governance structures as part of the required transitions. The effective shift to online and blended learning due to the COVID pandemic is helping to further improve the resilience of the education ecosystem. This augurs well for addressing the challenges ahead for education/learning related to the demographic, digital and green transitions underway.

Weaknesses:

The above average expenditure on education compared to EU counterparts does not necessarily mean that current public spending patterns are optimal. Indeed, OECD has highlighted the need for a more in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of public spending on education and to identify ways of achieving an optimal overall allocation of resources in the sector. The weakness in relation to policy monitoring and evaluation as part of systemic policy improvement and learning cycles means that assessments of the effectiveness of education policy approaches and measures are often dependent on external reviews. This may be due to limitations in terms of available specialized expertise and/or insufficient investment in local mechanisms and related capacity-building. In-depth information and analysis on the performance of the education system is largely fragmented and presented from a primarily external perspective. This hampers efforts to develop a comprehensive policy approach covering the ecosystem as a whole with a dedicated focus on national priorities.

The tendency to work in silos both within government and between government and industry is still very predominant. Despite significant achievements in meeting EU targets, the education ecosystem lacks sufficiently close links to industry and the labour market to ensure timely delivery of critical skills. The introduction of the concept of work-based learning is a positive step in this direction. The policy links between education and research and innovation are improving but not well-enough defined to allow effective co-design of policies and measures, in particular to address STEM and science literacy shortfalls and thematic and smart specialization priorities.

Malta's potential as an international education hub requires a more coordinated policy approach bringing together education, industry and research and innovation. This would also benefit Malta's internationalization approach at EU level and beyond. Insufficient rigour in attracting inward investments can prove counterproductive to efforts to build international profile. Inward and outward mobility barriers are still preventing a full exploitation of these opportunities.

Opportunities:

As an EU country centrally positioned in the Mediterranean, a range of assets including temperate weather suited for health/leisure activities and a richness of cultural resources serve as a strategic lever for attracting investments and hybrid tourism. The Maltese Islands offer an optimal living and learning environment for international students and teachers, with a range of education and research opportunities.⁴²

The hosting of education/ knowledge hub(s) is a viable opportunity, provided that a joined-up approach can be put in place, integrating education, research, innovation, environment and enterprise policies and actions. These domains need to share policy intelligence and support each other in a mutually reinforcing way. Malta's small size and its combined strengths in education, research and innovation create an opportunity for bringing these communities together in a concerted effort to build critical mass and enable the development of joint initiatives. At national level, there is an opportunity for HEIs to link up with the industrial and innovation ecosystems with appropriate investments in knowledge transfer. New opportunities opening up with the launch of the EU missions and the drive to implement the green and digital transitions, provide common areas of priority. Partnerships with countries/regions leading the green transition could explore the setting up of education hubs to promote learning for environment sustainability⁴³.

Shortfalls in terms of human resources, expertise and service provision, particularly in STEM, hampering take-up and transition management, need to be addressed through joint efforts, starting with closer interactions between compulsory and further education policy efforts. This collaborative approach

⁴² for example the study of sustainable and ecological changes of warm landscapes and seascapes.

⁴³ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/proposal-for-a-council-recommendation-on-learning-for-environmental-sustainability>

needs to extend to different types and size of industry in order to ensure that the appropriate skillsets are in place at the required levels to support these transitions and take advantage of the emerging market opportunities. Inward and outward mobility of students, researchers and educational professionals provides an important lever if appropriately targeted, to procure lacking /required expertise and specialized skills. While the pandemic has had a negative effect on physical mobility, it has facilitated access to online learning and opened up possibilities to source multiple training activities and materials.

A more strategic approach to internationalization is needed to focus these efforts to where they are needed most. In particular, closer cooperation and working partnerships with advanced member states are needed to tap into critical know how and expertise to upgrade policy, legislative and governance approaches to continue on the path towards achieving a state-of-the-art education and knowledge ecosystem.

Threats:

The emerging scenario up to 2030 and beyond is one of ongoing systemic crises, health and environmental as well as dynamic change, both natural and engineered. Crisis management and building long-term resilience to crises should not detract attention from the need to advance ongoing efforts to build a holistic culture of quality in education. Economic hardship exacerbated by the pandemic and cost of living increases (rent and transport costs) could prevent both local and foreign students from completing their studies and achieving their full potential. Failure of the education system to prepare citizens and young people for this new world, will have negative knock-on effects for society as a whole.

Education and learning systems are currently challenged by the need to prepare society as a whole for rapid and unprecedented change at all levels and to develop critical skills in resilience and managing disruption and transition. The emerging application areas related to the digital and green economy require a combination of highly specialized and advanced skills with more basic skills. Customised variations of these skillsets are currently not available to the extent and level required both in the private and public sectors and action is required if Malta is to keep up in these sectors. The main brunt of the pandemic may have passed, however some its impacts are proving more lasting. The global market for education is itself undergoing significant change and the pandemic has slowed transnational education and mobility.

Key sectors such as aviation, hospitality and tourism, linked to leisure/entertainment, health and well-being and education, depend on skilled staff that can spearhead and manage innovation and transition. The impacts at global level affecting supply chains and access to key resources together with the transition to Industry 4.0 (followed by 5.0), are having local consequences for enterprises, forcing them to rethink their business models and to invest in innovative skills and technologies. While the anticipation of such skillsets is relatively 'easy', their delivery can prove more elusive, particularly on the scale and level required.

1.4 Policy priorities identified through stakeholder consultations

A vision-setting exercise was launched by MFHEA in 2021 with the aim of consulting with key stakeholders in the further and higher education sector on emerging priorities for the sector. The exercise and resulting document made reference to the Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020 proposed in 2009 by the then National Commission for Higher Education in 2009.

The aim of this exercise was:

- to ensure the design of a forward-looking strategy which responds effectively to the changing world particularly concerning the 4th /5th industrial revolution and the shift to a digital and green circular global economy;
- to work closely with key players in the co-design process, to achieve effective alignment with national and international strategies and the active engagement of all stakeholders in the development and the implementation of the strategy.

The results of this exercise, including the vision, guiding principles, priorities and objectives have provided an important basis for building this strategic plan.

The consultations identified 6 key priority areas⁴⁴ requiring action up to 2030:

1. Social dimension in participation and access
2. Educational attainment, retention and completion
3. Relevance of teaching, learning and research
4. Quality and Transparency
5. Digital and green transition
6. Internationalization and mobility

1.5 Reviewing the evidence base for future policy design

Malta has made important advances in the education sector as evident in the progress achieved on a number of the EU targets. The analysis points to areas of education policy which require sustained efforts and those where deeper policy drives need to be put into place. The overview of relevant future trends and drivers provides insights on emerging areas of opportunity which Malta could tap through appropriate (re)design of its education policy. We identify below a list of areas of education policy requiring action. These have been structured into three main clusters of challenges:

- 1) policy and governance
- 2) policy implementation and targets; and,
- 3) emerging opportunities.

