

**A STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR THE PREVENTION
OF EARLY SCHOOL
LEAVING IN MALTA**

2014



Preface

Early school leaving (ESL) refers to those students between the ages of 18 and 24 who have left compulsory schooling and who do not have at least 5 SEC passes grade 1 to grade 7 and who are not in education or training. However, when looking at the phenomenon, it is within the span of compulsory schooling that ESL preventive measures need to be taken.

The EU has set the target of reducing ESL to 10% across member states by 2020. Figures for 2013 show that with an ESL rate of 20.9%, Malta has come a long way in opening up pathways into further and higher education for students leaving compulsory education. However, Malta still occupies the second place from the bottom in the EU. On the other hand Malta has committed itself to reach the ambitious target of reducing ESL to 10% by 2020.

This *Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta* aims at facilitating focused action that will support students to make the best out of their school years, from early childhood to the end of compulsory school and beyond. The aim is to enable students to develop their potential as human beings, as citizens and as stakeholders in the economy.

As a nation we should not only strive to have a lower rate of early school leavers and thus contribute to EU targets, but above all else we should do our best so that education and schooling become meaningful, engaging and relevant to students. School communities have changed over the years in terms of student diversity. Schools as organizations must look beyond the school perimeters and rethink themselves as teaching and learning organizations within and for the community. Parents and the community at large are both potential contributors to learning as well as potential beneficiaries of the teaching that goes on inside the school. The paradigm shift from inward looking schools to community schools is crucial in combating ESL. Schools should receive all the help and support necessary to address the educational needs of the widest possible spectrum of student diversity, doing justice to every student's claim for human fulfillment, regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, religion, culture or perceived ability. Opening

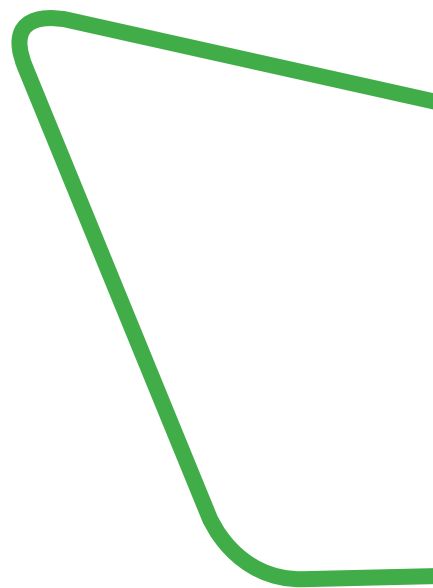
up schools to the community and ensuring better teaching and learning also entails better preparation and support for teachers to grow in their profession. At the practical level, more successful students also means a more promising future for our democracy, more people who are able to engage with politics at community and at national level, in the voluntary sector, in special interest groups and in civil society organizations. Students who benefit from their schooling will also be able to participate in the different economic sectors in ways that complement their holistic personal development, as persons who can contribute to the nation's economy and to the wellbeing of society in general.

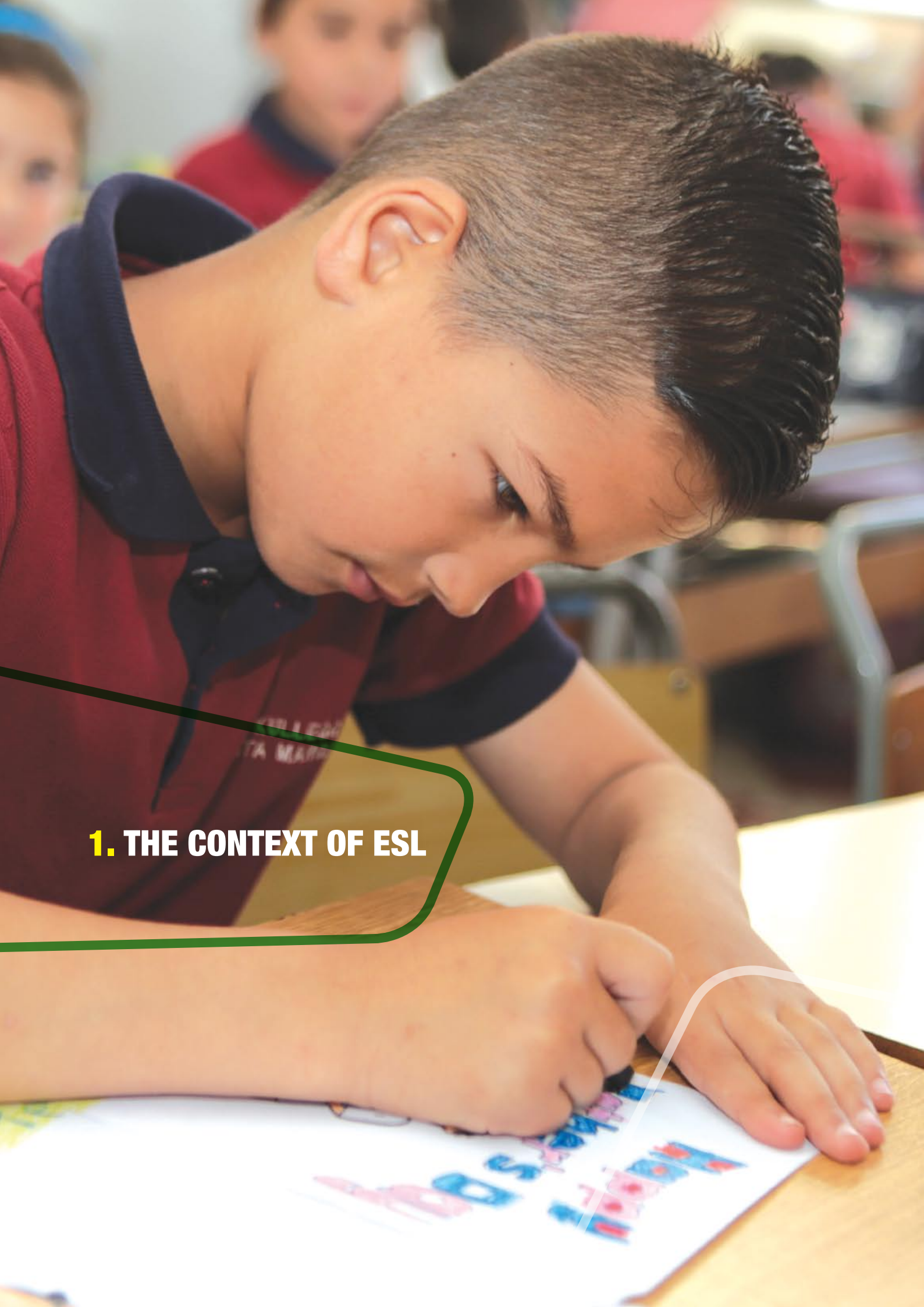
A student who has left school without a basic level of education is not just a number feeding into an ESL percentage, but a human being whose fulfillment is curtailed and whose future is prejudiced. Preventing early school leaving has to do with reaching EU targets as much as with enabling all students to receive their educational entitlement in terms of the opening up of educational pathways that foster fulfilled individuals, empowered citizens and productive and creative workers.

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Minister for Education
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1. THE CONTEXT OF ESL

The context of ESL

The European Union (EU) has set five targets to be reached by 2020. One of these targets is that of reducing the rate of early school leaving (ESL) to less than 10%. Malta has committed itself to reach this ambitious target by the same year.

1.1 What is ESL?

The EU defines early school leavers as those “young people leaving education and training with no more than lower secondary education.”¹ Early school leavers are those who will have limited life chances, will be channelled towards dead-end jobs if any, are more prone to join the working or non-working poor and are at risk of social exclusion. Early school leavers are thus those who will be less likely to fulfil their potential as human beings, as active citizens and as principal actors in the labour market.

1.2 ESL in Malta

In Malta, it is the National Statistics Office (NSO) that has so far measured ESL rates through the Labour Force Survey (LFS). After discussions with Eurostat, NSO has come to define ESL in Malta as those persons between 18 and 24 years of age who do not have at least the equivalent of Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) passes (grades 1 to 7) in five different subjects and who are not in education or training.²

The ESL rate for Malta in 2010 was 24.8%. In 2011 it decreased to 23.6% and went down to 22.6% in 2012. In 2013 it went down another two percentage points to 20.9%.³ These figures show that Malta has managed to lower the rate of ESL from 27.1% in 2009 by 6.2% in four years.⁴ However, Malta’s rate of ESL in 2013 was still the second highest in the EU and well above the EU average of 11.9%.⁵

In June of that same year there were 27,781 full-time and part-time students in further and higher education, up from about 11,000 in June 1995. Half of these students were in tertiary education while the other half were split in two equal cohorts divided between academically oriented and vocationally oriented further education.

Total student population in Further and Higher Education in June 2012⁶

Level of Educational programme	Total number of students	Percentage out of total in Further and Higher Education
Total Further and Higher Education	27,781	100%
Total Higher (Tertiary) Education	14,718	53%
Total Further (Academic)	6,609	24%
Total Further (Vocational)	6,454	23%

Despite the progress Malta has made to increase the number of students in further and higher education, data for 2013 shows that only about half the students in form 5 in May of that year managed to get a pass (grade 5 or better) in Maths, Maltese, English and Physics. Other worrying statistics show that in state schools, 23.9% of those sitting for SEC exams in May 2013 did not get a grade from 1 to 5 in any subject they sat for.

1 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (2013) *Education and Training in Europe 2020. Responses from the EU Member States. Eurydice Report*. Available from: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/163EN.pdf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014), p.17.

2 Ministry of Education and Employment (2012) *An Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta*. Malta: Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Employment. p.77

3 Information for 2013 supplied by NSO, Malta.

4 Ibid., p.78

5 European Commission (2013) *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving November 2013*. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014), p.32. See also information from Eurostat for 2013. Available from: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_lfse_14&lang=en. (Accessed: 09.05.2014)

6 National Commission for Further and Higher Education (2013) *NCFHE Further and Higher Education Statistics 2012. Report of the Survey held by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education October 2013*. Malta: NCFHE. p.16-19

The number and percentage of students who got grades 1-5 in the SEC exams in May 2013 ⁷

Subject	Number of students who made the grade out of a total of 4835	Percentage of students of made the grade out of a total of 4835
Maltese	2,665	55.1%
English	2,887	59.7%
Maths	2,457	50.8%
Physics	2,318	47.9%

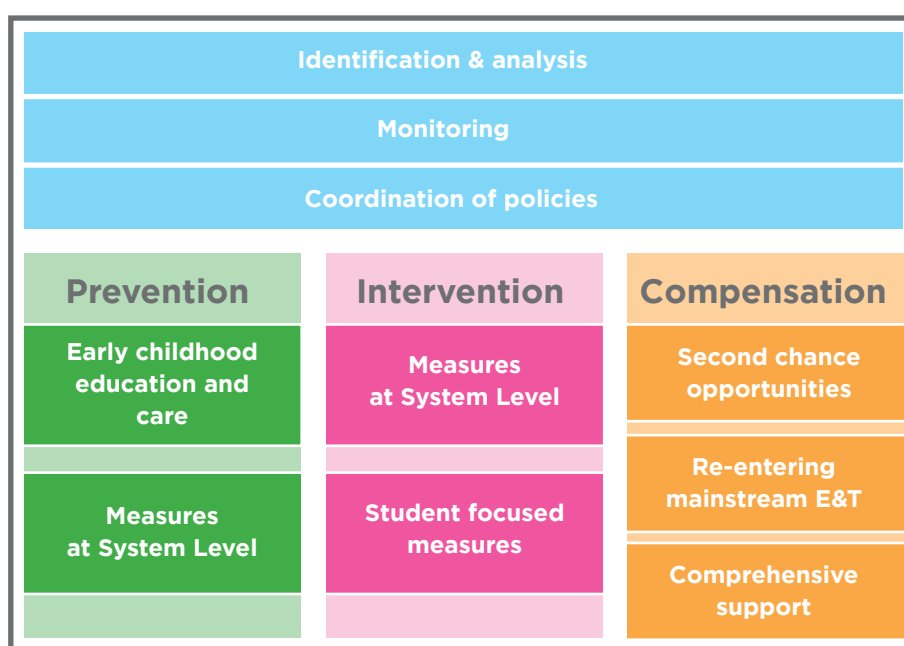
This clearly shows that for Malta to keep increasing the number of students in further and higher education and decrease its ESL rate, there is the need for a more strategic and focused plan. These figures should not discourage educators, but rather serve as a wake-up call for us all to put our heads together, review present practices, plan together and monitor progress for results.

1.3 Addressing ESL in the EU

In 2011 the European Commission suggested a strategic framework for reducing ESL in the EU ⁸:

- (a) Identification, Monitoring and Coordination: ESL can only be addressed if the phenomenon has been identified and researched. ESL can be triggered both by shortcomings in the education system as well as by individual situations. These factors need to be known and the data emerging from research needs to feed into policy making and implementation. Action needs to be well coordinated to achieve concrete results.
- (b) Prevention: Actions are taken to prevent ESL by ensuring that from the early years, schooling is meaningful and that it responds to students’ needs and particular situations
- (c) Intervention: Actions are taken to address ESL when warning systems reveal the need to give support to students at risk of becoming ESL. These actions are school based but also bank upon strong relationships with the wider community.
- (d) Compensation: Actions are taken to enable early school leavers to get back into education and training through second chance education and training opportunities.

Figure 2: Framework with regard to the Design of Strategies directed to Tackle Early School Leavers ⁹



⁷ Data provided by the Office of the Permanent Secretary, MEDE, March 2014.

⁸ European Commission (2011) *Commission Staff Working Paper, Reducing Early School Leaving: Accompanying Document to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving, SEC (2011) 96 final*. Available from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SEC:2011:0096:FIN:EN:PDF>. (Accessed on: 20.03.2013)

⁹ Ibid., p.13

1.4 Addressing ESL in Malta

A consultation document entitled *An Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta* was published in late 2012 by the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Employment. In April 2013 this document was launched for consultation and feedback was received by the general public, public entities and constituted bodies. A second document for further feedback was relayed to interested stakeholders. Out of this process emerged this Strategic Plan. The aim of this document is to put ESL high on the agenda, to map out challenges and responses and to ensure that the tackling of ESL in Malta is carried out in a concerted effort based on cooperation across sectors and levels. It also aims to contribute to the process of consolidating educational achievement through the drawing up of a *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024*¹⁰. The latter document forms the basis for the process of improvement in education in the next decade during which time the students develop their personal and social potential and acquire the appropriate knowledge, key skills, competences and attitudes through a value-oriented formation including equity, social justice, diversity, and inclusivity.

