European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010
Country Report: Malta

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CONTENTS

1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE .............................................................................................................1
  1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation .....................................................1
  1.2 Relationship with the existing/developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation ...............................................................2
  1.3 National institutional framework ..........................................................................................3
  1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation ............................................................4
  1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives ............................................................4
  1.6 Link between validation and the existing/developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications .........................................................6
  1.7 Funding framework ............................................................................................................6
  1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries .............................................................................................6

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ..............................................................................................6
  2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers .................................6
  2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions .........................7
  2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors ....................................7
  2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors .........................................8
  2.5 Costs to organisations .......................................................................................................8

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE ........................................................................................................8
  3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment ......................................................................................8
  3.2 Provision of guidance and support .......................................................................................9
  3.3 Costs to individuals ............................................................................................................9
  3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups .......................................................................9
  3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals ...................................................................................9

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION .................................................................................10
  4.1 Quality Assurance Framework ..........................................................................................10
  4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures ............................................................................10
  4.3 Evaluation framework .........................................................................................................10

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS .........................................................................................................10
  5.1 Methods used ......................................................................................................................10

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS ................................................................................................11
  6.1 Profile of validation practitioners .......................................................................................11
  6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners ...............................................................11
  6.3 Qualifications requirements ...............................................................................................11

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY ..........................................................................................................................12
1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

At present there is a draft legal framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta which should be added to the amendments to the Education Act by the first quarter of 2011. The Government, in its effort to meet the targets set out in the Lisbon Agenda, is committed to developing a framework and administrative structures for the validation of informal and non-formal learning as part of the country’s National Reform Programme for the period 2008-10. Following legislation, Sector Skills Councils will be established and occupational standards for the different sectors will be developed. Indeed, nine different sectors (these being: Agribusiness, Art and Design, Building and Construction Engineering, Business and Commerce, Community Services, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Information and Communication Technology, Maritime, and Mechanical Engineering) have been identified for occupational standards to be developed that match existing qualifications in the VET sector. Under the section of the NRP document relating to Education and Training, it is noted that Government is working to ensure that formal, informal and non-formal knowledge and skills are certified (Measure 4.5, p.20). This is considered of major importance as there is recognition that currently the education and training system in the country fails to recognise the knowledge and skills of approximately 40% of students who are labelled 'unskilled, unqualified and uncertified'.

The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC), which was established through Law 347 of 2005, has been tasked with implementing a new national qualifications framework for the country. The framework is compatible with the European Qualifications Framework and forms a single structure encompassing formal, non-formal and informal learning in Malta. It is also compatible with the 'European Guidelines for Validating Non-Formal and Informal Learning', which invite states to make validation of non-formal and informal learning an integral part of their national qualification system.

Even though the legislation which regulates the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Malta is still in draft form, the Malta Qualifications Council has taken a number of important steps towards the development of a system of validation, since the 2007 publication of the European Inventory. These include:

- The publication of a series of four working documents entitled valuing all learning in 2008. Volume 4 of these documents acknowledges the country's legislative gap in the area of validation of non-formal and informal learning and recommends legislative and non-legislative measures which would make non-formal, informal and prior learning part of the national qualifications framework for lifelong learning;

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3 View expressed by Mr Evarist Bartolo, MP, at the MQC Colloquium on the Validation of informal and non-formal Learning, Thursday, 4th June, 2009. For details see Notes on the MQC Colloquium on the Validation of informal and non-formal Learning.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned MQC working document Valuing all Learning: Frameworks for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning in Malta states that legislation is the first step required to take forward the implementation of a system of validation in Malta. Legislation could give citizens the right to validate their learning, specify the body which would hold the responsibility of regulating the validation process, and would ensure a link between validation and the formal education and training system.

1.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

From September 2006 until April 2007, a process of mapping informal and non-formal learning according to nationally agreed key competences was carried out. After this process had been completed, the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (NQF) was launched in June 2007. The NQF was influenced by the eight-level classification of the EQF but has two main differences with it. First, the MQF level descriptors are more detailed than those of the EQF, and they are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, competences and learning outcomes. Second, they are contextualised to the Maltese culture and social, economic and political priorities.

Learning outcomes summarise the knowledge, skills and competences that individuals gained, which are mapped throughout the MQF. The level descriptors measure complexity, degree and the level of learning associated with a particular competence level. They provide an overview of what an individual should know and be able to do without significant support at each level.