⁴⁴ National Further and Higher Education Strategy 2030 (NCHE, 2020)

	AREA	CHALLENGE	POSSIBLE ACTION RESPONSIBLE ENTITY
1.		Policy design and governance	
1.1	Public spend on education	improve effectiveness of budget allocation	Public Review OPM/PPS
1.2	Evidence base for policy design and learning	strengthen the evidence base /policy skills increase policy monitoring/evaluation	Capacity-building MFHEA Lead
1.3	Governance structures	reduce the fragmentation/policy silos	MEDS review
1.4	Values and Responsibility	enhance awareness/compliance with guiding principles; ensure equitable access, participation and inclusion to create equal opportunities for all	MEDS review /code
2.		Policy Implementation and Targets	
2.1	Quality assurance and transparency	promote the use of transparency, comparability and transferability tools; sustain quality standards in FHE provision offered in and from Malta; ensure a high level of compliance as the sector grows	invest in HR and training MFHEA lead
2.2	Internationalisation and Mobility	foster European identity and international collaboration facilitate outward mobility, increase participation of students and disadvantaged in mobility programmes promote automatic mutual recognition of qualification;	increase monitoring and evaluation – MEDS lead with MFHEA, UM, MCAST
2.3	Early childhood and school education	Address factors which impact on further and higher education: ensure a return to full participation, literacy, STEM and digital skills	Regulation by MEDS Joint action with relevant Ministries

2.4	Early leavers Dropouts (VET) Dropouts (Tertiary education)	reduce the number of early leavers improve efforts to reduce the number of dropouts; provide preparatory courses	Review of social factors, monitoring of efforts Lead: MEDS
2.5	Education attainment, retention and completion	promote parity of esteem between all education pathways; ensure basic skills/ minimum proficiency for 15 year-olds; provide professional development for staff; Tertiary education attainment: step up efforts to meet EHEA targets; enhance student support systems; ensure diverse, flexible, student-centred education provision;	Set KPIs and monitor progress Lead MEDS
2.6	Relevance of education Meeting Public and private sector needs	enhance the green, R&I, digital, and societal relevance of education at all levels; science/digital literacy ensure adequate supply of ICT and STEM professionals address shortfalls through targeted actions; address gender gap in STEM; Industry: co-design appropriate skills sets for different size /type of industry; increase work-based learning	Government-wide review Lead: OPM Joined-up initiatives between relevant Ministries National knowledge transfer office
2.7	Adult and lifelong learning	increase participation among low-qualified ensure basic digital skills (target:80%); address gender gap in the digital sector; address need for resilience skills	Dedicated support/ incentives MFHEA lead

2.8	Widening participation	widen participation at all levels financially reward HEIs to meet defined social objectives recognize prior learning facilitate the transition to online learning and the use of digitally supported teaching and learning;	MFIN performance-based funding mechanisms Incentives and support
3.		Emerging Opportunities	
3.1	International education/ knowledge hub(s)	Explore international partnerships in green/digital Digital, online and blended learning	Joined-up initiatives between relevant Ministries
3.2	Focus on national priorities	Cater directly for national priorities: aviation, hospitality and tourism, linked to leisure/entertainment, health and well-being and education	Joined-up initiatives between relevant Ministries

This table shows the supply demand side measures for higher education and research and innovation ecosystem.

SUPPLY			DEMAND		
Financial	Services	Networking Measures	Policies Support for Private Demand	Regulations	Public Procurement
Grants, subsidies loans,	Accreditation, Certification audits monitoring evaluation	Joined-up Policies, foresight for setting visions	Cluster policies Supply chain policies Smart specialisation		
Scholarships	Guidelines	Co-location Incubators, science parks, knowledge transfer hub	Tax subsidies /incentives	Ministry: governance, allocation of public funding, evaluation, accreditation	
Taxation	Information; signposting			HEI: staff recruitment Students: tuition fees, loans,	

A key challenge relates to ongoing pressures to implement and refine key ‘business as usual’ education support services linked to quality assurance and accreditation, which can detract from more forward-looking actions to address human resource and capacity-building needs. The latter are becoming critical. The balance of effort between areas of current and potential weakness and emerging opportunities will determine the design and scale of appropriate measures. This aspect will be addressed in the next section.





Vision : **Towards a dynamic knowledge ecosystem by 2030**

The shared vision, principles and many of the objectives elaborated in the Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020 remain valid in 2022 and provide an important compass for guiding national FHE policy and actions beyond 2020. However, ongoing and emerging challenges, in particular the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU drive on green and digital transitions and a highly volatile global environment, are generating new challenges for education and learning. This is a call to action to rethink and codesign education policy strategy together with related national policies. The aim is to dovetail education investments to secure national strategic positioning for exploiting emerging opportunities while ensuring resilience to cope with systemic crises. The emerging trends and drivers affecting the further and higher education sector highlight the need to prioritise and streamline the recommended goals and actions to ensure that the progress achieved to date on national and EU education targets is sustained and to focus efforts to build resilience at all levels.

In this context, the extensive stakeholder consultations held in the lead-up to the drafting of this strategic plan, have allowed a honing of the broad vision set in the 2020 Strategy into an overarching vision statement which encapsulates the way forward:

Vision for Further and Higher Education 2030

*Towards a **dynamic resilient knowledge ecosystem** by 2030, based on an **innovative, inclusive quality-driven further and higher education sector**, inspiring individuals, throughout their educational and life experience, to develop **relevant skills**, that allow them to contribute, as community members and **active citizens**, towards a fair, digital and green economy.*

The vision underlines the importance of reinforced efforts to build a resilient knowledge ecosystem, open to all, with an emphasis on engaging individuals to advance their own learning paths and thereby take on more proactive, productive roles in the knowledge economy and society. The aim is to instill a strong culture for quality and innovation in the education sector, permeating public and private entities, working hand in hand for the advantage of learners. This is a sine qua non if Malta is to emerge strongly in the green and digital economy.

A second precondition for ensuring achievement of the vision is agreement on a core set of guiding principles. The 2020 Strategy elaborated a detailed set of principles for each stakeholder to follow and these remain valid, in particular: “preserving the unique missions and characteristics that further and higher education institutions have, the importance of effective autonomous leadership in education institutions, capable of delivering on their diverse roles and missions in a proactive and responsible manner is the only vehicle for high quality, relevant education outcomes that guarantee a vibrant

future for Malta. The need for all stakeholders to assume their responsibilities shall be a crucial factor in determining the ability of Malta as a nation to meet its aspirations.”

In the light of current and emerging societal challenges, this Strategic Plan highlights the following core set of shared guiding principles as underpinning the vision:

1. The Maltese context, identity, cultural heritage and language shall be a central element across all objectives and targets of the strategy.
2. Malta shall maintain a high quality level of further and higher education provision, accessible to all students, irrespective of their social economic background and responsive to their needs and circumstances throughout their lives.
3. Further and higher education institutions shall maintain their autonomy and shall be encouraged to collaborate with emphasis on research and curricular development to remain relevant, diverse, and efficient particularly during and after the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. There should be strong synergy and coordination between all stakeholders based on clear assignment of roles and responsibilities. Mutual learning and cooperation shall form the essence of this coordination.
5. Channels for information and dissemination shall be reinforced to ensure access to information on different education services and open communication with the general public
6. Evidence-based, systematic, and effective monitoring, evaluation and performance review shall be based on relevant comparable data collection.
7. The strategy shall be supported by sustainable funding and a strong legal, policy and governance framework.