The actions outlined in this strategic plan are in line with the *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024* which centres around four measureable targets that both individually and collectively contribute directly towards the reduction of the number of early school leavers in Malta. The Framework highlights the need for Malta to reduce the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools. It aims at decreasing the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence while increasing student achievement. Another measureable target for our nation to achieve is the provision of support in educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, and reduce the relatively high incidence of early school leavers. A third target put forward by the Framework is to raise levels of student retention and attainment in further and higher education, followed by another target to increase participation in lifelong learning. These four measureable targets form the basis of the present document.

The document *A Strategic Plan Towards Preventing Early School Leaving in Malta* envisages structures that enable stakeholders to monitor implementation for the purpose of revising plans when the need arises, with the specific target of keeping on track in our quest for providing a more meaningful and successful educational experience for all students.

1.5 Guiding Principles

This document recommends the following policy principles which should guide Malta's strategic response to ESL:

- ESL concerns Maltese society in general. Facing up to ESL concerns schools, parents and communities, and has to be tackled through a strategic alliance between policy makers, educators, employers, trade unions and civil society, with a view to develop educational solutions that are relevant to students in today's socio-economic realities, stretched as they are in a local-global tension that oscillates between local communities, the Nation State, the EU, and the wider world;
- the concept of the school as an institution should be revisited. Schools are not enclosed citadels but an important stakeholder within civil society. They need to reach out and build bridges with communities in order to look for solutions to ESL that respond to student diversity and learning needs;
- early warning systems are necessary to identify potential early school leavers with a view to intervene as early as possible in supporting the achievement of children at risk. Particularly we need to see that structures and services are in place to address the needs of students living on the poverty line and students from a low socio-economic status;
- schools need to be pro-active and creative in addressing ESL issues and in making educational institutions relevant and effective. Schools need to be supported by policy makers and administrators through effective communication channels;

¹⁰ Ministry for Education and Employment (2014) *Framework For The Education Strategy For Malta 2014-2024*. Malta: Ministry for Education and Employment.

- actions need to take place at school, community, sectoral and national level. Education and Training institutions at all levels, from early childhood education and care to further and higher education have a stake in reducing ESL through prevention, intervention or compensation measures;
- lifelong learning is an attitude that needs to be inculcated in students from an early age. Formal and informal lifelong learning and adult learning initiatives have a key role to play in addressing ESL, both as a second chance education process that re-integrates early school leavers back into education and training and also in fostering a nation-wide attitude towards continuous self-development, community development, active citizenship, entrepreneurship and employment mobility;
- vocational education is not the only solution to ESL but it plays a crucial role in providing a more comprehensive and varied learning programme that responds to students' diversity of interest and learning patterns;
- all educational attainment should be recorded through a proper accreditation and certification system that will enable early school leavers to return back to education and training with the least possible difficulty.



A close-up photograph of two chefs in white uniforms and hats. The chef in the foreground is using a blue piping bag to decorate a rectangular cake on a metal tray. The cake is decorated with white cream, red berries, and other ingredients. The chef in the background is also focused on the task. The scene is set in a professional kitchen environment.

2. MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING: CROSS SECTORAL COOPERATION AND MONITORING

Meeting the challenge of Early School Leaving: cross sectoral cooperation and monitoring

Tackling ESL entails a sustained long-term effort that brings together all the stakeholders, from policy makers to school administrators, teachers, parents, trade unions, employers, as well as researchers. Actions need also to be informed by continuous research that informs policy by giving feedback on implementation processes.

2.1 Setting up an Inter-Ministerial Committee

Early School Leaving is a horizontal issue that cuts across the remit of various Ministries. For this reason this strategic plan suggests a comprehensive, wide ranging but also cohesive approach towards tackling the issue of ESL in Malta. Working across structural and organisation borders and parameters in a concerted way will insure a wide scope of action that is at the same time focused on obtaining concrete results.

For this reason this strategic plan suggests the setting up of an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) under the responsibility of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) by the end of 2014, with the mandate to:

- assess and propose strategies, policies and actions directed to address the challenges of ESL across different Government Ministries with the necessary support of pertinent Government agencies in order to ensure that actions are taken in a coordinated, coherent and consistent manner, leading to effective and tangible results;
- ensure that ESL and inter-related issues and proposed actions are designed and implemented with the support of schools, education and training institutions, NGOs, parents, persons with a disability, members of minority groups, local communities, employers, trade unions, and civil society organisations.

The IMC should be constituted of senior representatives from appropriate Government Ministries and will have the remit to invite stakeholders from time to time to discuss particular pertinent issues as deemed fit.



Strategic Action 2.1 Setting up an Inter-Ministerial Committee

This strategic plan recommends that whilst the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) acts as the lead agency in tackling ESL, an Inter-Ministerial Committee is set up to address ESL across sectors and Ministries. The IMC is to be chaired by the Director for Early School Leavers under the aegis of the Permanent Secretary within MEDE. It will be made up of senior officials of appropriate Government Ministries. It will invite relevant stakeholders from civil society, employers and trade unions for consultation meetings from time to time. The IMC will (i) assess and propose strategies, policies and actions directed to address the challenge of Early School Leaving across Government Ministries; (ii) ensure that ESL and inter-related issues and proposed actions include all the relevant stakeholders both in drafting policies and in implementing and monitoring them.

2.2 Setting up an ESL Unit

This strategic plan recommends the setting up of an Early School Leaving Unit (ESLU) under the aegis of the Office of the Permanent Secretary of MEDE by the end of 2014 with the mandate to own and steward responses to the ESL challenge. It will also be strategically placed to keep ESL high on the Ministry's and the Government's agenda.

The ESLU would ensure that a sustained resource base is in place and that it will:

- be a leading partner and work with relevant entities within and outwith MEDE to set up a comprehensive framework for the collecting of national, regional and local data related to ESL, while ensuring that high quality analysis and monitoring is carried out in order to guide future policy making and implementation;
- carry out on-going monitoring of strategies, policies and programmes emanating from this strategic plan; analyse their impact and performance, and on the basis of empirical evidence submit recommendations for their improvement;
- be responsible for the monitoring of education provision for children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school;
- provide consultation and assistance to schools across the state, church and independent sectors in developing ESL prevention programmes;
- work with the agencies and schools to ensure that teachers and support staff are well equipped to occupy centre stage in the drafting and implementation of strategic responses to educational disadvantage, as well as develop mechanisms that facilitate teacher and support staff involvement taking into account the demands of their job;
- work with schools, education and training institutions, NGOs, parents, persons with a disability, members of minority groups, local communities, civil society organisations, trade unions and the business community in order to develop structured mechanisms to tackle the challenge of ESL;
- seek to promote partnership between parents, teachers and the community in order to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote students' engagement in the education system. Ensure that effective ESL prevention programmes implemented by schools are identified, given visibility and support, and that their results are disseminated through properly structured cooperation networks across schools from the various sectors;
- establish networks with overseas entities involved in ESL prevention programmes with the aim of providing schools' staff and relevant stakeholders with formal and informal training opportunities in the area of ESL prevention including the continuous professional development of staff;
- seek funding for ESL prevention programmes under the 2014-2020 ESF financing instrument amongst others.

Strategic Action 2.2 Setting up an Early School Leaving Unit

This strategic plan recommends the constitution of an Early School Leaving Unit (ESLU) reporting to the Office of the Permanent Secretary within MEDE. The Unit will be responsible for ensuring an integrated, systematic, sustained, cohesive and coordinated approach to addressing the challenge of ESL.

2.3 Setting up an ESL working group within MEDE

It is further proposed that the ESLU establishes an Early School Leaving Working Group (ESLWG) by the end of 2014, to be chaired by the Director for Early School Leavers or his/her delegate. It will be comprised of representatives of entities within MEDE that have a direct contribution to make towards reducing ESL. These entities include among others:

- College Principals;
- the Department for Student Services (DSS);
- the Department for Research and Development (DRD);
- the Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLL);
- the Directorate for Educational Services (DES);
- the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE);
- the Malta College for Art, Science and Technology (MCAST);
- the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC);
- the Foundation for Educational Services (FES);
- Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ (AŻ);
- the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE);
- The University of Malta (UOM).





The aim of the ESLWG will be to:

- determine, coordinate and monitor services that address the needs of children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging in specific local conditions;
- ensure that pro-active preventive measures are in place;
- identify the need for professional development of school administrators, teachers, psycho-social professionals and others working with children and young people at risk;
- facilitate the establishment of parents, family and community networks that would work with schools to intervene and prevent ESL;
- establish support mechanisms that parents, families and carers may require to better support children or young persons;
- ensure that this is done in a concerted and mutually supportive manner, especially when the services are being given by entities that fall within the same Ministry and aiming to reach connected cohorts of students.

Strategic Action 2.3 Setting up an Early School Leaving Working Group

This strategic plan recommends the constitution of an Early School Leaving Working Group (ESLWG) that will work with schools and other entities to assist them in determining the needs of children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging, and to help them develop preventive measures that are specific to local conditions. The ultimate aim of the ESLWG is to see that this is done in a cohesive, coordinated and focused way.

2.4 Constructing a comprehensive data collection framework

The work of the IMC, the ESLU and the ESLWG cannot achieve results if the policies and actions are not informed by correct data that gives a true picture of the developing situation of ESL. A robust strategic plan needs an equally robust system for data collection and analysis. Data pertinent to ESL is presently collected by different departments within MEDE and by other agencies within the Ministry such as ETC and MCAST. For example, the Department of Curriculum Management (DCM) carries out early assessment in basic skills of students in the first three years of the primary school. DCM also organises the end of year annual examinations from year 4 in the primary school to form 5 in the secondary school, including the benchmarking examination at the end of year 6. Data relating to assessment and school attendance in state schools is inputted on a day-to-day basis on a nation-wide electronic platform (E1 platform) which permits school administrators and policy makers to access information related to student attainment and school attendance or absenteeism. Data relating to performance of Maltese students in international studies such as PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS is collected by DRD. The DSS carries out a tracer study of form 5 students to monitor their educational or employment pathways after compulsory school. ETC also carries out its own research about young people who are out of school and are either in education, in employment or simply unaccounted for. The official rate of ESL in Malta is then measured by the National Statistics Office (NSO) based on the LFS.

This strategic plan strongly suggests that MEDE should seek to complement the work carried by NSO by taking a more active role with regard to the generation, and publication of data related to education. The DRD that falls under the Office of the Permanent Secretary of MEDE should be the main driver behind a project that would aim at:

- taking stock of all the data being presently gathered by the different Departments and agencies within the Ministry for Education and Employment as well as by University, NSO and other agencies outside MEDE such as the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali għal Persuni b'Diżabilità and agencies working with minority groups;
- constructing a robust data collection framework that conforms to methodological standards set by NSO and Eurostat, for the on-going collation of key data sets within the education sector.

A collaborative, inter-ministerial approach to the collection and sharing of data would make this research framework more comprehensive and effective. It would inform future policy making and implementation at



national, college or school level. It would entail an on-going process of monitoring for progress and effectiveness. It would also lay the basis for a better collaborative and more focused approach towards reducing ESL at both the national and the local level. Thus, in line with the *Framework for the Education Strategy For Malta 2014-2024*, this strategic plan suggests the setting up of a comprehensive data system that would include the following important information about students:

- gender and nationality;
- age on entering and leaving education;
- provenance at the national, region and town level;
- school attended by student and categorisation of school by educational sector (state, church or independent);
- educational attainment as from early years;
- school attendance/absenteeism;
- socio-economic status of family of the student and his/her family;
- employment activities of early school leavers, or inactivity.

Given the fact that the reduction of ESL is one of the key performance targets that Malta is to meet in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy the report recommends that MEDE explores the possibility of securing funding under the EU 2014-2020 multi-financing framework to develop the data collection framework proposed in this plan with a possibility of having it in place by the end of 2015.

Strategic Action 2.4 Constructing a comprehensive data collection framework

This strategic plan recommends empowering the Department for Research and Development (DRD) within the Office of the Permanent Secretary of MEDE to network with other departments and agencies within and outside MEDE in order to take stock of all the relevant data collection systems that are presently in place and construct a robust and structured data collection framework that conforms to methodological standards set by NSO and Eurostat, for the on-going collation of key data sets within the education sector. This is necessary to gauge the real situation with regards to ESL and to formulate effective policies that help Malta to reduce its ESL rate.



3. MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING: PREVENTIVE MEASURES



Meeting the challenge of Early School Leaving: preventive measures

Preventive measures are meant to tackle ESL before it even manifests itself. It refers to positive actions that contribute to make schooling meaningful and effective, and thus averting disengagement from school. Preventive measures are meant to have long-term effects.

A. Early childhood education and care

EU policy documents argue that access to good quality early childhood education and care is a net contributor to reducing ESL, as evidenced by a correlation between performance in the PISA assessment of 15 year olds and students' attendance of pre-primary education.¹¹

3.1 Providing free childcare

Free kindergarten classes are available for everybody in Maltese state schools from the age of 2 years nine months up to 5 years. Government is now committed to complement this service by providing free childcare for the years 0 to 3, both for its educational benefits in the long term and also for the economic benefits in the short to medium term, given that it will enable young parents, particularly mothers, to remain in employment. As from April 2014, all children of parents who are in employment will be entitled to free childcare through a public private partnership.

This strategic plan strongly suggests that MEDE carries out continuous monitoring of the free early childcare programme in order to ensure that:

- the service providers are offering a quality service in terms of facilities, staff and relationships with children and their parents;
- families of low socio-economic status, migrant families and families from disadvantaged backgrounds gain access to the service and take the full benefit of it;
- childcare centres promote the acquisition of spoken Maltese and English among children from migrant families or from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- childcare centres provide children with an environment that stimulates curiosity, inquisitiveness, creativity and an openness to learning;
- There is a smooth transition from childcare centres to kindergarten.

Strategic Action 3.1 Providing free childcare

This strategic plan recommends MEDE to monitor the nationwide provision of free childcare to ensure that it is a quality experience for staff, children and parents, and that it contributes to the children's development as they prepare themselves to get into early childhood education.

