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The Director General

Letter Circular

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To: All Heads of Schools (State and Non-State) and Sections
From: Ian Mifsud - Director General (DQSE)
Subject: The Secondary School Certificate & Profile (SSC&P) 2014-15 Onwards

As from scholastic year 2014/15, the percentage weighting assigned to each of the three domains of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) has been revised. This is a result of further reflection on findings and discussions amongst stakeholders on whether the SSC&P is resulting to be a just and fair certification across sectors (State, Church and Independent Schools) giving a true representation of students' achievement. Furthermore considering that the educational journey in compulsory schooling prepares students up to MQF level 3, this shall be reflected in both the overall level of the certificate as well as at an individual subject level.

The revisions are essentially related to the fact that:

1. **Formal Learning is being retained as the only requirement to be awarded an accredited level;**
2. **Non-Formal and Informal Learning may impact only positively in terms of level attainment;**
3. **The SSC&P is being regarded as a Certificate of Accomplishment. Hence the attendance rate will be reported on the SSC&P Transcript but will no longer have an impact on the level being awarded;**
4. **The SSC&P may overall and at individual subject level be up to MQF level 3.**

Table 1 below summarises the percentage weightings being attributed to the respective domains, whilst Table 2 gives details on the percentage required to reach a specific accredited level. Both tables are followed by justifications for the revisions being made and related computations.

Domain	Percentage Weighting
Formal learning	65%
Non-formal learning	20%
Informal learning	15%
Attendance	0%

Table 1 – Percentage Weightings Attributed to Each Domain of Learning

Level	Percentage Required to be Awarded the Level
Not Accredited	29% and less
MQF Level 1	From 30% up to 44%
MQF Level 2	45% up to 64%
MQF Level 3	65% and over
Table 2 - Percentages to be Awarded Accredited Levels	

Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning

Besides the Formal component, it is being reaffirmed that a holistic educational journey is to be enriched by participation in Non-Formal and Informal Learning which may contribute to the consolidation of soft skills and character formation amongst others. Locally, the SSC&P is to date still the only accredited certification which reports and recognises these domains of learning. This strength is being acknowledged and taken in consideration in the revised criteria. Nevertheless, whilst maintaining the three domains of learning as contributors to the SSC&P, the above weighting only retains Formal Learning as the requirement for accession into accredited levels (MQF 1, 2 or 3), whilst the Non-Formal and Informal can only contribute to further enhance the certification but will no longer hinder students from attaining an accredited level. This is grounded in the fact that whether students manage to present recorded participation in Non-Formal and/or Informal or not, has a far greater degree of dependence on third parties (namely carers, parents, teachers, schools and/or registered organisations) rather than on the students themselves. Moreover, in acknowledgment of the fact that students would, by the end of compulsory schooling, have potentially reached MQF 3, this is now being recognised in the SSC&P.

Certification of Accomplishment

Furthermore, it is also being affirmed that the SSC&P is a certification of what the student has managed to accomplish by the end of compulsory schooling. To date, the students' attendance rate at school also had a direct bearing on whether they are awarded the certificate or not (it was a gate-keeping variable). This variable is being removed as any regular absenteeism in compulsory schooling, which is a manifestation of a student's disengagement from formal education, should be, and is being to differing levels of success, addressed as early as possible in a student's experience through preventive and interventive measures, but should not be a variable that penalises an individual on a certification for life.

The following is a brief explanation of each domain:

Attendance: - The attendance of a student is not mandatory to obtain a level in the SSC&P, nor does it have a weighting in the total marks obtained as justified in the introductory paragraph.

Non-formal learning: - Non-formal learning activities are not mandatory to obtain a level.
 - For **2014/15**, students will obtain 20% if they have 3 years or more with at least a Non-Formal activity, 12% if they have at least 3 activities over 2 years, 8% for 2 activities over 2 years, and 4% if they have at least an activity in 1 year.
 - For **2015/16**, 20% will be given only to those students who have 4 years or more with at least a Non-Formal activity. The remaining students will have 4% for each year they have a Non-Formal activity.
 - For **2016/17**, 4% will be given to students for each year in which they have a Non-Formal Activity.

Informal learning: - Informal learning activities are not mandatory to obtain a level.
 - As from **2014/15** onwards, every student will have 5% for every year in which one or more informal activities are carried out (up to a maximum of 15% for 3 separate years or more).

Formal learning: - As from **2014/15**, the acquisition of a level depends on a pass in three core subjects from amongst: English, Maltese, Mathematics and a Science subject (Physics, Chemistry or Biology). The computation of percentages arising out of formal learning is reflected in Table 3 below up to a maximum of 65%.

The 65% assigned to formal learning will be divided as follows:			
	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Core Subjects	38%	27%	18%
Subject 1	9%	6%	4%
Subject 2	9%	6%	4%
Subject 3 and/or more	9%	6%	4%
Total	65%	45%	30%

Table 3 – Percentage Weightings for Formal Learning

Table 4 below, first published in circular CMeLD176/2012, describes the cut-off points for each subject, contributing in the formal learning domain.

Examination Track	Level	Cut-off points
All Track 3 examination papers All other subjects for which there is only one examination paper at form 5	Level 3	55 – 100
	Level 2	40 – 54
	Level 1	25 – 39
	Certificate	0 – 24
All Track 2 examination papers	Level 3	65 – 100
	Level 2	50 – 64
	Level 1	35 – 49
	Certificate	0 – 34
All Track 1 examination papers	Level 1	50 – 100
	Certificate	0 – 49

Table 4 – Cut-Off Points for Formal Learning

In the **core subjects** section:

- i. If a student has more than one science subject, the best one will be considered to add up to the core subjects total. The remaining science subject/s will be taken into consideration when assigning marks for subjects other than the three core.
- ii. When a student presents a medical certificate for one of the four core subjects, the other three core subjects will be considered; if s/he has the necessary passes, s/he will be assigned the relative SSC&P level (1, 2 or 3). If the student has a fail or an absent in one of the other three core subjects, the student will automatically forfeit the SSC&P level.
- iii. If a student has a medical certificate for more than one core subject, 18% of the formal marks will be assigned, based on the remaining core subjects.
- iv. A student will forfeit the global SSC&P level if s/he is medically certified for all core subjects including science subjects, unless specific circumstances necessitate the consideration of the case on an ad hoc basis.
- v. As in iv above, the professional discretion of the Head of School, backed by an evidence-based judgement which may be substantiated whenever required, may be adopted to address specific circumstances on an ad hoc basis. It is strongly recommended that in such circumstances the Head of School liaises with the DQSE for quality assurance purposes.

The last process is **to add the percentages** obtained in each domain of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and refer to **Table 2** to see at what MQF level the SSC&P of the student will be.

This means that if a student obtains level 1 in his core total (i.e. s/he gets a pass in three core subjects all at level 1) AND a level 1 in the extra three subjects, it would lead to a level 1 SSC&P – 30% in all. If such a student also has a high participation in informal and non-formal activities, s/he can still obtain a level 2 or level 3 SSC&P. Similarly, if a student has a pass in three core subjects at level 2 or 3 AND a level 2 or 3 in the extra three subjects, this will add up to a level 2 or 3 SSC&P respectively.

Summary of criteria being used in 2014/15

	2014/15 Criteria
Formal Learning	Required – Max marks to be obtained = 65%
Non-Formal Activities	Not Required - 20% (Max marks): 3 years or more with at least a Non-Formal activity 12%: 3 Non-Formal activities or more spread over 2 years 8%: 2 Non-Formal activities spread over 2 years 4%: only 1 year with Non-Formal activities 0% (Min marks): No Non-Formal activities
Informal Activities	Maximum marks available 15%: 5% will be assigned for each year in which an Informal activity was carried out, up to a maximum of 3 years.
Attendance	Not Required – Attendance percentages will only be inserted in the transcript for record purposes

Summary of changes in criteria for 2014/15

Component	Original criteria	New Criteria
Formal	Required – Max 55%	Required – Max 65%
Non Formal	Required – 30% if Non-Formal activities are spread over 3 years, otherwise No Level	Not Required – 20% (Max): Non-Formal spread over 3 years 12%: 3 Non-Formal or more over 2 years 8%: 2 Non-Formal over 2 years 4%: only 1 year with Non Formal activities 0% (Min): No Non-Formal Activities
Informal	Max 15%: 5% per Year with Informal activities	Max 15%: 5% per Year with Informal activities for a maximum of 3 years
Attendance	Required	Not Required – It will only be inserted in the transcript for record purposes

	Lvl 3 Original	Lvl 3 New	Lvl 2 Original	Lvl 2 New	Lvl 1 Original	Lvl 1 New
Core Subjects	N/A	38%	25%	27%	10%	18%
Subject 1	N/A	9%	10%	6%	5%	4%
Subject 2	N/A	9%	10%	6%	5%	4%
Subject 3 and/or more	N/A	9%	10%	6%	5%	4%
Total	N/A	65%	55%	45%	25%	30%

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