The specific goals for implementing the vision are defined and addressed through a coherent set of recommended measures and targeted outcomes covering seven priority areas:

- Strengthening Policy Design and Governance
- Quality Assurance and Transparency
- Internationalization and Mobility
- Educational Attainment, Retention and Completion
- Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research
- Widening Participation and Adult Learning
- Exploiting Emerging opportunities

These seven strategic pillars are elaborated in further detail in the next section.

Strategic Pillars and Recommendations

The Vision for Further and Higher Education 2030 sets a high level of ambition to achieve a dynamic resilient knowledge ecosystem open to all. The pathway towards this vision entails the coordination of efforts on a number of fronts, namely:

- Joined-up Policy Design and upscaling of the national governance and legislative framework
- Building a robust Quality Assurance and Transparency
- The launch of a strategic approach to internationalization and mobility
- Incentives to support self-assessment and quality assurance at the institutional level
- Educational Attainment, Retention and Completion
- Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research
- Widening Participation and Adult Learning
- A proactive stance to exploit emerging opportunities in the green and digital economy

The Strategic Plan sets out the required measures for embarking on this pathway and identifies the lead players and key stakeholders. A key challenge to be overcome is the fragmentation in policy making in the education sector and in relation to other policy domains. The proposals relating to strengthening the governance and policy framework aim to improve coherence in policy design and the development of more joined-up policies. In particular the aim is to increase synergies between education, research and innovation and enterprise and build closer links with the digital and environmental policy domains. Thus, beyond addressing its own ‘internal’ targets in relation to quality assurance, educational attainment, relevant curricula and widened participation, this Strategic Plan focuses on how further and higher education can be instrumental in key sectors to drive economic recovery, R&I and green and digital transitions and Industry 4.0.

In order to fulfill this role, the further and higher education sector needs the appropriate tools, mechanisms and resources in place. This calls for a high-level strategic review of public spending in the education sector in order to achieve an optimal distribution of funding, reallocating resources where they are needed most and to dovetail with national priorities. In line with these efforts to increase the effectiveness of public spending, a more streamlined approach is recommended in rolling out quality assurance and education attainment measures. The aim is to improve quality by supporting self-assessment on the part of further and higher education (FHE) providers and incentivizing mergers between FHE providers locally and abroad particularly in areas of national priority.

The Strategic Plan recommends that a phased approach is followed in implementing these measures, with a primary emphasis on building a robust ecosystem, by putting in place the appropriate inter-ministerial and institutional policy and governance structures. In piloting new policy approaches, the recommendations include reviews, data collection, studies, monitoring and evaluation to promote the use of more evidence-based approaches.

Pillar 1:

Joined-up Policy Design and Governance

The pathway for achieving the Vision 2030 depends primarily on the development of a more strategic and joined-up policy approach to further and higher education. A key challenge to address is the current fragmentation in policy making in the education sector as a whole and in relation to other proximate policy domains. The recommended measures are pivotal for creating an enabling governance framework for policy co-design and joined-up policies. In particular the aim is to increase synergies between education, research and innovation and enterprise and build closer links with digital and environmental policy domains.

- **Recommendation 1.1: Review of governance structures in FHE to support joined-up policy (Lead: Ministry for Education)**
- **Recommendation 1.2 Review of effectiveness of FHE public spending (Lead: Ministry for Education and Ministry of Finance)**
- **Recommendation 1.3: MFHEA Working Group on Policy Intelligence**
- **Recommendation 1.4 Capacity-building: MFHEA structures including Policy Unit**
- **Recommendation 1.5 Upgrading of the FHE legislative framework**

Recommendation 1.1:

Review of governance structures in FHE to support joined-up policy

As one of the first actions to be undertaken in this Pillar, the Strategic Plan recommends that the Ministry for Education launches and oversees a review of governance structures within FHE to identify policy silos and other barriers constraining whole of government approaches in FHE and between FHE and related policy areas including research and innovation, and enterprise. The main aim is to make recommendations on effective mechanisms for supporting joined-up policy, including addressing gaps in structures, capacity and/or competence. A dedicated task force will be set up to undertake and complete this task within a six-month period and report to the Ministry with its findings and recommendations. The main targeted outcomes are to reduce fragmentation in national policy in FHE and related policy areas by identifying and addressing their cause and to develop coherent policy initiatives, by building synergies between FHE national institutions within MEDS and with related Ministries.

The Task Group should ideally be composed of competent independent experts drawn from the public and private sector and overseas and will report to the Ministry for Education.

The Task Group will give due consideration to whether there is need for a permanent high-level structure, such as an Inter-Ministerial Committee for Further and Higher Education, to steer joined-up policy on FHE and the role of FHE in other policies (education, finance, economy, enterprise, R&I, digital, environment, health, social justice).

Recommendation 1.2:

Review of effectiveness of FHE public spending

In line with OECD and FHE Strategy 2020 recommendations, this Strategic Plan recommends that the Minister for Education launches a review of public spending on further and higher education with the aim of improving the effectiveness of current budget allocations and ensuring adequacy by addressing gaps or shortfalls in areas of national priority. The review will make recommendations on the introduction of more transparent long-term financial planning to ensure that the targets set by Government in this sector can be achieved. Other aspects to be addressed include the use of public funding to incentivize increased accountability and required changes, including linking the level of annual budgetary allocations to performance (increasing participation rates, quality improvements and generation of own income), as well as the introduction of incentives for donors and social responsibility.

The Review will be undertaken by a team of independent local and overseas experts in FHE public spending to include representatives of OECD and Ministry of Finance. The aim is that the Review will include consultations and gathering of evidence from national authorities/institutions and key stakeholders and will be completed within one year. The findings and recommendations will be presented to the relevant authorities and actioned at the highest levels.

Recommendation 1.3:

Setting up of MFHEA Working Group on Policy Intelligence and Monitoring

As a complementary action, it is recommended that the MFHEA sets up a dedicated working group to develop and coordinate the collection of data and intelligence to support FHE policy design, set targets and measure performance. The main targeted outcomes are to strengthen the evidence base for policy, enable joined-up policy design and support the monitoring, evaluation and iteration of FHE policy.

The WG will be composed of relevant Ministries and public institutions and key experts in data collection and policy design, in particular the National Statistics Office. The WG will provide the necessary technical support to the Ministry for Education in the development of joined up policies in FHE and respond in a timely manner to related requests for information. The WG will prepare a yearly report on key data for presentation to the Ministry for Education and Cabinet. The WG will be supported in its work by a newly set up Unit within MFHEA addressing policy intelligence and monitoring.

Recommendation 1.4:

Capacity-building: MFHEA and the Policy Unit

A key outcome of the review is that it will identify gaps in capacity which prevent national authorities from fulfilling their functions in the FHE sector effectively. As the key national entity responsible for overseeing the implementation of national legislation and government policy in this sector, it is important that the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority is given particular priority. The Review will take into account both current gaps in capacity affecting MFHEA as well as anticipated capacity-building needs in light of additional functions which the Review and the Strategic Plan may confer

on MFHEA. The aim is to ensure that MFHEA has the necessary structures and resources to fulfill its role as an Authority effectively, giving due attention to all of its functions. In this context, the Strategic Plan recommends that MFHEA's setup is benchmarked with peer organisations in Europe in terms of structures, headcount, competencies and budget.

