



A Quality Assurance Framework for Education in Malta (0-16 years)

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FOREWORD BY MINISTER

The education that learners receive influences their overall development; it impacts their life's trajectory in a variety of ways.

While acknowledging that no two children learn in the same way or develop within the exact same timeframe, the educational opportunities that learners are provided with and the experiences that they acquire throughout their schooling helps them to achieve better results and function successfully in society.

Establishing a robust quality assurance system is essential for maintaining and enhancing the quality, equity, and efficiency of education, and the development of such a system is of utmost importance in supporting high-quality education.

Although assessing quality in education is a complex task given the nature of the sector, the document A Quality Assurance Framework for Education in Malta (0-16 years) by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education marks a significant step in transforming Malta's education system.

The framework aims to foster a common understanding among stakeholders regarding the principles of quality assurance in educational institutions. It strives to promote inclusive and equitable opportunities for all learners. Implementing quality assurance mechanisms ensures that educational institutions consistently work towards providing a high-quality educational experience. Importantly, the framework not only outlines the goal of achieving high quality but also provides guidance on the required methods and interventions.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are crucial for sustaining high-quality education. The framework supports a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation through evaluative practices, monitoring exercises, and constructive feedback which guide educators in their efforts to deliver quality education to learners.

I am sure that this framework will serve as a valuable guideline for schools that strongly encourages a strategic partnership to be formed between educational institutions and all those who have our children's education at heart, so that together we achieve the goals as set by the nation's educational goals.



Dr Clifton Grima

Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation

FOREWORD BY PERMANENT SECRETARY

Quality assurance involves the systematic review of educational provision to maintain and improve its quality, equity and efficiency. Therefore, the development of a strong quality assurance system is crucial to support high-quality education.

Notwithstanding that measuring quality in education is a challenging task due to the nature and complexities of the sector, the Quality Assurance Framework for Education in Malta (0-16 Years) is an important step in the transformation process of Malta's education system.

The framework's ultimate aim is to develop and share a common understanding among stakeholders about what quality assurance in educational institutions entails. It seeks to promote good practices in Quality Assurance as well as inclusive and equitable opportunities for all learners. This can only be achieved by having quality assurance mechanisms in place to ensure that educational institutions are working consistently towards providing a high-quality educational experience. Most importantly, however, this framework does not provide only the goal, but also the process and the type of intervention which is required to attain high quality.

To ensure high-quality education ongoing improvement is necessary, hence one needs to monitor and evaluate continuously.

This framework supports a systematic monitoring and evaluation system through its evaluative practices, monitoring exercises and constructive feedback. It is meant to inform and guide all educators in their efforts to offer quality education to learners.

To support the implementation of this process and establish a culture of transparency amongst stakeholders, the Department for Quality and Standards in Education will embark on a series of meetings in various educational institutions across sectors to inform about the framework and its vision, which is focused on providing a high-level education provision.

I am confident that this framework will be vital to schools as it will serve as a guideline to ensure high-quality school development and planning.



Matthew Vella

Permanent Secretary

Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation

FOREWORD BY DIRECTOR

Measuring quality can be a daunting task, especially when it comes to education. John Ruskin, English writer, philosopher, art critic and polymath of the Victorian era, said that ‘quality is never an accident, it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skilful execution’. Indeed, quality can never be accidental, and it is for this reason that in 2007, quality assurance (QA) became part of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education’s (DQSE) remit. The Directorate started a long journey which led us to launch two key documents which will frame the educational scene on quality assurance for the years to come.

The DQSE has always remained committed to its mission and learners have always remained at the heart of its efforts. While the DQSE has always operated within the parameters of a clear legal framework, until today there was no quality assurance framework which contextualised and gave meaning to the operations of this directorate and its primary functions and responsibilities. Quality assurance plays a key role in seeing that Malta’s vision for education becomes a reality. Both mechanisms of internal and external quality assurance are needed to ensure that educational institutions are working consistently towards providing learners in pre-compulsory and compulsory schooling with a quality educational experience, which focuses on their holistic development and well-being throughout the entirety of their educational journey. When QA processes and mechanisms are embedded into a sound and practical framework, these take on a new meaning. The role of this framework is to monitor and evaluate the quality of education provision in a reliable and holistic manner.

This framework aims at conveying a common understanding among stakeholders about what quality assurance in educational institutions entails.

This is done through a system which empowers educational institutions to become more autonomous in evaluating their own internal plans for improvement and thus increase the level of accountability towards development and improvement.

