

# MALTA

## ECEC Workforce Profile

*Country report author*

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**Citation suggestion:**

Sollars, V. 2017. "Malta – ECEC Workforce Profile." In *Workforce Profiles in Systems of Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*, edited by P. Oberhuemer and I. Schreyer. [www.seepro.eu/English/Country\\_Reports.htm](http://www.seepro.eu/English/Country_Reports.htm)

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## Introductory note

As a result of recent changes within the system of early childhood education and care in Malta, the country now has a coordinated ECEC system known as the Early Years Cycle (MEDE 2012). This comprises three rather distinct stages of ECEC provision:

- childcare services for under 3-year olds;
- kindergarten settings for 3- to 5-year olds; and
- the first two years of compulsory primary school, for 5- to 7-year olds.

For the purpose of this report, attention will be given to the workforce engaged with the under 5-year olds. However, where necessary and in order to help readers contextualise and position the information about childcare and kindergarten practitioners, salient differences between the non-compulsory and compulsory sectors of the Early Years Cycle will be included.

Retrieving data about the qualifications of Childcare Workers and Kindergarten Assistants currently employed in Early Years settings was one of the challenges faced in drawing up the current report and the research methodology employed to collect the information deserves a short overview. Where available, data were compiled from different sources including going through documentation pertaining to individual early years settings. Where data about staff qualifications were not available, an attempt was made to collect these through a short questionnaire which was distributed after seeking and gaining approval from the Research Department within the Education Directorate. To the extent possible, data cited in this report are quoted from the official documentation maintained by the Education authorities. Whilst gratefully acknowledging all the assistance offered by several departments and personnel within the various offices at the Education Directorate (see *Acknowledgements* at the end of this report), it needs to be emphasised that some of the data cannot be interpreted as official or exhaustive. However, it is highly indicative of the status of the early years workforce. Information provided refers to data from 2015/16 and 2016/2017.

## 1. ECEC governance

The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) within the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) is responsible for the regulation of non-compulsory ECEC settings, that is, for childcare settings for under 3-year olds and kindergartens for 3- to 5-year olds. State kindergarten settings, which cater for children between the ages of 2 years 9 months to 5 years 6 months, have been under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education since 1987. Kindergarten settings are provided in State, Independent and Church schools. The state sector is the largest of the three sectors.

Full responsibility for childcare settings passed from the Department for Social Welfare Standards (DSWS) within the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS) to the MEDE on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016. Most childcare settings are privately-owned and around 13% are managed by the state. However, all were eligible to join a free childcare scheme introduced in April 2014 (MEDE, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

The MEDE has overall responsibility for educational direction, policy development and decision-making. Within the Ministry, the Education Directorate has a number of divisions. Particularly relevant for ECEC are: (1) the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) which is responsible for providing and monitoring students' services<sup>1</sup>. Student Services include *Education psycho-social services, Special education, Inclusive Education, Projects and initiatives*. These ser-

<sup>1</sup> DES has three departments: *Education Resources; Student Services; and Lifelong learning and Early School Leavers*. The *Education Resources Department's* remit is mainly the deployment of teaching grades in State schools (Ministry for Education and Employment 2016a).

VICES are available for children in any education sector (Church, State and Independent schools); (2) the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) which acts as the regulatory body for all educational institutions (State, Church and Independent) at all levels and is responsible for establishing quality standards. Within the DQSE the Accreditation Unit (AU) is responsible for the issuing of both the temporary and provisional registration for childcare settings<sup>2</sup> and the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) is responsible for monitoring childcare and visiting kindergarten settings when school audits are underway.

### Abbreviations used in this report

AU	Accreditation Unit	LRP	Legally Responsible Person
B.Ed.	Bachelor in Education	LSA	Learning Support Assistant
CACHE	Council for Awards in Health, Care and Education	MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
CDEC	Centre for Child Development, Education and Care Studies	MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment
DCM	Department of Curriculum Management	MFSS	Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity
DES	Directorate for Educational Services	MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education	MQC	Malta Qualifications Council
DSWS	Department of Social Welfare Standards	MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
EO	Education Officer	MTL	Master in Teaching and Learning
ERCS	Education Regulatory Compliance Section	MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
ETC	Employment Training Corporation	NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
ETP	Extended Training Programme	PD	Professional Development
FES	Foundation for Educational Services	QAD	Quality Assurance Department
IfE	Institute for Education	SDP	School Development Plan
INSET	In-service Training	SKGA	Supply Kindergarten Assistant
KGA	Kindergarten Assistant	SMP	Statementing Moderating Panel
		UHM	Union Haddiema Magħqudin
		UM	University of Malta

## 2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

### 2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

There are two main categories of staff working directly with children within the non-compulsory early childhood education and care settings:

- **Childcare Workers**, generally referred to as child carers or child care assistants, work as core practitioners with the under 3-year olds in childcare settings; and
- **Kindergarten Assistants (KGAs)** work as core practitioners in kindergarten settings with 3- to 5-year olds.

The word ‘assistant’ is a misnomer as neither the Childcare Workers nor the Kindergarten Assistants actually assist anyone. Individual staff members are directly responsible for all aspects of work with very young children: planning, organising, managing, educating and caring.

<sup>2</sup> The Accreditation Unit is responsible for issuing a temporary registration for new childcare settings and a provisional registration for childcare settings which are operating in full compliance with the National Standards for Child Day Care (Ministry for Education and Employment 2016b; 2016c).

Data collated for this report indicate that in addition to the Child Care Workers within childcare settings, employers make reference to additional staff on their employee lists. These include individuals designated as ‘coordinators’, ‘relievers’, ‘helpers’, ‘students’ and ‘cleaners’. One setting refers to its staff as ‘play assistants’ and ‘play leaders’, with the latter taking the lead and the former providing support. There is no official/national description of duties for the various nomenclatures or designations attributed by the service providers to their staff.

Irrespective of assigned titles or official designations, across all settings Childcare Workers and Kindergarten Assistants have similar duties – though differences in titles or designations have an effect on the conditions of work (part-time/full-time) and salary. A MQF/EQF Level 4 qualification in early years is the minimum requirement expected of ‘qualified’ Childcare Workers and Kindergarten Assistants.

### Staff in childcare settings

According to the Occupational Standards (MQC & DSWs 2013), within childcare settings there are three tiers of employees:

1. the ‘Legally Responsible Person’ (LRP) who is not necessarily on site, does not have contact with children and therefore cannot really be considered as belonging to the workforce;
2. the Manager, Supervisor, Coordinator or Director; and
3. the Childcare Worker.

**Legally Responsible Persons** are accountable for the service provided at the facility and are to ensure a high quality care service in line with the National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (MFSS 2006). They are not necessarily directly involved in the running of the child day care facility. Since the LRP may be detached from the service and the client group, the DSWs standards only stipulate that this person must have reached the age of majority and must be of good conduct.

Some LRPs own or are responsible for multiple childcare settings operating from different locations on the island. Where childcare settings are located within school premises or within public-private entities or companies, the Head of School and the Head of the entity respectively, are listed as the LRP but are generally rather distant from the operation of the facility. In the documentation of the settings, information about the qualifications of the LRP is rarely included.

Whilst collecting data it was evident that in several private childcare settings, the **Manager** or **Supervisor** has a Childcare Worker’s role too and is directly responsible for a number of children. In some settings, a Childcare Worker is also identified as the **Coordinator** and whilst having the responsibility for a group of children, the coordinator would also be overseeing the activities which are organised at the setting. The decisions about dual roles for ‘coordinators/carers’, ‘supervisors/carers’ depend on the size of the setting, the number of children attending, whether the same owners have one or more childcare setting to manage and whether there are ‘relievers’ who can be called in to replace the regular care workers when the latter are away.

The 13 state supported and managed childcare settings run by the Foundation of Educational Services (FES) have a different set-up than the privately-owned childcare settings. Whilst the Chief Executive Officer for FES is identified as the LRP for all the settings, a childcare centre coordinator is appointed for each of the 13 settings. The overall objective of the position of a coordinator within the FES organisation is:

*To ensure effective leadership and management of the Childcare Centre, working with partners across all sectors and promoting high quality care to all children. This service is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff to share this commitment; to establish and promote a working environment in which the emotional, social, psychological, physical, developmental and educational well-being of children is paramount and in which a supportive, empathetic and non-judgemental approach is used in all interactions with children and their fami-*

lies. (FES - Job description, Childcare Centre Co-ordinator, Call for Application, personal communication, email 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2016)

**Coordinators/Managers** are responsible for the day to day running of the child care service and report directly to the LRP on the management and organisation of the service. They ensure that the service is in line with National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities (MFSS 2006) whilst providing high quality care and safety for the children. Moreover, they are responsible for inter alia supervision of suitable staff, availability and implementation of sound policies and procedures, for structuring the programme of activities, and for the intake of children.

The Coordinator has duties and obligations towards the service users, the team of Childcare Workers employed at the setting and the management. According to the call for applications for Coordinators<sup>3</sup>, duties towards the team require, for example, that they coordinate the work of the staff to ensure that the centre's aims, objectives and policies are implemented, monitored and evaluated; they lead, manage and support staff effectively on a day to day basis; they ensure that the team is well organised or they identify and sort out conflicts of interest and disagreements with colleagues.

According to email correspondence between the Acting Manager of the Welfare Services Assessment Unit and the childcare service providers (13<sup>th</sup> December 2015) and in an effort to improve the services by strengthening compliance with the National Standards in Child Day Care Settings (MFSS 2006), service providers were informed that in accordance with Standard 1.1 of the National Standards document:

*Managers/Supervisors [are] to be qualified at Level 5 in a qualification in child care recognised by DSWS, or be enrolled in a course which leads to that qualification by December 2016.*

*Carers [are] to be qualified at Level 4 in a qualification in child care recognised by DSWS, or be enrolled in a course which leads to that qualification by December 2016.*

*Staff who do not possess the necessary qualification, nor are enrolled on the course, should take the relevant trade test. Proof of application for trade-test is to be submitted to DSWS by end of December 2016.*

*Managers / Supervisors / Carers who are not adequately qualified or who do not register for a course which fulfils these basic requirements will not be considered as contributing towards the child to carer ratio as from January 2017. Additionally, the DSWS will not accept that LRPs of child-day care centres recruit new employees (carers) who are not in possession of the necessary child-care qualifications as from June 2016. (Correspondence held in Childcare files available at the Accreditation Unit)*

**Childcare Workers** are responsible for following the manager's decisions, policies, procedures and programme of activities and for ensuring the safety and well-being of the children within their care. They also indicate possible areas of improvement to the manager. According to the DSWS standards, a Childcare Worker must have reached the age of majority, be of good moral character and be trained in childcare.

### Staff in kindergarten settings

Within the kindergarten settings, **Kindergarten Assistants** (KGAs) are responsible for working directly with the children. They are expected to plan, prepare and conduct educational activities to stimulate and foster children's abilities, their personal, social attitudes and values as well as their autonomy and intellectual curiosity. Furthermore, they are expected to develop and implement schemes of work towards achieving the school development plan. In addition to creating an appropriate learning environment with suitable resources, they are to observe, assess and record children's development, progress and behaviour.

More often than not, KGAs work within a school structure and whilst they are the sole persons responsible for a group of children in their 'classroom', the Head of School has the overall responsibility for the kindergarten setting. In most schools, an Assistant Head of School is as-

<sup>3</sup> A copy of the application call for 2014 was shared through an email communication on 26 August 2016.

signed the responsibility of the kindergarten section but this depends on the school population and the distribution of roles assigned by the Head.

All practitioners working with Kindergarten children are referred to as 'Kindergarten Assistants'. There are two grades of KGAs, replacing the former grade of 'KGA'. The new grades are referred to as KG I and KG II and came into force following a number of agreements and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Government of Malta and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) (MEYE 2007, 2009a; MUT 2010). Staff initially employed in the grade of KGA is being assimilated into the new grades depending on years of service and their following an up-skilling programme with an established number of hours.

Apart from the regular KGAs with a full-time appointment, from time to time the DES issues calls for **Supply Kindergarten Assistants** (SKGAs). As the name implies, supply staff are employed either on a definite contract with a clear timeframe within which their services are required or may have their services terminated as a result of particular events (MEYE 2009b, Clause 2.2, 2.3, 2.4). SKGAs are also required to engage in training in order to obtain a recognised qualification in Early Years if their services are required for longer than one year. Provided they start a diploma or a first Degree Honours in Early Childhood Education on a part-time or distance learning basis from a recognised higher education institution they receive a permanent contract.

In conclusion, differences in nomenclature of KGAs arise from differences in qualifications and conditions of employment at the time of the call for applications. Irrespective of whether individuals are employed as KGA, KG I, KG II or SKGA, they are all expected to perform identical duties. This is evident by the various calls for applications which are issued periodically and where details about expected duties, entry qualifications and remuneration are provided.

Table 1 shows features of staff in centre-based settings in Malta and also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at end of this section).

Table 1

Malta: ECEC contact staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main position/s <sup>4</sup>	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED <sup>5</sup> level
<b>Childcare sector</b>				
<b>Supervisor / Manager / Coordinator</b>  <i>Profile:</i> Social/Health Care Professional	<b>Childcare settings</b> Under 3-year olds	Core practitioner with management responsibilities, sometimes also working with children	Depends on the Awarding Body; 0–3 years 0–5 years	2 years full-time study in management ECTS points: vary depending on programme/provider EQF level: 5 ISCED: 4
<b>Childcare Worker</b>  <i>Profile:</i> Social/Health Care Professional	<b>Childcare settings</b> Under 3-year olds	Core practitioner with group responsibilities	0–3 years	2 years full-time post-secondary qualification <b>or</b> various alternative routes e.g. 372 hours and 500 hours work placement; e.g. 3 phases, including 500 hours work placement ECTS points: not applicable

<sup>4</sup> The description of the responsibilities for staff in childcare settings is taken from the Occupational Standards (MQC and DSWs 2013). The summary /excerpt of responsibilities for KGA is drawn from the Calls for KGA II published in the Malta Government Gazette (July 11<sup>th</sup> 2014 and November 24<sup>th</sup> 2015).