Capacity-building measures will primarily take the form of strengthening and extending existing structures, including a new Policy Unit within MFHEA, and addressing gaps in expertise, including staff exchanges and training opportunities with peer organisations abroad.

Recommendation 1.5: Upgrading of the FHE legislative framework

The Strategic Plan recommends that a comprehensive exercise is undertaken to upgrade the FHE legislative framework. The aim is to ensure clarity, coherence and robustness in national legislation and to address any loopholes and that MFHEA has the necessary legal powers to fulfill its role. The Ministry for Education in consultation with MFHEA will decide on the appropriate setup to undertake this exercise.

Pillar 2: Exploiting Emerging opportunities

Malta's advances in further and higher education and growing research and innovation capacity combined with its strong digital footprint open up a portfolio of viable opportunities locally and abroad. Beyond digital education and serious gaming, Malta's recently launched Smart Specialization (RIS3) Strategy (2021-7) prioritises national investments in the following areas identified through a process of entrepreneurial discovery: future digital technologies and big data, marine and maritime technology, climate mitigation, health and well-being, smart manufacturing, aviation and aerospace. In order to position itself strategically to take advantage of windows of opportunity for exploiting relevant niche areas, there needs to be a more effective mechanism for timely action and coordination between Ministries responsible for education, R&I, economy, enterprise, employment, digital, environment, health and foreign affairs, to develop anticipatory and coherent policies and actions. Attracting and sustaining inward and local investments requires a joint commitment government-wide to deliver on the education, research and innovation, digital, enterprise fronts.

Recommendation 2.1: Setting up of a National Coordination Mechanism on Emerging Opportunities

The Strategic Plan recommends that as an important step in reducing policy silos and developing an enabling framework for policy co-design and coherence, that the Minister responsible for Education, sets up a national coordination mechanism on targeting viable emerging international opportunities and rallying government-wide efforts for their effective and timely take-up

The aim is that the national coordination mechanism provides strategic advice and leads the implementation of a framework for the development of a more anticipatory, joined-up approach in identifying and exploiting emerging niche opportunities in FHE and in FHE linked to other policy domains. A key priority in this context are opportunities linked to green and digital transitions which are critical for national economic recovery.

The national coordination mechanism will have the following remit and working approach:

- to act proactively to codesign the approach, coordinate cross-ministerial policies, and work on delivery systems: measures, programmes and resources.
- to set up, as required, dedicated sub-groups for addressing specific opportunities
- to commission required studies and bring in required domain expertise local and abroad

The National Coordination Mechanism will be composed of representatives of relevant Ministries, MFHEA, MCST, Chamber of Commerce, eskills Foundation among others.

The main targeted outcomes are to:

- Cater effectively through appropriate planning for a select number of national priorities and emerging niche opportunities: apart from the RIS areas identified above, clustered themes can be given consideration including digital tourism, hospitality, linked to leisure/entertainment, health, well-being and education;
- Ensure an adequate supply of required professionals, expertise and skills, including ICT and green professionals, for Industry 4.0 and the green circular economy with an emphasis on gender balance;
- Contribute towards achieving digital and STEM literacy and skills for all
- Contribute to the work of the economic sector councils and the work on programme audits with a focus on a particular area

Recommendation 2.2: Coordinated Action Plan

It is recommended that the National Coordination Mechanism with the support of MFHEA focuses its effort on developing a targeted action plan which outlines the proposed approach and the key actions and measures to be undertaken with a clear timeline and allocation of responsibilities. The plan will be presented to the Ministry for Education and Cabinet on an annual basis and will be used as the basis for securing the necessary resources .

It is envisaged that among the core actions foreseen, the following will be given particular priority as the means for developing the evidence base:

- to undertake skills stock-takes of economic sectors and niche areas of high priority
- to identify and address related gaps in skills and competencies

The Plan will include a number of exploratory actions, including the commissioning of studies and forward-looking initiatives to:

- explore the potential for developing international partnerships, with particular priority to green/digital learning, marine and R&I.
- to pilot an international education/knowledge hub as a means for widening the use of digitally supported teaching and blended learning

Recommendation 2.3:

Monitor and evaluate outcomes

As the pillar development and the work matures, the National Coordination Mechanism will draw up recommendations for the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system based on performance targets. This allows the monitoring of performance in relation to the action plan, initiatives and schemes and to ensure that the targeted outcomes are achieved.

Pillar 3:

Enhanced Educational Attainment, Retention and Completion

A key challenge in further and higher education up to 2030 is the need to set and achieve more ambitious targets for enhanced educational attainment, retention and completion at all levels. This represents both an education and social challenge with repercussions in other policy domains. This pillar focuses on developing effective national structures and mechanisms for coordinating policy approaches across government and unlocking resources as an incentive for meeting targets. A key objective is to ensure that FHE providers are appropriately equipped for ensuring diverse, flexible, student-centred education provision. This entails investments in training, upgrading facilities and continuous professional development for FHE stakeholders. The aim is to support FHE providers to set their own targets for education retention and completion and thereby responsabilise and empower them to play their part. A second focus of this pillar is on providing targeted support and incentives for students who are vulnerable, either due to financial or other barriers preventing them from completing their studies.

Recommendation 3.1:

Setting up of a Ministry for Education Working Group on Educational attainment, retention and completion

The Strategic Plan recommends that the Ministry for Education sets up a dedicated working group to lead the co-design of a strategic approach on educational attainment, retention and completion in consultation with key stakeholders. The core aim is to ensure that the policy is joined-up, effectively implemented, monitored and kept updated. The Working Group will be composed of responsible entities within the Ministry for Education, including MFHEA, representatives of relevant Ministries, representatives of FHE providers among others.

The main role of the Working Group is:

- to set targets in relation to basic skills requirements and proficiency, dropouts;
- to identify barriers and gaps in support;
- to recommend enhanced delivery structures and mechanisms,
- to develop appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

Recommendation 3.2:

Coordinated Action Plan on Educational attainment, retention and completion

As the Working Group proceeds with its tasks, the main deliverable will be the development of a targeted action plan. The plan, which will be updated on an annual basis, will build on ongoing work by MFHEA and aim to unlock additional resources and support mechanisms. In particular, the action plan will develop capacity-building actions aimed at improving MFHEA's competencies in this area through collaboration with international peers for provision of support, expertise; training for policy design /practitioners.

The main targeted outcomes are to:

- Ensure educational attainments at all levels, including passes in core subjects
- Clearly define, present and communicate all education pathways to targeted audiences;
- Ensure a diverse, flexible, student-centred education provision,
- Embed reinforced structures to achieve parity of esteem between all education pathways to encourage retention, completion rates and limit dropouts;
- Address the regulation of post-secondary education and ensure the achievement of basic skills/ minimum proficiency for 15 year-olds;
- Step up efforts to meet EHEA targets in tertiary education attainment;
- Undertake a student engagement study on a regular basis, targeting particularly students at high risk and those stages in education where there is high incidence of dropouts;
- Implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) guidelines, audits and monitoring;
- Secure a budget line and provide experts to support FHE providers.