For this document to be finalised, the DQSE went through a public consultation process to ensure that it reflects the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders. What we have here today is indeed the result of the collaborative effort of all those who have education at heart. This is the first step in an implementation plan which will ensure that all educational institutions hailing from different sectors are aware of the importance of quality assurance mechanisms and how these can work towards continuous improvement and innovation.

With this thought in mind, I would like to conclude by stating that the framework is not and should not be considered an end in itself. The framework should be considered as a launching pad for what is to come next, that is an education system which is more self-aware, one which is capable of quality assuring itself and which is strong enough to embrace the challenges which undeniably the future will offer.



Denise Gatt

Director

Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education

CONSULTATION PROCESS

A Consultation Process on A Quality Assurance Framework for Education in Malta (0-16 years) and the National Quality Framework and the National Quality Standards in Education (3-16 years).

The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) launched the Quality Assurance Framework for Education in Malta (0-16 years) and the National Quality Standards in Education (3-16 years) for public consultation in April 2023. Following an analysis of the feedback obtained from the consultation process and from different stakeholders, the final documents were published in July 2023.

As part of this consultation the DQSE organised a set number of focus groups to gather feedback on both documents. Interviews were also held with learners in different schools attending State, Church and the Independent sectors. Additional feedback provided by individual stakeholders was also considered part of the feedback process.

The feedback from the wider public consultation as well as the focus groups was compiled into a report by the DQSE. This report gathers the voices of over 200 stakeholders who participated in nine focus groups, interviews with learners as well as contributions through the online consultation website and individual submissions.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE MALTESE EDUCATION SYSTEM (0-16 YEARS)

Ensuring quality education for all can be said to be the most important challenge which education systems around the world face today. Understanding the nature of quality is no easy process due to its multifaceted nature. The understanding of quality education is one which is continuously evolving alongside the country's political, economic, and societal context.

The common core understanding is that quality education seeks to promote inclusive and equitable opportunities for all learners of Goal 4 on Education as detailed in the Sustainable Development Goals 2030¹. A quality education is one that aims at ensuring that children live a healthy lifestyle and learn within an environment which is physically and emotionally safe. Quality education is there to provide educational experiences which translate into a range of personal, social, and developmental benefits that lead, in turn, to active global citizenship, participation in the world of work, and lifelong learning.





Malta's vision for education is set out in the *National Curriculum Framework for All (2012)*², the *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 (2014)*³ and the *Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools (2022)*⁴. These three documents act as a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal for education, that of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong opportunities for all⁵. The common factor which underlies these goals is that learners are at the heart of the learning and teaching process. Malta's commitment towards supporting learners in their educational journey is spelled out in various national policies and strategies which focus on different aspects in education, such as literacy⁶, inclusion, language⁷, healthy lifestyle⁸, attendance⁹, behaviour¹⁰, diversity¹¹, intervention programmes¹², and early childhood education and care¹³. Enhancing the quality of education is key to responding effectively to achieve the aims of these documents. High-quality education is vital for employability, social cohesion, and Malta's overall economic and societal success.

Quality needs to be continuously monitored through clear and well-known quality standards as well as a cohesive quality assurance framework. This calls for efficient and effective quality assurance mechanisms across all levels of education. Quality assurance plays a key role in seeing that Malta's vision for education becomes a reality. These mechanisms are needed to ensure that educational institutions are working consistently towards providing learners in pre-compulsory and compulsory schooling with a quality educational experience, which focuses on their holistic development and well-being throughout the entirety of their educational journey¹⁴. In striving to achieve these objectives, the education system must be supported by a clear and robust quality assurance framework whose objective is to monitor and evaluate the quality of education provision in a reliable and holistic manner. This framework aims to disseminate a common understanding among stakeholders about what quality assurance in educational institutions entails. Moreover, the framework is also aimed at providing educators with an essential tool for reflection on three important areas of education, namely, leadership and management, teaching and learning, and ethos. It will also serve, together with the National Quality Standards, to guide both external evaluators as well as educational institutions towards accountability and the effective provision of quality education for all.



A HOLISTIC VIEW TOWARDS QUALITY ASSURANCE

To reflect the tenets of the different strategies and policies, including the *NCF*, the Quality Assurance Framework for pre-compulsory and compulsory schooling places learners at the centre of their educational journey. This universal approach towards child-centredness looks at quality from every aspect of the child’s experience at school or within the educational context. Figure 1 shows how this approach focuses on two main aspects: Structure Quality and Process Quality which in turn lead to Quality Education.