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2012. International Standard Classification of Education 2011.  
<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/iscsed-2011-en.pdf>

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main position/s <sup>4</sup>	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED <sup>5</sup> level
				ECVET: between 54 and 64 EQF level: 4 ISCED: 4
<b>Kindergarten/education sector</b>				
<b>Kindergarten Assistant (KGA)</b>  <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional	<b>Kindergarten setting located in primary school</b> 3- to 5-year olds (youngest possible starting age 2 years 9 months)	Core practitioner with group responsibilities	3–5 years	2 years full-time post-secondary qualification  Certificate (KG 1) <b>OR</b> Diploma (KG II)  ECTS points: vary ECVET: depends on the programme or provider EQF level: 4 ISCED: 4

#### Box 1

**SEEPRO professional profile categories** (adapted from Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010)

- *Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional* (specialist focus, 0– 6/7 years)
- *Pre-primary Education Professional* (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- *Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional* (focus on pre-primary and primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- *Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional* (broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- *Social Care/ Health Care Professional* (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

## 2.2 Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Overall, there is a very low, indeed negligible presence of men in KG and childcare settings. Early childhood education and care is still predominantly considered to be appropriate for women rather than men.

### Staff in childcare settings

Data on the workforce in childcare services were collected by going through documentation which is available for each specific childcare setting. In all, 95 files were reviewed corresponding to the number of settings in operation at the time. Data presented include information recorded between January and June 2016 from 93 childcare settings (no appropriate data were available for two settings).

The data are to be interpreted cautiously as currently there is no accurate or official system to maintain an up-to-date national database of the workforce in childcare settings or to monitor and trace the mobility of individuals within and beyond the sector.

Although a template prescribed by the DSWS required service providers to distinguish between qualified and unqualified staff as well as indicate the awarding body for the Childcare Worker's qualification, the course title and the MQF level of actual and/or prospective qualifications<sup>6</sup>, some service providers tended to simply list 'childcare' as the course title. This lack of attention to specification of course titles suggests that service providers are not necessarily

<sup>6</sup> Information requested about prospective qualifications includes the termination date as well as documented evidence that unqualified staff have actually started the programme of studies.

knowledgeable about the basic skills, knowledge and in-depth understanding which those seeking employment as a Childcare Worker ought to obtain through their initial professional studies.

Table 2 shows that in the 93 settings in the survey, 43% were in possession of the minimum entry requirement (MQF Level 4) for Childcare Workers set by the Occupational Standards (MQC & DSWS 2013) and a further 11.2% had a qualification level above the minimum requirement.

Table 2

Malta: Qualifications of staff employed in childcare settings (N=93), 2015/16

Qualification (by EQF/MQF Level)	Number	Per cent
Level 3 qualification	43	5.7
Level 4 qualification	325	43.0
Level 5 qualification	32	4.2
Level 6 or Level 7: University degree <sup>7</sup>	53	7.0
Miscellaneous <sup>8</sup>	50	6.6
In the process of obtaining a qualification	57	7.5
Insufficient information	37	4.9
No qualifications/no details included <sup>9</sup>	163	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 gives a breakdown of the number and proportion of men working in childcare settings.

Table 3

Malta: Gender of the workforce in childcare settings (N=93), 2015/16

	Male	Female	Male	Female	Males + Females
	Number		in %		Number
LRP	25	60	3.3	7.9	85
Manager/Director	9	52	1.2	7.0	61
Childcare Worker	2	563 <sup>10</sup>	0.3	74.0	565
Others <sup>11</sup>	1	48	0.1	6.3	49
<b>Totals</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>95.0</b>	<b>760</b>

There are several employees working in childcare settings with a foreign qualification<sup>12</sup>. Recognition of such a qualification in terms of its MQF Level rating is obtained by formal confirmation sought through the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE<sup>13</sup>). However, recognition of the qualification in terms of its relevance and suitability for employment is the responsibility of the employer. Several employees and employers in child-

<sup>7</sup> Not necessarily related to childcare or early childhood education

<sup>8</sup> Individuals in possession of various certificates. Examples: CACHE Diploma in Nursery Nursing; Cambridge Institute "Good Practice in Childcare"; Diploma of Higher Education in Social Work; Institute of Tourism Studies - Tourist guide; Diploma in languages (Castellan, French and English); BTEC Level 2 in Health and Social Care; Foundation Diploma in Art and Design.

<sup>9</sup> Includes male and female LRPs; managers and directors; care workers, helpers and cleaners.

<sup>10</sup> In 22 instances, one Child Care Worker was also identified as the Manager or Supervisor, or Co-ordinator or Guide

<sup>11</sup> Includes helpers, relievers and cleaners.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of foreign qualifications of individual employees include: Certificate of Vocational Diploma in Early Childhood Educator, Centre for Education and Culture Trebnje, Slovenia; Certificate III in community services (Children's services) – Victoria University of Technology, Australia; Scottish Nursery Nurses Certificate; Early Childhood Education awarded by the Further Education and Training Awards Council, Ireland;

<sup>13</sup> The NCFHE is the entity responsible for recognition, validation and accreditation of further and higher education.

care settings are in possession of a University degree or qualification. Amongst such qualifications, there are a number which are not related to early years<sup>14</sup>.

Within childcare settings, just under 10% of all Childcare Workers come from other European countries (Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Poland, Serbia, Hungary, Italy, Spain, England, Scotland and Belgium) as well as from non-European countries (Thailand, Russia, Cuba, Honduras and Brazil).

Table 4 gives an overview of the composition of the workforce in childcare settings.

Table 4

Malta: Composition of the workforce in childcare settings (N=93), 2015/16

Staff category	%
Staff with higher education degree (but not all ECEC specialist degrees)	7.0
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	n/a
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary <sup>15</sup> )	52.9
Staff with non-specialist or other, partly-related qualification <sup>16</sup>	6.6
Staff with no formal IPS <sup>17</sup> or in process of obtaining qualification	28.5
Specialist support staff	No data available
Male staff	5.0
Staff with background of migration	10.0
Insufficient information	4.9

### Kindergarten staff in the education sector

Within the State sector, data about professional qualifications of Kindergarten Assistants or Primary Teachers are not maintained or updated and the information was collated through a short survey conducted as an independent piece of research. The survey which was completed voluntarily, was sent to all 62 State schools with Kindergarten Assistants and Primary Teachers working in the first two years of compulsory education, teaching 5- to 7-year olds. The response rate was very encouraging: 382 (75%) of the potential 512 Kindergarten Assistants and 203 (71.5%) of the potential 284 Year 1 and Year 2 Teachers returned the completed questionnaire. Apart from items yielding background information, participants were asked to include details about:

- their professional qualification/s in early years when they were initially employed in their current role;
- alternative qualifications they were in possession of at the time of their employment if none were available relating to early childhood education;
- whether they had obtained a professional qualification in early childhood education whilst in employment;
- whether they were following a professional qualification in early years at the time of the research in March/April 2016.

There are no official data about the nationality of staff working within early childhood education and care settings, although the great majority is Maltese. In State KG settings, 13 of the 382 respondents (3.4%) were born in a country other than Malta. Six KGAs were born in Aus-

<sup>14</sup> Secondary school teacher of Serbian Literature and Language, University of Pristina; B.A.(French & Psychology); B.Sc. (Computing and Information Systems); B.Com (Business Management); Master in Diplomacy; Master in Pastoral Counselling; Bachelor degree in Philosophy and Social Sciences (Šiauliai University in Lithuania).

<sup>15</sup> Compulsory education in Malta lasts 11 years. Children spend 6 years in primary school (aged 5 to 11 years) and five years in secondary school (11-16 years). Any courses/programmes of study followed after the age of 16 are referred to as post-secondary education.

<sup>16</sup> Individuals in possession of various certificates. Examples: CACHE dip in nursery nursing; Cambridge good practice in childcare; Diploma of Higher Education in Social Work; Institute of Tourism Studies - Tourist guide; Diploma in languages (Castellan, French & English); BTEC Level 2 in Health and Social Care; Foundation Diploma in Art & Design.

<sup>17</sup> Includes male and female LRPs; managers and directors; care workers, helpers and cleaners.

tralia, three were born in England and one KGA was born in Canada, USA, Italy and Romania respectively.

Data about the non-state sector (Church and Independent schools) were collected by reviewing documentation which each school is obliged to submit annually to what until recently was known as the Education Regulatory Compliance Section (ERCS)<sup>18</sup> within the DQSE. This implies that data concerning the designation and qualifications of members of staff depend on the accuracy of the reporting of the school administration and as with the qualifications data about staff in childcare settings, it is an aspect where schools need support in ensuring that correct information is submitted.

### *Kindergarten staff in the State sector*

In total, there are 68 State primary schools organised in 10 colleges<sup>19</sup>. Of these, 62 schools offer kindergarten services for 3- to 5-year olds and include the first years of compulsory education for 5- to 7-year olds. The remaining six primary schools offer education services for the final three years of compulsory primary education (8- to 11-year olds).

Overall 310 (319 including “relievers”) Kindergarten Assistants in the state sector (including one male KGA) work with 3- to 4-year olds, and 202 (207 including “relievers”) with 4- to 5-year olds (Directorate for Educational Services 2016, email communication 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2016):

Table 5 shows data collected from questionnaires sent to 62 State schools in March/April 2016 and reflects possession of qualifications at the start of their current designation.

Table 5

**Malta: Composition of the workforce in kindergarten settings in the State sector, 2016**<sup>20</sup>

Staff category	%
Staff with specialist higher education degree (BA/MA)	0.6
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	58.6
Staff with non-specialist qualification	no data available
Staff with no formal IPS - or in process of obtaining qualification	38.5
Specialist support staff	no data available
Male staff	Only 1 person
Staff with background of migration	3.4
Insufficient information	2.1

About 60 of the respondents who had no formal qualification at the beginning of their career reported that they followed the 70 hours, 140 hours or 210 hours of up-skilling to be assimilated into the grade of KG II according to the agreement between the Government and the MUT (2010). Eight KGAs reported that they have followed/were following the B.Ed. (Hons.) degree in Early Childhood Education offered at the University of Malta.

### *Kindergarten staff in the non-state sector: Church school settings*

The 40 Church schools which provide educational facilities for very young children vary in that some offer services for 3- to 5-year olds, some cater exclusively for compulsory primary education (5- to 11-year olds) and others offer both KG and compulsory education. Out of the 40 Church schools, 12 schools provide primary school services only; 14 offer Kindergarten services only and 14 have both kindergarten and primary school services for a total of 67 kindergarten

<sup>18</sup> At the beginning of July 2016, ERCS was renamed as the ‘Accreditation Unit’. As a Unit, it will operate separately, although closely, with the Quality Assurance Department. ERCS used to form part of the QAD but they are now two separate entities.

<sup>19</sup> Each College incorporates a number of primary schools, a middle school and secondary school. There are nine colleges in Malta. Gozo constitutes one college made up of 11 primary schools and the secondary school.

<sup>20</sup> Data collected from questionnaires sent to 62 State schools in March/April 2016 and reflects possession of qualifications at the start of their current designation.

classes. 68 Kindergarten Assistants are employed in these 28 settings. Most of them (46 females, one male) work with 4- to 5-year olds in KG 2.

Table 6

**Malta: Composition of the workforce in kindergarten settings in Church schools (N=28) with 67 KG classes, 2015/16**

Staff category	%
Staff with specialist higher education degree	1.5
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	75.0
Staff with non-specialist qualification	no data available
Staff with no formal IPS	23.4
Specialist support staff	no data available
Male staff	Only 1 person
Staff with background of migration	no data available

### *Kindergarten staff in the non-state sector: Independent school settings*

There are 13 independent settings which offer KG provision and primary school and 10 settings which offer childcare services and KG provision<sup>21</sup>. No reliable data were available for three of the settings and these were therefore excluded. 59 Kindergarten Assistants worked with the 3- to 4-year olds and 45 KGAs worked with the 4- to 5-year olds. All of them were female.

Table 7

**Malta: Composition of the workforce in kindergarten settings within Independent schools (N=20) with 102 KG classes, 2015/16**

Qualification	%
Staff with specialist higher education degree	1.9
Staff with higher education degree – unrelated to Early Years	9.6
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	63.2
Staff with non-specialist qualification	no data available
Staff with no formal IPS	19.3
Specialist support staff	no data available
Male staff	None
Staff with background of migration	no data available
Insufficient information	5.8

It is worth noting that in contrast to the required qualifications for staff working with under 5-year olds, staff employed to work with children in compulsory education, including 5- to 7-year olds, are predominantly warranted (licensed) Primary Teachers who are qualified with a Bachelor's degree in Education (Government of Malta 1988, Education Act, Cap 327, Article 23 and Article 24, pp. 14-16). To date the B.Ed. (Hons.) has been offered as a four-year full-time programme of studies at MQF/EQF Level 6; ISCED 6, (UNESCO 2011) for a total of 240 ECTS. Very few practitioners working with under 5-year olds have a university qualification. They are not yet referred to as ECEC teachers, despite being given a warrant<sup>22</sup>. By November 2016, there were 67 graduates with a B.Ed. (Hons.) in Early Childhood Education and Care awarded by the University of Malta. Rather than working in KG settings, most of those who have completed the University course have been employed to teach within the compulsory sector.

<sup>21</sup> Taken from records for 2015/2016 submitted by schools to ERCS within the DQSE. Data were available for 20 of the 23 independent settings with KG provision.

<sup>22</sup> Teachers apply for a permanent warrant which is given by the Minister of Education upon the recommendation of the Council for the Teaching Profession. Warrants are recommended on the basis of appropriate qualifications.

### 3. Initial professional studies (IPS)

The Occupational Standards (MQC & DSWS 2013; NCFHE, 2017a, 2017b) established that within childcare settings, Childcare Workers should be in possession of a relevant qualification at EQF/MQF Level 4 whilst Supervisors/Managers should be in possession of a qualification at EQF/MQF Level 5. There are no specifications about the number of ECTS, the duration or the components of the courses.

With regard to IPS requirements for KGAs, apart from being proficient in English and Maltese, subsequent calls issued in recent years initially referred to explicit courses which were pegged at MQF/EQF Level 4 by the NCFHE (Malta Government Gazette, Dec 2009 and Feb 2011).