Recommendation 3.3:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Review in 2023-24

It is recommended that a year on from the introduction of RPL guidelines, the Working Group commissions a review in order to assess how RPL guidelines are being implemented, to obtain feedback from FHE providers and to make recommendations if they need adapting.

Recommendation 3.4:

Support package for FHE providers

The Strategic Plan recommends that based on consultations with FHE stakeholders, the Working Group co-designs a support package with a budget line to equip providers with the tools and resources to reduce the number of early leavers and dropouts. This will be based on the identification of gaps in expertise, resources and facilities and recommendations for how this can be addressed through appropriate support measures.

It is envisaged that the package could include provision of

- customized local training and tools for FHE providers: to set and meet targets for reducing the number of dropouts; e.g. pilot training scheme for doctoral and post-doc candidates with a focus on high quality teaching, technical and digital skills, pedagogical approaches for curriculum design, and teaching and assessment methods with set deliverables. Programme for existing staff: challenge as more resistant; to expose staff members to best practice and a young academics programme – “train the trainers”
- resources for upgrading of their support and guidance facilities for students at all levels,
- opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD) for staff to stay updated, with a focus on building resilience, using networking, mobility and peer learning nationally and abroad.

The targeted outcomes are to:

- sustain diversity in education provision by offering support and guidance to FHE providers, particularly those in the private sector;
- have in place national and institutional student support systems, providing both academic and non-academic support; ensuring early detection and timely intervention;
- ensure enhanced levels of technical competence, including guidance and counselling staff to support students to make informed choices, particularly in relation to STEM
- set conditionality for ensuring FHE providers meet targets for dropouts and increase student representation in decision-making and meeting EU targets (EHEA).

Recommendation 3.5:

Support for students

The Strategic Plan recommends that the Working Group commissions a comprehensive review of social factors impacting on early leavers and dropouts to determine where support is required most and in what format it could prove effective. The Working Group will present its findings and recommendations to the Steering Group with a view to developing a support scheme for vulnerable students. The aim is to keep the review ‘live’ by monitoring the situation on a regular basis to ensure the responsible and cost-effective use of resources.

The Working Group will give consideration to the piloting of the following support schemes:

- Pilot a support/incentive scheme (subsidized bank loan) for vulnerable students to cover tuition fees/learning costs targeting areas with highest dropout rates
- A scheme for student vouchers for mentoring through internships and work experience, incentivizing take-up in areas of national priority, including handholding, detailed information on courses, career guidance.

The targeted outcomes are to:

- Reduce the number of dropouts due to students encountering financial constraints and/or difficulties in following their courses.
- Increase students’ work experience related to the field of study prior to starting the study programme, RPL system can be developed to recognize the learning

Pillar 4:

Robust Quality Assurance and Transparency

Vision 2030 places a strong emphasis on quality assurance by mainstreaming standards in FHE provision offered in and from Malta; facilitating the use of transparency, comparability and transferability tools; and ensuring a high level of compliance as the sector grows. Extensive work is underway on the development of procedures and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance mechanisms (EQAVET framework), accreditation, programme audits, blended learning, jointly awarded and transnational programmes, a code of conduct on academic integrity and peer review. The challenges ahead are considerable and include the need to build trust with stakeholders and to foster a culture of shared ownership and commitment to quality assurance. As part of these efforts, it is important to ensure that stakeholders are consulted and informed in advance on developments in quality assurance. Vision 2030 goes a step further by providing FHE providers with opportunities to embark on self-evaluation pathways and where appropriate to face this challenge in partnership with others. The Strategic Plan recommends that the MFHEA, as the national authority responsible for this pillar, sets up a dedicated working group to lead the co-design of a quality assurance policy in consultation with key stakeholders. The core aim is to ensure enhanced policy coordination and implementation and to ensure that the policy is kept updated. The Working Group will be responsible for identifying key concerns in the period up to 2030 and proposing appropriate measures and required resources. In particular, the WG will focus its efforts on developing and overseeing systematic QA review

mechanisms (Europass, Malta Qualifications Framework updating); and to identify and address barriers to compliance (e.g. gaps in expertise).

The Working Group will be composed of responsible entities within the Ministry for Education, in particular MFHEA, eskills Foundation, representatives of relevant Ministries, Chamber of Commerce, and representatives of FHE providers among others.

Recommendation 4.2: Targeted Action Plan for QA

As the Working Group proceeds with its tasks, the main deliverable will be the development of a targeted action plan for quality assurance. The plan which will be updated on an annual basis, will build on ongoing work by MFHEA and aim to unlock additional resources and support mechanisms. In particular, the action plan will develop capacity-building actions aimed at improving MFHEA's competencies in this area through collaboration with international peers for provision of support, expertise; training for QA policy /practitioners. The targeted outcomes of the Plan are to: strengthen QA policy coherence and implementation sector-wide and thereby increase stakeholder trust and confidence; to achieve a high level of compliance by all private and public education institutions and to develop sustainable partnerships between national FHE institutions, including joint education programmes. A key priority for the Action Plan up to 2025 is the organization of programme audits of institutions, offering online and blended learning, jointly awarded programmes and transnational programmes of study.

Recommendation 4.3: Monitoring and evaluation

The Working Group will draw up recommendations for the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system based on performance targets. This allows the WG to monitor performance in relation to the action plan, initiatives and schemes and to ensure that the targeted outcomes are achieved.

Recommendation 4.4: Review of FHE Provider Sector

In order to design more tailored policies and support to cater for different profiles of FHE providers, the Strategic Plan recommends the launch of a sector-wide review. The Working Group may appoint a task force to undertake this review. The aim of the review is to identify key factors which lead small providers to close down their operation, with a view to better design remedial support measures which can be provided. A second aim is to ensure that the efforts of MFHEA in the area of QA are appropriately targeted and cost effective, given the large number of providers and the diversity of profiles they have to cater for.

Two initiatives have been identified for consideration as part of the review:

- (i) Pilot Merger Scheme: incentive to encourage mergers and partnerships between FHE providers in Malta and abroad linked to areas of national priority. The aim is to help build critical mass as a basis for improving quality of provision and compliance.
- (ii) Pilot Voucher Scheme: incentive for FHE providers to embark on self-assessment. The aim is to provide FHE providers with vouchers to support their efforts to undertake self-assessment and self-evaluation allowing them to access required expertise. The targeted outcomes are to instill a culture of self-evaluation as a means for fast-tracking QA compliance; and to facilitate the identification of high quality FHE providers.

Recommendation 4.5 Training facility for FHE providers

The Strategic Plan recommends that the Steering Group directs its efforts and secures resources for the setting up of a local training facility for FHE providers and those providing QA consultancy services to providers. The facility will draw on collaboration with international partners for the provision of peer support and expertise to enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements particularly linked to VET. MFHEA will be responsible for identifying appropriate peer organisations and setting up the training programmes and tools for internal quality assurance. The targeted outcomes are to increase local expertise in quality assurance and to build mutually beneficial partnerships with quality assurance agencies in Europe.