Thus progression in the Maltese NQF is recorded as follows:

- Knowledge and understanding;
- Applied knowledge and understanding;
- Communication skills;
- Critical skills;
- Learning skills; and
- Autonomy and responsibility.

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8 Notes from the National Colloquium can be found on the website: http://www.mqc.gov.mt/accreditation-and-validation
As mentioned above, the national qualifications framework encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning. In autumn 2010 it was decided that the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta will be assessed against the eight level system of the Malta Qualifications Framework. Validation in Malta will be based on a learning-outcomes approach. To decide this, in 2009 the MQC had consultations with key stakeholders to decide whether validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta will be assessed against the eight level system of the Malta Qualifications Framework. At the National Colloquium on the validation of non-formal and informal learning held in June 2009, participants discussed whether a new system where all learning is recognised, valued and validated should be introduced. In his presentation Richard Curmi, Senior Manager at the National Qualifications Council, presented the results of a survey on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta. According to this study, 91.2% of the respondents agreed that validation of non-formal and informal learning should become a fully accepted process in the Malta Qualifications Framework and the national certification system. Furthermore, 82.9% of the respondents believed that validation of non-formal and informal learning should be given a level rating within the national qualifications framework whereas 11.8% of the respondents believed that it should not. Some of the respondents who gave a positive answer believed that recognition should go up to level 3 and others said that there should not be a distinction. Consultations continue with stakeholders in this field.

However there are no specific standards in place to support the delivery of validation at the moment. According to the 2008 working document of the MQC, validation standards of non-formal and informal learning should be the same as those used in formal education and training. The MQC is currently developing a more formal approach to legally recognising informal and non-formal learning activities that corresponds to nationally agreed criteria of occupational and educational standards. The qualifications that will be awarded will be the same as existing vocational qualifications.

1.3 National institutional framework

In Malta the Ministry of Education, Employment and Family has the ultimate responsibility for the entire education system. This includes among others primary and secondary education, the University of Malta, the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), Malta Council for Culture and the Arts, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and Malta Qualifications Council.

The regulation of the National Qualifications Framework is under the responsibility of the Malta Qualifications Council. According to the 2005 legislative act (347/2005) the objective of the MQC is:

To steer the development of the National Qualifications Framework [...] and to oversee the training and certification leading to qualifications within the Framework and which is not already provided for at compulsory education institutions or degree awarding bodies.

The Malta Qualifications Council has also been given the responsibility to:

- Establish, promote and maintain the National Qualifications Framework, based on standards of knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes to be acquired by learners;
- Promote and facilitate lifelong learning access, transfer and progression; and

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• Foster the recognition abroad of professional and vocational certificates awarded in Malta under these regulations.

The working document Valuing all Learning: Frameworks for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning in Malta identifies the following responsibilities for the MQC, should it be nominated by law as the official regulator of non-formal and informal learning:

• to set up sector skills units responsible for drawing up standards;
• to identify and accredit institutions involved in invisible learning;
• to draw up guidelines for the validation process;
• to develop in-house infrastructure for the validation process and/or draw up standards for the accreditation of institutions involved in the validation process; and
• to appoint the external verifiers responsible for monitoring the validation process.

1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The Malta Qualifications Council intends to develop a decentralised system of assessment, recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, which will ensure that the standards and guidelines are respected through internal and external verifiers.

Before a system of validation be implemented, it is intended to establish a number of Sector Skills Units, with the role of identifying the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform occupations within their sector. These sector skills units will identify the different jobs in their particular sector, outline the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform these jobs and map these against the National Qualifications Framework. They will also ensure that the validation institutions are meeting the required standards set out for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Sector Skills Units will also be responsible for the validation process as well as training institutions.

The University (and its institutions) is responsible for its own validation procedures – both design and implementation. Contacts have been established between the University of Malta and the University of Pau (France) for collaboration on the validation of informal learning at degree level.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is still at an early stage in Malta. At present the Malta Qualifications Council is conducting pilot studies to develop methodological frameworks/tools, methods of assessment and sectoral skills units, together with national and international partners, such as the Foundation for Human Resources Development, the Zghazagh Azzjoni Kattolika (Catholic Action Movement or ZAK) and nine European partners. The aim of the pilot studies is to validate skills gained in non-formal and informal environments, as a means to build an individual’s capacity for further education and professional development.

At national level, a collaborative study between the Malta Qualifications Council and the ZAK seeks to establish occupational standards for assistant youth leaders and also youth leaders. In the long term this will be a prototype for all NGOs in Malta to follow. The project validates the leadership and social skills and knowledge gained by young people through their participation in Zghazagh Azzjoni Kattolika. The assessors of the skills are members of the organisations who are qualified Youth Workers; to ensure the quality of the

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19 Interview with Richard Curmi, Senior Manager, Malta Qualifications Council, 4 May 2010.
validation process 10% of the individuals also have a second assessment by external assessors. Participants who want to have their leadership and social skills validated should demonstrate that they acquire the ability to:

- Participate actively in the peer group (evidence of group skills and basic leadership skills);
- Work in a team of youth leaders and assist in leading a group of young people (evidence of leadership skills and basic knowledge about youth work);
- Work in a team of youth leaders and put in practice basic youth work principles (evidence of basic youth work principles and working in an organisation);
- Take full responsibility of a youth group and coordinate the work done by a team of youth leaders (evidence of basic management skills and youth work principles); and
- Coordinate the management of a network of youth groups, take part in the devising of youth development programmes for different youth groups and put in practice advanced youth work principles (evidence of leadership skills and basic knowledge about youth work).

At European level, the Malta Qualifications Council is also coordinating a Leonardo da Vinci Project with nine European Partners. This project, entitled INLearning, aims to promote social inclusion of people who do not hold any formal qualifications. By establishing a portfolio pen drive known as a ‘Lifepass’, the programme seeks to develop a methodological framework for the validation of informal and non-formal learning which will be applicable across different sectors and may be utilised across Europe. The objective of the project is to allow individuals to take the Lifepass portfolio pen drive and use it across Europe, as is the case with the Europass. The methodological tool will be tested in different employment sectors such as printing, agribusiness, construction, hospitality, transport, security, and childcare. A manual to accompany the Lifepass will also be developed, based on experiences gained during the pilot phase. Thus far, in Malta the INLearning programme has been tested in the printing and agribusiness sectors.

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**INLearning (Leonardo da Vinci)**

The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) began developing a transnational validation project in 2009. The project is called INLearning and it has been implemented in Austria, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia and Turkey. The INLearning project aims to promote social inclusion through developing a methodology framework for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. A portfolio called ‘Lifepass’ has been developed which will be applicable across different sectors and may be used across Europe.

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20 Zghazagh Azzjoni Kattolika, Zak’s point of view, Validation of informal and non-formal learning, presentation delivered at the MQC Colloquium on the Validation of informal and non-formal Learning, Thursday, 4th June, 2009.

21 InLearning, Occupational Standards: Partner (1) Malta
1.6 Link between validation and the existing/ developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

The existing documentation on the proposed system of validation for Malta does not refer to the link between the future system and the credit / modular system of qualifications.

1.7 Funding framework

According to a representative of the Malta Qualifications Council, the details of the funding framework for validation have not yet been defined.

1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

At the national level this information is not available, since a validation system has not yet been implemented in Malta. Data on validation in companies and the third sector is not collected either.

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

According to the 2008 working document of the Malta Qualifications Council, non-formal and informal learning is common in many educational fields in Malta, such as leisure, crafts, academic, cultural, vocational and work-oriented learning. However, as mentioned above, there is no national framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and competences acquired through this learning remain to a large extent invisible. Certificates of attendance which are often provided to participants upon completion of a [non-formal] training programme do not have value for educational authorities and in the labour market.

However, as outlined in the 2007 European Inventory report for Malta, some exceptions exist and validation initiatives can be found among national, private and third sector organisations.

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

The maturity clause at the University of Malta allows adults aged 23 and over to apply and follow courses as well as be exempted from credits, modules and courses even if they do not possess the normal entry requirements based on official certification. Each application
is assessed on its own merit; the background and life experiences of the applicant are considered in order to decide whether someone is admitted to a course\textsuperscript{23}.

The Institution of Tourism Studies (the Institute or ITS) offers vocational training for the tourism sector. To select applicants for the courses, the Institute uses the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) to assess the prior experience of candidates. Candidates applying to attend courses are given points for their work experience in the tourism industry. The Institute of Tourism Studies also has the maturity clause which allows individuals aged 23 or above to apply for courses even if they do not possess the full entry requirements. Their prior experiences are assessed on an individual basis.

The Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), an institution that is primarily responsible for providing most of the vocational education and training in Malta, also has a maturity clause. Individuals aged 23 or above, who are in the possession of the School Leaving Certificate, are accepted in programmes at Level 5 of the Malta Qualifications Framework. Those who are 21 years old can enter programmes at Level 3 and 4. Depending on their prior experiences, individuals can either be accepted into a degree course or asked to undertake additional studies in order to be fully accepted\textsuperscript{24}.

The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) - Malta’s Public Employment Service - has developed its own method of trade testing which offers the opportunity to both employed and unemployed people to validate their informal and non-formal learning. A number of specific trades can be validated, including accounting technicians, carers with the elderly, and telecommunications. Those candidates who want their prior learning to be validated have to take a written examination as well as an interview. This process may lead to the issuing of certification in specific trades and has the potential to increase employment opportunities, particularly in the case of unemployed seeking work\textsuperscript{25}.

Finally, as reported in the 2007 European Inventory report for Malta, the Armed Forces Malta has a system for recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning, which was adopted from the British Army. The army performs trade and other tests for training, re-training and lifelong learning and issues certificates in collaboration with the Educational Institutions in Malta\textsuperscript{26}.

\section*{2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions}

It is not yet clear what role different IAG providers will play in the validation process. This will be decided once the design of the validation system is further developed.

\section*{2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors}

It is envisaged that representatives of employers and employer associations, workers and professionals and trade unions will be members of the aforementioned sector skills units, which will be set up by the Malta Qualifications Council.

Enterprises are also already working independently to validate their learners’ informal and non-formal learning. The 2007 Malta report of the European Inventory on validation of

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informal and non-formal learning refers to Playmobil and its multiskilling programme, which is still relevant in 2010.27

Playmobil Malta Ltd launched in September 1995 a multi-skilling programme entitled the ‘learning strand’. This is a three-tier approach to the skills process which divides skills into those which the learner ‘must-know’, those which are ‘good-to-know’ and those which are ‘nice-to-know’ skills. The company also introduced a first-aid training programme and a computer-assisted learning technique among a representative group of workers from its various departments.28

As became evident in the 2009 National Conference on the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning, employers value the validation of non-formal and informal learning because it assesses potential employees and certifies their skills and knowledge. For instance, a certificate which validates the leadership skills and budgeting knowledge gained by potential employees while participating in voluntary sector activities, would help employers evaluate them.

2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

The university structure in Malta includes schemes that allow NGOs to create and propose a programme which can count as an optional credit for fulltime students who wish to participate in voluntary work. Thus, in addition to the core courses that all students are obliged to complete, students can also gain a certain number of optional credits through working in the community and voluntary work.29

Furthermore, participants/volunteers of the European Voluntary Service (Action 2.1) of the Youth in Action Programme (as with other Actions within the programme) are given a Youthpass Certificate which is issued by the applicant organisation through an online system (see the Youthpass case study, produced for the 2010 Inventory update, for further detail on this). Non-formal recognition is also given to voluntary service outside EVS.30

In addition, as indicated above, the Malta Qualifications Council is working closely with two non-governmental organisations to develop occupational standards for employees in these sectors. The first collaboration is with the Scouts and the second one is with Zghazagh Azzjoni Kattolika. The organisations work together to establish occupational standards for assistant youth leaders and youth leaders.31 These standards will be then used to support validation of skills acquired by working in the sector.

2.5 Costs to organisations

So far no study has been conducted to verify the costs of the validation of informal and non-formal learning to organisations.

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Individuals have overall limited knowledge of the opportunity to have their learning validated. The Malta Qualifications Council is making an effort to raise awareness about validation of informal and non-formal learning among the key stakeholders with meetings,

28 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Interview with Richard Curmi, Senior Manager, Malta Qualifications Council, 4 May 2010.
conferences and public consultations but this needs to be intensified once a comprehensive validation system is established\textsuperscript{32}.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

Since a system of validation has not yet been established in Malta, it is yet to be decided which organisations will take the role of guidance and support. Within those projects already implemented, existing staff /volunteers of the leading organisations have delivered the necessary guidance / support to participants.

3.3 Costs to individuals

Since a system of validation has not yet been established in Malta, it is yet to be determined what the costs to individuals of the validation procedures will be. For participants in EU-funded projects, participation is usually free of charge.