*in possession of the **MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Early Years** including the Extended Training Programme organized by the DQSE in collaboration with MCAST or an appropriate recognized comparable qualification including a **Pre-school certificate in Education for KGA issued by the Education Division or a Pre-School Certificate in Child Care issued by the Education Division** (Malta Government Gazette, 2009, p. 15,070)*

More recently, the 2014 and 2015 recruitment calls for KG II with the DES did not identify a specific course/programme of studies but referred to a recognized Diploma (Government Gazette, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2014; 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015). Applicants were to be:

*in possession, or have been approved for the award, of a **recognised Diploma at MQF level 4, in early Childhood Education and Care** that includes a component of training Practice (including the Extended Training Programme organised by the education Directorates in collaboration with MCAST), or a recognised appropriate comparable qualification including qualifications in **pre-school education or pre-school childcare 0-5 years at MQF level 4** (2014, p.8546) and (2015, p. 15,623)*

Three subtle shifts in the call for applications to recruit KGAs in the State sector with implications for the workforce and IPS are worth noting.

1. Moving away from specifically identifying courses or programmes of study is a way of acknowledging the proliferation of training courses by different entities, all of which purport to address early years matters. This increases the urgency of establishing clear standards and expectations (as yet, these are non-existent) about the qualifications of practitioners in early childhood education and care which could then be addressed within the different courses.
2. It appears that irrespective of the content of the programme of studies, the only distinction between recruitment/employment requirements for Childcare Workers and KGA relates to the practical or work placements conducted during IPS. Irrespective of the programme of studies followed, prospective KGA seeking work within the State KG sector, require evidence of a practicum in a kindergarten setting.
3. The 'Extended Training Programme' (ETP – for details see section 8.3), initially set up in 2006 and offered exclusively to MCAST students, had four components: induction, observation visits, teaching practice and tutorials. The Education Directorate retained responsibility for the induction component only (which in 2014 and 2015 was allocated 25 hours) whilst MCAST has responsibility for the remaining three components which were delivered as an integral part of the BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) programme. However, according to the MCAST Principal (personal communication, Nov 2016), the ETP will no longer be a requirement for KGAs in the State sector since this was unfairly penalising MCAST students. DES/DQSE will consider transforming this into an induction programme for all newly recruited KGAs.

In 2011, apart from being able to communicate in Maltese and English, the recruitment call for KG II with the DES (Malta Government Gazette 2011) stated that applicants were to be:

*“...in possession of or have been approved for the award of a Diploma or higher, in Early Childhood Education and Care that includes a component of training practice including the Extended Training Program organized by the DQSE in collaboration with MCAST or a recognised appropriate comparable qualification that comprises a component of Training Practice, including a Pre-school certificate in Education for KGA or a Pre-School Certificate in Child Care.”* (Malta Government Gazette 2011, 808)

Whilst tangible efforts have been made to raise the IPS for KGAs to EQF Level 6, and despite the Government and MUT 2007 (MEYE 2007) and 2010 (MUT 2010) agreements, it appears that the current EQF Level 4 courses will still be accepted and expected as the minimum entry requirement. A draft document with proposals about changes to the Education Act (Professions in Education Act, MEDE 2016d), explicitly recommends Level 4 as the minimum qualification for recruiting KGAs. This is discussed in greater detail in section 9.

Several entities offer training programmes which purport to make students eligible to work within childcare and/or kindergarten settings. Some courses are offered on a full-time basis, others are run as part-time courses. Some programmes target 16-year old school leavers, whilst others attract women who are seeking to (re)join the labour market. Entities which offer programmes of study are licensed by the NCFHE and seek to get their programmes accredited according to the MQF level rating. The University of Malta (UM) and MCAST are both self-accrediting entities (Government of Malta, 2012b, S.L. 327.433)<sup>23</sup>.

Whilst the NCFHE publishes a list of accredited courses offered by licensed institutions (NCFHE 2016a), it has always insisted that the decision whether to accept a programme of studies as valid in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies for a specific employment rests with the employer<sup>24</sup>. The accreditation awarded by NCFHE has an expiration date of five years; after that, providers are required to resubmit an application. It is possible for a provider to update a course to be in line with developments while keeping the same title. The MQF/EQF level rating of the course is assigned taking into consideration the course objectives and the learning outcomes. It is not linked to the duration of the course. The Referencing report (NCFHE 2016b) distinguishes between an ‘award’ and a ‘qualification’, specifically to “overcome the confusion in understanding the different types of certification that exists” (p 53). Substantial courses lead to a ‘qualification’; short courses which do not fulfil the requirements in terms of minimum ‘credits’ required, are referred to as ‘awards’.

### 3.1 Initial qualifying routes – higher education and vocational

The following tables show the entry requirements, professional studies, awards as well as credits, EQF and ISCED levels of the different initial qualification routes of the ECEC workforce.

<sup>23</sup> A self-accrediting entity is one which does not have to submit its programmes and courses to an external agency in order to have the programmes pegged to the MQF/EQF. Private entities which are planning to offer courses or entire programmes of study, need to submit their documentation through NCFHE in order to get the level rating and thus recognition of the programme/course.

<sup>24</sup> The entry requirements or job requirements are the prerogative of the employer and it is up to them to determine if the course is suitable. The NCFHE examines the prospective level of the course and the number of ECTS/ECVET proposed. It also utilises external evaluators to attest the validity of the learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment proposed by the applicant. (Email communication with Head of Accreditation Unit, NCFHE, August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016). Further details are available through the Referencing Report (NCFHE, 2016b).

Table 8

**Malta: Kindergarten Assistant**

<b>Job title in English: Kindergarten Assistant</b>
<b>Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional</b>
<p><b>Entry requirements:</b> MCAST-BTEC Diploma in Health and Social Care <b>OR</b> MCAST Diploma in Health and Social Care <b>OR</b> four O-Level/Secondary School Certificate and Profile<sup>25</sup> (Level 3) including (compulsory) English Language, Maltese and Mathematics.</p> <p><b>Professional studies</b><sup>26</sup>: 2 years full-time, post-secondary – students can enrol at MCAST when compulsory education is completed at the age of 16.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development<sup>27</sup> including the Extended Training Programme</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> n/a</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 4</p> <p><b>ISCED 4</b></p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Kindergartens for 3- to 4-year olds (youngest entry age 2 years 9 months), located in State, Church-affiliated or Independent (private) primary schools or Independent kindergartens.</p> <p><i>Until 2001</i> (the Programme used to be offered by the Education Division when MCAST was set up):</p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> At least four 'O' levels including English, Maltese and Maths.</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 2 years full-time, post-secondary; the programme has been discontinued but holders of the certificate are eligible to apply as KGAs.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Pre-School Education Certificate</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> n/a</p> <p><b>ECVET:</b> not available</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 4</p> <p><b>ISCED 4</b></p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> see above</p>

Table 9

**Malta: Childcare Worker/Child Carer/ Childcare Assistant**

<b>Job title in English: Childcare Worker</b>
<b>Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional</b>
<p><b>Entry requirements:</b> MCAST-BTEC Diploma in Health and Social Care <b>or</b> MCAST Diploma in Health and Social Care <b>or</b> 4 SEC/O-Level/SSC&amp;P<sup>28</sup> (Level 3) passes; compulsory: English Language, Maltese and Mathematics</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 2 years full-time, post-secondary – students can enrol at MCAST when compulsory education is completed at the age of 16.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> not applicable</p> <p><b>ECVET:</b> not available</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 4</p> <p><b>ISCED 4</b></p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Childcare settings, 0–3 years and KG settings, 3-5 years</p> <p><b>Alternative routes:</b></p> <p>Any IPS in child care pegged at MQF/EQF Level 4 and approved by NCFHE followed on a full-time or part-time basis. Courses to date are offered by several private institutions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Entry requirements:</b> 16 years of age or older; an MQF Level 2 qualification in Mathematics, English and Maltese and a clean Police Conduct Certificate. In the absence of an MQF Level 2 qualification, individuals can apply if in possession of other qualifications or relevant experience.</li> </ol> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 372 hours (lectures), 500 hours practicum</p>

<sup>25</sup> Secondary School Certificate & Profile. Details available in DQSE & NCFHE (2012) *SSC & P Handbook*

<sup>26</sup> Other comparable Level 4 IPS are listed with 'childcare' as the field of work but have been accepted for KG

<sup>27</sup> Earlier programmes offered at MCAST through BTEC were known as Edexcel Level 3 BTEC National Diploma in Early Years; MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children's Play, Learning and Development; MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development. The MCAST courses are now home-grown.

<sup>28</sup> Secondary School Certificate and Profile. Details available in DQSE & NCFHE (2012) *SSC & P Handbook*.

**Job title in English: *Childcare Worker***  
**Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional**

**Award:** JobsPlus (formerly ETC) – VET Award in childcare (0-5)

**ECTS points:** n/a

**ECVET:** 54

**EQF level:** 4

**ISCED** 4

**Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years

2. **Entry requirements:** At least pass grades in 3 ‘O levels’ – Maths, English and Maltese (MQF Level 3). Eligibility tests, known as a pre-course assessment<sup>29</sup>, are offered to potential students who are not in possession of the ‘O’ levels.

**Professional studies:** Three phases (no details available about duration); Phase 3: 500 hours practicum

**Award:** ETC/NCFHE: Certificate of Competence in Child Care (0-5) after a period of traineeship; Certification awarded upon successful completion of the Trade Test

**ECTS points:** n/a

**ECVET:** not available

**EQF level:** 4

**ISCED** 4

**Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years

3. **Entry requirements:** ‘O’ level English *or* CACHE level 2 Certificate for the Children and Young People’s Workforce (QCF) also referred to as the foundation course for persons interested in working as child carers but who do not have at least an ‘O’ level in English or have not studied for a long time (Future Focus Ltd. 2016).

**Professional studies:** offered as a part-time course; 360 hours of work experience/practicum are to be completed

**Award:** Future Focus – CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People’s Workforce (QCF)

**ECTS points:** 65<sup>30</sup>

**ECVET:** n/a

**EQF level:** 4

**ISCED:** 4

**Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years and KG settings, 3-5

4. **Entry requirements:** An ‘O’ level Standard of education: Maths, English and Maltese recommended

**Professional studies:** evenings and weekends, over one year; 450 hours of placement

**Award:** Minds Malta<sup>31</sup> – Diploma in Childcare (The early years)

**ECTS points:** n/a

**ECVET:** 56

**EQF level:** 4

**ISCED** 4

**Main ECEC workplace:** Childcare settings, 0–3 years and KG settings, 3-5

5. **Entry requirements:** ‘O’ Levels in English, Maths and Maltese. ‘Eligibility tests’ are offered to applicants who are not in possession of ‘O’ levels.

**Professional studies:** Full time or part-time route; Includes 500 hours of practical work. Course divided into three components.

**Award:** Centre for Child Development, Education and Care Studies – VET Diploma in Child Development, Education and Care

**ECTS points:** n/a

**ECVET:** 60

**EQF level:** 4

<sup>29</sup> The pre-course assessment was developed by Jobsplus Training Design and Quality Assurance Unit. The scope of this assessment is to ensure that a person who enters the course has the capability of coping with the workload requested from MQF Level 4 qualifications. This pre-assessment consists of a number of exercises to assess the reading and writing abilities of prospective trainees as well as their numeracy skills.

<sup>30</sup> According to a footnote on the NCFHE register for accredited courses, “the number of Credits was obtained from the Ofqual website; programmes of studies accredited internationally may not use ECTS or ECVET system”.

<sup>31</sup> From January 2017, will be offered by St Catherine’s High School, Higher Education Tuition Centre.

<b>Job title in English: <i>Childcare Worker</i></b> <b>Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional</b>
<p><b>ISCED 4</b>  <b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p> <p>6. <b>Entry requirements:</b> No specific qualifications – seeking recognition of prior learning <b>or</b> in possession of a qualification which is not at MQF Level 4 <b>or</b> in possession of a qualification which is not home-grown. Prospective candidates need to have 3 years’ experience with children in a childcare facility catering for children from 0–5 years. Applicants also need to present a reference letter by a previous employer, confirming the number of hours of their experience to the Assessment Board, prior to the Assessment.</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> Process of validation of informal and non-formal learning. Assessment consists of: Written test (100%); Interview (90%) and Portfolio (10%); Practical test (100%). (Pass mark 50 in each of the sections.)</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Jobsplus and Trade Test (NCFHE 2016a)</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> not applicable</p> <p><b>ECVET:</b> n/a</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 4</p> <p><b>ISCED 4</b>  <b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p>

Table 10

**Malta: Childcare Manager/Coordinator (IPS)**

<b>Job title in English: <i>Childcare Manager/Coordinator</i></b> <b>Profile: Social/Health Care Professional</b>
<p><b>Entry requirements:</b> MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children’s Care, Learning and Development and SEC/O-Level passes in Mathematics, English and Maltese <b>or</b> MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children’s Play, Learning and Development and SEC/O-Level passes in Mathematics, English and Maltese <b>or</b> 2 A-Level passes and 2 I-Level passes Compulsory A-level or I-level: 2 subjects from Mathematics, English, Maltese.</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 2 years full-time study at College of Arts, Science and Technology</p> <p><b>Award:</b> MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years (MCAST 2016a)</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> 120</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 5</p> <p><b>ISCED 4</b>  <b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p> <p><i>OR</i></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Preference will be given to students who hold the CACHE level 4 diploma certificate or equivalent irrespective of age. Students who completed the Future Focus Level 3 certificate and wish to proceed directly to level 5 must be at least 23 years on date of application.</p> <p><b>Professional experience requirement:</b> At least 3 years of continuous experience working as a child carer</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Future Focus: CACHE Level 5 Diploma in Leadership in Children’s Care Learning and Development for child care centre managers</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> not applicable</p> <p><b>ECVET:</b> 90 (Future Focus Ltd. 2016)</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 5</p> <p><b>ISCED 4</b>  <b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p> <p><i>Alternative route:</i></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> No specific qualifications</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> Process of validation of informal and non-formal learning for Childcare Managers and Supervisors in childcare centres. Assessment is composed of three components: Written Test (100%); Interview (100%) and Portfolio (100%)</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Trade Test for Childcare Supervisor/Manager (Jobsplus and NCFHE 2016b); Certificate of Competence pegged at Level 5 within the MQF and EQF and endorsed by the NCFHE</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> not applicable</p> <p><b>ECVET:</b> n/a</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 5</p> <p><b>ISCED 4</b>  <b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Childcare settings, 0–3 years</p>

### 3.2 Competencies and curricula in IPS programmes

Tables 11a-11i highlight the competencies, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches within the various MQF/EQF Level 4 courses for Kindergarten Assistants and Childcare Workers. Most of the information presented was elicited from the public domain including websites, the transcript which accompanies the certificate and records at the MEDE Registry.