Pillar 5: Improving the Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research

A dynamic global economy, new jobs and working patterns and a fast-changing workplace render the anticipation of skills needs and competencies up to 2030 complex. The timely delivery of future economy skills and preparing for jobs which do not yet exist, is challenging. However, the green, digital and societal transitions ahead provide a clear direction for re-aligning education and training. A key step is to enhance the relevance of education to science and digital literacy at all levels. The education system needs to work more closely with enterprises and relevant Ministries to develop effective education and training initiatives which support the future economy. Action is needed at national level to support the upskilling of workers for industry 4.0, in areas such as digitalisation, circular and green economy, among others. There is an urgent need to ensure an adequate supply of ICT and STEM professionals, to co-design appropriate skills sets for different sizes and types of industry; and to increase work-based learning. This will also entail actions to ensure that there is a stronger emphasis on values and ethics, including inclusiveness and social economy principles.

Recommendation 5.1:

Setting up of a Working Group on Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research

The Strategic Plan recommends that MFHEA sets up a dedicated working group to lead the co-design of a forward-looking approach to anticipate teaching/learning needs up to 2025 and to ensure the relevance of learning and research in line with current and emerging national priorities.

This initiative will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders, in particular the Ministries responsible for enterprise and inward investment, green and digital transitions, and research and innovation. The Working Group will be composed of relevant Ministries, key entities responsible for curriculum development, including MEDS, MFHEA, eskills Foundation, Malta Enterprise, MCST and Chamber of Commerce.

The main role of the Working Group is to:

- define education needs linked to digital and green economy/transitions, social economy and niche areas in the new national smart specialisation strategy RIS3⁴⁵
- ensure relevance by embedding evidence-based, anticipatory approaches in curricula design;
- co-design the approach and work on delivery systems and education providers;
- enhance synergies between education and research;
- develop high quality and innovative professional Vocational Education and Training provision, in particular targeting green and digital transitions;
- identify and coordinate required resources and funding instruments;
- monitor implementation of these approaches and their effectiveness;
- address gaps in data-gathering and capacity for adopting these approaches

The main targeted outcomes are to:

- embed efficient and timely education delivery systems which cater more directly to national and industry needs.
- Ensure systematic use of evidence in policy design, including annual national graduate tracer surveys and skills and market forecasting;
- Develop a balanced approach in tackling relevance of teaching in relation to different priorities: national and industry priorities as well as personal development.

Recommendation 5.2:

Targeted Action Plan on Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research

The Working Group will incorporate its proposed measures into a dedicated action plan. The initial focus of efforts will be on building the evidence base: identifying and addressing priority national needs, industry requirements and societal/individual diversity. The plan which will be updated on an annual basis will build on ongoing work by MFHEA and aim to unlock additional resources and support mechanisms. In particular, the action plan will undertake dedicated relevance reviews of key sectors of emerging priority, in particular industry 4.0 and green, digital and societal transitions with the aim of developing the necessary coordination of efforts to deliver the required skills and competencies in a timely manner.

The main targeted outcomes are to:

- Incentivize mutually beneficial partnerships between Ministries, FHE providers and industry in areas of national priority; (RIS3: Health and Well-being, Sustainable Use of Resources for Climate Mitigation; Smart Manufacturing, Marine and Maritime Technologies; Digital Technologies);
- Ensure that society/individuals are equipped with resilience and crisis management skills for coping with systemic crises and pandemics; enhance personal development, combining hard and soft skills and competencies;
- Set targets and develop an appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanism to track progress and fine-tune policy.

Recommendation 5.3 Programme audits in areas of national priority

The Strategic Plan recommends that the Working Group spearheads the setting up of programme audits in areas of national priority and advises on the thematic focus and approach. The composition of the Working Group provides an effective mechanism for launching such inter-ministerial initiatives, working in close cooperation with the Ministries concerned. The targeted outcomes are to build stronger working links with Ministries to advance the quality of programmes in a particular area and to set national occupational standards through the Sector Skills Councils. This initiative will form an integral component of the targeted action plan. The actual implementation of the programme audits will be undertaken by MFHEA in consultation with the QA Working Group

Recommendation 5.4 Pilot work-based learning and student internships

The Working Group will consider the design and piloting of a scheme to promote work-based learning and student internships in industry, both local and abroad. An MFHEA Report analyzing work-based learning will provide VET project EOI for VET experts and the scoping report by November 2022 will provide a clear picture of the current situation in Malta and provide the basis for setting the guidelines.

Recommendation 5.5 Task Group on Values and Ethics

The Working Group will set up a task group to undertake a review of current practices in relation to values and ethics in FHE sector. The aim is to move towards the adoption of a common set of

⁴⁵ http://mcst.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Malta-RIS3-2021-2027_DRAFT-PUBLIC-CONSULTATION-Oct2020.pdf

values and principles in FHE to ensure equitable access, participation and inclusion to create equal opportunities for all. The targeted outcome is enhanced awareness/compliance with these guiding principles sector-wide.

Pillar 6: **Social Dimension: Widening Participation and Adult Learning**

Despite progress on many fronts in the FHE area, Malta needs to continue with its ongoing drive to widen participation and adult learning to ensure that FHE opportunities are truly open to all, regardless of background or gender. As Malta's population becomes more international and less homogenous, the challenge of preparing for the future economy and society, is expected to increase in complexity and require a targeted, yet comprehensive approach. By involving all the relevant players from the public, private and voluntary sectors, the aim is to bring on board a broader base of experience, expertise and resources, to address this challenge more effectively. This task goes hand in hand with efforts to identify effective means for reaching out to different societal players and engaging them in the FHE sector.

Recommendation 6.1: **Setting up a Working Group on the Social Dimension**

The Strategic Plan recommends that the MFHEA sets up a dedicated working group to lead the co-design of a comprehensive policy approach on the social dimension of FHE. The aim is to ensure widening, equitable and inclusive participation in FHE and adult learning, in line with current and emerging national and EU priorities. This initiative will be undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders, in particular the Ministries responsible for social policy, economy, innovation and enterprise, MFHEA, MCESD, NCPE. Consultations are also to be held with relevant public entities and representatives of corporate social responsibility, cooperatives and voluntary organisations.

The immediate goals of this Working Group are to:

- launch a review of the social dimension of FHE (widening inclusive participation in FHE and adult learning), focusing on the effectiveness of current approaches and to make recommendations for a more joined-up approach.
- identify areas requiring urgent action and launch consultations to design and pilot appropriate measures,
- unlock required resources from the public and private sectors, including incentives to support social innovation,
- to develop effective mechanisms for monitoring and securing the social dimension of FHE.

The main targeted outcomes are to:

- ensure equitable, widening participation and inclusion by rallying efforts and resources to provide a truly enabling environment for all;
- Reinforce structures for permeable pathways between all education systems, in particular both initial and continuing vocational education and training, general and academic education and informal and non-formal learning;
- Widen the supply of learning opportunities for adults by encouraging flexible and modular provision in terms of study intensity and mode of delivery;
- Set regulations for the provision of non-traditional learning programmes such as MOOCS, OERs and monitor microcredentials;
- Financially reward HEIs and FHE providers to meet defined social objectives.

Recommendation 6.2: **Coordinated Action Plan on the Social Dimension of FHE**

The Working Group will incorporate its proposed measures into a dedicated action plan which takes due account of societal and individual diversity. The initial focus of efforts will be on building the evidence base: identifying and addressing priority national social needs, as well as the potential of industry and voluntary sector to advance the social dimension of FHE and social innovation. The plan which will be updated on an annual basis will build on ongoing work by MFHEA and aim to unlock additional resources and support mechanisms.