B. Making schools relevant and meaningful for every student

To avert ESL, schools need to see that nobody falls by the wayside and that schools address the needs of students of all abilities, culture or ethnic origin. Schools need to take into account the entitlement of all students and to take into consideration the changes occurring in Maltese society. Prevention of ESL will therefore entail making schools welcoming and relevant to all.

3.2 Educating for and through diversity

Maltese schools are becoming more heterogeneous than ever before in terms of country of origin, language, culture and religion. Foreign students are becoming always more frequent in schools and colleges. The *National*

¹¹ See for example European Commission (2013) *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving November 2013*. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014). p.18

Curriculum Framework (NCF) embraces the principles of diversity and inclusion. It states that the principle of diversity “encompasses that an individual is unique and recognises individual differences whether these stem from dimensions of race; ethnicity; gender; sexual orientation; socio-economic status; age; physical, mental or intellectual abilities; religious beliefs; political beliefs; or other ideologies.”¹² With regards to students from migrant families, all these aspects of diversity are closely intertwined in what may be a very complex socio-economic situation that oscillates from total social inclusion to total exclusion.

This strategic plan strongly suggests that schools recognise this reality and address it through their ten-year, school based plans, as part of the *Framework For The Education Strategy For Malta 2014-2024* by adopting a number of intervention measures including:

- developing guidelines for school development plans on how best to integrate migrant students and families, devising appropriate teaching plans and introducing teaching and learning resources that reflect a range of cultures and social perspectives and dimensions;
- providing migrant students and families with the necessary support to overcome the insecurity that may result from being part of a minority grouping and build up their self-confidence and self-esteem in a host culture and society;
- developing procedures to ensure that migrant minors are registered in a school and are given the necessary induction support so that both the students and their parents or guardians integrate themselves within the school community, including cultural orientation and language support, with the extra support of professionals from DSS in the case of foreign families with past traumatic experiences;
- providing teachers with the necessary training and support services to be able to cope with but also to make the best out of classroom diversity in all its aspects (culture, language, religion, physical and intellectual abilities) in the quest for total inclusion and engagement in meaningful educative classroom and school environments.

Strategic Action 3.2 Educating for and through diversity

This strategic plan strongly entices schools to respond to diversity through proactive, inclusive school environments, student and family support for better self-esteem and self-confidence, the setting up of induction, cultural orientation and integration programmes for migrant students and their parents, as well as teacher training that will enable staff to deal with diversity through inclusion, and turn the challenge of diversity into an enriching experience for all the students.

3.3 Meeting the needs of high achievers

High achievers need to be continually challenged for school engagement and achievement. This may be a challenge in mixed ability classes. This strategic plan follows on the suggestions of both the NCF and the *Framework For The Education Strategy For Malta 2014-2024* in favour of student centred learning and suggests that schools take these children into consideration by:

- investing in teacher training to empower teachers with the skills necessary to identify and effectively respond to and challenge high achieving students in their classrooms;
- investing in parent education that will enable home support for students at both ends of the ability and achievement spectrum;
- developing and making available off-the-shelf as well as customised learning tools and resources for gifted students on the virtual learning environments that are already available in state schools and that are accessible from the classroom and from home;
- seek the support of agencies such as FES, particularly through the Malta Writing Programme, as well as resource persons, community based organisations and other civil society organisations that may contribute to support programmes in mainstream education that cater for the different educational needs of all students, from low to high achievers, within mainstream education.

¹² Ministry of Education and Employment (2012) *A National Curriculum Framework for All*. Malta: Ministry of Education and Employment. p.10

Strategic Action 3.3 Meeting the needs of high achievers

This strategic plan recommends that schools cater for the needs of high achievers by investing in teacher training, in parent education and in challenging and easily accessible virtual learning environments, and by building bridges with the wider community to harness all the necessary resources that can support more challenging programmes for school engagement for students of all abilities and educational needs.

3.4 Setting up middle schools: making caring community schools possible

Research shows that schools with large populations do not provide an ideal educational environment.¹³ Students in smaller schools have better relationships with their peers and feel safer than peers in larger schools. Teachers in smaller schools feel more committed and find more satisfaction in their work. This reflects itself in better student performance. There also seems to be a correlation between smaller schools and low rates of absenteeism.

In the past decade the Maltese Government has invested a lot in state-of-the-art secondary schools that have also resulted, however, in secondary school populations that run into hundreds. In September 2014 MEDE will be introducing middle schools for forms 1 and 2 of the secondary school, while forms 3, 4 and 5 (the last three years of the compulsory school) will have separate buildings and administrations. The aim of this reform is to avoid problems usually related to large schools such as bullying of older students on younger students, the impersonal relationships in large groups, and the problems related to students passing through the turbulent mid-adolescent years. Smaller middle schools will prevent early school leaving by creating smaller and safer school communities that are more conducive to learning, where student-teacher and student-student relationships are easier to forge, and teachers can give more individual attention to students.

In view of this reform this strategic plan suggests that MEDE monitors the phasing in of middle schools in September 2014 in order to see that schools exploit the smaller size of the school and the smaller teacher-student ratio in a way that:

- the individual needs of the students are met and that ever less students feel left out or incapable of engaging with school life;
- the learning experience complements educational aims with in-class and out-of-class activities that make schooling more interesting for students who lack a sense of connection with and of belonging to the school;
- teachers are well equipped, and if necessary, adequately trained to cater for the needs of different students with differing educational needs;
- parents are empowered to be in a better position to contribute to their children's education, both in the home but also through active parent involvement practices inside the schools;
- parents are empowered to be able to identify early signs of school disengagement, learning difficulties or other problems that might lead to their children becoming early school leavers and to seek ways how to cooperate with the school in order to see to their children's educational needs in a satisfactory way.

Strategic Action 3.4 Setting up middle schools: making caring community schools possible

This strategic plan recommends that MEDE monitors the phasing in of middle schools in the secondary school cycle to ensure that smaller sized school communities result in more caring and more responsive schools that find strength in better student-teacher relationships and better parent involvement in their children's education with a view to preventing the possibility of students becoming disengaged or feeling left out.

¹³ See for example: http://www.communityworksinstitute.org/cwjonline/essays/a_essaystext/grauer_smallsch1.html#sthash.rLgorLgo.dpuf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014).

C. Supporting children at risk through innovative teaching and learning tools and through school and community based solutions

Schools tend to cater for mainstream abilities and needs. In order to reach out to students who are most at risk, schools need to be supported to develop new teaching methods, use innovative teaching and learning tools and develop school based solutions to address students' needs.

3.5 Developing e-Learning content to better respond to student learning needs

A potential major contributor to a varied and relevant pedagogy that responds to student diversity is e-Learning. In the past three years Government has invested in interactive white boards that have been supplied to all state school classrooms at all levels. Teachers have also been given training to use this infrastructure. This investment now needs to be complemented by a strong and focused further investment in finding ways and means how to exploit the possibilities that the infrastructure opens up for new teaching and learning methods. Currently, e-content is being developed by professionals from the DQSE for subjects taught at years 3 to 6 in the primary school, and for a number of subjects taught at forms 1 and 2 in secondary schools (English, Mathematics, Maltese, Science, Geography, History and Social Studies). For some teaching areas off-the-shelf e-content is being procured and customised for local needs. For other subjects, such as Maltese, e-content has to be developed ex novo. An authoring tool system has also been procured to enable teachers to create their own content. Training is envisaged to start in April 2014 for the staff of the e-Learning Centre. This staff will then train school teachers during in-service training to make the best use of the system to create relevant and effective teaching and learning tools that will cater for the variety of learning needs in their classrooms with a view to addressing particularly those students who are most at risk.

This strategic plan entices DQSE to ensure that:

- relevant and effective e-content is developed by both DQSE professionals as well as by school teachers;
- e-content is continuously monitored and reviewed for quality, relevance and effectiveness in addressing the learning needs of those students most at risk;
- staff at the e-Learning centre are adequately trained by the end of May 2014 and that this staff in-turn trains teachers in state schools from July 2014 onwards on a continuous basis, both through centrally organised training courses and also through ad-hoc responses to individual schools' training needs;
- school leaders are fully conversant with this enabling technology and in doing so integrate the e-Learning content as seamlessly as possible into the classroom teaching of the diverse subjects.

Strategic Action 3.5 Developing e-Learning content to better respond to students' learning needs

This strategic plan recommends that investment in e-Learning infrastructure is complemented by the development of e-content. It entices the e-Learning centre to invest heavily in staff training with a view to specifically explore ways how e-content may address the learning needs of those students who are most at risk of school failure.

3.6 Tapping mobile technology for more student engagement

In line with the NCF students will be given the opportunity to follow individual learning pathways to ensure that each child develops his or her full learning potential. In a classroom environment that is becoming always more characterised by diversity of ability, attitudes, and socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, new teaching and learning tools need to be tapped. In this regard MEDE is considering tablet computing devices as a technological tool worth assessing in terms of their capabilities of increasing access to learning and of achieving a one-to-one teacher-student relationship. A One Tablet Per Child initiative is being piloted in order to evaluate the best solution for anywhere-anytime learning for the primary school classroom. The piloting team is also focusing on how this new technology can contribute to reaching the aims of the *National Literacy Strategy*.

In April 2014 the use of different kinds of tablets will be piloted in a number of year 4 classrooms through teacher training and mentoring. In September 2014 the tablets will be used as teaching and learning tools in the classrooms involved in the pilot study. At the end of the scholastic year 2014-2015 the characteristics of an ideal prototype will be laid out by the piloting team and a programme for a national roll-out through a public private partnership will be put in place.

This strategic plan supports the tapping of mobile technology and strongly urges the piloting team to focus on the teaching and learning benefits that will result from it, and to analyse how this new technology can help to make teaching and learning meaningful and effective for the widest possible diversity of students' learning needs, helping to increase student engagement and reduce the risk of student disengagement. The pilot project should assess how individualised learning can be achieved, how independence and self-initiated learning in students is increased and what type of learning can happen beyond the classroom, especially within the family.

A future national roll-out of the tablet to year 4 primary school students after the pilot project should be accompanied by a strong effort to make teachers, students and parents aware that the tablet is a learning tool with the potential to facilitate the teaching and learning process for students with different learning patterns and learning needs.

Strategic Action 3.6 Tapping mobile technology for more student engagement

This strategic plan supports the piloting of the use of mobile technology in the primary schools and strongly entices all stakeholders to gauge its effectiveness as yet another teaching and learning tool that might be useful to make teaching and learning meaningful and effective. It is believed that tablets can enable schools to respond to student diversity and learning needs, especially those who are most vulnerable. This plan also suggests continuous teacher training in the use of the tablet technology as well as parental involvement in the implementation of the project. This will ensure that the tablet technology teaching and learning potential is maximised.

3.7 Funding for a School based approach to reducing ESL

This strategic plan underlines the importance of specific prevention measures that are undertaken at a local level, given the fact that schools have unique characteristics that need locality specific or community specific strategies. This will only be possible if colleges and schools have access to decentralised funds.

In line with the *Framework For The Education Strategy For Malta 2014-2024* we need to find long term sustainable funding for school based strategies. Different types of financing models can be followed:

- funds that are decentralised at college level;
- funds that are decentralised at school level;
- allocation of financing for a particular preventive mechanism.

The report recommends that a vote item for ESL is introduced under the ESLU both with regard to operations expenditure as well as to programmes and initiatives. The programmes and initiative votes would be subsequently split into two - part of the funds would be owned by the ESLU itself in order to provide it with the financial resources that will allow it to introduce prevention mechanisms that may be appropriate for implementation in more than one school; the other would be decentralised to state colleges to be used across the schools, allowing for the funding of locality specific ESL prevention mechanisms.

The ESLU will also seek to extend the financial resources available for ESL preventive initiatives by applying for financing from the European Social Fund (ESF) available from the 2014-2020 EU budget. The ESLU will also support schools and colleges to tap funding possibilities for staff training as well as for strategic partnerships from Erasmus+ as from 2015. ESLU will also help schools to explore funding from corporate social responsibility opportunities (CSR).

Strategic Action 3.7 Funding for a School based approach to reducing ESL

This strategic plan recommends that a two tier level of financing is allocated to a new programme and initiative line item within MEDE where part of the financial vote will rest with the ESLU to enable it to fund prevention mechanisms that may be appropriate for implementation in more than one school; the other part would be decentralised to colleges for use across schools allowing for locality specific ESL prevention mechanisms. Alternative funding is also to be sought from 2014-2020 EU funds and from CSR opportunities.

D. Reintroducing vocational education in the secondary schools as an alternative learning pathway

The statistics published in October 2013 by NCFHE regarding students in further education in June 2012 reveal that 6,609 students were in academic education while 6,454 were in vocational further education. This shows that 51% chose the academic stream while 49% chose the vocational stream.¹⁴ But in reality, no vocational education was being provided in secondary schools across sectors. The NCF seeks to redress the imbalance and seeks to incorporate Vocational Education and Training (VET) education within mainstream education and in a way that it enjoys equal status with other academic subjects.¹⁵ The *Framework For The Education Strategy For Malta 2012-2024* also highlights the importance of vocational education and the link between education and the economy. The Commission Staff Working Paper entitled *Reducing early school leaving*¹⁶ argues about the advantages of including VET pathways in secondary education as an entitlement for students who have different aspirations. It also argues that ironically, ESL is also most common within VET. It thus emphasises the fact that not only VET should be promoted as a credible alternative learning pathway but should also be structured in such a way as to reduce dropouts and respond more effectively to students' aspirations and learning needs.

3.8 Introducing a well structured vocational education pathway in Maltese secondary schools

After the closure of the trade schools in Malta, vocational education went literally missing from the secondary school curriculum. It was felt that students with different learning needs and aptitudes were being let down since only an academic oriented curriculum with its pedagogic implications was on offer. On the other hand vocational education was reorganized at further education level and centralised within a new institution, MCAST. However, it was being felt that at post-compulsory school level it was rather late in the day to offer VET. For this reason, a pilot project was launched in conjunction with the Business, Technology and Education Council (BTEC). After intensive teacher training throughout 2011, four different BTEC subjects were offered in six state secondary schools, two church secondary schools and two independent schools as from September 2011. The subjects on offer were Information Technology, Engineering, Health and Social Care, and Hospitality. These were offered to a restricted number of form 3 students, who by the end of compulsory school at form 5 would acquire a Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) level 3 qualification through BTEC. VET subjects were offered as regular curriculum options. The first students in these VET educational pathways in the secondary schools will finish their courses in May 2014 with an MQF level 3 BTEC vocational qualification.