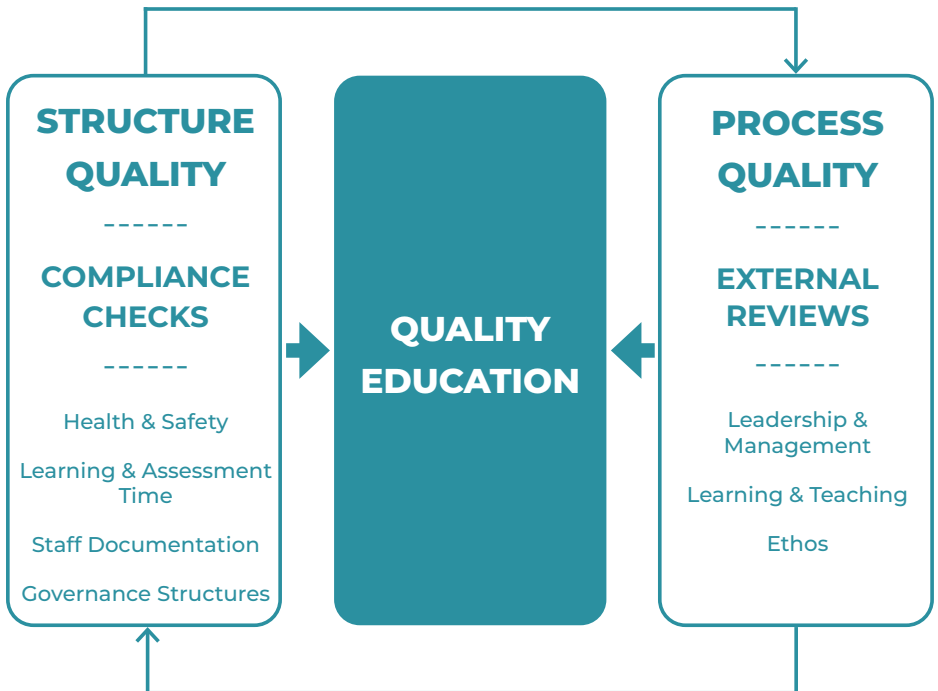


Figure 1: A holistic approach towards quality education

Structure Quality

Structure Quality, also referred to often as 'compliance', consists of processes which look into how an educational institution is designed, organised and maintained. Key aspects of structure quality also strongly contribute to the licensing process. Amongst its fundamental components, structure quality includes staff suitability through qualifications and skills, the ratio of educators to children, adherence to learning and assessment time entitlement (contact time between educator and learner), health and safety requirements as well as the policies, procedures and practices that bear a direct impact on the organisation of the school.



Process Quality



Process Quality focuses on the main aspects of the life of each child at school. It specifically focuses on three key pillars of education, namely, Leadership and Management, Learning and Teaching, and Ethos. These areas form the basis of the *National Quality Standards in Education (3-16 Years)*.

The area of Leadership and Management looks at all those elements which are necessary for leading and managing a school. The learning and teaching aspect, which is fundamental to each learners' learning opportunities, looks at the different strategies and pedagogical practices which are being adopted by educators with children and how these are leading towards engagement in their learning journey and effective improvement. Finally, the area of Ethos deals with the way the character of the school emerges from the intentions, interactions, and behaviour of the school members. It also involves the relationships developed by the school with and amongst the different stakeholders in the community, in particular with parents.

A focus on both Structure and Process quality areas allows for a comprehensive view of quality education provided to learners in all educational institutions notwithstanding sector or age. It also allows for well-defined monitoring and evaluation of services provided by educational institutions.

THE LINK BETWEEN INTERNAL & EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

Schools within the Maltese education system are familiar with two types of quality assurance processes, namely, internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. The Education Act (Cap 605) as well as the *NCF* promote the internal review and school development planning as pivotal tools for schools to be consistently aware of where they stand, what their strengths and areas for development are and how they are planning for improvement.

The external review process is viewed as complementary to the internal review where a regulatory body external to the school looks at the way the school evaluates itself and how it promotes reflection through the promotion of professional learning communities. This is evaluated through the National Quality Standards and the school is provided feedback for improvement through constructive dialogue. The different processes within these mechanisms are aimed at generating reflection, dialogue, innovation, and professional development within schools.



The external review is primarily an instrument that promotes improvement by guiding and empowering schools in their ongoing pursuit to improve their practices and outcomes as they strive towards achieving the holistic vision of education as set out in the *NCF*, the *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024*, and the *National Inclusive Education Framework*. The external review is also a way of providing accountability, confirming that schools are operating in line with national expectations and aspirations while promoting a culture of consistent excellence and rigour in aiming for the highest possible standards. Consequently, a successful and purposeful external review is situated precisely on a delicate balance between the complementary functions of improvement and accountability.