Table 11a

**Malta: Competencies, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**  
(Provider: MCAST (2016b), Award: MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development)

Competencies	Curricular areas	Pedagogic approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enabling students to work in a professional capacity with children in the early years sector,</li> <li>- planning activities for babies, toddlers and children in the early years,</li> <li>- maintaining health and safety standards in early years settings,</li> <li>- implementing activities and constructing resources for children,</li> <li>- monitoring and recording the development of children.</li> </ul>	<p>Core study units:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive relations for children's care, learning and development;</li> <li>• Positive environments for children's care, learning and development;</li> <li>• Promoting children's development;</li> <li>• Safeguarding children;</li> <li>• Promoting children's rights;</li> <li>• Children's learning activities and play;</li> <li>• Diet and nutrition for children;</li> <li>• Physical activities for children;</li> <li>• Psychological perspectives on children's behaviour;</li> <li>• Supporting children's numeracy skills;</li> <li>• Supporting children's literacy skills;</li> <li>• Design and technology for the early years practitioner;</li> <li>• Environmental science for the early years;</li> <li>• Meeting additional requirements for children's settings, learning and development;</li> <li>• Psychological observation;</li> <li>• Reflecting on and developing practice for children.</li> </ul> <p><i>Mandatory specialist units:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research skills;</li> <li>• Health, education and social services for children and their families;</li> <li>• Food and mealtimes in Early Years.</li> </ul> <p><i>Optional specialist units:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with children with additional needs;</li> <li>• Promoting mathematical development in children aged 4-8 years;</li> <li>• Promoting literacy in children aged 4-8 years;</li> <li>• Cooking activities with children;</li> <li>• Supporting children's creativity.</li> </ul>	<p>A mix of lectures and supervised practical work with children of different age groups in childcare settings and schools. Students are expected to dedicate a number of self-study hours to work on the assignments given out by the lecturers but also to prepare materials and activities for placement purposes.</p> <p>Students are exposed to the most innovative teaching techniques and are also trained on observation techniques required to monitor the development of children. There is a major emphasis on the practical components carried out in this course.</p>

Table 11b

**Malta: Curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**  
(Provider: Education Division<sup>32</sup>; Award: Pre-School Education Certificate)

Curricular areas	Pedagogic approaches
<p>A two-year course in Child Development and Child Care in three components:</p> <p>1) <i>Theory</i>: Child development; Child care; Curriculum</p>	<p>Lectures; seminars and workshops. Discussion, planning and preparation of classroom equipment and materials in; language acquisition;</p>

<sup>32</sup> Programme used to be offered through the Further Studies and Adult Education Department

Curricular areas	Pedagogic approaches
development; Personal enrichment 2) <i>Methodology</i> : The curriculum: the integrated day. Use of projects and story themes to combine 'subject' into interesting learning programmes. 3) <i>Practice</i> : School Practice: one term in the first year (approximately 33% of the time); two terms in the second year (approximately 66%)	mathematical concepts; environmental studies; moral/ethical issues; science concepts; creative arts Planning a programme of learning while implementing theories and methodology studies.

Table 11c

**Malta: Competencies, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**

(Provider: ETC; Award: *VET award in childcare 0-5*<sup>33</sup>)

Competencies	Curricular areas	Pedagogic approaches
All competencies enlisted under the National Occupational Standards for Childcare Workers (MQC & DSWS 2013)	8 Modules: 362 hours + 500 hours practicum + 10 hours assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child development (86 hours);</li> <li>• Development of communication, imagination, creativity (60 hours);</li> <li>• Physical care of the child (65 hours)</li> <li>• Nutrition and hygiene (21 hours)</li> <li>• Health and safety (32 hours)</li> <li>• Children's rights, equality and inclusion (37 hours)</li> <li>• Supporting a child with disability or individual needs (49 hours)</li> <li>• Self-reflection and self-development (12 hours)</li> </ul>	Modules 1 to 7 are delivered through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lecturing</li> <li>- Discussions</li> <li>- Role plays</li> <li>- Presentations</li> </ul> Module 8 is based on lecturing and hands-on experience in a childcare facility.

Table 11d

**Malta: Competencies and curricular areas for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**

(Provider: ETC/NCFHE<sup>34</sup>; Award: *Certificate of Competence in Child Care 0-5*)

Competencies	Curricular areas
All competencies enlisted under the National Occupational Standards for Childcare Workers. (MQC and DSWS 2013)	Programme organised in three phases: <p><b>Phase 1: Foundation course</b> focused on child development (physical; intellectual; social/emotional and moral; development of imagination and creativity; development of language) and child care (basic concepts of nutrition; hygiene and care; the physical needs of the young child; environmental and safety issues; childhood ailments and immunisation). Can proceed to Phase 2 and Phase 3 on successful completion of the foundation phase</p> <p><b>Phase 2: Traineeship (off-the-job training)</b> focused on further studies in child care issues (importance of equal opportunities; inclusion of children with special needs; parental involvement; observation and records in child study; first aid in emergencies; team work between colleagues) and methodology (ECE pioneers; play as a major medium of development; theories and types of play; daily programmes in child care settings; preparation of materials and evaluation; choice and care of play materials).</p> <p><b>Phase 3: On-the-job training</b> focused on <i>Physical care</i> (students are monitored and examined in all aspects of physical care of babies, toddlers and 2- to 3-year old children including preparation of food, feeding, cleaning and caring for equipment; bathing, nappy changing; health and safety routines; exercise and settling children down) and <i>Play activities</i> (students are monitored and examined in all aspects of prepara-</p>

<sup>33</sup> Information retrieved from transcript accompanying certificate. Future certification will be issued by Jobsplus

<sup>34</sup> Certificate of Competence through Trade Test awarded after a period of traineeship. Traineeship organised in three phases as well as practice placement.

Competencies	Curricular areas
	<p>tion and execution of all aspects of play activities as appropriate to the stage and age of child's development: baby play and suitable play for toddlers and children 2-3).</p> <p><b>Plus:</b> 500 hours of practice Certification issued on successful result of Trade Test</p>

Table 11e

**Malta: Competencies and curricular areas for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**

(Provider: Future Focus; Award: *CACHE Diploma for Children and Young People's Workforce*)

Competencies	Curricular areas
<p>Designed to build the knowledge and skills needed when working with children and young people from birth to 19 years (CACHE 2016).</p> <p><b>Understanding ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the importance of effective communication in the work setting;</li> <li>- which competences are required in one's own work role;</li> <li>- the importance of diversity;</li> <li>- how duty of care contributes to safe practice;</li> <li>- the expected pattern of development for children and young people from birth to 19 years;</li> <li>- the factors that influence children and young people's development and how these affect practice;</li> </ul> <p><b>Knowing ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how to address conflicts or dilemma that may arise between an individual's rights and the duty of care; how to respond to complaints;</li> <li>- how to monitor children and young people's development;</li> <li>- which interventions should take place if development is not following the expected pattern;</li> <li>- the importance of early intervention to support the speech, language and communication needs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>70 credits<sup>35</sup>:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote creativity and creative learning in young children (5);</li> <li>• Engage in personal development in health, social care or children's and young people's settings (3);</li> <li>• Care for the physical and nutritional needs of babies and young children (6);</li> <li>• Support children and young people's health and safety (2);</li> <li>• Promote the well-being and resilience of children and young people (4);</li> <li>• Professional practice in children and young people's social care (4);</li> <li>• Develop positive relationships with children, young people and others involved in their care (1);</li> <li>• Context and principles for early years provision (4);</li> <li>• Promote communication in health, social care or children and young people's settings (3);</li> <li>• working together for the benefit of children and young people (2);</li> <li>• Promote learning and development in the early years (5);</li> <li>• Understand child and young person development (4);</li> <li>• Assessment and planning with children &amp; young people (5);</li> <li>• Understand how to support positive outcomes for children and young people (3);</li> <li>• Principles for implementing duty of care in health, social care or children's and young people's settings (1);</li> <li>• Promote child and young person development (3);</li> <li>• Support children's speech, language &amp; communication (4);</li> <li>• Promote children's welfare and well-being in the early years (6);</li> <li>• Promote equality and inclusion in health, social care or children's and young people's settings (2);</li> <li>• Understand how to safeguard the well-being of children and young people (3).</li> </ul>

Table 11f

**Malta: Curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**

(Provider: Centre for Child Development Education and Care Studies; Award: *Diploma Course in Childcare 0-5*)

Curricular areas	Pedagogic approaches
<p>Three parts with 16 Modules - each with different ECVET weighting.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Child Development and Care</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) all aspects of child development;</li> <li>(b) physical care of the child.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. <b>Early Childhood Education:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) principles of ECE;</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>Taught through contact hours; self-study hours; hands-on-hours in childcare settings; assessment hours.</p> <p>The contact hours in each of the 16 modules are divided into: an introductory power point presentation; videos or other related visual material; class discussion on the topic/knowledge involved in the particular module; a short written exercise - discussed and reviewed.</p>

<sup>35</sup> Taken from transcript accompanying certificate although details on the NCFHE documentation (list of accredited courses) indicates 65 credits

Curricular areas	Pedagogic approaches
(b) play as a major medium of ECE; (c) other important Issues in ECE: e.g. equal opportunities; self-reflection, child-welfare <b>3. Practicum:</b> 500 hours of mentored and monitored practice.	

The information document for the course scheduled to start in October 2017 and offered by *SCHS Higher Education Tuition Centre*<sup>36</sup> defined the general competences and objectives through 'skills' and 'competences'. By the end of the course, the student/prospective child-carer will be able to

- provide care promoting health and development for babies and children under 5;
- develop and maintain a healthy, safe and secure environment for children aged 0 to 5 years which promotes positive behaviour;
- deliver services to families who are bilingual or whose preferred language is not English or Maltese;
- follow the manager's decisions, policies and procedures and programme of activities;
- perform with integrity, respect and responsibility towards the children in her care;
- build positive relationships with team members and parents with the aim of providing the best possible care to the child;
- reflect on herself and her service provision;
- be open to further develop herself and her practice;
- ensure that the quality of her care is non-discriminatory and not affected by the child's gender, race, creed, ability or other characteristics.

Table 11g

**Malta: Competencies and curricular areas for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**

(Provider: Minds Malta<sup>37</sup>; Award: *Level 4 Diploma in Childcare (The Early Years)*)

General Competencies	Curricular areas
A clear understanding ... - of a child's development; - of the Maltese legal framework regarding child services; - of health and safety requirements; - of how to support children with special education needs; - of the role of play in a child's development; - of how to plan and implement learning activities based on play; - of how to create and promote a multicultural learning space for children and - an increased awareness of the influences of personal upbringing, beliefs and value systems on the type of carer one becomes.	<b>Taught Courses – Total: 35 credits</b> Lectures and group discussions form the main pedagogic approaches. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming a reflective and professional child carer (2)</li> <li>• Caring for babies – the first year (3)</li> <li>• Early childhood education (4)</li> <li>• Health and safety in the Early Years (3)</li> <li>• Child development ages 0–5 (8)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Cognitive development</i> (2)</li> <li>- <i>Communication development</i> (2)</li> <li>- <i>Emotional and social development</i> (2)</li> <li>- <i>Physical development</i> (2)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Legal considerations in the child care field (2)</li> <li>• Play and development in the Early Years (2)</li> <li>• Understanding the behaviour of children aged 0-5 (2)</li> <li>• Working with disability and diverse educational needs in the Early Years (3)</li> <li>• Observing and assessing children in the Early Years (2)</li> <li>• Personal and social development for Childcare Workers (2)</li> <li>• Psychosocial issues in the Early Years (2)</li> </ul> <b>Practice placement – 21 credits</b> With babies (0–18 months) – 225 hours With toddlers (18 months–3 years) – 225 hours

<sup>36</sup> *St Catherine's High School Higher Education Tuition Centre* bought the programme from *Minds Malta*. *SCHS* initially planned to start the Diploma in Child Care Course in January 2017. However, the number of applications did not warrant the start of the course in January (email communication 5<sup>th</sup> January 2017),

<sup>37</sup> Details provided by Head of Training Centre via email communication on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

Table 11h

**Malta: Competencies, curricular areas and pedagogic approaches for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**(Provider: MCAST; Award: *Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years*, MCAST 2016a)

Competencies	Curricular areas	Pedagogic approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>conduct research in the Early Years sector</li> <li>maintain health and safety standards in childcare and kindergarten settings</li> <li>enhance managerial and pedagogical competences</li> <li>provide an adequate educational environment for young learners</li> <li>being able to link theory with practice</li> </ul>	<p><i>Core study units:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuing professional development;</li> <li>Communicating values and leadership in an early years environment;</li> <li>Theories of development birth to three:</li> <li>Early Years curriculum, play and learning.</li> </ul> <p><i>Theories of development:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 – 8 year olds;</li> <li>Early Years research and project;</li> <li>Understanding children’s behaviour;</li> <li>Child protection;</li> <li>Professional practice.</li> <li>Specialist units: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contemporary issues in child’s health;</li> <li>Promoting language development;</li> </ul> </li> <li>Promoting numeracy skills;</li> <li>Promoting knowledge and understanding of the world;</li> <li>Working with families;</li> <li>Developing play in the early years;</li> <li>Pedagogic issues for the early years. .</li> </ul>	Throughout the course students will engage in critical pedagogical discussions and field internships which will help them acquire the required leadership skills.

Table 11i

**Malta: Competencies and curricular areas for Level 4 and Level 5 IPS**(Provider: Future Focus; Award: *CACHE Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People’s Services (England)*; *Children’s and Young People’s Management*)

Competencies	Curricular areas
<p>The students should be able to know ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>principles of professional development, diversity, equality and inclusion in their own area of responsibility;</li> <li>how to develop systems and processes that promote diversity, equality and inclusion;</li> <li>the current legislative framework as well as health, safety and risk management policies, procedures and practices relevant to health, and social care or children and young people’s settings;</li> <li>how to engage in working partnerships;</li> <li>how the components of research are used;</li> <li>the pattern of development that would normally be expected for children and young people from birth to 19 years;</li> <li>the factors that impact on children and young people’s development;</li> <li>the benefits of early intervention to support the development of children and young people;</li> <li>the potential effect of transitions on children and young people’s development;</li> <li>the influence of assessing, monitoring and recording the development of young children and young persons on the use of intervention strategies;</li> <li>theoretical approaches regarding the development of children and young persons;</li> <li>the impact of current legislation that underpins the safeguarding of children and young persons;</li> </ul>	<p><b>Core mandatory units: (30 credits)</b></p> <p>Use and develop systems that promote communication (3 credits; 1 lesson);</p> <p>promote professional development (4 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Champion equality, diversity and inclusion (4 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Develop health and safety and risk management policies, procedures and practices in health and social care or children and young people’s settings (5 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Work in partnership in health and social care or children and young people’s settings (4 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Undertake a research project within services for health and social care or children and young people (10 credits, 4 lessons).</p> <p><b>Pathway mandatory units: (38 credits)</b></p> <p>Understand children and young person’s development (6 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Lead practices that supports positive outcomes for child and young person development (6 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Develop and implement policies and procedures to support the safeguarding of children and young people (6 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Lead and manage a team within health and social care or children’s and young persons’ setting (7 credits, 3</p>

Competencies	Curricular areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the features of effective team performance;</li> <li>- the purpose of professional supervision;</li> <li>- how the principles of professional supervision can be used to inform performance management;</li> <li>- different approaches to promote positive well-being and resilience in children and young persons and their impact on practice;</li> <li>- regulatory requirements, codes of practice and relevant guidelines for managing concerns and complaints;</li> <li>- recruitment and selection processes;</li> <li>- the purpose of induction;</li> <li>- the financial management in their own work setting;</li> <li>- how to manage a team;</li> <li>- policies, theories and models which underpin appraisal of performance.</li> </ul>	<p>lessons);</p> <p>Develop professional supervision practice in health and social care or children’s and young persons’ work settings (5 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Lead practices in promoting the wellbeing and resilience of children and young people (8 credits, 3 lessons).</p> <p><b>Optional: (24 credits)</b></p> <p>Develop procedures and practice to respond to concerns and complaints (6 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Recruitment and selection within health and social care or children’s and young persons’ settings (3 credits, 1 lesson);</p> <p>Manage induction in health &amp; social care or children &amp; young people’s settings(3 credits, 1 lesson);</p> <p>Manage finance within own area of responsibility (4 credits, 2 lessons);</p> <p>Understand how to manage a team (3 credits, 1 lesson);</p> <p>Appraise staff performance (5 credits, 2 lessons).</p>

### 3.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

In childcare settings, Childcare Workers must be in possession of one of the recognised MQF/EQF Level 4 courses or show evidence that they have started a course if they are already in employment. Since June 2016, employers are no longer allowed to employ workers who are not appropriately qualified.

Prospective Kindergarten Assistants must be in possession of one of the recognised MQF/EQF Level 4 courses (as outlined earlier in the report) otherwise, individuals can only be offered a position of ‘Supply KGA’.

Individuals with higher qualifications, whether directly relevant or not, may be employed in both kindergarten and childcare settings. However, there is no extra salary or remuneration for someone who is in possession of a first, second or third cycle degree level. Considering the generally poor working conditions, rather than opportunities for moving up and across qualifications, Childcare Workers seek opportunities to move *out of* the system or secure employment in the State sector as Kindergarten Assistants.

Another route into achieving recognition and thus approval to be employed without formal qualification is possible through the Trade Testing System (Jobsplus<sup>38</sup>, 2016). Trade Testing was set up in order to assess individuals who have acquired knowledge, skills and competences in a particular occupation but do not possess a formal qualification. Through trade testing, a person is assessed by an interview, a theoretical and a practical test. Successful candidates are awarded a Certificate of Competence in a particular occupation. In order to sit for these assessments, a candidate must be proficient in written English. With regard to childcare, there are two Trade Tests: 1) for a Childcare Worker leading to a Level 4 Certificate of Competence; 2) for a Manager/Supervisor leading to a Level 5 Certificate of Competence. Information guides for both the MQF Level 4 and Level 5 (Jobsplus & NCFHE 2016a, 2016b) Trade Tests in childcare are available for prospective applicants. Especially for individuals working in childcare settings, and having reviewed the qualifications documentation available, many are being advised to sit for the Trade Test in order to earn the Certificate of Competence. Usually the Trade Test is being taken by individuals who either (1) have no formal qualifications, (2) have a qualification in ‘care’ or ‘management’ but not with a Level 4 or Level 5 rating by NCFHE, or (3) have a foreign qualification which may or may not have a Level 4 or Level 5 rating.

<sup>38</sup> In August 2016 Jobsplus replaced what was formerly known as the Employment Training Corporation (ETC).



## 4. Workplace-based learning in the IPS of core practitioners

Most of the Level 4 programmes which are currently available for KGAs and Childcare Workers have a component of practice within Early Years settings. The workplace/practice placements are not nationally regulated but are determined by the providers of the various programmes available. The amount of time students spend at kindergarten and childcare settings whilst following their initial professional studies varies. From documentation available about the content of the programmes, it would appear that students are expected to complete between approximately 300 hours of placement to 500 hours or more. Where students are following part-time studies, work placement hours are completed at times when they can be accommodated.

In some IPS routes, the supervision of the student placements falls to the regular staff working within childcare settings. There are no specific mentoring programmes to prepare Managers/Supervisors or Childcare Workers on how to support students in their placement and to date, whoever accepts to mentor or support students at the workplace does not receive any remuneration for doing so. Neither is there a designated time allocated explicitly for mentoring.

It is worth pointing out that the BTEC courses for both level 4 and 5 came to an end in June 2016 and have now been replaced by the MCAST Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development (MQF Level 4) and MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years (Level 5), both introduced in September 2015. The first cohorts of students are expected to complete their studies in June 2017.

### **MCAST Level 4 programme of studies – BTEC Course<sup>39</sup>**

The total number of hours of placement over the two-year course amounts to 750 hours. The minimum required by BTEC is 100 hours in each of the assessed placements, which include: children from 0 to 2 years, from 2 to 4 years and from 4 to 8 years

In order to achieve the required number of hours, the MCAST course provides students with the following placements:

#### *Year 1 of Course Programme*

- Mid-November to January – a weekly placement for orientation/observational purposes in a childcare/nursery setting;
- February to March/April (depending on Easter dates) – a six-week block placement in the same setting with babies or toddler groups;
- After Easter – a weekly placement in a different childcare/nursery setting;
- End of April/May to June – a five-week block placement with babies or toddler groups in a childcare/nursery setting.

#### *Year 2 of Course Programme*

- November to mid-December – a five-week block placement part-teaching in Kindergarten 1 classes;
- February to March/April (depending on Easter dates) – a seven to eight-week block placement in Kindergarten 2 classes with six to seven weeks of full teaching:
  - most of the students will be paired in the same class;
  - some students are placed in classes on their own depending on the logistics of the school;
  - students under the age of 18 are placed in class with the class teacher to cater for the legal responsibilities – class management is the responsibility of the student for the said six to seven weeks.

<sup>39</sup> Information supplied by the Deputy Director, Programme Management of the Technical College (MCAST)

All placement hours fall within a 60-hours guided learning unit which is the equivalent of around 6 ECVETs.

Students have to achieve a broad range of specifically defined skills in different settings which they go to throughout the two years. The BTEC logbook of observation skills lists 103 skills which target the overall development of babies, toddlers and infants. The specific skills refer to social development; health and hygiene (toileting; changing nappies; bedding); food handling and preparation; preparing and planning for indoor and outdoor activities; making and using different media for creative arts activities; promoting number work by modelling and encouraging children to count; engaging with storytelling; promoting play through selecting items for a treasure basket, heuristic and sensory play; physical play activities; table-top activities etc.

Moreover, students are required to carry out various types of self-evaluation activities:

- on all their planned and implemented activities;
- a weekly evaluation on different aspects of their experience within the setting;
- an evaluation on the different areas of the skills/competences as they are achieved in the various settings – students have to reflect on preparation prior to placement, skills developed during placement and come up with an action plan to develop further such skills.

Mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres are not required to complete a specific qualifying course for such a task. Centres are chosen by designated staff within MCAST after having checked the list of registered centres and having visited the selected centre. Information is sent to the centre prior to sending students for placements and lecturers make it a point to speak to the centre manager and supervising staff on each of the assessment visits.

There is open communication between the centres identified for placements with the MCAST administration, the Early Years coordinator, the staff responsible for identifying settings for students' practice placements and the assessing lecturers/tutors depending on the type of query or difficulty they may have.

Although the Supervisor in the centre is not responsible for the student's assessment, the assessors actively seek their feedback during each of the visits. This feedback, together with observed practices by the lecturer, has an impact on the overall performance of each student. Supervisors are not remunerated by MCAST for the work they carry out with the students.

There is no time allocation for mentoring since it is considered to be 'on-going' in both nurseries and schools, i.e. focused, reflective talks between student and mentoring staff are not part of the approach. Unless the placement requires otherwise, students are not allowed to be responsible for any group of children unless they are supervised.

### **MCAST MQF Level 5<sup>40</sup> programme of studies**

Just as in the level 4 course, students cover 750 hours for work placements over the two-year programme. From the students' perspective, the workplace placements vary depending on the route through which they were recruited for the programme. Students who join the Level 5 programme after having completed their studies at 6<sup>th</sup> grade (predominantly such individuals would be approximately 17- to 18-year olds) and who therefore do not have the MQF Level 4 qualification in childcare, are sent to a childcare setting in their first year of the programme in order to conduct two practice placements with a group of babies and a group of toddlers. In the second year of the programme, their workplace assignments are conducted with children in kindergarten. Students who proceed to the Level 5 programme after having completed the Level 4 qualification, conduct the workplace placements in the first two years of compulsory education in the primary sector. Similarly to the Level 4 programme, the placements for stu-

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<sup>40</sup> MCAST Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years is the MQF Level 5 course which is being offered from 2016 onwards. As a home-grown course it is replacing the former MQF Level 5 MCAST-BTEC Higher National Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years.

dents following the Level 5 course are also conducted in block, more or less at the same time as the Level 4 students are in the settings.

The assessment of skills for students on work placements during the Level 5 course is very similar to the skills expected of Level 4 students especially for students who were following the Higher National Diploma as their introductory course into child care. Assessors ensure that lessons and classroom management are equally adequate for practitioners working with 5 to 7 year olds.

### **Jobsplus (formerly ETC<sup>41</sup>)**

A person attending Jobsplus childcare courses is given a timeframe during which a total of 500 hours placement have to be completed within four to five months. This gives trainees the flexibility to make arrangements with the childcare facility offering the placement and set an individual timetable.

During the work placement, students are expected to achieve the competences listed in the National Occupational Standards (MQC & DSWS 2013) (see section 3.2). With regard to self-evaluation and external evaluation, trainees have to fill in a portfolio, which needs to be countersigned by the Childcare Centre Supervisor/Manager and is evaluated by Jobsplus trainers. Persons mentoring trainees within childcare centres are expected to have at least an MQF Level 4 qualification in childcare. Given that these mentors do not receive any form of remuneration, they decide themselves about the amount of hours needed to supervise trainees as this time might vary depending on trainees' aptitude and activities planned. Notwithstanding this flexibility, the Quality Assurance Unit within Jobsplus conducts physical spot checks at the childcare settings to ensure that trainees are being exposed to different activities to enhance their learning experience as well as to ensure that the trainees are complying with the policies of the childcare setting.

### **Future Focus – MQF Level 4 study programme**

The CACHE Level 3 Diploma for “children and young people’s workforce - social care pathway” includes 360 hours of work placement which are attributed 18 credits. The placement hours are conducted throughout the programme whilst lectures which have a two-hour duration, take place weekly.

For example, the students are expected to support children and young persons in their creative, cognitive and affective development and learning as well as facilitate transition experiences; to respect diversity, equality and inclusion; to follow hygiene and prevention standards, organisational processes and the relevant early years framework; to meet the individual needs of children and young persons; to provide environments within the setting that support and extend children’s development and learning; to engage in positive working relationships with colleagues. They also have the professional responsibility to reflect and evaluate their own performance and prepare a personal development plan.

No information was available about the assessment of the placements or the evaluation conducted by the students although the director of the centre reported that one assessor is responsible for the theoretical component of the programme and another assessor checks the practical component.

### **Future Focus – MQF Level 5 study programme**

The Level 5 programme offered by Future Focus runs for eight months with two hourly lectures each week as well as 100 hours (5 credits) allocated for a work placement. Skills and competences developed through the work placement include being able to: use and develop systems that promote communication, professional development, equality, diversity, equality

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<sup>41</sup> Information supplied by the Department Manager for EU Affairs, Labour Market Analysis & Employers Services Division via email communication on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

and inclusion as well as the wellbeing and the resilience of children and young people; develop health and safety and risk management policies, procedures and practices; work in teams; undertake a research project within the setting; lead and manage a team; develop professional supervision practice; develop procedures and practice to respond to concerns and complaints; contribute to the recruitment process; manage induction; manage finances within their own responsibility; appraise staff performance.

### **Centre for Child Development, Education and Care Studies<sup>42</sup>**

The programme of studies offered by the CDEC and leading to a Level 4 Diploma in Child Care includes 500 hours of mentored and monitored practice. This is a continuous learning process and includes: taking part in the physical care of children; learning from peers; planning, delivering and self-evaluating daily activities conducted with the children; observing children and compiling a 'child study' (report on one specific child). Monitoring during placements is done by the centre manager but the examination and assessment of all components, including the child study, are undertaken by the course tutor.

Students are free to negotiate with centre managers the time of day and hours done per week. Times and days are flexible according to lecture and students' personal needs. Students are not allowed to start practice until the first theoretical part (child development) of the study course is completed. During the second part, students can do some practice on days when there are no lectures. This helps them to practise items learned in class and return to discuss and evaluate findings, but the bulk of the work placement is done when the theoretical parts are over.

### **Minds Malta<sup>43</sup>**

Students were required to carry out two placements, one with babies aged between 0-18 months and one with toddlers aged 18 months-3 years. Hours were divided equally between both placements.

Placements were to take place in a setting approved by the DSWS and started after a few weeks of the course commencing, to give the students some time to familiarise themselves with the course content and allow for personal learning. This helped them link theory to their observations on site. The toddler placement included gifted children and those with additional needs.

During their placements, students were required to keep a logbook to record their observations of what was happening within the centre; the activities and tasks they were involved in; their reflections of their own performance, including their strengths and weaknesses and possible improvements. These two logbooks (one for each placement) accounted for 80% of the marks allocated to the placement. The remaining 20% were assigned on the basis of evaluations by early childhood educators<sup>44</sup> who visited the students during their placements and who observed them interacting with children, their colleagues and the manager. The educators visited the students four times: twice during their first placement and twice during their second placement. Whilst the centre manager was asked to provide feedback about the students' performance, the students were formally assessed during the second and the fourth visit by the early childhood educators. The early childhood educators, who were remunerated for these tasks, provided guidance, mentoring and assessment.

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<sup>42</sup> Information supplied by the Head of the training centre via email on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Information about the placements provided by the Head of the training institute via email 11<sup>th</sup> September 2016. The Diploma which used to be offered by Minds Malta will be offered by a different entity from January 2017.

<sup>44</sup> The early years educators are in possession of a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education. Some participated in the teaching of some credits but did not necessarily have a qualification in supervision or mentoring.

## 5. Continuing professional development (CPD)

For staff working in childcare settings, there are currently no requirements at any stage for any kind of CPD. The setting up and proliferation of childcare settings is a relatively recent phenomenon and to date, most efforts have been to ensure that employees in the sector are in possession of their minimum Level 4 or Level 5 qualification. However, a number of settings do have arrangements in place where staff participate in in-house CPD sessions. This is mostly the case in organisations responsible for managing several settings or in large childcare settings where there are specific coordinators whose duties include overseeing the organisation of the activities.

### CPD in the private sector

Anecdotal reports indicate that one private organisation arranges a one-day CPD session annually which takes place on a weekend and is awarded with a certificate of attendance/participation. Examples of issues which have been dealt with thus far include management issues with emphasis on the relationships with parents; story-telling; play therapy and emotional well-being. This organisation is keen on further investing in its staff and plans to send 30% of their carers abroad for job-shadowing and formal training to improve their knowledge about the Reggio Emilia approach.

In another large privately-run childcare setting, CPD is organised after hours or on Saturdays. Training is conducted in a number of ways:

- 1.5 hours per week for preparation and research for which Childcare Workers are paid;
- 4 to 6 hours per month with training or staff meetings for which Childcare Workers are paid. The meeting is normally divided in two or three components and organised as follows: Part 1: reflecting on procedures where the staff are shown practical case studies collected by the principal/administrator over the week or issues that staff would want to discuss; Part 2: Human resource issues or clarifications; and Part 3: specific subjects or company information as required.
- 4 to 10 hours every three or six months are spent on CPD. The practitioners are not paid for these hours but they are given a certificate of attendance.

### CPD in the State and Church sector

Childcare Workers employed with the 13 state-funded childcare settings managed by the FES have their own CPD sessions. Staff training days are carried out twice yearly. Childcare centres are closed on these two days and all childcare staff (Coordinators and Childcare Workers) are present. Attendance is compulsory. The table below gives an overview of the topics and focuses on staff development activities held over recent years for FES coordinators and carers.

Table 10

Malta: Topics explored during staff training days at FES childcare settings and CPD providers

Topics	Providers
Learning outcomes Sharing of good practice Collaborative learning	
Early childhood language policy Aqra Miegghi/Read with me methodology	National Literacy Agency
Policies and procedures Best practice Teambuilding - outdoor living	Programme Coordinator Childcare Centre Coordinators and Childcare Workers
Manual handling of children Secure attachment Self-help skills	Institute of Health and Safety Childcare Centre Coordinator Occupational Therapist

Topics	Providers
Fire-fighting course	
Emergent literacy	Programme Coordinator
Story-telling techniques	Programme Coordinator
How to apply the National Curriculum Framework to the 0–3 age group	Programme Coordinator
Challenging behaviour in young children	Educational Psychologist
Healthy eating for infants: what, why and how?	
Creativity	
Food handling course	
First aid course	St John’s Ambulance

For staff working within the State and Church kindergarten sectors, professional development/in-service training is regulated by agreements between the Government of Malta and the Malta Union of Teachers (MEYE 2009a, 2009b; MUT 2010) and an *Agreement between the Church Authorities and MUT for teaching grades in Church schools* (2011). The specific CPD framework regulates all ‘school-based teaching staff’ who, in the 2010 agreement are defined as “*Heads of School, Assistant Heads, Heads of Department, Teachers, Instructors, Kindergarten Assistants, Learning Support Assistants and all students’ psycho-social services personnel*” (p. 48). There are compulsory CPD sessions and voluntary ones.

According to the 2010 agreement, professional development obligations for teaching grades are as follows:

- Each school is allocated one afternoon per term during school hours to organise a school development session (staff meeting). On these afternoons, children are dismissed from school at lunch-time rather than staying on as usual for the afternoon hours.
- One day-long School Development Plan (SDP) day dedicated to the review and planning of the school’s SDP. This day is held during the school’s full-days calendar, that is, between October and May. Children do not attend school.
- Three sessions of two hours each after school hours, spread over the scholastic year. These sessions are meant for staff, curriculum and/or school development. They can be organised on a College (group of schools) or individual school basis. Attendance is remunerated at overtime rates.

From the perspective of the Education Directorates and in order to strengthen the schools’ internal quality assurance system, the focus of discussions for the day-long school development plan should be guided by an internal review of the individual schools. The senior management team is expected to present a SWOT<sup>45</sup> analysis to the staff. Together, the teaching staff and management are responsible for developing an action plan in order to prioritise work for the following academic year.

### In-service training

With regard to in-service (INSET) training, practitioners are required to attend in-service training for three working days immediately prior to their reporting for duty in September or immediately following the closure of schools for the summer recess”. These INSET courses last for 12 hours in total during the summer timetable<sup>46</sup>. Until 2015, the overall responsibility for overseeing the CPD sessions rested with the Department of Curriculum Management (DCM) within the DQSE but since the setting up of the Institute for Education (IfE) in January 2016, in-service courses will be organised and co-ordinated by the Institute (2016a, 2016b, 2016c) .

Compulsory sessions generally address specific issues and all practitioners working with a specific age group or subject are expected to attend. These trainings are organised by Education

<sup>45</sup> SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis is a structured planning method that evaluates a project or organisation.

<sup>46</sup> Schools are open from about 8.00a.m./8.30a.m. until 12.00/12.30pm during June, July and September.

Officers. Trainings regarding national innovations, such as the introduction of interactive whiteboards; changes to syllabi and changes to the National Curriculum are also compulsory. They are organised to reach all practitioners in Malta who usually participate in small groups.

Voluntary courses are organised by different entities such as the Institute for Education, in conjunction with the Secretariat for Catholic Education or even at College or school level if organised by Heads of School.

Compulsory and voluntary courses within INSET training are free of charge and participants receive certificates of attendance/participation. Since setting up the Institute for Education, in-service trainings have to be accredited. This implies that participants would be obliged to present an assignment if they are to be awarded a certificate of achievement rather than a certificate of attendance.

INSET specifically targeted for KGAs often are voluntary. The INSET Catalogue for 2014 (DCM, 078/2014) listed for example one voluntary course titled “*Playing to learn ...Learning to Play*”: *Hands-on science adventures for the early years* targeted at KGAs I and KGAs II, and Year 1 and Year 2 teachers. A compulsory course for KGAs was organised in 2015 when the Education Officers (EOs) responsible for the sector drew up a 12-hour course titled “*Emergent literacy in context*”. By the end of the three four-hour sessions, participants were expected to be able to identify the different skills of emergent literacy; be familiar with the different approaches to emergent literacy skills within a context and use different approaches to develop children’s listening and speaking skills. College-based courses held in July and September 2014 also emphasised Literacy: A practical approach; Literacy: A hands-on approach and Effective literacy and language teaching and learning in the early years. The latter 12-hour training had four overall objectives, namely (1) to make the teaching staff more aware of ways that ensure a smoother transition between kindergarten and first grade of primary school; (2) to enable the teaching staff in the Early Years classes to implement the NCF guidelines in a more concrete way; (3) to improve the quality of teaching and learning regarding receptive and productive language skills; (4) to encourage teaching staff to promote creativity and autonomous learning. All KGAs and Year 1 and Year 2 primary school teachers in the College were expected to attend these sessions. Whilst the main topic for each of the three days was different for KGAs and teachers, the organisation of the morning was identical: each training day started with a presentation; activity plans were developed during workshops and in conclusion, working groups presented their activity plans. Effective communication skills and nurturing positive attitudes towards learning, Pre-reading and pre-writing skills and Smooth transitions KG 2 to Year 1 were the three topics for staff working with the under 5s. College-based CPD strengthens the collegiality between and amongst members of staff from different schools.

Since 2013, KGAs hosting student practitioners during their work-place/practice placements, were withdrawn from the classroom for a number of weeks in order to attend training sessions. The DQSE, through the DCM and in collaboration with IfE presented the programme as part of the Early Years on-going reform (DCM 270/2015). The first and last week of the students’ placement were used to enable a smooth transition or ‘handing over’ between the student practitioner and KGA whilst the intervening five weeks were dedicated to the training of KGAs.

According to the timetable for the *Training programme for the Hosting KGII 2015*<sup>47</sup>, over four consecutive weeks participants attended three 1.5-hour sessions daily. Topics/subjects included *Emergent literacy*, to which six sessions were dedicated over three weeks. Every double session on literacy was followed by a tutorial. A whole day was dedicated to other topics like *Healthy Eating* or *Physical activities for the very young*. Moreover, individual sessions were added, e.g. *How children learn* or *Socio-emotional behavioural difficulties*

During any scholastic year, further opportunities for ad hoc voluntary training sessions are supported by the Directorate. In February 2015, a science conference was organised during a

<sup>47</sup> Records available in MEDE Registry files.

weekend (DCM 009/2015) titled *New Perspectives on Early Years and Primary Science Education*. The conference was organised by the DCM as part of the Scientix Project Implementation and sought to engage early years and primary level educators in innovative pedagogical practices based on the Little Scientists' House Programme.

Two initiatives by the National Literacy Agency targeted KGAs, LSAs (Learning Support Assistants) and primary teachers for after-school sessions. One focused on the "Read with Me" (DCM 008/2016) programme, aimed to promote literacy amongst new born to 3-year old children and seeks to train personnel to help and support parents, grandparents and guardians in regularly conducting activities with their children. Another initiative focused on the programme "The Magic of Stories" (DCM 018/2016) with the aim of educating and training participants in presenting stories in an interactive and motivating manner for 4- to 10-year old children.

Heads or Assistant Heads of schools who are responsible for KG classrooms and KGAs are not required to have any specific qualification or training focusing on the early years but can voluntarily attend courses or presentations related to early childhood education and care. For example, as outlined in an invitation extended to Heads of schools across the three sectors (State, Church and Independent), a two day training programme was offered to Assistant Heads who were responsible for Kindergarten. The training was part of the Early Years ongoing reform (DCM 085/2015). Topics included e.g. *Developing fine and gross motor skills* or *Early intervention Strategies*. About 80 Assistant Heads participated.

All members of staff irrespective of whether they are working directly or indirectly with very young children could be eligible to follow undergraduate or post-graduate studies depending on the entry requirements for their chosen programme. For example, the initial three cohorts of students who followed the University of Malta's Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and Care were mostly practitioners working with 3- to 5-year old children in State, Church or Independent schools. KGAs who are employed in the State sector and have been employed with the Ministry for at least two years, can apply for a paid study leave lasting less than one year (MEDE 2016e). Documentation about the programme of studies must accompany the application which needs to be submitted to the appropriate office at least 25 days before the start of the requested study leave period. Successful applicants must agree to serve their organisation for a certain period of time after completion of the studies. (CDRT 2014)

## 6. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing

### Qualification of ECEC staff

Recent national policy reforms and initiatives concerning ECEC staffing have focused on the upskilling and professional development of KGAs and arise from agreements and memoranda of understanding between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers (MEYE 2007, 2009a, 2009b; MUT 2010). These agreements collectively steer a rather gradual and cautious upgrading in the qualifications of the early years workforce; the initiatives are also at different stages of implementation. When state KG settings were introduced in 1975 for 4-year-olds and extended to 3-year-olds in 1988, KGAs were employed on the strengths of their GCE (General Certificate of Education) 'O' level qualifications (EQF Level 3, equivalent to school leaving exam). They received training on the job through short, intensive courses (Education Division files, 1975).

Some 30 years later, the agreements and grade structures for KGI and KG II refer to a **Level 4** 'certificate in education' and a 'certificate in pre-school education' or a 'national diploma in early years' as entry requirements for the respective grades.

As detailed earlier in this report, the assimilation of the older KGAs who had no formal initial professional qualification at the time of their employment into the new grades depended on their years of accumulated service and an established number of hours (210, 140 or 70 hours) of up-skilling. This up-skilling programme, available for all KGAs irrespective of the sector within which they were employed, was organised by MCAST, which is the national entity responsible for vocational education and training. Aspects presented during the 210 hour course included:

- professional development;
- reflective practice and sharing of good practice;
- understanding and promoting children’s development;
- creating positive relationships and promoting children’s rights;
- a stimulating learning environment;
- a practicum; and
- a portfolio.

Successful candidates were given a certificate of achievement.

Another reform which was underway but is now being steered in a different manner relates to a **University qualification** for staff seeking to work with under 5-year olds. One of the recommendations published in the first national policy document for early childhood education (Solars, Attard, Borg, and Craus 2006), concerned the professional qualifications of staff working in the early years. The recommendation was that *Staff directly responsible for a group of 3- to 5-year olds should have a tertiary level qualification* (49).

The Government-MUT Agreements of 2007 and 2010 both include a section titled “Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher” (ECEC teacher). Whilst the 2007 Agreement was drawn up “to facilitate the implementation of an education reform process For All Children to Succeed,” the 2010 Agreement was drawn up “to further facilitate the implementation of an education reform process For All Children to Succeed”. With regard to early childhood education and care, the first agreement identified four major improvements (MEYE 2007, 6-7), the boldest being the introduction of a Level 6 teaching qualification for prospective staff wanting to work with under 5-year olds. Although this measure was to be adopted from scholastic year 2015-2016, it has not been carried forward.

### **Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher<sup>48</sup> (ECEC Teacher)**

With effect from school year 2015-2016, new recruitment of personnel responsible for early childhood education and care were meant to be ECEC Teachers.

*Entry in the grade of ECEC Teacher will be through a public call for applications open to persons: a) Who are in possession of the appropriate education and training in early childhood and care at first Degree level, or a comparable qualification, issued by an institution of higher education duly recognised by the Education Authorities, and b) who are holders of the appropriate Warrant awarded by the Council for the Teaching Profession as provided for in the Education Act. (Govt - MUT 2010 agreement, p. 13)*

Between 2007 and 2009, the B.Ed.(Hons.) in Early Childhood Education and Care was developed by staff at the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta and externally validated before being launched in October 2009. The 180 ECTS programme was offered as a five-year part-time course in order to attract current practitioners seeking to up-grade their professional status. The course was offered for three consecutive years between 2009 and 2011, with the first two groups of graduates successfully completing the programme in 2014 and 2015 respectively. In November 2016, the third evening cohort of students graduated, bringing the total number of graduates with an early years teaching degree to 59. Since 2013, the programme was developed into a four-year full-time course of studies (240 ECTS) and as a daytime course

<sup>48</sup> Referring to early years practitioners as ‘teachers’ implies that they will have the same status and pay parity as qualified teachers working in the primary and secondary schools.

it has served to attract younger cohorts of students. In addition, through an agreement between the Faculty of Education at UM and MCAST, students who had successfully completed a two year full-time Higher National Diploma studies in early years, were eligible to complete 120 ECTS from the 240 ECTS in the B.Ed.(Hons.) programme and graduate with a B.Ed.(Hons.) too. By November 2016, this route yielded another eight students, graduates in early childhood education.

However, the B.Ed.(Hons.) in Early Childhood Education is being phased out as the corresponding programmes which served as initial teacher education routes for prospective primary (5- to 11-year olds) and secondary (11- to 16-year olds) school teachers are being replaced by a post-graduate Master in Teaching and Learning (MLT, 120 ECTS). The two-year full-time, Level 7 MTL came into effect in October 2016. Following discussions, the direction and request from the Ministry was for the development of a B.A. in Early Years for Kindergarten Assistants. Although this is a tertiary level programme (Level 6; 180 ECTS)<sup>49</sup> and as such an improvement over Level 4 qualifications, there are some serious implications of offering a Bachelor's degree in the unfolding, local scenario.

- Whilst initial professional education for prospective teachers who want to work in primary and secondary school, including teaching 5- to 7-year olds, is raised to Level 7, the Level 6 course reinforces the widespread belief that working with under-fives is of an inferior status. The B.Ed. (Hons.) degree for ECEC ensured that graduates with that qualification would have identical status to prospective teachers working in compulsory education.
- From a political and national perspective, any value or attraction of following a B.A. in Early Years is seriously compromised because a Level 4 qualification for KGAs is still sufficient as the **minimum qualification** and this therefore undermines any motivation for securing a Level 6 qualification. Draft documentation of a proposed updated Education Act was available for public feedback in 2016.

## 7. Recent country-specific research relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues

To date, there have been no large scale or national research projects addressing issues relating to the professionalisation or staffing in early childhood education and care in Malta.

## 8. General workforce issues

### 8.1 Remuneration

#### Childcare Workers

Data about salaries paid to Childcare Workers are rather sketchy. Since most of the settings are privately owned, the owner is the person who negotiates the salary with the carers seeking employment. Variations also exist depending on whether the carers are employed full time or part time. Some random requests about remuneration sought from a number of Managers or Child Care Workers employed in different settings yielded the following information: Childcare Workers in private settings earn between 5.50€ and 8.90€ per hour or between 8,500€ and 17,661€ per annum respectively, depending on their years of service and annual increments.

<sup>49</sup> The earlier agreement between the University of Malta & MCAST to accept HND students to join the B.Ed.(Hons.) cohorts will apply to the new three-year B.A.(Hons.) programme. Students who have successfully completed their two year EQF Level 5 studies at MCAST will join the B.A. students for 60 ECTS.

Additional duties (like supervising children in the morning to accommodate the parents' schedules) are usually remunerated separately.

The challenge to recruit and retain qualified Childcare Workers within private childcare settings is set to become stiffer since a new collective agreement between the state funded FES and the Union representing the FES employees has been drawn up. According to this agreement, the salary for Childcare Workers employed at the FES settings started at 16,760€ up to a maximum of 17,870€<sup>50</sup> in 2016.

A second challenge concerns the recruitment of qualified staff, which is experienced by all childcare settings, irrespective of whether these are privately-owned or state funded. Since the qualification for Childcare Workers and Kindergarten Assistants is identical, as soon as Childcare Workers are offered employment as Kindergarten Assistants in the state sector, they evidently choose to work in these settings. The working hours, conditions and salaries are more attractive. KGAs have a long summer<sup>51</sup> and they can therefore take on part-time work, often in summer clubs, summer-school or even helping in childcare settings whilst earning extra money.

### Kindergarten Assistants

The salary<sup>52</sup> for the post of a KG I is pegged at Salary Scale 15, that is 13,163€. With annual increments of 298€ this can progress to a maximum of 14,951€. A Kindergarten Assistant I can progress to Salary Scale 14 (14,036.02€/316.83€ - 15,937.00€) on completion of five years' service and progresses to Salary Scale 13 (14,981€/335.50€ - 16,994€) on completion of a further five years' service.

The salary for the post of a KG II is pegged at Salary Scale 12: 15,972€ per annum, rising by annual increments of 354€ up to a maximum of 18,096€. A Kindergarten Assistant II can progress to Salary Scale 10 (18,127.98€/407.67€ - 20,574.00€) on completion of five years of service and subject to satisfactory performance. Additionally, a Kindergarten Assistant II receives an all-inclusive allowance of 300€ per annum as stipulated in the agreement between the Government of Malta and the MUT (2010).

Kindergarten Assistants have lower salaries than Primary School Teachers. Teachers, who are holders of a B.Ed. (Hons.) as their initial professional studies qualification, enjoy pay parity, irrespective of whether they are teaching in a primary or secondary classroom/school. They start their career at Salary Scale 9 (19,320€, up to a maximum of 22,004€ including 447€ annual increments) and can progress to Scale 7 after 16 years of service (22,043.98€/531.17€ - 25,231.00€). Depending on the grade they are teaching and any special duties, they additionally receive an annual allowance of 600 to 800€.

Deputy Heads and Centre Heads have higher salaries than Primary Teachers and Kindergarten Assistants. The former's salary is pegged at Scale 7 while Centre Heads receive a salary commensurate to Scale 6 (23,600.02€/596.33€ - 27,178.00€).

## 8.2 Full-time and part-time employment

There is no official data about the working conditions for **Childcare Workers** employed in the private sector. Anecdotal information suggests that whilst some are employed on a full-time basis with a 40 hour week, it seems common to have care workers employed on a part-time basis. These could be employed either on so-called reduced hours, working 30 to 39 hours a week or on part-time hours, working 20 to 29 hours a week. Several report that they are in-

<sup>50</sup> Includes increments of €370, awarded annually until maximum of the scale is reached. Salary also includes a Collective Agreement increase for 2016-2018.

<sup>51</sup> School children start their holidays at the beginning of July and resume school around the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of September

<sup>52</sup> The salary figures quoted in this section are taken from documentation supplied by the Public Administration HR Office (PAHRO). The various salary scales and increments over the years are also available in the *Collective Agreement for Employees in the Public Service effective from 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2011 – 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2016*.

formed about the duration of their working day from day to day, depending on the requirements of the service provider and the demand for hours booked by parents. Some settings offer their carers a full-time contract for a 40 hour week employment even if the children are only present for a shorter number of hours. This tends to occur within nurseries attached to large, private schools where child care workers do supervision duties especially where older children stay for extended hours.

In the 13 state-funded childcare settings and in accordance with the agreement between the UHM and FES, Childcare Workers had their work contracts raised from 30 hours to 35 hours in 2015 and increased to 40 hours a week from October 1<sup>st</sup> 2016. Thus Childcare Workers employed with the government have a full-time, indefinite contract.

Both Childcare Workers and service providers are highly aware of the challenging situation facing employment issues. Managers and service providers have complained that they have difficulties in employing qualified Childcare Workers. Whilst most privately-owned childcare settings offer part-time employment, carers naturally prefer to have full-time contracts. Private childcare settings face a major challenge in recruiting qualified staff since the employment contracts and payment offered within the State funded childcare settings are better than what the private sector can offer. State-funded childcare settings offer 40 hour contracts of indefinite employment.

**Kindergarten staff** within State school settings who are employed on a full-time basis, work 5½ hours a day or a 27½ hour week including mid-morning break. This applies from the fourth Monday in September to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> of June and the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, the school working hours are 3¾ hours per day or an 18¾ hours week, including mid-morning break (MUT 2010). However, to date there is no official information about the distribution of full-time and part-time Kindergarten Assistants in private settings.

### 8.3 Staff support measures in the workplace

To date, there are no formal measures available either for induction or for mentoring and supporting newly-qualified staff. This applies to practitioners working in kindergarten settings as well as practitioners in childcare settings.

Discussions about an induction period for newly qualified KGAs have been on-going but there are currently no tangible outcomes. However, within the State sector, Education Officers (EOs) who are responsible for specific Kindergarten classrooms within the ten Colleges, have taken the initiative to support KGAs and the senior management teams. Although there is no structured mentoring support offered, during routine visits, particularly on so-called Confirmation Visits, time is spent with the KGA reflecting on their practice and making suggestions for improvement. Most KGAs appreciate this support and get the necessary changes under way. Time constraints do not allow for regular follow-up but the assistance of the EOs is always provided should further support be sought or required.

Support is also given through publications of documentation which is then distributed to all KGAs in the State sector and sometimes also shared with the practitioners in the non-State sectors.

The 'Extended Training Programme' (ETP – see also *Section 3.1*), initially organised between January and March 2006, had four components. It included 27½ hours allocated for induction; 27½ hours for observation visits; 260 hours of teaching practice experience conducted over 10 consecutive weeks and 15 hours for tutorials with students on Friday afternoons for a total of 330 hours.

The induction week, conducted in the first week of the ETP had four aims: to familiarise participants with some aspects of ECE with the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC); provide further training in early learning strategies; establish a shared language to talk about early years practice; and identify what practitioners do to support and structure children's learning effectively. During induction week, presentations focused on a united approach towards providing a

high quality curriculum; the good practice game; from principles to practice; sessions about Emergent Literacy and Emergent Numeracy; project work; assessing Young Learners; and planning and preparation<sup>53</sup>. During Week 2 of the ETP, students were assigned to classrooms to observe KGAs at work and to facilitate the transition ahead of their taking over the class. Teaching practice was conducted between Week 3 and Week 12 of the ETP. Staff from the Education Division and MCAST visited the students at their placement classrooms for assessment purposes.

Recently, the Education Directorate retained responsibility for the induction component only (which in 2014 and 2015 was allocated 25 hours) whilst MCAST has responsibility for the remaining three components (observation visits, teaching practice and tutorials) which are now delivered as an integral part of the BTEC program. In 2015, the induction component included sessions on Let me Learn, Science, Speech and language Development, Emergent Literacy, Spirituality, ICT, Aqra mieghi (Read with me), Positive Behaviour Strategies, Inclusion, PE, Numeracy, Art, Music and Drama.

The ETP has always been offered exclusively to MCAST students<sup>54</sup>. However, considering that (1) the Education Directorate is responsible for the induction component only; (2) the Directorate sees this as an opportunity of introducing prospective members of staff to policies and expected practices within the State KG classroom; (3) recruitment of KGAs for the State sector incorporates students who would have followed their IPS through entities other than MCAST and (4) in the absence of any formal requirement of induction or mentoring, it seems evident to hypothesise that in the near future, the induction component is developed formally and independently of any IPS provider and becomes compulsory for all new recruits prior to commencing employment within any early years setting. According to the MCAST Principal (personal communication), the ETP will no longer be a requirement for KGAs in the State sector since this was unfairly penalising MCAST students. DES/DQSE will consider transforming this into an induction programme for all newly recruited KGAs.

#### 8.4 Non-contact time

Generally there are no allowances for non-contact time among staff in childcare or kindergarten settings. There are, however, a few exceptions in this regard, predominantly where childcare and/or kindergarten settings are housed within independent schools, where the settings operate on timetables similar to those used at the school. When non-contact time is allocated, the staff is expected to work on the planning of the programme and development of activities. Within private settings, non-contact time tends to amount to 1.5 hours per week. In one of the largest private childcare settings, this time is allocated for quality assurance. This setting engages a part-timer to be with the children whilst the regular staff is planning their work.

Childcare Workers in private settings usually work 20 hours per week in direct contact with the children between 09:00 and 13:00 and have two hours per week for planning. Childcare Workers employed in state funded settings work 40 hours, 10 hours of which are non-contact hours. They are not obliged to spend these hours at the setting.

As illustrated below, the duties expected of Child Care Workers during non-contact time are specified in an appendix of the Union's Agreement (FES-UHM<sup>55</sup>). Besides attending team meetings every three months and monthly meetings with the coordinator these duties include:

- assessing the children for whom they are directly responsible;
- updating the developmental checklist (Meggitt's)<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Documentation available in Registry files (MEDE).

<sup>54</sup> MCAST offers its components of the ETP prior to the second teaching practice placement for cohorts of students, irrespective of whether they are following the MQF Level 4 or Level 5 programme of studies.

