

Handbook on the Provision of Home Education

Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE)

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GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
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1 | Purpose of handbook

This handbook is about home education provision in Malta. Its aim is twofold: first, to help develop an understanding of what home education in the context of Malta is and, second, to help prospective applicants familiarise themselves with the application stage, particularly with what they need to know prior to applying, and the licensing process. The handbook also explains how monitoring by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) is done to ensure a quality home education programme.

2 | Rationale

Home education is a worldwide phenomenon and national policies and legislative frameworks enabling home education vary across different countries (Eurydice Report, 2018). In Malta, home education is regulated by the Education Act (CAP. 605), thus making it “lawful for a parent of a minor of compulsory school age to ... provide home education” (CAP.605.46). Home education, as the name implies, takes place in a setting distinct from that of an educational institution but, in terms of its provisions, is related to the knowledge and skills learners receive at school. Home-educated learners should benefit from an individualized programme that helps them discover and realize their full potential, both academic and personal, and that offers varied, yet meaningful and authentic, learning experiences. With a tailor-made curriculum that revolves around the student, the learning foci are identified and a programme is devised to achieve the desired learning outcomes. In this way, learners who are being educated away from the formal school context and classroom environment will still be provided with the knowledge, skills and competences to develop and achieve their full potential. Home education thus offers learners one possible path by which they can fulfil the requirements of compulsory education (Hána and Kostelecká 2020).

The decision to home-educate children constitutes a significant choice in one’s life (Neuman and Guterman, 2019). Consequently, this brings about manifold changes that affect many areas of life. The choice of home-educating children “requires different practical and ideological preparations than those needed for conventional school education” (Neuman and Avriam 2003, 136).

The parent/s or guardian/s who make a considerate decision to home-educate their children become the legally responsible person/s for the education provision of their children. Offering a safe learning context, the home environment constitutes one setting where home education takes place. Therefore, the facilities and resources available at home should be commensurate with the chosen curriculum and conducive to high-level teaching and positive learning experiences. However, the home may not always be the primary location of home education (Adamson, 2021). Home education may take place in public places and spaces and therefore includes, but is not limited to, onsite learning that offers multiple opportunities of discovery and hands-on learning.

Home education calls for a high degree of parental responsibility, involvement and accountability. The home educator may either be the legally responsible person him/herself if in possession of a teacher's warrant or an entrusted warranted teacher.

The quality of home education impacts the student's future educational path and career trajectory, including access to post-secondary institutions. For this reason, in accordance with the Education Act Cap 605, the home education provider is issued with a Home Education Licence once the educational programme is evaluated and accepted by the DQSE. This will be complemented by preliminary onsite visits. Quality of the home education provision will be monitored by regular external review visits which may be either planned or unannounced, from the Quality Assurance Department within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE).

A key understanding is that home education is not about parents withdrawing their children from an educational institution for any reason, nor does it act as a replacement to the services offered by the National School Support Services. Crucially, home education, once licensed, is about customizing the curriculum to suit the academic and personal requirements of learners. It entails parents or guardians assuming legal responsibility to provide a high-quality educational experience equivalent to that provided in schools at their own expense. To ensure the holistic well-being of the home-educated child, the applications, planned programmes, and relevant documentation submitted by potential licence holders will be vetted by the DQSE.

3 | Applying for Home Education Provision

A consideration of application should be made with full awareness of what home education is about.

In the context of Malta, 'home education' is taken to mean the progressive education of a minor provided or organised by her/his parent whereby a home educator provides tuition to the minor, at the expense of the parent, in substitution to state or non-state education in accordance with the provisions of Part III and any regulations made under this Act (Cap 605, Education Act, p. 3).

Figure 1 helps prospective applicants get to know what the different stages of getting a licence involve. Each stage is explained in the sections that follow.