Currently the teachers involved in the teaching of these subjects are collaborating with MCAST and the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) in order to develop home-grown qualifications in the same four subjects, together with a new VET subject, Agribusiness and Animal Husbandry that will be piloted in one secondary school as from September 2014. Discussions are also underway between the University of Malta (UOM), MCAST and ITS in order to find ways how to harmonise the MQF level 3 VET subjects being developed, with the SEC qualification. This would mean that passes in academic SEC subjects and in vocational subjects at MQF level 3 will be attested to in one certificate issued jointly by UOM, MCAST and ITS. It would also lead to mutual recognition of both SEC qualifications and VET qualifications by all three further and higher education institutions. This structure would provide a more credible VET learning pathway in the secondary school that would address different learning styles and needs, and also a more flexible learning pathway at further and higher education level. It is also part of a focused effort to identify dead ends in the education system and move towards more permeability between education sectors and levels, ensuring flexible pathways for progression from one level to the other.

At a wider level MEDE will also be cooperating with CEDEFOP to address the challenges the country is facing with regards to VET at all levels, especially in relation to:

- students' learning needs, capabilities and aspirations for employment;
- the needs of industry and the labour market in general;
- matching new job opportunities with available people's skills.

14 National Commission for Further and Higher Education (2013) *NCFHE Further and Higher Education Statistics 2012. Report of the Survey held by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education October 2013.* Malta: NCFHE, p.16

15 Ministry of Education and Employment (2012) *A National Curriculum Framework for All.* Malta: Ministry of Education and Employment, p.40-41

16 European Commission (2011) *Commission Staff Working Paper. Reducing early school leaving. Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving.* {COM (2011) 19}. Available from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SEC:2011:0096:FIN:EN:PDF>. (Accessed on: 20.03.2013)

In line with the objectives of the *Framework For The Education Strategy For Malta 2012-2024*, this cooperative venture with CEDEFOP will enable MEDE to embark on three different projects namely:

- the development of quality apprenticeship schemes;
- the development of vocational learning tracks in general secondary education;
- the carrying out of a curricula skills gap analysis.

The main objectives of the study on apprenticeships would be to carry out in-depth reviews of existing policies and national developments in order to identify the strengths and challenges of such policies. The development of vocational learning tracks in general secondary education is to prevent students from dropping out by assessing their capabilities and consequently apply a wide variety of educational approaches as to help them realize their full potential. Finally, the skills gap analysis will enable the state to address skill deficiencies and mismatch at the national level. This cooperation with CEDEFOP will be piloted by a steering group and a stakeholder committee that will be up and running by the second quarter of 2014.

In view of this, this strategic plan recommends that:

- the MQF level 3 home-grown alternatives to the BTEC courses are piloted together with the new home-grown qualification in Agribusiness and Animal Husbandry in the initial 10 schools as well as in the new school that will host the new VET course;
- the implementation of the home-grown courses is monitored, and the teaching, learning and assessment processes are reviewed for effectiveness in addressing students' needs and aspirations;
- a plan for a national roll-out of VET subjects in mainstream state, church and independent schools for the academic year 2015-2016 is carefully laid out with the full co-operation of, and continuous communication with college principals, heads of schools, students and parents;
- guidance teachers, career advisors and Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) teachers are trained in order to be able to guide form 2 students when choosing subjects to be taken in form 3, including the VET subjects currently being developed;
- the VET Education Unit within the Office of the Permanent Secretary of MEDE, currently overseeing the piloting of the VET subjects in the secondary schools, enters into discussions with UOM, MCAST and ITS so that when the time comes for the national roll-out of the project, there will be enough teachers who would be in a position to deliver the VET programmes;
- the on-going, formative assessment methods currently being used in the VET subjects that are being piloted are assessed for effectiveness and their use in academic subjects be also considered;
- the piloting team considers the development of MQF level 1 and level 2 VET qualifications for students in the secondary schools that will not be able to achieve an MQF level 3 VET qualification, with a view to ensuring a smoother passage between the secondary school and the MQF level 2 and 3 courses held at MCAST and at ITS at post secondary level;
- the VET Education Unit is eventually integrated within the DQSE for a better streamlining of curriculum development, assessment methods, teacher continuous professional development and the opening up of always more flexible education pathways for student progression from secondary to further and higher education;
- the further development of VET in the mainstream curriculum at secondary level is continuously monitored by the VET Education Unit in order to ensure that feedback from the monitoring process and also from the CEDEFOP studies will give direction to the development of new courses that are in line with the students' needs and aspirations but also with the country's economic development.

Strategic Action 3.8 Introducing a well structured vocational education pathway in Maltese secondary schools

This strategic plan recommends that measures are taken to develop a mainstreamed well-structured VET pathway in secondary schools that would address students' different learning needs and aspirations and that would ensure flexible progression pathways from the secondary schools to the different further and higher education institutions

E. Transition processes, flexible pathways and career guidance

The document *Education and Training in Europe 2020*¹⁷ makes the case for a strong career guidance service across primary and secondary schools. It also highlights the vitality of a good career guidance service that would enable students to consider different learning pathways and different career options that steer away from stereotypes, enabling students to widen the scope of their studies. It is also crucial to have a career guidance service that empowers those students most at risk of dropping out of school. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with particular learning difficulties need to be helped to find suitable openings in the education system that would enable them to develop their abilities and also to access employment opportunities on par with others within a perspective of social justice.

3.9 Strengthening the transition process across educational pathways

One of the aims of introducing the state school colleges system was to ease transition from primary to secondary school as well as to foster a culture of lifelong learning “from the earliest stages... right up to the University of the Third Age and similar institutions.”¹⁸ However, there seems to be a pattern whereby in the Secondary School absenteeism is higher than in the Primary School, while in further and higher education institutions there is a retention rate of students in their first post-compulsory school year that can be improved. Professionals from DSS and from further and higher education institutions such as MCAST already carry out transition exercises with students and parents. This sterling work can be improved through different actions in order to decrease absenteeism or school disengagement as a result of students’ difficulties in settling down in a new school environment, as well as increasing student retention in further and higher education institutions. This strategic plan suggests that the proposed ESLWG facilitates discussion and cooperation between stakeholders to carry out the following actions:

- consolidating the student information electronic platform (E1 Platform) that captures the students’ development over the different cycles of education, from early years to post-secondary, as well as facilitating access by schools to the useful information on the platform that might enable schools to respond better to students’ needs at the primary, middle, secondary and post-secondary school;
- revisiting or, where necessary, putting in place, structured transition programmes that involve students, parents, teachers from the previous and from the succeeding school cycle, and professionals from DSS for a smoother transition process;
- increasing the structured co-operation between psycho-social professionals working across the different education cycles, from early years to post-secondary, in order to help integrate students in their new school setting;
- assessing current mentoring and buddy systems in different schools, where older students and/or teachers are assigned a responsibility role to support newcomers during their first year in the middle school, secondary school and further or higher education institution, in order to monitor them for effectiveness, propose improvements and find ways for their wider implementation across schools at different levels;
- widening the implementation of transition and induction processes, such as Welcome Weeks where new students and their parents meet with school leaders, teachers and older students, and become familiar with the school’s resources, facilities, protocols and support services.

Strategic Action 3.9 Strengthening the transition process across educational pathways

This strategic plan recommends that the proposed ESLWG facilitates discussion and cooperation between stakeholders to assess and strengthen the transition programmes in place today in order to support students as they move from one cycle of education to the other, from early years to further and higher education.

17 Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency (2013) *Education and Training in Europe 2020. Responses from the EU Member States. Eurydice Report*. Available from: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/163EN.pdf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014). p.25

18 Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2005) *For All Children To Succeed. A New Network Organisation For Quality Education in Malta*. Malta: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment. p.25-26

3.10 Review and consolidate the career guidance service across levels

School may become more meaningful if students are helped to make the right choices when it comes to deciding on career paths at the various levels. Career Guidance may provide a wide range of activities that can guide young people to make informed choices about subjects, programmes and schools as well as about employment opportunities.

Several initiatives have been taking place in this area. New professional profiles have been created within state colleges in order to separate counselling from career guidance. Thus state schools now have the services of counsellors as well as career advisors and trainee career advisors. A number of career guidance teachers operate centrally from DSS. Guidance teachers in secondary schools liaise with these professionals. They also give service in primary schools in a bid to facilitate the transition from primary to secondary. Activities run by these teams of professionals include one-to-one sessions with students, information sessions for students and for parents, participation in job fairs, as well as the organisation of a job exposure programme for all form 4 students in state schools. They also carry out one-to-one interviews to help form 5 students in their transition from compulsory schooling to further and higher education and, possibly also employment. They also provide a summer walk-in service for these students and work towards the compilation of an annual end-of-compulsory schooling tracer study.

The latest initiative in consolidating career guidance across levels is the review of the Personal and Social Development (PSD) curriculum at both primary and secondary school level. This subject has been widened in scope to incorporate also career guidance. A new syllabus for forms 3, 4 and 5 of the secondary school has been drawn up and a new MQF level 3 qualification has been accredited by NCFHE in Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD). The aim is to empower students with career management skills so that they would be able to take informed decisions about their educational pathways and possible employment tracks.

In order to consolidate these career guidance services, it is being proposed that:

- the ESLWG facilitates the cooperation between DQSE, DES, DSS professionals, schools from across different levels and sectors, as well as other agencies such as ETC in order to see that career guidance services at different levels and in state, church and independent school sectors receive a quality coherent guidance service. It should also facilitate communication between professionals involved with compulsory school students and professionals from such institutions as MCAST, ITS and the Higher Secondary schools (the ones in Naxxar and in Rabat Gozo);
- the ESLWG considers the contribution of AŻ in facilitating youths' access to career guidance services. It should also consider the services given by ETC job advisors;
- the DES reviews the complement of education psycho-social professionals servicing schools to ensure that an adequate number of professionals are present both at the centrally placed offices of DSS as well as in the schools;
- the ESLWG brings together professionals involved in career guidance from various entities and enables them to access more up-to-date information about trends in the labour market;
- the ESLWG helps professionals involved in career guidance to establish closer links with the economic sector such as trade unions, employers associations, the Maltese cooperative movement, the public sector, and the voluntary sector with a view to provide them with structured continuous professional development (CPD);
- the ESLU encourages schools to harness the presence of resource persons in the wider community in order to provide exposure to different occupations and professions embedded within our local communities, either by inviting these persons to school or by taking students out to these persons. These resource persons might include people in the public service (the local Health Centre, the local Library, the Local Council Office), people from the local business community, people from Community Based Organisations (CBOs) (the local band club, the local football club, the parish church, a local faith-based group, a local ethnic-based group), as well as persons who stand out, either for their service to the community (a local medical doctor, volunteers from an NGO) or for successfully managing to overcome barriers for employment and social inclusion (single parents, people of different ethnic origins and persons with a disability). Such activities should be used not only for the purpose of providing a more enriching career education but also for more creative learning prompts in curricular areas such as social studies, religion, ethics and creative writing;

- all stakeholders involved in the job exposure programme for form 4 students review the programme for its effectiveness in order to improve the service and reap more benefits from it. The stakeholders are to consider better student preparation and induction, monitoring of students during the job exposure, and a structured personal evaluation of the job exposure experience on the part of the students.

Strategic Action 3.10 Review and consolidate the career guidance service across levels

This strategic plan recommends that the proposed ESLWG facilitates networking between different stakeholders involved with career guidance services across sectors and levels. The working group should enable the stakeholders in the sector to establish closer links with civil society and the economic sector in order to ensure that they have up-to-date information about trends in the economy and in the labour market and also to contribute to these professionals' CPD.

3.11 Honing the potential of the Secondary School Certificate and Profile

The NCF is designed to respond to developments in the education system in Malta mainly - (i) the setting up in 2007 of the Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, (ii) the 2009 Referencing Report of the MQF to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF); and (iii) the new National Learning Outcomes Framework that is recommended in the *National Curriculum Framework* itself.

The linking of the three frameworks will ensure that at the end of the compulsory education cycle, students will be provided with the Secondary School Certificate and Profile (SSCP) which records their formal, informal and non-formal learning that would have taken place during the five year secondary school cycle. This certificate is pegged at levels 1 and 2 of the MQF and will be awarded subject to the achievement of pre-established criteria.

The importance of this development is that it provides a certification mechanism for students who might not be able to acquire a level 3 certification at the end of compulsory schooling. It would enable them to accede to further and higher education pathways including MCAST, ITS and the Youth.Inc programme. It is thus a potential tool for keeping students in education beyond compulsory school age, enabling them to further their education and acquisition of skills and competencies, and thus better their chances to become active citizens and to find employment.

This strategic plan suggests that the effectiveness of the mechanism that supports the SSCP be monitored so that it is honed into an effective tool that will really reach up to expectations, that is, that it “portrays meaningful learning experiences and opens the doors to further and higher education, employability and a good quality of life.”¹⁹

Strategic Action 3.11 Honing the potential of the Secondary School Certificate and Profile

This strategic plan supports the introduction of the SSCP for the accreditation of formal, informal and non-formal learning of students in compulsory schooling. This mechanism is to be monitored for effectiveness to ensure that it becomes a tool for potential early school leavers to enter further and higher education pathways in order to have better life chances.

F. Parents, not any more the silent partner

The document *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving* highlights the very important role that parents play in reducing ESL. It states very categorically that ESL strategies need to “enable parents to become a resource in their children’s learning.” It also states that schools have an important role to play to empower parents to fulfil this crucial role. Schools need to make parents aware of the phenomenon of ESL. More importantly, schools need to view parents as key players in the school community, both as net contributors and as net beneficiaries of the teaching and learning process that goes on inside and around the school. This new paradigm of school-parent relationship is a potential contributor towards enabling parents from a low socio-economic status to help their children to “aim higher in their educational aspirations and achievements” since for such pupils parental support may be

¹⁹ Ministry of Education and Employment (2012) *A National Curriculum Framework for All*. Malta: Ministry of Education and Employment. p.IX

“important for gaining recognition, demonstrating and celebrating achievements, raising self-esteem and self-respect.”²⁰

3.12 Harnessing and strengthening parental support to combat ESL

Parents’ involvement in Maltese schools has had a turbulent history in the last decades of the 20th century. Teachers have gone from viewing parents as possible partners to outright intruders and yet again as potential stakeholders within the school community.