<sup>55</sup> Union Haddiema Maghqudin – Voice of the workers

<sup>56</sup> Child care workers at FES settings are expected to complete templates according to the child's age drawn from Caroline Meggitt's developmental checklists.

- developing the objectives to be achieved by the children and planning weekly activities;
- evaluating the activities and seeking ways to improve them;
- drawing up a report on a prescribed template, about each child before s/he progresses to a kindergarten setting;
- proposing actions for improvement of service to be discussed and agreed to with the Co-ordinator during the mentoring time as well as inform other colleagues at the setting;
- seeking professional training in addition to that which is done twice a year, directly by FES.

## 8.5 Staff shortages and recruitment strategies

Service providers claim to have difficulties in employing Child Care Workers with suitable qualifications. The reasons cited for this shortage are associated to better work conditions which are offered for Kindergarten Assistants. Child Care Workers and Kindergarten Assistants are both expected to be in possession of an MQF/EQF Level 4 qualification. Hence, when vacancies arise within KG settings, Child Care Workers understandably see this as an opportunity for a better salary and improved job security. Service providers are resorting to employing foreign childcare workers. This was confirmed through data collection – documentation was available for care workers who were born and/or educated in Spain, Italy, Russia, Hungary, Serbia, the Czech Republic, England, Scotland, Cuba and Honduras. A number of care workers were born in Australia or USA and are potentially returning migrants. In this regard, one issue which is yet to be investigated or discussed concerns language proficiency and communication between foreign care workers and babies, toddlers and parents who are predominantly Maltese and/or English speaking.

## 9. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

There are several challenges which Malta has faced and continues to struggle with in relation to the early years workforce. These include: (1) the required initial professional studies and expected qualification of staff in order to secure employment in early childhood education and care settings; (2) the monitoring and support of practices both during initial professional studies and during employment; (3) the nature and content of CPD activities and (4) recording, maintaining and evaluation of data about settings and services.

### Initial professional studies and required/expected qualification of staff

The primary challenge concerns the level of qualifications which early years educators have or are expected to achieve. This applies to both childcare and kindergarten practitioners and it is a challenge which has hampered the sector ever since services were introduced. In the absence of a well-educated or professional workforce, only very few practitioners can withstand pressures, advocate for children’s rights and make a difference by preparing and creating appropriate learning environments for young children’s benefit and well-being. Whilst it is a well-documented and researched conclusion that highly-qualified staff are better positioned to offer quality services (Yoshikawa et al. 2013; Melhuish 2004; Lowe Vandell & Wolfe 2000), a current consultation document entitled *Bringing Education into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Professions in Education Act* (MEDE 2016d) proposes that individuals will be eligible for a license to practice the profession of a Kindergarten Assistant, if they are in possession of:

*“a qualification in early childhood education at a minimum of Level 4 of the Malta Qualifications Framework and a certificate from a head of school certifying that the applicant has received adequate experience in the profession of kindergarten experience for a period of two years” (p. 9).*

The consultation document with proposals to improve the Education Act fails to address childcare and despite the recent transfer of responsibilities for childcare settings to the Ministry for Education and Employment, there is no mention or reference to childcare workers, service providers or legal requirements with regard to their academic and professional qualifications.

A cursory look through the history of early childhood education in Malta suggests that rather than driven by vision, well-planned policy or strategy, initiatives are taken sporadically and haphazardly without much consideration for the long term implications on the well-being of the children. In the absence of a well-educated workforce, there cannot be any coherent contributions where the early years practitioners themselves could advocate for change and contribute to modifications in practices through a bottom-up approach. On the contrary, in the absence of highly trained staff, the sector will continue to embrace and accept ad hoc practices and policies which are dictated or imposed by administrators and policy makers with little regard to long-term implications or considerations for the immediate impact which decisions and practices will have on children and their overall development. Often decisions are only taken and implemented in order to address imminent or immediate concerns.

By 2014, the call for applications as published in the Malta Government Gazette (2014), specified that apart from being Maltese citizens and “proficient in the Maltese and English languages”, applicants were expected to be in possession of at least a recognised diploma at MQF-Level 4 in Early Childhood Education and Care (p. 8546f).

Ever since kindergartens were set up in the mid-1970s, over the years the need for highly qualified staff has been highlighted repeatedly via internal documentation and discussions within the Directorate of Education at the Ministry as well as echoed in national policy documents. Both kindergarten and childcare sectors developed in the absence of any plan to ensure the gradual development of a highly qualified workforce. This weakness is a reflection of the local, cultural perceptions and expectations about early childhood education and care. At the time when kindergartens were introduced and again, with efforts to extend child care provision, paramount importance was given to the potential increase in the country’s economic activity, the attraction of enticing women into the labour market and consequently the need to employ ‘staff’ in response to the demand for settings and placements to accommodate the children. Whilst efforts were made to ensure the obvious structural and organisational factors were in place, matters impinging on the learning processes, pedagogies, achievements and outcomes for children did not gain attention. The benefits associated with high quality early years provision may have started being addressed gradually, with lots of hindsight and in a rather haphazard manner. Just as the first KGAs received training after they were employed, Childcare Workers are still in the process of earning a minimum qualification whilst already being responsible for young children.

There are further difficulties related to current initial professional studies.

- The content of all the programmes available require a thorough study against expected standards to ensure that students are adequately trained to develop the skills, knowledge and competences corresponding to occupational standards and job descriptions. Employers are to determine whether a programme of studies is appropriate preparation for the personnel to be employed. Because they are not necessarily well-versed in early years’ matters, it is unrealistic to expect them to make correct decisions or even demands about the professionalisation of their prospective employees.
- The work-based components of any IPS are crucial for the students and are a vital learning experience if appropriately supervised and mentored. Currently, there is no programme for mentors who are monitoring, supporting and assessing students during their practicum. Especially in childcare, there seem to be very few appropriately qualified and experienced Supervisors who can follow students and assist them in their professional development.
- In situations where Managers of childcare settings, who may have only minimal understanding or work experience with children, find themselves mentoring and supervising

- students on their work placements, the placement experience can be simply a matter of clocking up hours rather than a real, learning experience.
- In a free market environment where institutions are mushrooming and Level 4 courses addressing early years' matters are increasing, it is difficult for employers to identify initial professional studies of good quality.
  - As long as the minimum entry requirement for IPS attracts students who do not have a high level of education, there are likely to be repercussions for the quality of the service.

### Nature and content of CPD activities

CPD is another challenge which the childcare sector is facing. While both the Childcare Workers and Managers are still working towards achieving an initial qualification related to early years or management and leadership in the sector, CPD is currently unheard of unless individuals take the initiative to follow and attend courses, seminars or conferences. Induction periods, mentoring and support measures urgently need to be addressed to ensure that responsive and sensitive carers start planning and preparing appropriate activities and experiences for children. The documentation available in some of the childcare files however, raises several questions about the appropriate choice of activities or the expectations and understanding about young children's development.

Apart from activities simply being listed without any supporting context, the rationale, sequence, coherence and relevance of such activities for the under three-year olds raises doubts about any real understanding and knowledge of child development, or any in-depth logical, analytical and reflective approach to planning in a manner which addresses children's realities and lived experiences.

Although CPD for Kindergarten Assistants within schools is somewhat more organised, one challenge concerns the direct relevance of the CPD sessions for staff working with kindergarten-aged children. This view has been expressed by several Kindergarten Assistants working in state schools<sup>57</sup> and arises from the dilemma of simply being housed within a primary school on the one hand to belonging and being an integral part of the educational system rather than simply an appendix to the primary school setting on the other hand. The professional development sessions dedicated to discussing and agreeing on action plans which the school sets out for the subsequent scholastic year are driven by the needs of the primary school and its expectations about achievements of older children with the result that several Kindergarten Assistants from different schools are concerned that the focus of their work has shifted to the academic level even before compulsory education begins.

### Monitoring and support of practices both during initial professional studies and during employment

Attempts at a decentralised and more autonomous system may be laudable. College or school-based initiatives within all sectors are to be encouraged and supported as a means of responding to issues which are of immediate relevance to the practitioners. Yet, having an overarching college-based, regional or national plan with clear objectives and targets could contribute to a more thoroughly informed and educated workforce. Sporadic one-off sessions which bring in a host of presenters who can individually conduct excellent sessions on their area of expertise, raising awareness, giving ideas and opportunities to try things are simply not enough to ensure that modifications and adaptations in day-to-day practices will follow or are even interpreted and adopted in a meaningful manner. Any initiative for CPD - whether taken by College Principals, Heads of schools, EOs or even following recommendations of staff members - should be addressed within a wider context of actual practice with children. In the absence of a wider

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<sup>57</sup> Interviews are being conducted with early years' staff as part of a current study focusing on quality issues in early years settings. This research study is funded by Research Innovation and Development Trust (RIDT) within the University of Malta.

strategy or vision, CPD activities risk becoming repetitive, lack coherence and fail to lead to growth, change and development. Ideally, an infrastructure is to be set up to enable and facilitate monitoring and support: it is futile to invite staff to attend CPD and expect participants to rapidly interpret, understand, adopt and adjust their practice and activities without further support, feedback or opportunities to reflect on their practice.

### **Recording, maintaining and evaluation of data about settings and services**

A national system needs to be developed in order to ensure that all members of staff employed in childcare together with their employment history can be easily traced. This implies that upon employment, staff should be bound to provide accurate information about their qualifications as well as be obliged to inform the appropriate sources of their termination and/or engagement of duties elsewhere within the sector. In some instances, although staff lists were available, they were undated and it was thus difficult to determine whether the information was current or outdated. In some instances, the centre's staff list and the list compiled by an assessor differed to a great extent. The same applied to lists of staff's qualifications.

Service providers and other personnel involved in recording data about qualifications need to be instructed and assisted to ensure that information is reported accurately. Although a template prescribed by the DSWS required service providers to distinguish between qualified and unqualified staff, as well as indicate the awarding body, the course title and the MQF level of actual and/or prospective qualifications<sup>58</sup>, service providers did not necessarily complete the form accurately.

### **Concluding remarks**

Discourse about the quality of services provided remains rather shallow. There does not seem to be the political will or national interest to take stock of the situation from a holistic perspective and to address the crucial issues, keeping in mind that the quality of children's development and their learning experiences are of paramount importance and should be central rather than peripheral to any policy decision. Ironically, preventive measures identified to address the high rate of early school leavers in Malta (MEDE 2014) refers to good quality early childhood education and care experiences and recommend, for example, a continuous monitoring of ECEC programmes, provision of an environment that stimulates curiosity, inquisitiveness, creativity and an openness to learning as well as a smooth transition from childcare centres to kindergarten.

Incorrect practices which require modification have to be 'unlearnt' before new behaviours and practices are in place. In an environment where everyone and everything is allowed to flourish, regulating the sector becomes critical.

Raising the profile of the early years workforce is indeed a delicate balancing act: the entry requirements expected when accepting students for initial professional studies; the depth of knowledge and understanding acquired through the IPS; support through induction and mentoring together with opportunities for CPD; employability prospects; decent conditions of work, ensuring that the demand for services is met; and a high turnover of staff are challenges which are interlinked and have to be addressed. Resolving the different aspects satisfactorily requires a well-researched and well thought out policy which puts children as the main beneficiaries at the centre.

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<sup>58</sup> Information requested about prospective qualifications includes the termination date as well as documented evidence that unqualified staff have actually started the programme of studies.



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<http://fcd-us.org/resources/evidence-base-preschool>

## Acknowledgements

Compiling the report<sup>59</sup> was possible with the prompt assistance of many individuals who willingly allowed me access to documentation and patiently replied to several queries which I raised from time to time. To all, thank you very much. Your assistance was invaluable and highly appreciated.

Mr Ian Mifsud – Director General, DQSE

Mr Gaetano Bugeja – Director, Department of Curriculum Management, DQSE

Mr Joseph Micallef – Director, Education Resources, Educational Services Division

Ms Ninette Sammut – Director, Accreditation Unit, DQSE

Dr Jacqueline Vanhear – Director, Quality Assurance Department, DQSE

Mr Stefan Borg – Assistant Director, Accreditation Unit, DQSE

Ms Alexandra Ebejer – Assistant Director, Department of Curriculum Management, DQSE

Mr Joseph Zarb – Principal, Accreditation Unit, DQSE

Mr Lawrence Azzopardi – Education Officer, Secretary to the Council for the Teaching Profession

Ms Catherine Falzon – Education Officer, Education Resources Department

Mr John Cachia-Fearne – Officer at Scale 5, Accreditation Unit, DQSE

Mr Peter Paul Carabott – Service Manager, Education Resources Directorate

Ms Carmen Grech – Education Officer, Training & Professional Development Unit, DQSE

<sup>59</sup> The data were compiled between Jan 2016 and April 2017. The name of individuals listed was accurate at the time data were being collected.

Mr Saviour Grech – Education Officer, Accreditation Unit, DQSE  
Mr Andre' Galea – Education Officer, Accreditation Unit, DQSE  
Ms Josann Ghirxi – Service Manager, Inclusive Education, Education Services Department  
Ms Tania Mangion – Education Officer, Early Years DQSE,  
Mr John Preca – Education Officer, Accreditation Unit, DQSE  
Ms Maria Angela Schembri Meli – Education Officer Early Years, DQSE

Mr Stephen Cachia – Principal, MCAST  
Ms Claire Flores – Deputy Director, Program Management, Institute of Community Services  
Ms Rose Piccinino - Early Years Co-ordinator, Institute of Community Services

Ms Edel Cassar – CEO for the NCFHE  
Mr Kenneth Camilleri – Head, Accreditation Unit, NCFHE

Mrs Rosanne Galea, Managing Director, Future Focus Ltd.  
Mrs Grace Izzo, Head of Centre for Child Development, Education & Care Studies  
Ms Fleur Mifsud Bons – Head, Minds Malta, registered private training institute  
Ms Elizabeth Pisani – CEO for FES  
Ms Suzanne Vassallo – Programme co-ordinator at FES  
Ms Alexia Vella – Department Manager at Jobsplus  
Ms Mariella Vella – Department Manager at Jobsplus

Thanks also go to the College Principals and Heads of state schools for supporting the data collection process as well as several service providers from childcare settings who willingly shared information with me.