The synergy between the internal and external review is key to achieving ownership of the process and promoting development, especially for accountability purposes. As seen in Figure 2, the link created between the two quality assurance mechanisms is pivotal to the development of a sound and comprehensive quality assurance framework. Developing such an important synergy will also promote the voice of the leaders, educators, learners as well as stakeholders within the community in contributing towards shaping their own quality education. It will also provide educators with learning spaces to reflect and discuss important aspects related to the school and thus facilitate the development of professional learning communities.

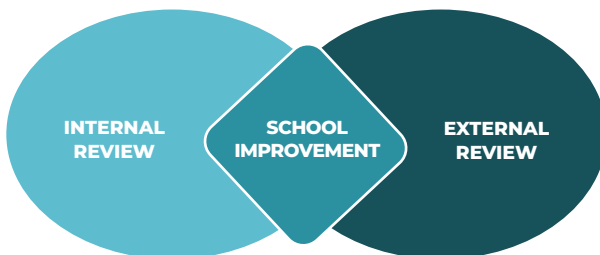


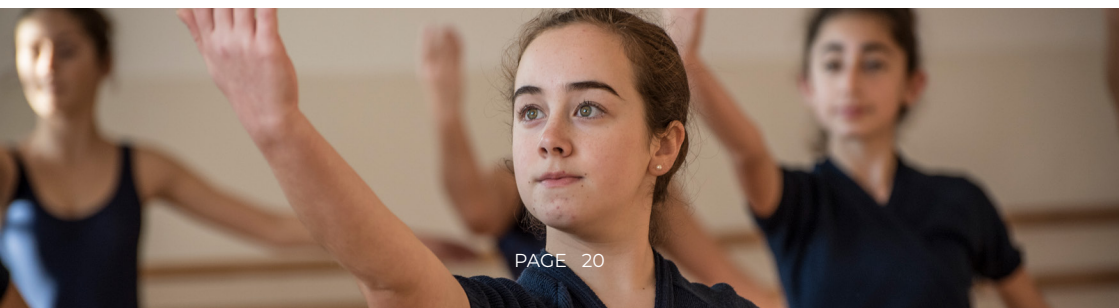
Figure 2: The synergy between internal and external quality assurance



The link between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms is strengthened through national quality standards which articulate a shared national understanding of school quality, based on the pillars of Leadership and Management, Learning and Teaching, and Ethos. Success criteria included in the *National Quality Standards in Education (3-16 Years)* provide clear guidance on how one can evaluate the extent to which a standard is being achieved. Taken together, the standards and success criteria provide a basis for aligning internal and external review processes as outlined in the *NCF* (p.32): "Quality Assurance is to be realised through a system of ongoing self-evaluation, monitoring and review within schools complemented by an external review system that together foster school improvement." The final objective of this alignment is that of creating a balance between autonomy and accountability and between a centralised and decentralised system of quality assurance mechanisms.

At the heart of the framework and the synergy between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms is the internal review process, carried out by individual schools in a self-evaluation exercise. The actions that flow from an internal review process should deliver improved educational outcomes and experiences for all learners. An internal review must be an integral part of the school's development planning process, with the resulting actions and objectives captured and mirrored in the School Development Plan (SDP). These priorities will also mirror the National Standards and development priorities originating from current national policies and strategies. Therefore, educational institutions are guided to use the National Quality Standards and success criteria to steer their internal evaluation and school development planning.

Underpinning an effective internal review process is reliable data collection, a thorough analysis, and reflection in identifying priority targets. Schools, their Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and educators need support in shaping the tools necessary to gather the relevant data and in analysing, interpreting, and using it to inform future decisions and directions. This support can be provided internally by the school leadership and through peer engagement. It can also be provided by external professional support with the aim of building the skills and capacity within the school to be able to carry out an effective internal review exercise. This support system for the school acts as a crucial interim link between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms.



TOWARDS A NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

The National Quality Assurance Framework for pre-compulsory and compulsory schooling finds the provision of quality education at its centre which is viewed through the holistic lens of structure and process quality. This framework seeks to link internal and external quality assurance towards greater autonomy as well as accountability. The diagram below expands from internal quality assurance carried out by the educational institution towards external quality assurance where external evaluation is then carried out in the light of the institution's plans for improvement.



Figure 3: A Quality Assurance model for general education

TIER 1: STRUCTURE AND PROCESS QUALITY

The first tier places Structure and Process quality at the core of the framework. The first step in understanding the level of quality provided is by looking at both 'Structure' and 'Process' aspects of quality. To carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the educational institution both aspects and their different facets are to be explored.