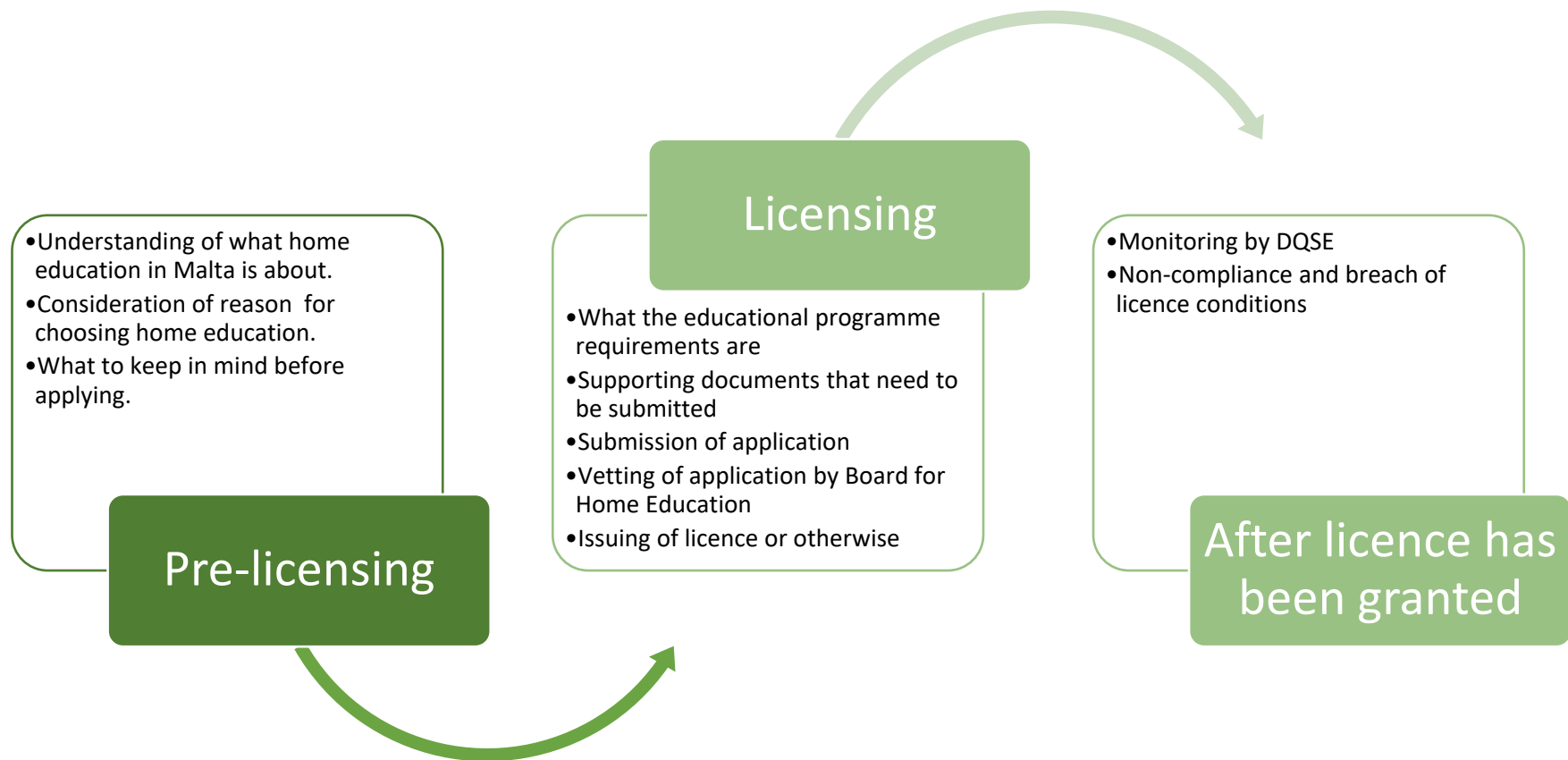


Figure 1. The licensing stages.

4 | Pre-licensing Stage

In the pre-licensing stage prospective applicants need to inform themselves about what home education within the Maltese educational and legal context entails.

4.1 Who is eligible to apply

The applicant's reasons for choosing home education are vetted by the Board for the consideration of Home Education provision and each case is considered on its own merits. Below are listed some of the reasons which the Board may consider acceptable for Home Education provision:

- Health reasons, specific to the child's individual needs¹.
- Short time² relocation.
- Following internationally recognized accredited programmes accepted by the DQSE.
- Other reasons which may be acceptable to the DQSE.

4.2 What I need to know before applying

The parent or guardian as the legally responsible person and the home educator/s should be well-informed about what home education entails. Below are some important considerations:

- Children of compulsory school age³ are eligible for home education.
- A parent or person with parental authority/guardian may apply for a Home Education provision licence as per Education Act CAP 605.
- The applicant needs to devise and submit a Home Education Provision programme as per section 5.
- The person/s who will be delivering the home education programme is to be in possession of a valid permanent teacher's warrant⁴.
- The legislation in relation to home education is specific to persons residing in Malta, not overseas. Therefore, the home education programme has to be delivered in the Maltese Islands.
- The legal responsibility of Home Education always rests on the parent/guardian as licence holder.

¹ 'Individual needs' refer to needs and any difficulties of a physical, sensory, intellectual or psycho-social nature (Cap 605, Education Act, p.3).

² 'Short time' is in this document defined as up to a calendar year from relocation/issue of licence.

³ 'Compulsory school age' means any age from five (5) years to fifteen (15) years, both inclusive, and accordingly a person shall be deemed to be of compulsory school age if he has attained the age of five (5) years and has not attained the age of sixteen (16) years or has not yet completed the last year of secondary school (Cap 605 Education Act, p. 2).

⁴ A permanent warrant is requested because this provides assurance that the home educator has acquired the high professional acumen necessary to plan for and provide home education.

- Application forms are available on the DQSE website <https://educationservices.gov.mt/en/dqse/Pages/Home-Education.aspx>
- All required supporting documentation is to be submitted along with the application.
- All expenses for Home Education are to be borne by the licence holder.
- The licence is to be renewed on a yearly basis or depending on the duration of the educational programme at the discretion of the Board.
- Applications will only be considered if all supporting documentation is provided and the application is duly filled in.
- Queries regarding Home Education provision in Malta and the application process are to be sent to home.education@ilearn.edu.mt

5 | Licensing Stage

This section explains the application process and how the application is vetted by the Board for Home Education Provision.