The path-breaking Principle 14 of the 1999 *National Minimum Curriculum* redeemed parents from their role as adjuncts in fundraising activities to a “source of support for the curriculum.” The crucial point which this document makes is that schools can empower parents to participate in educational activities within the school as well as to educate them in order to support their children’s education within the home.²¹ Efforts in this direction have been largely the result of enterprising heads of school. FES has also had a programme for parent empowerment in schools with a varying degree of success.

This strategy strongly suggests that schools across sectors should rethink parent participation that goes beyond giving a helping hand in fund raising activities or the sporadic parents’ days.

Schools in Malta across sectors are usually very well kept buildings, the result of a huge infrastructural investment from tax payers’ or parents’ money. It is rather sad that this investment is used for a very limited number of hours to address the learning needs of a limited section of the community. This strategy entices schools to find locality specific ways how to empower parents to give a positive contribution to their children’s education, especially those students from low socio-economic status families. Actions may range from one-off information sessions for parents to a more structured parent education programme through formal and informal participation in learning activities within the school. A pro-active school-based policy for the promotion of parent involvement in the school community will help parents to be in a better position to help their children within the home, as well as enable students and their families to move from the periphery of the school community towards occupying a more central role. This should result in lessening the likelihood of vulnerable students becoming early school leavers and also have the spill-over effect of contributing to social mobility in the wider society.

Strategic Action 3.12 Harnessing and strengthening parental support to combat ESL

This strategic plan entices schools to enrol parents as partners in their children’s education at this early stage in their formal education, and to see them as major stakeholders in the effort to reduce ESL. This needs to be done by educating parents in order to facilitate their supportive role in the education of their children both at school and at home. The reaching out to parents from a low socio-economic status will help to reduce ESL and promote social mobility.

G. Combating ESL through teacher training

The document *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving* also identifies teacher support as a major ingredient in the effort towards preventing ESL. It suggests that teachers may need support to be able to develop methodologies that address the educational needs of individual students, possibly through adequate CPD, as well opportunities to network with other teachers to share good practice with regards to facing up to the ESL challenge in different and similar local realities.²²

3.13 Supporting teachers to address the ESL challenge

In recent years a lot of reforms have been going on within the education sector in Malta. Some major changes relate to the removal of streaming, the introduction of the benchmarking examination, and the phasing in of

²⁰ European Commission (2013) *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving November 2013*. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014). p.22

²¹ Ministry of Education (1999) *Creating the Future Together. National Minimum Curriculum*. Malta: Ministry of Education. p.44-45

²² European Commission (2013) *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving November 2013*. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014). p.22

e-Learning infrastructure, e-Learning tools and e-Content. For various reasons Maltese schools have become increasingly mixed ability, multi-cultural communities. Social problems and poverty have also become more accentuated in more areas across the Maltese islands and are not contained phenomena anymore.

It is more urgent than ever before that teachers are equipped and given the necessary support to address the individual needs of their students and thus actively giving their share to reduce ESL. Teachers with the necessary competences with regards to student centred, inquiry based learning will make inclusive classrooms a success for an ever wider number of students. This is vital in classroom environments populated by students with different abilities and learning needs, high and low achievers, students with a disability, students from different cultural, racial and ethnic groups, and the whole array of students that make every school such a diverse community.

With regards to teacher support, it is also important to analyse the kind of support that teachers need to perform to the best of their abilities. Support services include a number of specialised teachers and support staff such as the Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), teachers in the peripatetic service, and the complementary teachers. The LSA system for students with special educational needs will be analysed by MEDE through support from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. It is very important that the other support services are analysed for their effectiveness and real impact on the teaching and learning that goes on inside schools. It is in this light that this document suggests that:

- an Institute for Teacher CPD is set up under the aegis of the Council for the Teaching Profession (CTP) and with the active collaboration of the Faculty of Education of UOM, in order to equip teachers with the necessary ongoing training that would enable them to address students' needs in classrooms characterised more than ever before by student diversity of ability and cultural baggage. The institute will provide ad hoc training courses, as well as offer tailor made support to schools in the CPD of their staff;
- the ESLU should cooperate with the European Union Programmes Agency (EUPA) to empower schools to seek Erasmus+ funding for teacher training in those areas where Maltese teachers have much to learn from practices across different European countries. ESL is one such area, given that most EU member states have a far lower percentage of ESL than Malta;
- a comprehensive review of support services (LSAs, the peripatetic service, complementary teachers, literacy and numeracy support teachers) is carried out to highlight successes and shortcomings with a view to ensure that class teachers receive adequate and effective support in their quest to address students' individual learning needs.

Strategic Action 3.13 Supporting teachers to address the ESL challenge

This strategic plan highlights the importance of supporting teachers since they are key players in addressing the ESL challenge. This strategy suggests the setting up of an Institute for Teacher CPD under the aegis of the CTP, the empowerment of schools to seek Erasmus+ funding for teacher training, and a review of support services on the lines of the review currently underway of the LSA system with the aim of providing teachers with more effective focused support.

**4. MEETING THE CHALLENGE
OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING:
INTERVENTION MEASURES**



Meeting the challenge of Early School Leaving: intervention measures

Intervention measures are steps taken to support students who are finding it difficult to cope at school. Difficulties might stem out of the students' learning difficulties or because they might be passing through difficulties in their personal lives. They might also be the result of the school's inability to respond to different learning needs, different learning patterns and different abilities.

A. Early warning systems

The Commission Staff Working Paper entitled *Reducing early school leaving*²³ points to the importance of having in place early warning systems in order to identify students who are at risk of becoming early school leavers. The same Paper mentions school absenteeism as one of these early signs, arguing that long periods of absenteeism in the early years may result in truancy or dropping out of school in the secondary school years. Responding in a timely manner to school absenteeism in the early years will thus contribute to reduce the occurrence of ESL. The document *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving*²⁴ mentions the occurrence and recording of traumatic events in a child's life, as well as performance in exams as early warning systems. Absenteeism in the early years, socio-economic factors, traumatic events in family life, poor performance in school tests, and the inability of the school to detect these occurrences as early as possible and to respond to them in a timely manner, may all be compounding factors that may result in vulnerable children disengaging from school and consequently becoming early school leavers.

4.1 Developing early warning systems and enabling timely action

The DES has put in place a nationwide electronic platform for the day-to-day recording of students' school attendance in all state schools from kindergarten to form 5 (the E1 platform). Through this system, every student is registered by her or his identity card number. At present the personal records include generic information (parents' or guardians' names and address), the student's daily attendance inputted on a day-to-day basis at school level, and the student's marks obtained in examinations. Every school has access to its own data to facilitate early action, especially with regards to absenteeism. The centrally placed Student Information System Unit manages access at a central level for research and policy making purposes. Once a child is noted as absent on the platform, a text message notification is sent to the parents to notify them of the child's absence. Every school then keeps track of absenteeism patterns on a monthly basis and when recurrent absentees are identified, the schools notify the psychosocial professionals from the DSS to start investigating and to report back to the school to consider early remedial action.

At present schools do not make much use of the E1 platform to monitor student academic performance. Besides, formal exams are only carried out as from year 4 of the primary school onwards and thus no students' marks are inputted into the E1 system prior to that year. However, in years 1, 2 and 3 there are other forms of assessment for basic skills, namely Maltese, English and Numeracy, that are used to monitor those students who are most at risk of disengaging from school. These assessment tools are meant to serve as early warning systems that enable teachers to address the particular needs of vulnerable students who might have difficulties from their very first years in mastering the basic essential skills that are the gateway for further learning. Focused action is taken not only by the class teacher but also by support services such as the Literacy support teachers, the Numeracy support teachers and the Complementary teachers.

This strategic plan strongly suggests that:

- the possibilities of the E1 electronic platform are further explored so that information recorded on it will include also information related to the socio-economic status of the child. This will help to inform policy making and implementation at individual, school and national level;
- the E1 platform is extended to church and independent schools so that the phenomenon of ESL in these schools can be monitored and addressed;

²³ European Commission (2011) *Commission Staff Working Paper. Reducing early school leaving. Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving. SEC (2011) 96 final*. Available from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SEC:2011:0096:FIN:EN:PDF>. (Accessed on: 20.03.2013). p.25

²⁴ European Commission (2013) *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving November 2013*. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014). p.21

- every school has access to psychosocial professionals that can help to address absenteeism through multi-disciplinary teams that support the child, the family and the school staff;
- a structured system of community based action is developed whereby psychosocial support services from other agencies outside MEDE, especially those present in the community such as at AĊCESS centres, work in close cooperation with MEDE staff to support the child and his or her family whenever situations leading to absenteeism occur in the child's life;
- the early identification of students with learning difficulties in the early years is reviewed, and ways are found how to input information from these identification tools into the E1 platform;
- a review of the support services given to teachers and students in the early years is carried out to ensure effectiveness in helping young students to master the basic tools needed for further learning, namely Maltese, English and Numeracy. This includes a review of the support given by LSAs, Literacy and Numeracy support teachers and Complementary teachers (see strategic action 3.13 above).

Strategic Action 4.1 Developing early warning systems and enabling timely action

This strategic plan recommends that existing early warning systems, especially those related to school attendance and student performance, are further developed and extended to non-state schools. It is further recommended that support services are reviewed with a view to provide schools with the necessary support that would enable them to take timely action in responding to early warning signs with regards to factors that might eventually lead vulnerable children to become early school leavers.

B. Support networks for students at risk

The document *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024* states that the proposed Strategy “aims to cultivate student engagement and motivation, and to promote high aspirations in learning within an inclusive, safe and orderly environment both physical and psychological.” This strategic plan for the prevention of ESL is proposing a number of intervention measures in support of students most at risk of becoming early school leavers.

4.2 Consolidating support networks around students at risk

This strategic policy acknowledges the fact that youth workers, social workers, support social workers, counsellors and other psychosocial professionals have a very important role to play in supporting young people. It is being recommended that psychosocial professionals working across Ministries and in different agencies, mainly in Aġenzija Appoġġ, Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ and DSS working in schools should be strengthened as much as possible. More cooperation amongst the different professional teams should be facilitated by the Inter-Ministerial committee (strategic action 2.1) and the ESLWG (strategic action 2.3). This will help to:

- bring together all those stakeholders who work with and around the child or young person, and very often, their family;
- continue to foster a multi-disciplinary approach, involving team based assessment, planning and intervention, in collaboration with the student, the family and other stakeholders within the community;
- raise awareness about the need that the psychosocial teams from DSS are fully equipped to collaborate with the schools in order to give the best service to students at risk;
- adopt systematic, outcome-based services with an integrated evaluation process that aim at early identification of students at risk, timely concerted action, effective support to child and family, and the drafting, implementing and monitoring of support programmes for children and their families.

This strategic plan also entices schools to build better links with the surrounding communities in order to bring the communities into the schools and take the schools out into the community. This will lead to better mutual relationships between schools and families and will also contribute towards the mutual consolidation of formal and informal support networks that nurture student wellbeing, especially for students at risk. In this manner, a collaborative holistic approach will aim to promote self-confidence and self-esteem, develop life and problem

solving skills, practise social skills, link the student to appropriate community services, and ultimately facilitate the student's engagement in education and training.

Strategic Action 4.2 Consolidating support networks around students at risk

This strategic plan considers that psychosocial professionals have a unique responsibility within local and school communities in offering support to vulnerable students and their families. This strategy thus, suggests that the Inter-Ministerial Committee and the ESLWG mechanisms are used to bring about more cooperation between the psychosocial professionals working within different agencies both within and outside of MEDE for a more cooperative support network that would help to keep students engaged in education. It also entices schools to build better relationships with parents and communities to create more supportive networks around students most at risk of disengaging from school.

4.3 Harnessing Youth Workers' support for older students

Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ has taken two initiatives to empower young people in the community: developing the concept of Youth Cafes and Youth Hubs in the community, and an empowerment programme that offers training to young people through projects that will enhance their skills and competences to become responsible individuals and active citizens in their communities.

Youth Cafes are operating in Qawra, Msida, Birgu and Valletta within AĊCESS community service centres and are run by youth workers. This means that they can support other services provided at these community centres by other entities such as ETC and FES. This integrated, community-based approach, which also involves parents, families and the local community, can make a vital contribution towards keeping young people in education and training.

Youth Hubs offer support to young people attending higher education. Presently Youth Hubs support students attending the Youth.Inc Programme and students attending MCAST (Kordin Campus). Youth Hubs are an informal space where students can acquire the necessary skills and competences both to integrate themselves in the learning community within the institution and also to be able to influence what goes on in the institution itself. Youth workers working in these centres are in a very strategic position to help reduce the number of students who opt out of further and higher education mid-way through their programmes and therefore help to increase student retention in post-secondary education programmes.

It is being proposed that Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ reviews its services with a view of expanding it into other communities and other Secondary Schools and higher education institutions in Malta and Gozo.

Strategic Action 4.3 Harnessing youth workers' support for older students

This strategic plan commends the work done by Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ in reaching out to youths in their communities and in their schools and encourages the agency to study ways how these services can be extended to other communities and further and higher education institutions both in Malta and in Gozo with a view to support young people through informal learning experiences in the community, and to better integrate themselves and also influence their formal learning institutions.

4.4 Empowering students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

Nurture Groups in the primary schools and Learning Support Zones in the secondary schools have been set up in order to:

- provide support to students with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties within a safe and conflict free environment;
- enable students to manage their behaviour;
- help reintegrate students who are long absentees or have been excluded from school into mainstream education.

This strategic plan recommends that the DSS carries out a comprehensive review of the Nurture Groups, the Learning Support Zones and the Learning Support Centres in order to assess how they are positively affecting the social, emotional, behavioural and academic competence of referred students and the way they are enabling students to accede to, or re-integrate themselves into, mainstream education. This should be done with a view of extending good practices so that more students receive their entitlement in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, an attitude for lifelong learning, and overall well-being.