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Since 2009 the Malta Qualifications Council has participated in an EU-funded Leonardo da Vinci project which seeks to develop a model for accreditation and certification of basic vocational training courses undertaken by people with learning disabilities. This is an EU wide programme and partners are from Austria, Belgium, Malta, Sweden and Slovenia. The target groups for the programme are\textsuperscript{33}:

- People with learning disabilities or people from sectors of society where educational achievement is low;
- Training institutions which provide training to people mentioned above;
- Employers who will get information about the knowledge, skills and competences of applicants;
- Public boards dealing with national educational systems; and
- Public boards developing the National Qualification Frameworks.

The rationale for the programme is that often people with (learning) disabilities or people from sectors of society where educational achievement is low are not able to graduate from formal vocational training, such as apprenticeships. As a result, these people tend to join basic vocational training courses specifically designed for them by certain institutions which are not officially accredited. The aim of this project, which is due to end in September 2011, is therefore to develop a model for accreditation and certification of these training courses, using the European and National Qualification Frameworks. Beneficiaries would then be able to use such a certificate as evidence of their skills and therefore employability.

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

Systematic studies on the benefits of validation to individuals have not been carried out in Malta. However, the policy document ‘Valuing all Learning IV’\textsuperscript{34} outlines the following key benefits for learners of the introduction of a validation framework:

- Increased self-confidence as learners – which can lead to better motivation for further learning;
- The opportunity to better plan their career;
- Access to better and more informed career guidance support; and

\textsuperscript{32} Review of the process of validation of informal and non-formal learning in partner countries: Malta.
\textsuperscript{33} NQF Inclusive, Accreditation and Certification of Basic Vocational Education for Disadvantaged People in NQF, http://nqfinclusive.org/index.php?m=8
\textsuperscript{34} Malta Qualifications Council (2008). Working document on ‘Valuing all Learning: Frameworks for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning in Malta’, MQC.
4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

At the Colloquium on the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning held in June 2009, the Malta Qualifications Council indicated that it is working towards establishing a Quality Assurance agency for monitoring and evaluation, in order to "ensure transparency, confidence and fairness in the validation system". The Malta Qualifications Council is also promoting the use of reference points for the assessment of VINFL, such as occupational standards and qualification levels.

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

The Malta Qualifications Council intends to use a system of external verification to ensure that the validation system is implemented in line with national standards and guidelines. Two main types of external verifiers are envisaged:

- Experts in the sector in which the learning is being assessed – who will take part in some of the assessments to ensure that standards within the sector are adhered to;
- Experts in quality assurance and assessment processes – who will review the whole validation system.

4.3 Evaluation framework

As validation is currently in development in Malta, no evaluations have yet been carried out.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

5.1 Methods used

Since there is no national framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, national, private and third sector organisations use different tools of assessment and evaluation in the validation process.

At the University of Malta individuals who want to apply for a course under the maturity clause submit their CV and are invited in an interview.

At the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) applicants need to write a letter to the Registry and express their interest to be admitted to a particular course under the maturity clause. Then a board is appointed; its members examine the applicant’s CV to see whether he/she has acquired relevant experience, qualifications, competences and knowledge through informal, non-formal and formal learning. The board also invites the applicant to an interview before making the final decision to accept or reject the application.

Individuals who want to be accepted for studies at the Institution of Tourism Studies (ITS) need to provide testimonials of work experience in the sector. In the case of the maturity clause a board is set up to examine the applicant’s CV and interview him/her in order to decide whether he/she will be accepted.

Finally, as mentioned in section 3.1 above, applicants at the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) need to present themselves for formal summative assessment to the


trade testing board. Applicants take a written exam, a practical session as well as an interview in order to get the Certification.

The assessment methods of the system of validation will be drawn up once legislation is in place.

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

The profile of validation practitioners varies, depending on the sector. For instance, at the University of Malta, individual academics within the Faculties are nominated as a faculty committee by the Admissions board to act as validation practitioners. On other occasions validation is conducted by the admissions board\(^{37}\).

6.2 Provision of training and support to practitioners

At the Colloquium on the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning held in June 2009, the Malta Qualifications Council indicated that it will also be working on establishing training and guidance procedures for all those involved in the validation process. This is being done with the Employment and Training Corporation (Malta’s Public Employment Service), through a revision of the Trade Testing.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

As validation is currently in development in Malta, no qualifications requirements have been established yet.

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Stakeholders consulted:
Malta Qualifications Council