The Action Plan aims to:

- Build an in-depth evidence base on current and emerging priorities related to the social dimension and inclusivity and recommendations for the design of appropriate measures
- Set and address targets for widening participation in FHE, adult education and lifelong learning, with a particular focus on low-qualified and socially disadvantaged groups (including the elderly, persons with special needs, ethnic minorities and migrants)
- Set and address targets for bridging the gender gap in FHE, in particular in STEM fields of study and professions, including the digital sector;
- Pilot remedial actions targeting:
 - o Basic digital skills for all
 - o Bridging the gender gap
 - o Upskill the low-qualified

The targeted outcomes are to:

- achieve a high level of basic digital skills (target:80%);
- reduce the number of low-qualified;
- widen participation in FHE by recognizing prior learning and facilitating the transition to online learning and the use of digitally supported teaching and learning;

Recommendation 6.3 Monitor and evaluate outcomes

As the pillar development and related work matures, the Working Group will draw up recommendations for the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation system based on performance targets. This allows the WG and MFHEA to monitor performance in relation to the action plan, initiatives and schemes and to ensure that the targeted outcomes are achieved.

Recommendation 6.4 Strategic approach to communications

As part of the effort to widen participation in FHE, the Strategic Plan recommends the development by the WG and MFHEA of a more strategic approach to communications. This covers a range of different types of communications, from official notifications to FHE providers and awareness-raising notices to young and adult learners. This will entail efforts to identify the appropriate/effective means for communicating with different audiences, in particular those which have proven difficult to reach. Apart from consideration of alternative media, including social media, the development of customized content and the organization of regular networking events could prove effective. This action is considered a key element in raising awareness on this new Strategic Plan and for building joined up approaches. A key priority is to increase awareness on the Malta Qualifications Framework.

Pillar 7: Strategic Internationalization and Mobility

In recent years, Malta has recorded significant progress on key EU education targets, as indicated in the EU Education and Training Monitor (2020). Maintaining the progress achieved to date requires continued efforts to keep track of developments at EU level, participate proactively in the setting of policies and targets, engage in relevant peer learning and collaborative actions, as well contribute to the design of new EU initiatives. Given the extent of these commitments Malta has to be selective in identifying where its efforts are best deployed in order to secure national needs and support Malta's performance.

The EU is currently working on a number of policy initiatives in order to advance the European Education Area, including the development of closer links between education and research and innovation, the Higher Education Transformation Agenda, the European Strategy for Universities and extending the European Universities Initiative.

These initiatives dovetail and impact on EU initiatives in related areas including the European Green Deal, the Twin Transitions, the Digital Agenda and the European Pact for Research and Innovation. Malta needs to adopt a joined-up strategic approach to these initiatives and more broadly to the twin challenges of internationalization and mobility by developing the appropriate national structures and mechanisms to coordinate efforts.

Recommendation 7.1: Setting up of a SG Working Group on Internationalisation and Mobility

The Strategic Plan recommends that MFHEA sets up a dedicated working group to lead the co-design of a strategic approach on internationalization and mobility in consultation with key stakeholders. The core aim is to ensure that joined-up policies are implemented effectively and that these policies are monitored and kept updated.

The Working Group will be composed of representatives of relevant Ministries, MFHEA, EUPA, MCST among others.

The main targeted outcomes are to:

- Set national priorities for internationalization and mobility in further and higher education taking into account related priorities in other policy domains;
- take full advantage of opportunities at EU level, particularly to address gaps in structures, capacity and competencies at national level, and thereby provide effective national inputs to EU policy design in FHE and related areas;
- address short-term priorities resulting from global crisis and disaster, such as forced migration, war, pandemic and environmental disaster.
- improve the quality and effectiveness of internationalization and mobility actions, by linking them more directly to national needs and priorities, addressing gaps in capacity and skills, required peer learning and capacity-building and reducing brain drain,
- develop the evidence base through enhanced data collection, analysis and dedicated studies for policy design and more systematically set targets,
- draw up recommendations for the implementation of appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms based on performance targets. This allows the WG and SG to monitor performance in relation to the action plan, initiatives and schemes and to ensure that the targeted outcomes are achieved.

Recommendation 7.2: Targeted Action Plan on Mobility

As the Working Group proceeds with its remit, one of its main deliverables will be the development of a targeted action plan on mobility, addressing both international and inter-sectorial mobility. The plan which will be updated on an annual basis will build on ongoing work by MFHEA. The core aim is to

improve policy coordination and unlock additional resources and support mechanisms. In particular, the action plan will develop capacity-building actions aimed at improving MFHEA's competencies in this area through collaboration with international peers for provision of support, and expertise.

The action plan will focus on actions to:

- develop and implement flexible mobility formats (short and long term, virtual and blended) in all types of private and public educational institutions
- facilitate inter-sectorial mobility, in particular for researchers;
- ensure full portability of available domestic student support measures for credit and degree mobility;
- ensure automatic recognition of learning period abroad by transferring all credits gained during a period of study abroad towards the student's degree
- encourage the use of existing tools (e.g. learning agreement and memorandum of understanding, Europass platform, Diploma Supplement, EQF/NQF...) supporting mobility of learners particularly within the private institutions

The targeted outcomes of the Plan are to:

- set and achieve an optimal balance between ensuring equitable mobility opportunities for all, meeting EU mobility targets, and addressing national needs and priorities;
- address barriers to mobility through coordinated action and in particular ensure increased mobility of disadvantaged learners at all levels;
- achieve an increased share of students and staff participating in outward mobility and digital mobility periods in line with national policy;
- develop a strategic approach to incoming mobility targeting national needs;
- increase automatic mutual recognition of qualifications;
- secure a budget line to unlock necessary resources

Recommendation 7.3: Targeted Action Plan on Internationalisation

The Working Group's second key deliverable will be the development of a targeted action plan for internationalisation. The plan which will be updated on an annual basis will build on ongoing work by MFHEA and aim to unlock additional resources and support mechanisms. In particular, the action plan will develop capacity-building actions aimed at improving MFHEA's competencies in this area, through collaboration with international peers for provision of support and expertise. The WG will consider the setting up of a dedicated Unit within MFHEA to coordinate EU affairs and the internationalization approach.