5.1 What the requirements are

- An educational programme to be approved by the Board.
- A suitable learning environment for the delivery of an effective home education programme.
- Evidence showing the availability of and access to adequate educational resources and facilities that are in accordance with the programme submitted (e.g., if the child is to follow sciences at secondary level, the licence holder needs to provide evidence that these services are catered for at their own expense).

5.2 Educational programme requirements

The licence holder must provide a programme of activities which includes:

- Evidence that the programme is linked to an approved curriculum.
- The learning outcomes are tailored to the individual strengths.
- Assessment opportunities (e.g., projects, assignments, tests).
- Any online and on-site/outside education opportunities.
- The programme of activities for both primary and secondary. This needs to include an allocation of a minimum of 30 and not more than 45 hours per week of learning time. The Board will evaluate the time allocation depending on age and the modality in the delivery of the educational programme.
- Evidence of an adequate exposure to different skills, knowledge, and competences.
- An outline of how the programme corresponds with the learners' individual needs, strengths and learning preferences, and how it promotes a social experience that is equivalent to that provided in an education institution and is in the best interest of the child.
- A clear indication how it will record on a regular basis the student's attendance as well as the academic, personal and social development in accordance with the licensing requirements.

5.3 Supporting documentation

The following documentation is to be provided by the applicant with the application:

- Child's birth certificate.
- Authenticated copies of the qualifications and permanent Teachers' Warrant of the parent/guardian or their delegated home educator/s, subject to approval from the Education Resources Department (ERD).

- Protection of Minors Application (POMA) for third parties (renewed on a yearly basis) and a Police Conduct Certificate (valid for six months).
- Evidence of educational resources and facilities which will be utilised in relation to the delivery of the programme.
- A detailed scheme of work covering the first term (three months) which includes the time frame, location and details of the person/s delivering the activity.

5.3 Submission of applications

The fully completed Home Education Provision application can be found by following this link <https://educationservices.gov.mt/en/dqse/Pages/Home-Education.aspx> and may be submitted any time during the year. The applicant must ensure that the child continues to attend or begins attending a licensed school until the evaluation process is finalised and a licence is issued or otherwise. Commencement of the Home Education Provision will be legally considered as the date of issue of the licence.

If an applicant wishes to follow the standard scholastic year timeline, applications for home education are to reach the DQSE by the end of June.

The DQSE binds itself to finalise the evaluation process within 30 working days from the completed submission of the Home Education Provision application. For an application to be considered complete all documentation is to be submitted as per requirements.

5.4 Board for Home Education Provision

The vetting of applications is carried out by the Board for Home Education Provision. The *ad-hoc* board set up by the DQSE is composed of two members from the Education Review Section, one member from the Programme Accreditation Section, one member from the Registration and Compliance Section, all from the DQSE, MEYR's legal representative, and a representative from the Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes (DLAP) or as required. One of the members representing the DQSE acts as chairperson and is responsible for convening the board as required. Following evaluation of an application, the board submits a recommendation to the Director DQSE for endorsement or otherwise.

The remit of the Board is explained in Figure 2.



a | Considers the validity of the reason/s for home educating



b | Evaluates the proposed programme



c | Provides recommendations for approvals of programmes for endorsement by Director QAD



d | Recommends the issuing of the Home Education licence



e | Considers the External Review reports



f | Recommends the renewal, suspension or withdrawal of the licence

Figure 2. Remit of the Board for Home Education Provision

6 | After Licence is Granted

6.1 Monitoring of quality Home Education Provision

The DQSE is responsible for the monitoring of Home Education provision. The monitoring process is carried out through onsite visits which are:

- carried out by officers from the DQSE will be held on a regular basis at the premises where the programme is delivered, as indicated by the applicant, to monitor the quality of home education provided.
- announced and/or unannounced and monitor the quality of education provided based on the standards/criteria for home education as well as the programmes/documentation submitted by the licence holder on a yearly basis.

Following these visits, the DQSE will issue a report on the quality of the service provided. The licence holder is obliged to follow the recommendations and required actions highlighted in the report. The report will be sent to the Board for its consideration.

If the LRP wishes to stop the licence at some point, s/he would have to contact the DQSE to communicate the decision.

6.2 Non-compliance and breach of licence conditions

As licence holders, parents/guardians who fail to abide by these regulations or the advice of the authorised Education Official may be considered as being in breach of Education Act Cap 605 1.6 and be held liable to a fine not exceeding €100 for each day during the period of non-compliance.

The Board may recommend the DQSE to suspend and/or subsequently withdraw the home education licence if the period of non-compliance is deemed detrimental to the child.

In this scenario, the parent/guardian must ensure that the child starts attending a licensed school with immediate effect.

Any false information shall render the licence null.

Disclaimer

The DQSE retains the right to make necessary technical adjustments or updates to the Handbook on Home Education Provision from time to time. The most up-to-date version of the Handbook will be available on the DQSE site.

7 | References

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