Strategic Action 4.4 Empowering students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

This strategic plan recommends that the DSS carries out a comprehensive review of pull-out programmes for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in order to assess how they are positively affecting the social, emotional, behavioural and academic competence with a view to extend the services for more student engagement and empowerment as lifelong learners.

4.5 Supporting teenage mothers to stay in education and training

Servizz Għożża is another service given by the DSS. Its main aim is to provide a positive passage of experience through teenage pregnancy, encouraging school age mothers to continue with their education and empowering them to pursue career paths. The service supports pregnant teenage students either by providing counselling while students keep attending compulsory school, or by providing a full-time programme at the Service's centre for students who opt out of compulsory mainstream school. Students can also opt to share their days between the centre and the school. The staff at Servizz Għożża works closely with Heads of School and psychosocial professionals from the DSS. Pregnant teenage girls who are above school age are encouraged to attend a full programme at the Centre, but attendance is not compulsory.

This strategic plan entices DSS to review the support service already given by Servizz Għożża in order to explore ways how the service can better enable young mothers to reach their fulfilment both as mothers and as lifelong learners by remaining in education or training after giving birth. It also entices DSS to explore ways how to empower the young mothers seeking their support to make use of free childcare services as mentioned in strategic action 3.1 above.

Strategic Action 4.5 Supporting teenage mothers to stay in education and training

This strategic plan invites DSS to further develop Servizz Għożża in order to empower teenage mothers to make their motherhood a positive experience while combining it with their lifelong educational journey, by tapping such possibilities as free childcare facilities provided by the state.



4.6 Supporting students and parents through after-school support programmes

FES runs a number of after school initiatives that support students and parents. Klabb 3-16 provides after-school care and homework support for children of working parents. NWAR provides a one-to-one support programme for students who need support in mastering basic literacy skills and for their parents. Klabb Naħla provides homework support for students at risk. The Malta Writing Programme provides creative writing opportunities for students and parents.

This strategy invites FES to:

- review the current programmes for their reach and effectiveness in helping students with learning difficulties as well as creative and gifted children.
- research the impact of the positive parent involvement that is inbuilt in some of these programmes in order to strengthen it and disseminate it as an example of good practice for parent involvement;
- find ways how to better synchronise the Foundation's different services with day school teaching and learning in order to obtain more focus and results, making sure that FES programmes become part of a network for student and parent support that will eventually make the student's school experience a success;
- find ways how to obtain more visibility for the Foundation's support programmes in order to reach out to more students and parents, and to increase effectiveness.

Strategic Action 4.6 Supporting students and parents through after-school support programmes

This strategic plan invites FES to carry out a review of student and parent support programmes currently being offered by the Foundation in order to bank upon past experience, obtain more focus, reach out to more students and parents, and see that FES programmes and day-school teaching and learning complement each other for better results.

4.7 Supporting students at risk in the secondary school

As from scholastic year 2013-14, the Department for Curriculum Management (DCM) has initiated an alternative learning programme for form 3 students in the secondary school who are finding it difficult to cope with the mainstream curriculum. The programme, called Core-Curriculum Programme (CCP), was conceived as a three year programme that would lead participating students to come out of compulsory schooling at form 5 with an MQF level 1 or level 2 qualification. While retaining part of the mainstream curriculum, it offers students practical, applied, learning programmes in the following core subjects: Maltese, English, Mathematics, Science with Design & Technology, Italian, Religion, PE, ICT (for ECDL), Social Studies, History and Geography. The CCP aims to support students in attaining the following soft skills:

- learning to learn;
- cultural Awareness and Expression;
- sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurship, Social and Civic competence.

The Gozo College Boys' Secondary School has opted to implement a variation of the CCP. Instead of the Science with Design & Technology programme, the College has made arrangements with the GOZO MCAST Institute of Building and Construction for students in the CCP programme to take an MQF Level 1 qualification in building trades at the Institute.

Similarly, St Ignatius College Handaq Boys' Secondary School has opted to design an in-house, tailor made, CCP for form 3 students at risk of becoming early school leavers, with a core curriculum that is complemented by a programme of vocational courses that are in the process of obtaining MQF Level 1 accreditation by NCFHE. The teachers running this programme have been recruited in-house on a voluntary basis.

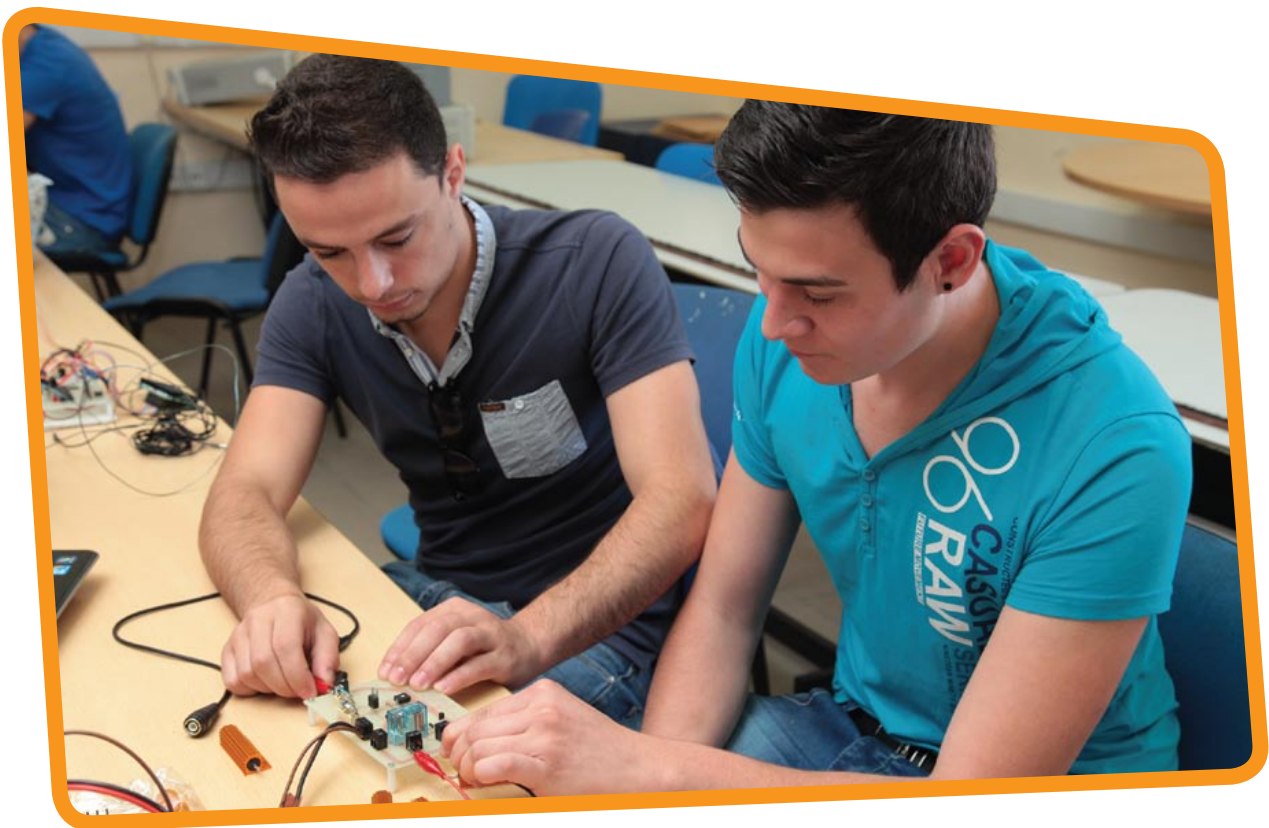
An emergency intervention measure has also been taken in the scholastic year 2013-2014 to address the needs of form 5 students who had not applied to sit for any Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examinations at the

end of the scholastic year in May 2014. These students were almost de facto early school leavers. To entice them to consider going into further education, MEDE put together a varied programme with the help of ESLU, the Vocational Education Unit and the psychosocial services at DSS. This was based on VET, basic skills, ICT and soft skills. This was made possible through the cooperation of MCAST, ETC, Microsoft, Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, and FES. Out of a possible 350 students who were interviewed, 230 showed interest in joining this Alternative Learning Programme (ALP). The programme will come to an end in September 2014. The aim is to give these students the possibility of obtaining an MQF level 1 qualification and entice them to consider going into further education at MCAST, ITS or the Youth.Inc programme.

The difference between the CCP offered at form 3 and the ALP offered at form 5 is that the first is school based and participating students remain within mainstream education. The ALP is a pull-out, centrally organised programme, offered in different campuses belonging to different institutions within MEDE. Ideally, students needing alternative learning programmes are catered for within mainstream institutions and within the school communities where they belong. Thus, this strategic plan strongly suggests that:

- a comprehensive review of the first year of CCP is carried out between DCM, ESLU and the Vocational Education Unit in order to evaluate the programme for its effectiveness in re-engaging students and in making school meaningful for students at risk;
- a range of accredited vocational subjects at MQF levels 1 and 2 are developed together with school staff in the ten colleges at both girls' and boys' secondary schools in order to offer an alternative programme that balances basic skills, general culture and VET within mainstream schools;
- investment in the necessary infrastructure is made to make VET teaching and learning possible, together with the provision of trained staff to deliver these courses as well as laboratory technicians where necessary;

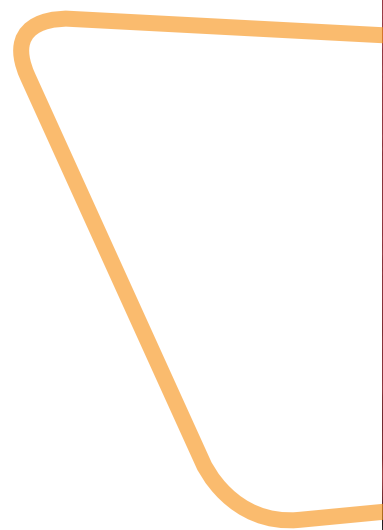




- the development of the VET component of the three year CCP is developed in conjunction with the VET MQF level 3 programme that is being offered in secondary schools as mentioned in strategic action 3.8 to consider possible permeation between the two programmes;
- teachers involved in the CCP are given intensive training to be able to teach basic skills (literacy, numeracy and ICT) in different, relevant, hands-on ways, and where possible embedded in VET subjects;
- while a national blueprint for the CCP is developed, every school is left with ample room for manoeuvre to cater for school specific conditions and students' needs, by exploring the input of community based resources as well as ad hoc partnerships with other VET institutions such as MCAST, ITS or the private sector;
- with the phasing in of the school based CCP, the centrally organised ALP for form 5s will be phased out. The ALP will be offered for the scholastic year 2014-2015 for form 5s who will not be sitting for any SEC examinations in May 2015. It is strongly suggested that a thorough evaluation of the 2013-2014 ALP is carried out to ensure a smoother running programme for the 2014-2015 scholastic year;
- the SSCP is developed in such a way as to reflect the evolving of the CCP to ensure that it captures and makes visible the learning that goes on during the programme, ensuring that students are able to proceed to further education after finishing compulsory education.

Strategic Action 4.7 Supporting students at risk in the secondary school

This strategic plan suggests that by June 2014 a review of the CCP is carried out in order to move towards a school based alternative learning programme for students whose learning needs are not catered for by the ordinary mainstream curriculum. DCM and the Vocational Education Unit are to cooperate in order to help schools develop well balanced programmes with a component of accredited VET courses at MQF levels 1 and 2. The SSCP is to capture the learning that goes in the CCP in order to facilitate student progression to further education.





**5. MEETING THE CHALLENGE
OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING:
COMPENSATION MEASURES**

Meeting the challenge of Early School Leaving: compensation measures

Compensation measures are meant to address the learning needs of students who have finished compulsory schooling without the necessary qualifications. They are meant to reintegrate them back into education and training and to facilitate their passage into secure and meaningful employment.

A. Reintegration programmes at further education levels

Compensation measures are mostly about re-integration of students into mainstream education through second chance education programmes that combine formal classroom teaching with hands-on learning and practical work. The document *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving*²⁶ outlines the characteristics of quality second chance education. It establishes quality benchmarks that should be seriously considered by policy makers, namely:

- second chance education programmes should be accessible, relevant and flexible;
- second chance education should be duly accredited in order to serve as a pathway to further education and training;
- second chance education needs political commitment and a strong school leadership;
- it entails adopting a personalised and holistic approach in responding to students' needs;
- it should be as positive an experience as possible, to make up for the students' previous negative experiences related to schooling;
- it should be flexible enough to respond to students' learning needs and allows for mobility between systems;
- the teacher's role is crucial in offering students an all-round support that goes beyond classroom teaching;
- second chance education should enable students to move back again into mainstream education, and where possible second chance programmes should share campuses and staff with mainstream education.

5.1 Striking strategic partnerships for an effective second chance education for students at risk

In Malta there are at least five institutions that offer full-time second chance education to students who do not have the necessary qualifications to progress to MQF level 4 academic or vocational education programmes and who need to catch up with programmes that range from MQF level 1 to level 3. Other institutions offer more flexible, part-time education and training.

At MCAST, all the eight Institutes that make up the College offer foundation courses at MQF level 1, 2 and 3. The basic entry level into level 1 is a secondary school education certificate that shows that the student has finished compulsory education. The course would typically include a mixture of key skills (literacy, numeracy and ICT) and a vocational hands-on component. Students can then progress from one level to the other within MCAST and also across institutes, allowing flexible progression pathways up to MQF level 6.

Similarly the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) is developing its own foundation course that enables students who have completed compulsory school without an MQF level 3 qualification to enrol in a three-year course that goes from level 1 to level 3 and that combines basic skills with a VET component related to the tourism industry. Students have the possibility to progress up to MQF level 5 within the Institute in areas related to the industry.

FES runs the Youth.Inc programme for young people who have completed compulsory education without the basic qualifications. It offers participants a mixture of basic skills, life skills and a variety of hands-on, employment related learning opportunities. It is a full time course that includes also a work placement. Successful participants will acquire a general certificate of education at MQF level 1 and would be able to proceed to a second full-time course leading to MQF level 2.

²⁶ European Commission (2013) *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving November 2013*. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf. (Accessed: 20.03.2014). p.23-24

The Higher Secondary school at Naxxar offers a revision course for students who have not acquired the necessary qualifications to proceed to an academically oriented further education programme but who at least have a pass in two SEC subjects. This is aimed at enabling participating students to gain enough passes in SEC subjects to be able to join a matriculation course in the following year.

Besides these in the academic year 2013-2014, a total of 1,458 students aged 17 to 24 enrolled for a number of part-time, morning or evening courses organised by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLL) in one of the various adult learning centres that the directorate has spread over Malta and Gozo.²⁷ These courses include SEC courses that would enable students to further their education and enhance their job opportunities, as well as a variety of MQF level 1 academic and VET courses.

For its part, ETC offers training to persons who are either in unemployment or want to up-skill themselves for upward job mobility. In 2011 ETC trained 15,072 persons of all ages; 3,000 young people were assisted through the Youth Employment Programme while 3,059 personal action plans were developed jointly by employment advisors and job seekers of all ages.²⁸

Students who have completed compulsory schooling and are following full-time programmes receive a stipend, based on regular school attendance. This is in line with recommendations made in the *Commission Staff Working Paper. Reducing early school leaving. Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving.*²⁹

All these measures contribute to lower Malta's ESL rate. We do, however, need to address the problem of student drop-out in full-time further education programmes.

Drop-out rate at ITS, MCAST and the University Junior College³⁰

Drop-out rate from ITS courses			
Year	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
Percentage	22.0%	13.3%	16.7%

Drop-out rate from MCAST courses			
Year	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
Percentage	11.7%	14.7%	13.0%

Drop-out rate from University Junior College courses			
Year	2010/2011	2011/2012	
Percentage for 1st year students	9.35%	9.35%	9.11%
Percentage for 2nd year students		1.52%	0.73%

This strategic plan recommends that in order to consolidate the different second chance education initiatives provided across the different institutions, the following actions are taken:

- the ESLWG (strategic action 2.3 above) facilitates the link between providers of second chance education, employers and civil society in order to ensure a more focused, coordinated and relevant educational offer, avoid duplication and overlapping of work and address new needs on the part of students and employers;
- MCAST and ITS are to bolster their efforts in making their courses more relevant by introducing entrepreneurship education, and further explore the possibilities of offering hybrid courses that are partly carried out on their campuses and partly on the workplace;

27 Data provided by Directorate for Lifelong Learning, March 2014.

28 Eurostat. <http://ws.eures.com.mt/AnnualReport2011/sections/05/index.php>. Accessed: 25.03.2014.

29 European Commission (2011) *Commission Staff Working Paper. Reducing early school leaving. Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving. SEC (2011) 96 final*. Available from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SEC:2011:0096:FIN:EN:PDF>. (Accessed on: 20.03.2013). p.32

30 Data provided by the Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Education and Employment, March 2014.

- the ESLWG helps institutions that offer basic skills training (literacy, numeracy and ICT) to develop new teaching methods that are more appropriate for second chance education and that strategically move away from conventional teaching methods usually associated with compulsory schooling. They are particularly enticed to explore ways of embedding learning in VET hands-on activities as well as by exploring new teaching and learning smart technologies;
- the Youth.Inc programme should be reviewed to highlight its strengths and weaknesses and to build upon this exercise in order to develop an accredited MQF level 3 programme by the end of academic year 2014-2015. Youth.Inc should also discuss with ITS and MCAST in order to explore ways how to secure permeability between Youth.Inc and other pathways at ITS and MCAST;
- the Naxxar Higher Secondary School is to seriously consider banking upon the success of its revision courses and develop revision courses for students who have not managed to obtain any passes in SEC examinations at the end of secondary education. DES should help in finding the necessary physical and human resources to extend the Naxxar campus to make these courses possible in the near future;
- DLL is to complement the work of the institutions offering full-time courses by increasing its capacity to offer part-time SEC courses both in the morning and in the evening to young people seeking part-time second chance education in a variety of subjects. Given that the DLL's Lifelong Learning Centre is operating at full capacity round the clock, DLL and MEDE should consider a second Lifelong Learning Centre where SEC courses as well as other academic and VET courses currently accredited at MQF level 1 can be offered to satisfy the increasing demand;
- by the end of 2014 DLL will launch a nation-wide consultation process about a National Strategy for Lifelong Learning. The ESLU and the ESLWG should give all their support to DLL to ensure that the consultation process is a success and that it leads to better community-based strategic partnerships with schools, local councils and CBOs, as well as with trade unions, employers and civil society.

Strategic Action 5.1 Striking strategic partnerships for an effective second chance education for students at risk

This strategic plan recommends that the proposed ESLWG acts as a catalyst to bring about a cultural shift towards more cooperation between institutions that offer full-time and part-time second chance education to students who leave compulsory school without the necessary qualifications that provide the passport for upward mobility. It recommends more permeability between programmes, the opening up of pathways through a wider provision of revision and part-time courses, as well as an investment in teacher training for a more effective and relevant pedagogy that is more compatible with the needs of young persons who are most at risk of becoming early school leavers.

5.2 Providing quality second chance education for persons with a disability for better life chances

This strategic plan wholly supports the consolidation of the mainstreaming of students with a disability across the spectrum of compulsory education as well as in further and higher education. A special schools reform has also been implemented to increase access to quality education for students with Individual Educational Needs. However, there is still a high percentage of students with a disability who have left compulsory school with the necessary qualifications and who are neither in education or training, nor in employment.

Both MCAST and ITS offer courses for students with a disability to empower them for independent living through employment. Courses combine basic skills, personal and interpersonal skills, and employment-related skills. ITS offers a one-year MQF level 1 course entitled Key Skills for Independent Living while MCAST offers a two-year Pathway to Independent Living course. The DSS offers a similar educational pathway for students with a disability who have finished compulsory school at the Dun Manwel Attard Young Adult Resource Centre in Wardija. For its part, ETC cooperates with NGOs such as Inspire and Richmond Foundation to offer personalised training courses for persons with a disability. It also runs a scheme that offers jobs with Local Councils to persons with a disability seeking employment. Youth.Inc are also flexible enough to host young persons with a disability in their programmes. Notwithstanding these initiatives, circumstantial evidence suggests that the number of young people with a disability who are in education, training or employment is very low and many persons with a disability go off the radar once they leave compulsory school.

This strategic plan recommends that the proposed ESLU liaises with NSO, DRD, DSS, the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali għal Persuni b'Diżabilità (KNPD), Aġenzija Sapport and any other relevant organisation in order to get a clear

picture of who are the persons with a disability leaving compulsory education that are neither in education nor in employment. It also recommends that the Inter-Ministerial committee (strategic action 2.1) enables different agencies, particularly from MEDE and from the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS) to seek ways how the families of young persons with a disability can be better supported so that young persons with a disability receive their entitlement in terms of education, training and employment, with a view to secure better life chances and where possible, independent lives. It is also important that the ESLWG (strategic action 2.3) brings together educational institutions such as DSS, MCAST, ITS, Youth.Inc and ETC in an effort to review the transition process from compulsory to further and higher education. The ESLWG should also enable educational institutions involved with second chance education of persons with a disability to establish a sound link with trade unions and employers, and also explore further the idea of social cooperatives with stakeholders from the Maltese cooperative movement. Keeping young persons with a disability in second chance education and training and facilitating their transition into employment is a duty which the state has to fulfil in order to secure these persons' entitlement to personal fulfilment and independent living.

Strategic Action 5.2 Providing quality second chance education for young persons with a disability for better life chances

This strategic plan recommends that the proposed ESLU and its supporting networks (the IMC and the ESLWG) facilitate concerted efforts to identify young persons with a disability who are neither in education and training nor in employment. This effort will aim at addressing their educational and training needs in order to facilitate their integration in the labour market. Facilitating the passage from compulsory school to second chance education and into employment will ensure that more students with a disability get their entitlement to an education that leads to better life chances and independent living.

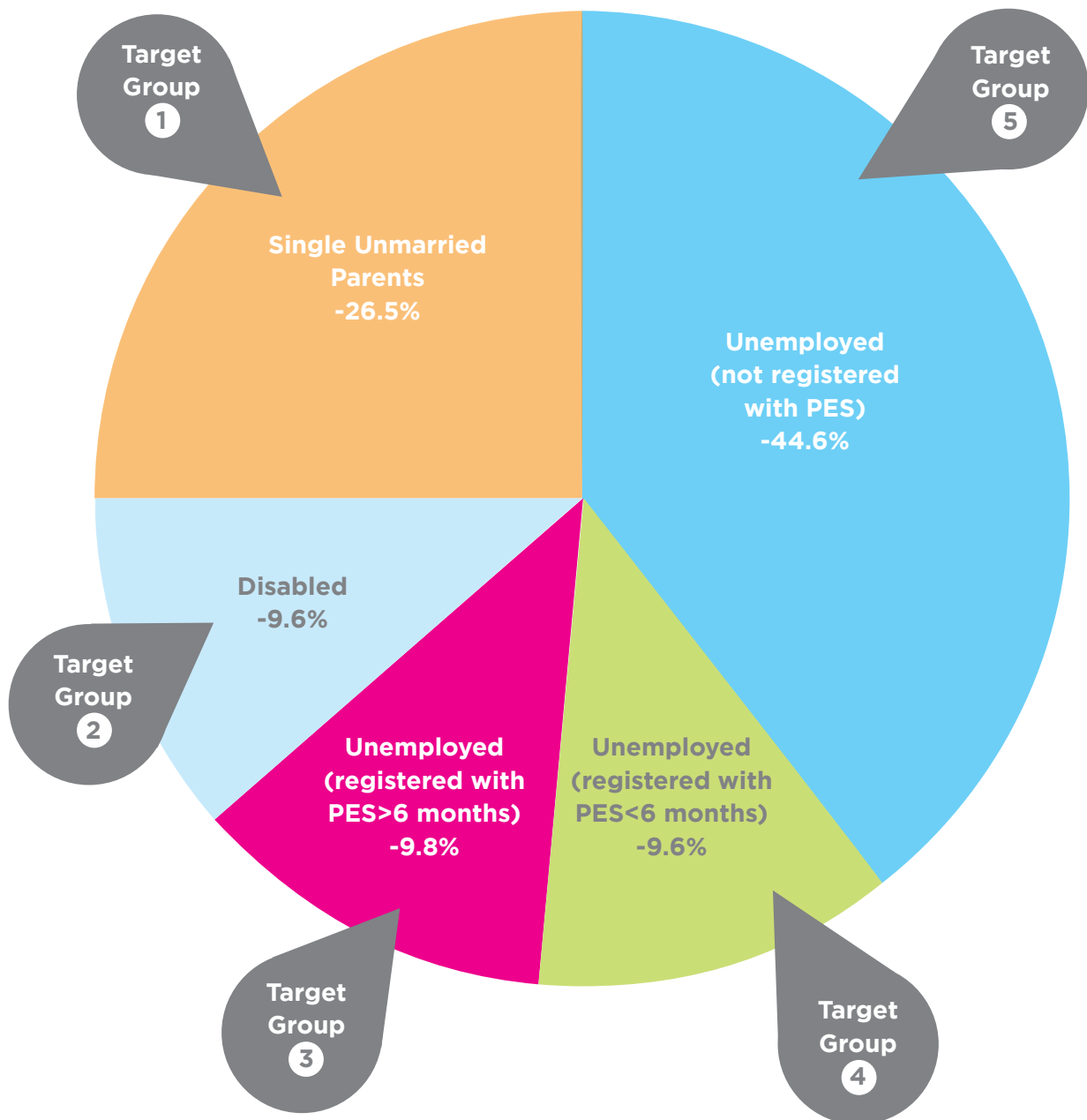
5.3 Implementing the Youth Guarantee Scheme to reach out to young people at risk

In April 2013, in a Council Recommendation, EU Member States endorsed the Youth Guarantee Scheme which has the aim of ensuring that “all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.”³¹ The same Recommendation entices Member States to give priority to those youths who are registering for work and also to those youths neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) who are not registered with a Public Employment Service (PES).

MEDE is the Maltese entity responsible for implementing the Youth Guarantee Scheme in Malta. For the past months the Ministry has been collating administrative data to profile youths between 15 and 24 and who are NEETs. Through the social benefit register, the unemployment register and the Labour Force Survey, MEDE compiled a breakdown of who these NEETs are. The graphical illustration below shows the five heterogeneous groups identified³²:

³¹ Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on Establishing a Youth Guarantee 2013/C 120/01. Available from: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?jsessionid=yn1pTynHknd6HJb1BsmmnXnx8LTyKNTShJp5rnMTSycWvQg17NCV!-639655971?uri=CELEX:32013H0426\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?jsessionid=yn1pTynHknd6HJb1BsmmnXnx8LTyKNTShJp5rnMTSycWvQg17NCV!-639655971?uri=CELEX:32013H0426(01)). (Accessed: 26.03.2014).

³² Data provided by the Jobs+ Unit, Ministry for Education and Employment, March 2014. See also Ministry for Education and Employment (2014) *The National Employment Policy*. Malta: MEDE. p.85-87



Target Group 1: single unmarried parents, mostly women, living on social benefits.