The Action Plan will focus on:

- gathering evidence to define the national approach on inward investment in FHE and the identification of areas to be targeted for new internationalisation initiatives and securing the budget to support this.
- developing a strategic overview of EU collaboration opportunities to increase coordination and coherence in FHE: including EHEA inputs; support the European Universities' initiative and COVEs; mobility approach (ERASMUS) and other EU funded programmes (ESF/ERDF)
- exploring the potential of job shadowing and internships between European education institutions and exchanges of staff and students for targeted education experiences

The targeted outcomes of the Plan are to:

- develop a strategic approach on internationalization in consultation with relevant Ministries with an emphasis on gearing actions to national priorities;
- enhance Malta's international profile through proactive participation in EU policy fora, liaison internally with relevant units, and identifying required actions
- ensure optimal use of EU opportunities: funding, expertise, access to infrastructure, participation in EU projects and capacity building activities
- fully exploit EU initiatives, in particular the University Flagships and the European Universities initiative
- increase efforts towards more targeted use of bilateral cooperation within EU and beyond – particularly with EU counterparts on a more consistent level, for example on accreditation
- develop strategic partnerships between Maltese and MS FHE policy institutions to address national priorities;
- secure a budget line for 5 strategic partnerships up to 2030 to address FHE 2030 priorities-

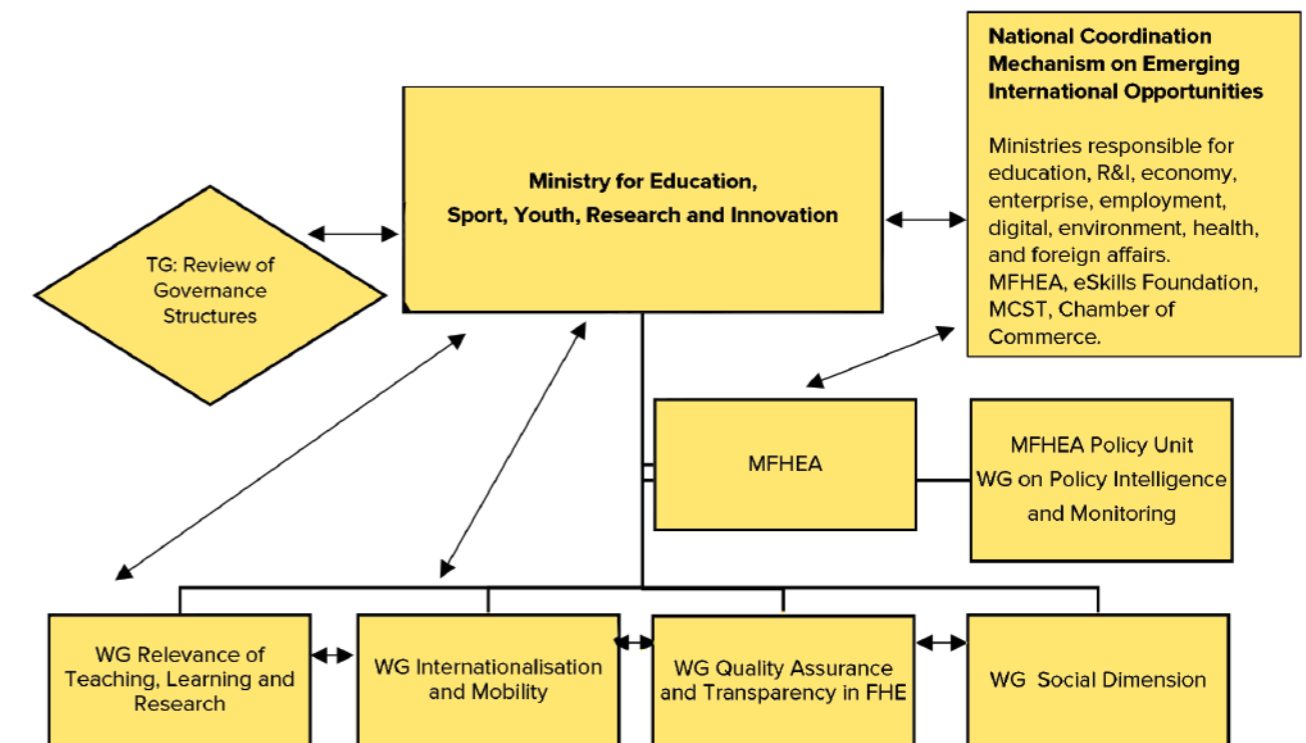
Summary Table of Recommendations

PILLARS	RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Policy Design and Governance	1.1: Review of governance structures in FHE to support joined-up policy (Lead: Ministry for Education) 1.2: Review of effectiveness of FHE public spending (Lead: Ministry for Education and Ministry of Finance) 1.3: MFHEA Working Group on Policy Intelligence 1.4: Capacity-building: MFHEA structures including Policy Unit 1.5: Upgrading of the FHE legislative framework
2. Exploiting Emerging Opportunities	2.1: Setting up of a National Coordination Mechanism on Emerging Opportunities (Lead: Ministry for Education) 2.2: Targeted Action Plan on Emerging Opportunities 2.3: Monitor and evaluate outcomes
3. Enhanced educational attainment, retention and completion	3.1: Setting up of a Working Group on Educational attainment, retention and completion (Lead: MFHEA) 3.2: Coordinated Action Plan on Educational attainment, retention and completion 3.3: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Review in 2023-24 3.4: Support package for FHE providers 3.5: Support for students
4. Robust Quality Assurance and Transparency	4.1: Setting up of a Working Group on Quality Assurance and Transparency in FHE (Lead: MFHEA) 4.2: Targeted Action Plan for QA 4.3: Monitoring and evaluation 4.4: Review of FHE Providers 4.5: Training facility for FHE providers
5. Improved Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research	5.1: Setting up of a Working Group on Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research (Lead: MFHEA) 5.2: Targeted Action Plan on Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research 5.3: Programme Audits in Areas of National Priority 5.4: Pilot work-based learning and student internships 5.5: Task Group on Values and Ethics
6. Social Dimension: Widening Participation and Adult Learning	6.1: Setting up a Working Group on the Social Dimension (Lead: MFHEA) 6.2: Targeted Action Plan on the Social Dimension of FHE 6.3: Monitoring and evaluating outcomes 6.4: Strategic approach to communications
7. Internationalisation and Mobility	7.1: Setting up of a Working Group on Internationalisation and Mobility (Lead: MFHEA) 7.2: Targeted Action Plan on Mobility 7.3: Targeted Action Plan on Internationalisation

Proposed launch of structures and initiatives with a timeline

- 2023
 - Launch of Reviews by the Ministry for Education
 - MFHEA Capacity-building
 - Ministry for Education Working Group on Educational attainment, retention and completion
 - MFHEA launch of 4 Working Groups on:
 - Internationalisation and Mobility
 - Social Dimension
 - Relevance of Teaching, Learning and Research
 - Quality Assurance and Transparency in FHE
- 2024
 - Setting up of a National Coordination Mechanism on Emerging International Opportunities

Proposed Chart and Structures





Way forward

This Strategic Plan has redefined our Vision and goals for Further and Higher Education 2030:

Towards a dynamic resilient knowledge ecosystem by 2030, based on an innovative, inclusive quality-driven further and higher education sector, inspiring individuals, throughout their educational and life experience, to develop relevant skills that allow them to contribute as community members and active citizens towards a digital and green global economy.

Through a simplified set of guiding principles, the aim is to bring on board all stakeholders in further and higher education, building a culture of mutual trust and shared responsibility, as we embark on the challenging pathways ahead.

The roadmap which has been set, is deliberately ambitious - we need to step up our efforts if we are to catch up and keep up with our peers. The launch of the pillars and recommended measures depends on the active engagement of all stakeholders and their invaluable contribution to their design and implementation. The aim is to provide an enabling framework to work together to unlock capacities and resources across different sectors, and thereby build the critical mass to make these policies work in practice.

This Plan depends on having the appropriate structures, mechanisms and resources in place to ensure more evidence-based and forward-looking policy design fit for 2030 and beyond.



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