

Professionalization of Trainers for workbased basic skills

Basic specialist country report (*Malta/Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability*)

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Synopsis

Partner countries are to provide country reports with their national insights, success and failure factors, examples of good practice, new challenges and competences. Through this, cross-national similarities can be identified in the analysis of the challenges and competency development of the professionals while also establishing a common knowledge base in the partnership. The publication provides important impetus for the integration of corresponding competences and development approaches into the relevant national courses and further education. It will also provide impetus for the EU-wise discussion on the reduction of the proportion of low skills and low qualified adults.

1) Partner Organisations

Working Priorities on the topic of work based basic skills

Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability

The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education and Employment is led by a vision that learning should be a lifelong journey for everyone. Individuals and communities need to acquire skills which are relevant to their lives, their needs and their work.

The Directorate offers policy guidance on lifelong learning and organises adult learning courses through a more personalised and innovative approaches to education. It aims to ensure that there are learning benefits for numerous different sectors: individuals, communities, employers and society at large.

As the National Coordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning, the Directorate is improving the quality of adult teaching and learning in Malta. We are striving for better coordination in the sector so as to increase participation in adult learning of all kinds (formal, non-formal and informal learning), whether for the acquisition of work skills, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment.

The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020¹

Whilst compulsory schooling already incorporates frameworks and governance, adult learning remains the weakest link in the National Lifelong Learning system. Alternative learning pathways and opportunities, whether it's second chance adult education or more job-related training need new approaches and new governance. All this is tackled in the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020. The document sets out

¹ National lifelong learning strategy,
<https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Malta%20National%20Lifelong%20Learning%20Strategy%202020.pdf>

Malta's obligations within the EU Lisbon process to address the challenges face in embedding Lifelong Learning within our society and identifies the areas of national priority in the years to come.

The National Lifelong Learning strategy has three strategic measures in relation to the concept of workbased learning. These include:

- 1) the promotion of adult skills as the optimum, flexible route to employability, personalised professional development and economic well-being.
- 2) the setting up of proper and developed work-based learning environments
- 3) the development of guidelines for work-based learning programmes

To implement these strategic measures, the Directorate, through the project EU Agenda for Adult Learning led a small scale awareness campaign to provide information to employers on how they can work with members of their workforce who have problems with basic skills. Through previous collaboration with other EU partners, Malta invited an expert trainer from Ireland to conduct awareness raising meetings and training seminars for employers on the benefits of workbased learning. These training sessions were designed to facilitate the provision of short focused inputs on the topic, followed by opportunities for reflection and networking opportunities. The target cohort for this campaign were the manufacturing and large industries and also retail Industries and small and medium sized companies. These sessions saw the participation of Jobsplus, GWU and Reggie Miller Foundation, GRTU, MHRA, Chamber of Commerce, Playmobil, PG Group, Farsons, BOV, MCAST, Methode, Consolidated Biscuits, Actavis.

Current provision of workbased learning/on the job training from a pilot cohort of 10 employers that attended the training sessions conducted by the project showed that some employers had successfully engaged with workbased learning in recent times. It appeared however that awareness of the availability of current provision was quite low. Several companies' offer in-house training and some of the larger companies have standardised induction/training programmes. None of these however address basic skills in a targeted way, but concentrate on training in work-practices and

company ethos. It was noted that SMEs do not generally have the budgets or structures to facilitate basic skills training.

Definition of workbased learning

Cedefop² vs Malta context

What is "workbased learning"? Or should it rather be called "work-place learning" or even "workbased-related learning "

Workbased learning refers to the learning of adults at the workplace as a means of improving their capabilities as adults.

Policy documents as e.g. the Riga Conclusions rather refer to "work-based learning". CEDEFOP defines "work-based learning" according to knowledge bases and skills that emerge through the execution and reflection of tasks in a vocational context, be it the work place or an educational institution.

Malta uses workbased learning and apprenticeships in interchangeable manner. At times workbased learning is used to describe the process whereby students in compulsory education and those following vocational courses are placed within a company to conduct an apprenticeship. This would therefore mean that they would still be students following an apprenticeship to gain practical insight on the theoretical components of the course they're following in preparation for employment. At the moment, the Ministry of Education and Employment has embarked on an internal and external consultation process to develop the proposed Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act to provide a framework for the development of effective Work-Placements, Apprenticeships and Internships.³ This act is still at first reading stage.

² Referent report, Malta contribution; <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/malta-vet-europe-country-report-2017>

³ Work based learning act;
<http://education.gov.mt/en/Pages/Public%20Consultations/WBL.aspx>

This bill entitled an act to regulate Work Based Learning and Apprenticeships within the context of a Vocational Education and Training Programme.

2) **Key challenges for professionals**

Tutor capacity

The success of any workbased learning instance is very much dependent on the skills of the tutor delivering the course. Standardised training for adult basic skills educators does not currently exist in Malta.⁴ This would be a major obstacle, when attempting to increase employer and employee engagement with basic skills courses in the work place. Work place delivery of basic skills requires a specific skills set, additional to more general proficiency in adult tuition. Capability is also needed to integrate literacy and numeracy into relevant training materials. The transmission to basic skill learners of transversal skills such as personal effectiveness, team work and communication skills etc. also need to be considered in addition to the technical training.

Awareness of the current provision for workbased learning

There are several schemes provided by private institutions, governmental institutions and EU funds that would allow for workbased learning to take place. Unfortunately, access to this information is not always readily available and due to the lack of time or staff that is available these might at times hinder employers or professionals from applying for such grants in order to build and sustain workbased learning. In the medium-term, the creation of a space for dialogue for adult learning professionals, businesses and likeminded people would very much help in shifting the mind-set. An

⁴ There are various programmes that target parents and children which do have specialised tutors on basic skills. However, target audience is not solely adult learners and specialisation can be in the form of basic skills for parents on how to interact with children.

open forum could be developed for highlighting sectorial needs and the creation of mutually acceptable and workable training solutions.

A more co-ordinated approach to the delivery and responsibility for workbased learning

Due to the lack of available curricula, the lack of professionals specialised in basic skills and due to the lack of a bill governing such systems in the medium to long term, a programme for addressing basic skill needs in the work place would need to have a more coordinated approach. Funding options would need to be explored to enable the development of such programme that should be spread on a national basis to ensure conformity across sectors when it comes to basic skills.

3. Work based basic skills training at a glance

As mentioned in previous sections, the Directorate, through the project EU Agenda for Adult Learning was able to venture into the topic of workbased learning. Before the training sessions with employers were conducted, a form of market research was conducted with stakeholders who have direct exposure to work based learning schemes or are providers of such schemes.

Public service employees

Work based learning initiatives for public service employees are provided by the Institute for Public Services (IPS) which is the central training organisation of the Public Service. Through ESF funding, (ESF 4.100 - Developing Core Skills in the Public Service) under Operational Programme II public service officials were able to benefit from certain upskilling and new competences that are relevant for their work place. The ESF training framework spread over 11 areas and incorporated innovative methods of training, such as e-learning, blended learning, coaching, IT training, seminars, workshops and modular programmes.⁵

⁵ ESF 4.100, Developing Core Skills;
<https://publicservice.gov.mt/en/institute/Pages/ESF4.100/ESF4100.aspx>

Reggie Miller Foundation, General Workers Union

The Reggie Miller Foundation, is the General Workers Union's educational annex. The Reggie Miller Foundation provides learning opportunities for the general public and enterprises who wish to enrol in any of the courses provided by the Foundation. The Reggie Miller Foundation together with the Unilang School of Languages create courses based on the needs of the enterprises who approach them. Course content is created upon various discussions with employers, educators and employee representatives to ensure that cross sectional competences are addressed. They offer a flexible course provision while ensuring that support is given through the learning cycle. ⁶

Jobsplus

Jobsplus is Malta's national employment and training corporation. Jobsplus currently manage ESF funding scheme named '*Investing in Skills*'. The main aim of such scheme is to promote the training of persons actively participating in the Maltese Labour Market with the aim to increase productivity and enhance adaptability.⁷

Eligibility Criteria:

- **Complete documentation** - The Applicant shall fill in and submit the latest available Investing in Skills Application Form found on the Jobsplus website, complete with all the relevant details and enclosing supporting documentation, as applicable. Incomplete applications will not be accepted for processing;
- **Falls within the definition of an undertaking;**
- **Project implemented within or for the direct benefit of the eligible territory;**

⁶ Reggie Miller Foundation;

<http://www.gwu.org.mt/ReadText.php?ID1=L&ID2=39#unilang>

⁷ Jobsplus, Investing in Skills Scheme; <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/schemes-jobseekers/investing-in-skills>

- **Incentive Effect:** Aid shall be considered to have an incentive effect if the Beneficiary has submitted a written application for the aid before work on the project or activity starts. Therefore, invoices, payment of deposits, payment of air travel costs and others must be dated after the submission date of the Investing in Skills application;
- **Eligible Training Programme:** Aid shall not be granted for training which beneficiaries carry out to comply with National Mandatory Standards on training (in other words, it must be voluntary training as opposed to legally enforced training). Furthermore, Information Sessions and Team Building events are not eligible under Investing in Skills since these are not considered as training;
- **The trainee needs to be formally employed with the beneficiary during the training period.** Apprentices or students engaged in vocational training with an apprenticeship or vocational training contract are not eligible;
- **Aid cannot be granted to any Undertaking found to be in difficulty.** Jobsplus will conduct checks to ensure that every applicant Undertaking is financially sound.

Subsidy on Training Costs:

The Standard Rate of Unit Cost to be applied in INVESTING in SKILLS is € 25 per trainee per hour, subject to the cappings indicated in Section 2.3 of the Implementation and Guidance Notes.

Under no circumstances can the IB reimburse more than 15 trainees for the same training under IIS, irrespective if these claims derive from separate and unrelated Beneficiaries.

Jobsplus will reimburse the unit cost based on the training hours actually attended by each trainee up to a maximum of 25 hours for non-accredited training. If training is accredited by the NCFHE (National Commission for Further and Higher Education), ITS (Institute of Tourism Studies), UOM (University of Malta) and MCAST (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology) the capping of 25 hours will not be applied.

In the case of accredited training, **MQF/EQF Levels 1-4** will be accepted under Investing in Skills.⁸

4. Curricula for work based basic skills

A specific curriculum for work based basic skills for adult learners is not yet formulated. It is important to factor in that secondary education and higher education do have a specific curricula tailor made for basic skills. It may therefore be necessary to develop specific curricula, for tutors of workbased basic skills training in Malta. One possibility would be to utilise pre-developed structures for tutor training through exchange with other European partners with expertise in this area, hence the Directorates partnership with *bbb* and *Profi-Train* project. Tutors could then develop, disseminate, and build on their skills in the Maltese context. These newly developed skills would enable a very high level of provision in the area. They could also add an additional dimension to teaching methodologies across service provision. Strategies such as integrating literacy and using workbased documents/materials to support basic skills learning could enhance the courses/modules when given in a work place. The Directorate for Lifelong Learning do offer English, English as a Foreign language, Maltese, Maltese as a Foreign Language, ICT and Maths at introductory level. Course content in relation to these essential skills courses is not directory related to work based basic skills learning. Notwithstanding this, the Directorate has at times been approached to tailor make a basic skills course for a particular entity/company in relation to on the job training.

5. Required competencies for trainers for work based basic skills

As previously mentioned the formalisation of the adult education landscape in Malta, beyond institutes for post-secondary and/or tertiary education, is still in it's infancy.

⁸ More information about the 'Investing for Skills' scheme can be accessed from the following: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/schemes-jobseekers/investing-in-skills>

Thus, when it comes to the competences required by adult educators and most especially those within a work place remit, a comprehensive national list of such competences is not available.

From a historical perspective there has always been a divide between education within schools and at the work place. In fact, education professionals are referred to as 'teachers' and 'lecturers' within the formal, mostly compulsory educational system and 'trainers' within an industry environment. The two have been perceived as distinct and separate for several years.

This is not to say that collaboration between educators and employers is non-existent. For example, when it comes to VET courses, apprenticeship systems and other student work placements this is quite common however, collaboration tends to dwindle drastically once students leave the formal educational system and become full time employees.

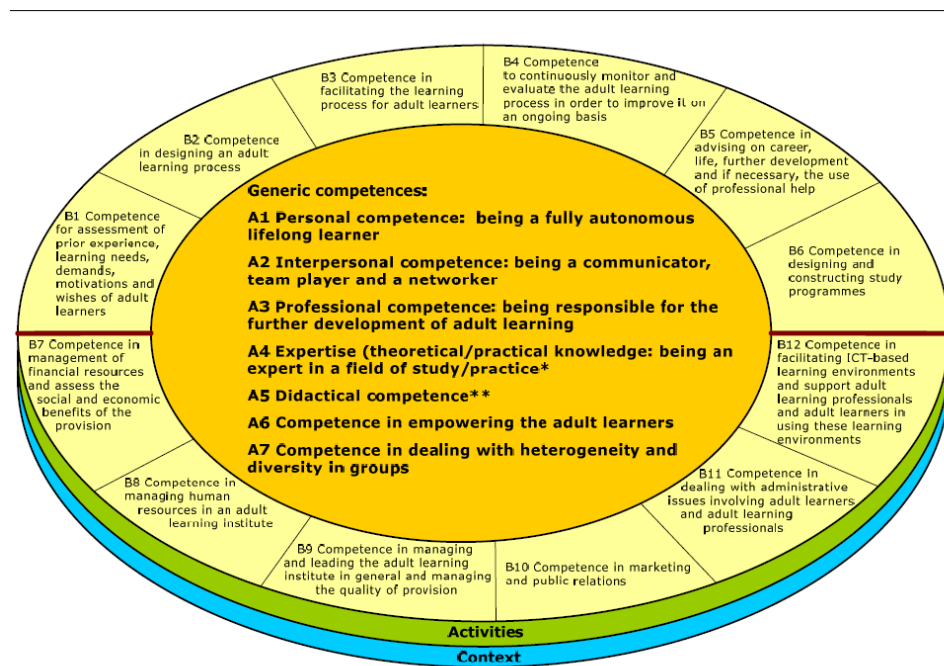
Within the industry sector training normally becomes the remit of the HR function and/or people who have a background in psychology, business, management and communications. HR would assess the training needs in line with business needs and technical trainers from within the same company (possibly line managers) or freelance consultants who are sourced locally or from abroad would design and deliver customised programmes. Since 99% of businesses in Malta are SMEs, a high percentage of which are micro businesses with less than 10 people, training if any tends to fall within the remit of the business owner.

The local private training provider industry is also quite developed and employers do resort to these providers for their training needs. These centres would mostly offer off-the-shelf pre-designed courses for the general public and therefore would mostly lack any customisation to the specific needs of the business. Such training centres focus on home grown soft skills, people management and communication training or are licenced to provide industry standard training such as Microsoft, Cisco or Service management training.

The issues related to this set up, this divide between the formal education system and work based learning within industry is that there is a lack of important competences for work based basic skills training trainers from both sectors.

The purpose of the 2010 study 'Key competences for adult learning professionals' commissioned to Research voor Beleid by the European Commission was to develop a reference framework of key competences for adult learning professionals. In their study they identified a comprehensive list of competences required by professionals as represented in the figure below.

Figure 1.1 Graphic representation of the set of key competences of adult learning professionals



* For professionals not directly involved in the learning process, the expertise concerns not subject knowledge, but specific (for example managerial, administrative or ICT) expertise.

** For professionals not directly involved in the learning process or supportive in a managerial, administrative way, the didactical competence is less relevant.

Buiskool, B.J et al (2010), Research voor Beleid, Key competences for adult learning professionals. Contribution to the development of a reference framework of key competences for adult learning professionals. Final Report. P.11

In Malta industry trainers are normally experts in their field, have an academic qualification in their area of specialisation and years of experience working within the industry. If we translate this to the competences referred to in the study conducted by Research voor Beleid (2010, P. 13) trainers from the industry usually possess the generic competences A1 to A4 and the specific competences B7 to B12. They are usually weak in the didactical and pedagogical competences which according to this framework would be the A5 to A7 and the B1 to B6 competences. Sometimes trainers in industry are asked to attend a 'Train the Trainers' course but even though this does enhance these mentioned competences it is not comprehensive enough.

On the other hand, educators from the compulsory field of education, who have completed their teacher training courses (Bachelors of Education, Postgraduate Certificate in Education or the Masters in Education from the University of Malta) have sound pedagogical skills. However, they usually lack applied subject area expertise, teaching in different environments which are not necessarily classroom based, experience within specific industries and the larger corporate world of work.

However, in this study it is clear that such competences cannot be mutually exclusive. Both sets of competences are required for quality professional adult educators to be truly effective in helping employees to learn. This means that they find difficulty in customising training to specific work environments, to help individuals transfer learning to the job and to measure results of training against the bottom line.

In conclusion, in Malta it would be ideal to attract more educators from the formal education institutions to move into work based basic skills training and to attract industry trainers towards achieving teaching qualifications. Both types of educators need to enhance their current competences in order to be quality adult learning professionals teaching work based basic skills.