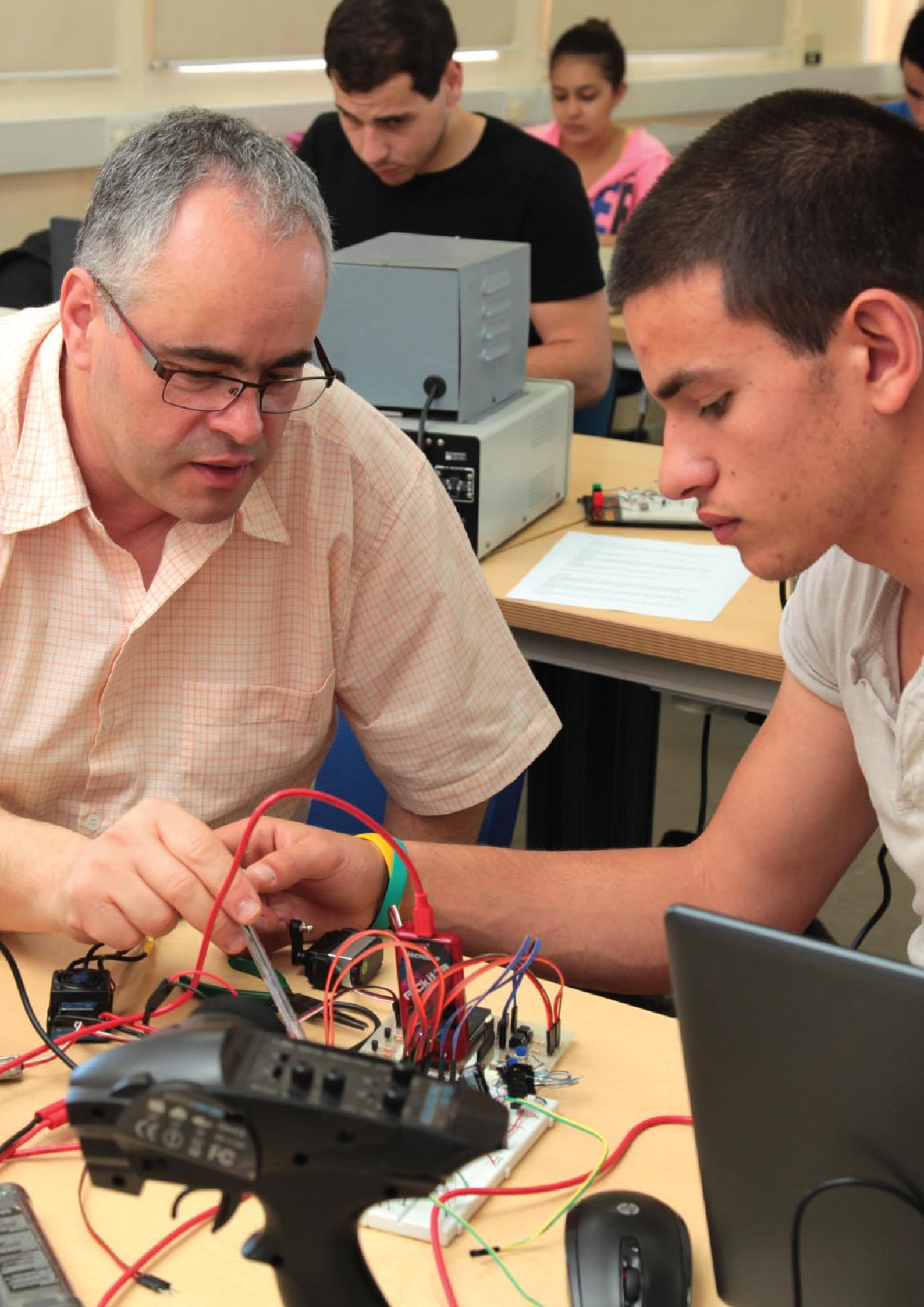
Target Group 2: disabled youths in receipt of a disability pension.

Target Group 3: unemployed youths who have been registering with the Public Employment Service for more than 6 months and in receipt of unemployment assistance. Individuals have to be head of households to be eligible for such benefits.

Target Group 4: unemployed youths who have been registering with the Public Employment Service for less than 6 months.

Target Group 5: unemployed youths who are captured in the Labour Force Survey but are not registering for work with the Public Employment Service.

Following the lead of the Council Recommendation of April 2013, MEDE will first tackle target groups 4 and 5 who amount to about 3,500 young persons. By the end of 2014 MEDE will be launching initiatives to entice 10% of this target group through a pilot project that will bring together public and private entities in a partnership for the provision of education, training and job exposures.



This strategic plan strongly entices MEDE to carry out an on-going review of the process, especially to analyse ways how public and private enterprises can cooperate in order to reach out to the maximum number of young people at risk, to retain them in training and education until they acquire the necessary skills and competences for employment, and to accompany them in their transition into gainful employment. The lessons learned from this pilot project will stand MEDE in good stead to:

- increase its capacity and ability to reach out more effectively to other vulnerable groups;
- empower unemployed young people to move out of the vicious cycle of the benefit trap or 'assistencialism'³³ through re-integration into education and training and a smooth transition into employment;
- explore different kinds of public-private partnerships that will enable unemployed young persons to acquire employment-relevant skills and a positive work ethic.

Strategic Action 5.3 Implementing the Youth Guarantee Scheme to reach out to young people at risk

This strategic plan recommends that the pilot project for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee Scheme in Malta will be monitored for effectiveness of process and obtaining of results so that lessons learned will enable MEDE to reach out to other vulnerable groups of unemployed youths.

³³ Cardona, M. (2010) *You will always have the poor among you. A report about poverty in Malta. Malta: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice.* p.100.





6. MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE PREVENTION OF ESL IN MALTA: THE STRATEGY AT A GLANCE

The following matrix identifies the strategic actions that make up this strategic plan and maps out key performance indicators that will be used to monitor the implementation of this strategy.

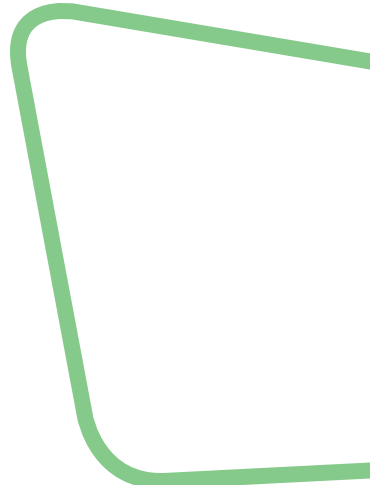
1. Aim: reducing ESL rate in Malta to 10% by 2020				
2. Implementation and monitoring systems				
2.1 Inter-ministerial committee			2.2 ESL Unit	
2.4 Constructing a comprehensive data collection framework				
3. Prevention			4. Intervention	
Strategic pillars	Strategic actions	Performance indicators	Strategic pillars	Strategic actions
A. Early childhood education and care	3.1 Providing free childcare	More children attend childcare.	A. Early warning systems	4.1 Developing early warning systems and enabling timely action
B. Making schools relevant for every student	3.2 Educating for and through diversity	Schools are able to reach out to students with different abilities and from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds	B. support networks for students at risk	4.2 Consolidating support networks around students at risk.
	3.3 Meeting the needs of high achievers	Schools are able to reach out to high achieving students		4.3 Harnessing Youth Workers' support for older students
	3.4 Setting up middle schools: making caring community schools possible	Middle schools are set up in every state college		4.4 Empowering students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
C. Supporting children at risk through innovative teaching and learning tools and community based solutions	3.5 Developing e-Learning content to better respond to student learning needs	Teachers are able to use eLearning tools in the classroom for better student attainment		4.5 Supporting teenage mothers to stay in education and training
	3.6 Tapping mobile technology for more student engagement	Tablets are phased into schools as from year 4 upwards		4.6 Supporting students and Parents through after-school support programmes.
	3.7 Funding for a school based approach to reducing ESL	School based plans for tackling ESL receive medium to long term funding.		4.7 Supporting students at risk in the secondary school
D. Re-introducing Vocational education in the secondary schools as an alternative learning pathway	3.8 Introducing a well structured vocational pathway in Maltese secondary schools	VET is introduced in the secondary schools at par with academically oriented subjects		
E. Transition processes, flexible pathways and career guidance	3.9 Strengthening the transition process across educational pathways	Transition processes between school cycles are strengthened through new services for students and parents		
	3.10 Reviewing and consolidating career guidance across levels	Career guidance becomes more entrenched in mainstream schools		
	3.11 Honing the potential of the Secondary School Certificate and Profile	The SSCP is reviewed continuously for effectiveness to become a tool for progression into higher cycles of education and training		
F. Parents, not any more the silent partner	3.12 Harnessing and strengthening parental support to combat ESL	More initiatives for the structural integration of parents in schools are taken		
G. Combating ESL through teacher training	3.13 Supporting teachers to address the ESL challenge	A teacher training institute is set up to empower teachers to keep up with the many developments taking place in Maltese society and in our educational system		

5. Compensation

Performance indicators	Strategic pillars	Strategic actions	Performance indicators
Prompt action is taken to improve student performance in the early years and to reduce absenteeism.	A. Reintegration programmes at further education levels	5.1 Striking strategic partnerships for an effective second chance education for students at risk	More students go into second chance education, more students complete second chance education leading to MQF level 3
Psychosocial networks cooperate more in their bid to respond to the needs of students at risk.		5.2 Providing quality second chance education for persons with a disability for better life chances	More disabled students get into second chance education
Youth workers are present in more places to support youths.		5.3 Implementing the Youth Guarantee Scheme to reach out to young people at risk	More initiatives are taken under the Youth Guarantee Scheme in order to reach out to other target groups
Support for SEBD students is more effective in reponding to students' needs and in re-integrating them into mainstream education.			
More teenage mothers continue with their education after childbirth.			
More students and parents make use of after-school support programmes.			
An alternative learning programme is developed to cater for the needs of vulnerable students in mainstream schools and that would include a VET component.			

Legend

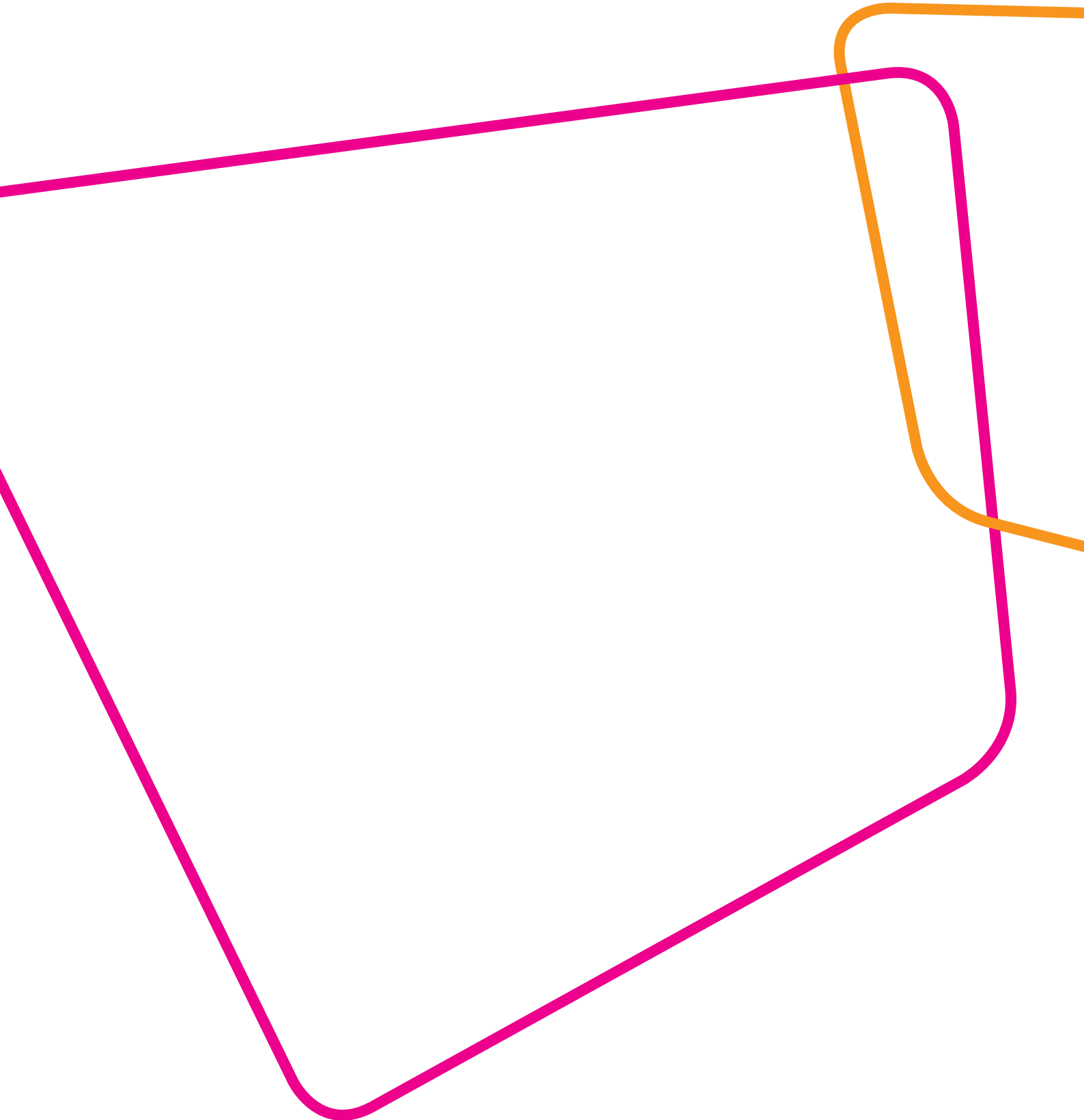
-  Already Started
-  Will start by end 2014
-  Already exists but need reviewing
-  Still to commence



7. GLOSSARY



ALP:	Alternative Learning Programme
AŽ:	Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ
BTEC:	Business, Technology and Education Council
CBO:	Community Based Organisation
CCP:	Core Curriculum Programme
CPD:	Continuous Professional Development
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
CTP:	Council for the Teaching Profession
DCM:	Department of Curriculum Management
DES:	Directorate for Educational Services
DLL:	Directorate for Lifelong Learning
DQSE:	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
DRD:	Department for Research and Development
DSS:	Department for Student Services
ESF:	European Social Fund
ESL:	Early School Leaving
ESLU:	Early School Leaving Unit
ESLWG:	Early School Leaving Working Group
ETC:	Employment and Training Corporation
EU:	European Union
EUPA:	European Union Programmes Agency
FES:	Foundation for Educational Services
IMC:	Inter-Ministerial Committee
ITS:	Institute for Tourism Studies
KNPD:	Kummissjoni Nazzjonali għal Persuni b'Diżabilità
LFS:	Labour Force Survey
LSA:	Learning Support Assistant
MCAST:	Malta College for Art, Science and Technology
MEDE:	Ministry for Education and Employment
MFSS:	Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity
MQF:	Malta Qualifications Framework
NCF:	National Curriculum Framework
NCFHE:	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
NEET:	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGO:	Non Governmental Organisation
NSO:	National Statistics Office
PES:	Public Employment Service
PIRLS:	Progress in International Progress in Literacy Study
PISA:	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSD:	Personal and Social Development
PSCD:	Personal, Social and Career Development
SEC:	Secondary Education Certificate
SSCP:	Secondary School Certificate and Profile
TIMMS:	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UOM:	University of Malta
VET:	Vocational Education and Training



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