TIER 2: INTERNAL REVIEW AND SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Following a careful evaluation of both structure and process quality, the second tier consists of the internal review process and school development planning. This is where the school goes through the process of understanding where it stands in relation to the National Quality Standards by collaborating with the different stakeholders who form the school community. This is then developed into the School Development Plan which, through clear and focused action plans, seeks to involve the different stakeholders in their journey towards improvement. This second tier is very important as it shapes the path for the school and enhances the ownership of their plans towards improvement by those who are ultimately going to implement them. A clear and owned School Development Plan will help create a better link with the third and fourth tier.

TIER 3: EXTERNAL SUPPORT, PARENTS, SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

When the School Development Plan is clear and the aims for improvement are set, the educational institution can move into the third tier. This is where the different stakeholders who impact the school come into play to set in motion the priorities identified by the school. This includes collaboration vis-à-vis decision-making with governing bodies linked to the school and relevant funding which may ensue. This is also where any relevant training or support identified at the planning level can be catered for through training needs and any external support.

TIER 4: NATIONAL STANDARDS, EXTERNAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION, DATA ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK, AND NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND REGULATION

The fourth tier is where external quality assurance is carried out through set monitoring and evaluation practices. This tier does not only comprise monitoring and evaluation in relation to the school's own plans for improvement but also looks at quality provision vis-à-vis national legislation, policy, and strategy. External Quality Assurance is promoted through sound and consistent dialogue with educational institutions regarding their plans for improvement and how they have been brought to fruition.

The fact that this framework gives internal quality assurance its due importance allows for the opportunity to be able to look into the whole process to evaluate how the educational institution has set its own plans for development and how it is accountable for its own improvement.

This Quality Assurance Framework favours a collective capacity-building approach where each and every stakeholder has an important part to play in the improvement plan of the educational institution where quality is seen as being everyone's responsibility. Significantly, it is aimed at fostering professional learning communities that seek to create a continuous cycle of innovation and improvement across the whole education system.



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GLOSSARY

Compulsory schooling

Compulsory schooling ranges from 5 to 16 years, covering six years of primary education and five years of secondary education.

Educational institutions

Kindergarten, primary, middle and secondary schools, specialised schools, learning support centres, resource centres, and childcare centres.

Equitable education

Fair access to support, opportunities, and resources so that all learners achieve their full potential.

External professional support

Support sought by the school through national support services, educational institutions, and agencies to help in school improvement.

Global citizenship

Active participation in projects that address global issues of a social, political, economic, and environmental nature. The underpinning idea is that individuals are members of multiple, diverse, local, and non-local networks.

Inclusive education

The valuing and acceptance of diversity, its value, and the rights of learners to not only attend mainstream schools, but also to belong as valued members through active participation and the elimination of the barriers limiting the participation and achievement of all learners, respect diverse needs, abilities, and characteristics (*A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools, 2022, p.6*).

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages, in all life-wide contexts (family, school, the community, the workplace, and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal), which, together, meet a wide range of learning needs and demands (UNESCO: Institute of Lifelong Learning).

Parents

The term refers to the biological or legal guardian of the learner attending the school (*A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools, 2022, p.11*).

Pre-compulsory schooling

Pre-compulsory schooling covers the period from birth to five years and includes attendance in childcare centres and kindergarten.

Priority targets

The targets identified by the school leadership and educators through an internal review process. Priority targets provide direction for the school community in line with the vision of the school.

Quality education

A system that serves all learners in such a way that it prepares them for the future. In so doing it makes provisions for a relevant curriculum, appropriate assessment, quality teaching, collegial leadership and accountability to peers and families. Quality education has high expectations for all.

School development planning

Data-driven planning undertaken by the School Leadership Team in liaison with stakeholders with the aim of identifying priority targets for the school to work on. This is enshrined in the School's Development Plan..

School governance

The effective leadership and administration of a school through appropriate processes, systems, and management to ensure sustainability and development. School governance varies from one educational institution to another and may comprise the Head of College Network, the Senior Leadership Team, the board of governors, directors or trustees, bursar, and administrative personnel.

School leadership

The team of people leading a school, generally composed of the head of school, assistant heads of school and Heads of Department. The term also refers to Learning Support Centre co-ordinators. School leadership may also include personnel from the school's human resource and finance departments.

Social cohesion

The extent of connectedness among groups in a society, underpinned by a sense of belonging of a community and the relationship between members of the community itself.

A QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION IN MALTA (0-16 YEARS)



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION,
SPORT, YOUTH, RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION