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ReferNet is a network of institutions across Europe representing the 28 Member States, plus Iceland and Norway. The network provides Cedefop with information and analysis on national vocational education and training (VET). ReferNet also disseminates information on European VET and Cedefop's work to stakeholders in the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/networks/refernet>

The thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) systems provided in 'VET in Europe' reports. The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

Thematic perspectives provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

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## 1. Background

High quality vocational education and training (VET) systems can contribute to combatting unemployment, improving labour market integration and fighting social exclusion. Moreover, access to higher education is being made easier and more possible through vocational qualifications as vertical permeability from secondary to tertiary level is on the increase.

However, in many EU member states, parity of esteem between VET and general education is still a faraway objective and participation in VET is still lagging behind general education <sup>(1)</sup>. In most EU countries, general education still enjoys a traditional dominant position and VET continues to be regarded as a 'second best' option.

Evidence is scarce on citizens' perceptions about VET in existing literature, particularly when comparing VET perceptions to views on general education and insights into specific attractiveness factors of VET such as permeability or satisfaction with skills acquired. So, with the aim of providing a richer picture of VET perceptions in Europe suitable to inform VET policy-making, Cedefop launched its first-ever opinion survey in 2016 <sup>(2)</sup>. The opinion survey provides unprecedented data on Europeans' opinions on awareness, attractiveness and effectiveness of VET in Europe.

Given the heterogeneity and variety of VET within and between Member States, the scope of the survey is mostly focused on initial vocational training (IVET) at upper secondary level although there are questions addressing both IVET and CVET.

The survey covers the 28 EU Member States with 35, 646 respondents from different social and demographic groups, aged 15 and over. A multi-stage random (probability) sample design was used, taking into consideration probability proportionality to population size and to population density. The Maltese sample consisted of 761 individuals over 15 years of age, which represented 0.08% of the EU 28 population. In Malta, face-to-face interviews were administered between 1st and 27th June 2016 in people's home and in the appropriate national language. 205 of Maltese respondents had followed or are following general upper secondary while 100 are following or had followed VET. The final report was published in October 2017.

This ReferNet Malta article aims to present a more contextualised interpretation of the survey findings from a Maltese perspective and to single out relevant aspects to the

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<sup>(1)</sup> There is considerable variation of the survey respondents' participation in VET among Member States: ranging from a high 70% in Slovakia, 69% in the Czech Republic and Slovenia and 68% in Croatia to a low 18% in Cyprus, 17% in Portugal and 12% in Ireland.

<sup>(2)</sup> Cedefop (2017). *European public opinion survey in vocational education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No. 62.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/264585>

national situation as compared to the EU average. It provides contextual and complementary information relating to the results of the Cedefop VET opinion survey.

## 2. Introduction

In the foreword to the opinion survey report Calleja, (former Director at Cedefop), writes that opinions matter as much as facts and statistics because people's view on the image, quality outcomes and effectiveness of the provision in vocational education and training (VET) can have a significant impact not only on an individual's education choice but also on policy making <sup>(3)</sup>. Perceptions of the value of VET, its ability to equip people with the right skills, to open employment opportunities after completing it, and to make it possible to access higher education through vocational qualification are crucial elements in establishing VET as an attractive option.

However, there is scarce evidence on citizen's perceptions of VET in EU Member States. What is known for sure is that, in each member State, VET is understood quite differently and takes diverse aspects and forms.

Designed to complement existing European data sources and statistics, this first Cedefop opinion survey on VET in Europe <sup>(4)</sup> aims to provide comparative information on how EU citizens perceive VET in their country. The survey provides an interesting perspective on EU citizens' opinion on awareness, attractiveness, experience and effectiveness of vocational education and training in the EU.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Cedefop (2017). *European public opinion survey in vocational education and training, p1-2*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No. 62. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/264585>

<sup>(4)</sup> In 2012, a European Commission Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2012a) provided a general overview of VET perceptions in Europe. However, it did not compare VET perceptions to views on general education and provided limited insights into specific VET attractiveness factors such as permeability or satisfaction with skills acquired. Through this opinion survey Cedefop aimed at filling this gap and providing a richer picture of VET perceptions in Europe suitable to inform Vet policy-making.

### 3. Awareness, Knowledge and Perceptions of VET

Most EU citizens (86%) reported that they had heard of vocational education and training (VET) before the interview, and this includes 71% who said that they had not only heard of it but also know what it is. In the case of Malta, the awareness level came out unexpectedly much lower with the following percentages: 48% of the respondents said yes, they knew what VET is; 24% saying they had heard about it but did not really know what it was; and another 28% saying that they had not heard about it at all.

Considering that *vocationalism* – understood as the tightening and loosening of the bonds between education and the world of work that coincided closely with the country's economic performance - has had a perennial appeal in Malta given the constant state of fragility and vulnerability of the country's economy <sup>(5)</sup>, these figures come as a surprise.

A first consideration that comes to mind is that both the term *vocational education and training* and the acronym *VET* have been introduced fairly recently in the local educational jargon following the setting up of the leading vocational training college in Malta – the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) in 2000. It seems that its meaning is still unfamiliar, unclear and misleading to most. Locally, the meaning of VET is definitely understood by many if referred to as trade or technical education. The reason being that, prior to the setting up of MCAST, upper secondary vocational pathways were offered in trade schools and technical institutes. The terms *vocational education and training* and the acronym *VET* were not part of the vernacular, and missing in educational publications prior to the year 2000.

There is also a historical reflection to make. The unsuccessful implementation of the innovative changes in the 1970s, aiming at creating a more egalitarian school system in compulsory and further education in Malta, resulted in a strong aversion to educational change, to a preference for stability and stratification rather than any attempt for greater educational justice that might well lead again to chaos. The traumatic legacy of the botched '*comprehensivisation*' attempt of the 70's led to the 1981 counter reform in our education system. For forty years, our education system embraced the academic achievement discourse as the best form of education <sup>(6)</sup>. This trend had emphasised knowledge acquisition to the detriment of a balanced learning spectrum combining knowledge and skills.

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<sup>(5)</sup> Sultana, R. G. (1992). *Education Development and National Development: Historical and Critical Perspectives on Vocational Schooling in Malta*, p. 9. Mireva Publication, Malta.

<sup>(6)</sup> It was only recently, in 2011, that the streaming mechanism in state and church schools was done away with. Selective examinations at the end of primary education were phased out and replaced by the end of primary benchmark assessment. The tripartite system at secondary level was also phased out and replaced by a general secondary schools' network.

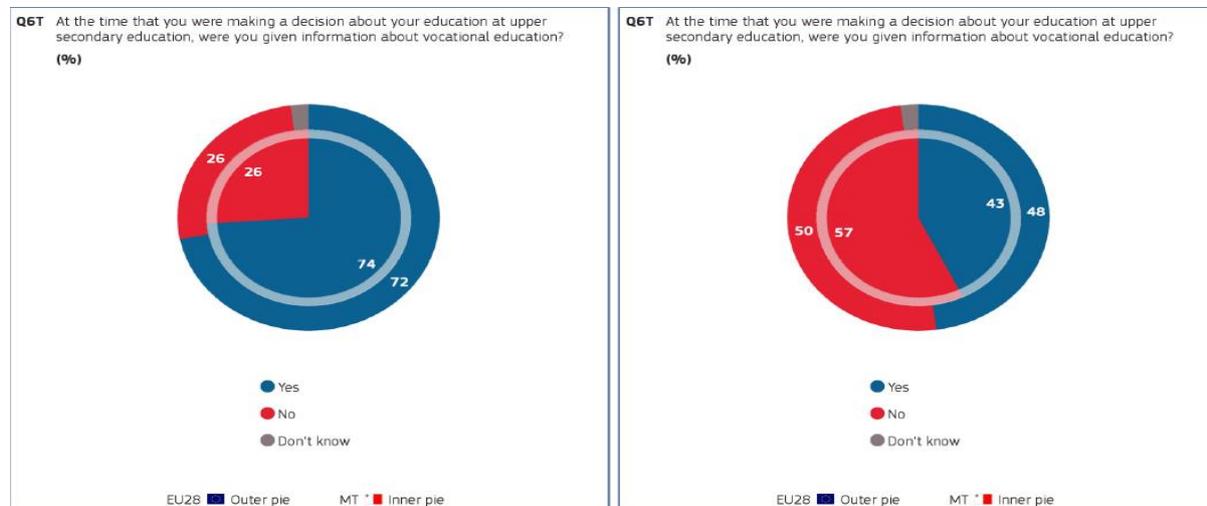
Throughout the first ten years of the new millennium, the need to do away with selectivity and streaming gathered momentum.

The high percentage (67%) of Maltese respondents who reported having had a predominantly general education indicates another contributing factor to their not having an accurate notion of VET in Malta. In a national scenario of an education system that from 1981 till 2000 was almost exclusively based on the academic achievement discourse and on the high status of academic education, those in position to influence Maltese learners – parents, teachers and guidance teachers/career advisors – were generally biased in favour of academic education. Parents encouraged their children to follow the high-status educational stream. Educators, having themselves followed academic pathways and pedagogies, were ill-prepared to offer proper advice about VET pathways. Consequently, their guidance reflected an inaccurate and prejudiced perception of what VET is. Considering the survey data in Figure 1, it is worrying to note that 27% and 57% of the VET and the general education participants respectively are still stating that they had not received any information about vocational education pathways when making a decision about their upper secondary education.

Figure 1.

**Vocational Education Participants**

**General Education Participants**



+

It is to be assumed that, with the ongoing implementation of the career guidance policy for schools<sup>(7)</sup> and recruitment of career guidance professionals in secondary schools, learners would be better informed and prepared about which post-secondary institution they

(7) Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2007). *A Career Guidance Policy and Strategy for Compulsory Schooling in Malta*. Published by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment. Available at: <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/documents/policy%20documents/career%20guidance.pdf>

would be interested to pursue their education in or whether they would prefer to enter the world of work.

The Ministry for Education and Employment has embarked on an ongoing campaign to promote VET as a viable educational pathway leading to prestigious careers and job satisfaction. This includes the introduction of VET subjects as an option in Year 9 (age 13 years) and the upcoming implementation of the *My Journey – Achieving through different paths* <sup>(8)</sup> reform together with the high profile being achieved by MCAST and ITS courses among the economic sectors and the general public. Preconceptions and bias against VET are being eroded as the currency of vocational education and work-based learning continue to increase. VET has become a key factor in enabling the education sector to remain continuously proactive and receptive to the needs of local industry, thus continuing to establish itself more and more as an important player in Malta's economic growth.

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<sup>(8)</sup> MEDE (2016). *My journey: achieving through different paths: equitable, quality education for all*. Floriana, Malta: Ministry for Education and Employment. Available at: <http://www.myjourney.edu.mt/>

#### 4. Attractiveness of VET

The Eurobarometer survey gauged how Europeans in the different EU nations felt about vocational education and training in their countries. The survey shows an overall positive citizen perception of VET and, of all the respondents, the image is perceived as most attractive in Malta. Although Maltese respondents tend to agree with their European counterparts that general education has a more attractive image than VET, 91% of the vocational education participants and even 84% of the general education participants in Malta have a positive view of VET.<sup>(9)</sup> The possible reasons underpinning this positive perception reflect successful policymaking conceived in a trustful environment nurtured along the past twenty years.

The Maltese government is investing heavily in education and in the VET system, with investment increasing in recent years. Public education from early childhood education and care up to tertiary level, including all IVET offered by schools and State providers up to EQF level 6, is funded by the state <sup>(10)</sup>. In recent years, the share of education in total public expenditure has been around three percentage points above the EU-28 average, while education expenditure as a share of GDP (5.6% as compared to 5.0%) has been more than 0.6 percentage points higher than the average (Figure 2). In 2016, general government expenditure on education as a percentage of total public expenditure was 14.1% (EU 28 average 10.2%) and 5.4% as a proportion of GDP (EU-28 average 4.7%). Preliminary estimates indicate that the expenditure on VET in 2017 and 2018 has increased by 56% and 76% respectively over 2016 <sup>(11)</sup>.

Moreover, there was significant progress in key areas with respect to the development of VET.

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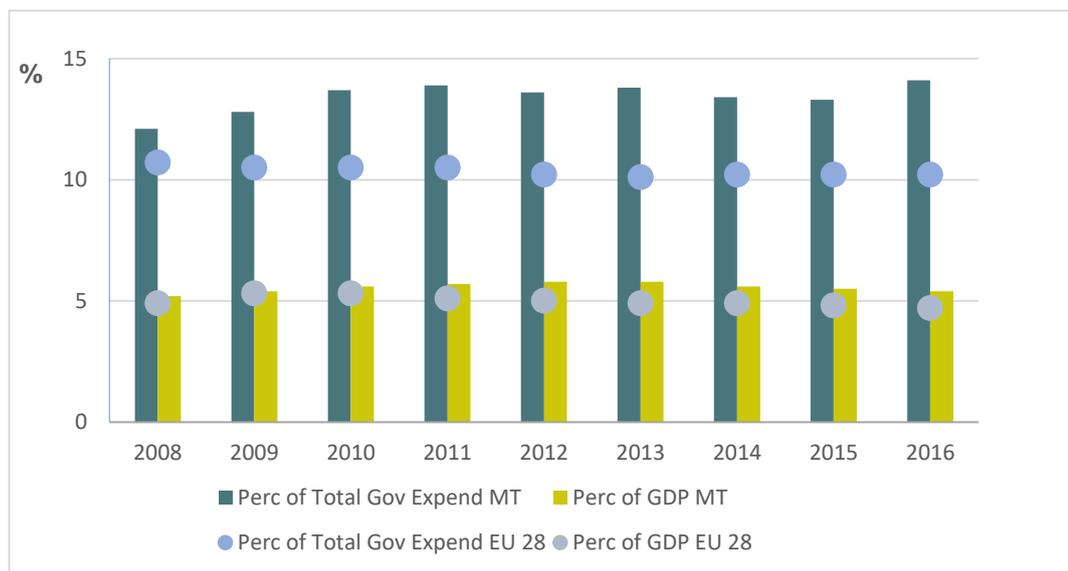
<sup>(9)</sup> In the previous 2011 Eurobarometer requested by the European Commission , 71% of all the respondents considered VET positively. The perception was the most favourable in Malta, with 92% of the Maltese respondents stating they have a very positive view about VET as it offers high quality learning and leads to jobs that are well paid.

<sup>(10)</sup> Church schools do not charge tuition fees, and are subsidised by the state. Tax rebates help parents with children attending independent schools cover the costs.

<sup>(11)</sup> Information on VET expenditure from VET Unit, MEDE 2018

Figure 2.

**Public spending on education**



Source: Eurostat (2018) [gov\\_10a\\_exp](#) [extracted on 10.11.2018].

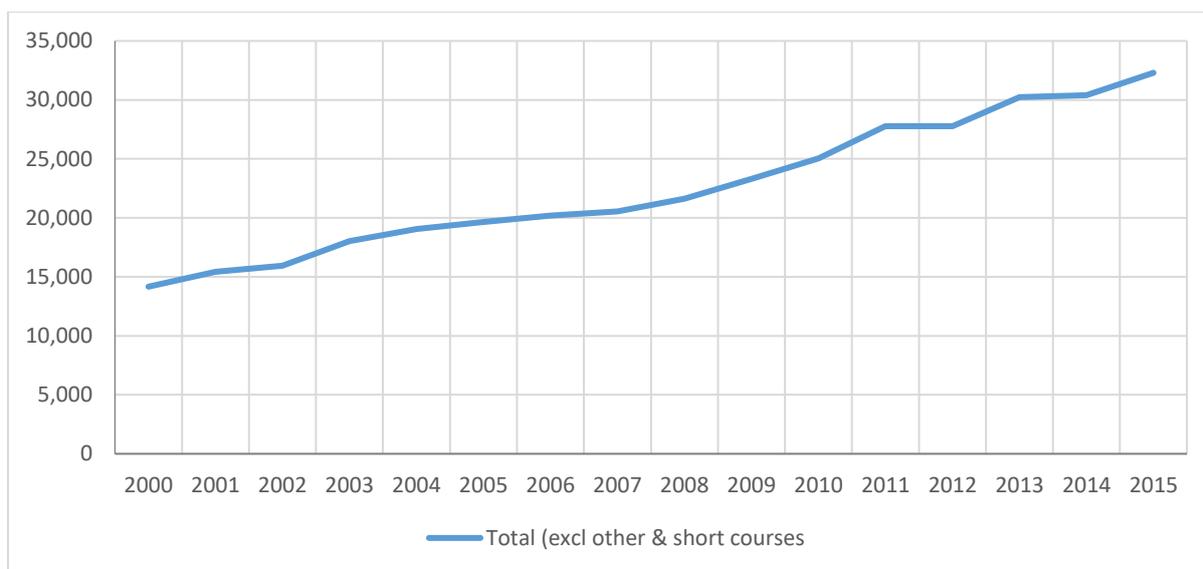
The setting up of the Malta College for Art, Science and Technology (MCAST)<sup>(12)</sup> in 2001 was a definite milestone in boosting vocational education in further and higher education. Subsequently, VET became an increasingly popular option for learners as a progression route after compulsory education, with participation more than tripling since 2000 (Figure 3).

Moreover, in 2013 and then in 2015 the participation in VET exceeded for the first time participation in academic tracks (Figure 4)..

<sup>(12)</sup> Established in 2001, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) is the country's leading vocational education and training institution. <http://mcast.edu.mt>

Figure 3.

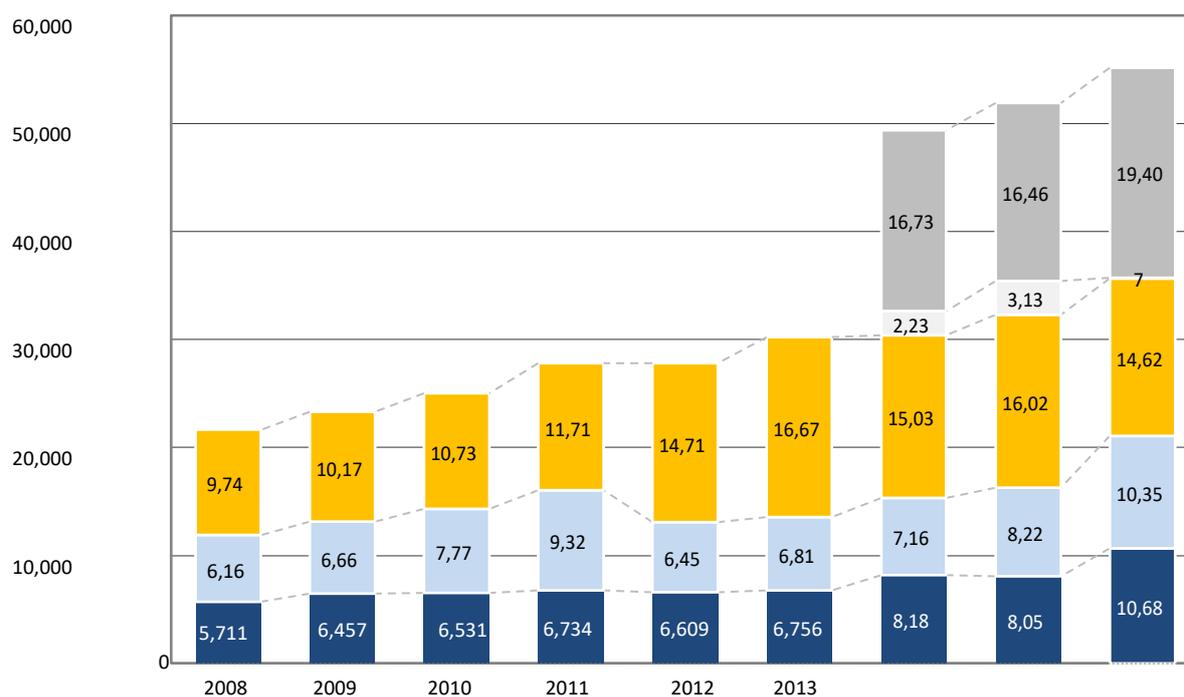
**Total student population following Further and Higher Education in Malta 2000-2015**



(Source: 2000–2005 NSO Education Statistics; 2006–2007 NCHE provisional data; 2008–2015 NCFHE Further and Higher Education Statistics)

Figure 4.

**Total student population following Further and Higher Education in Malta 2008-2016**





\* 'Other' refers to programmes by non-licensed education providers or programmes not accredited locally by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education.

Subsequently, MCAST developed into a VET provider not only of further but also of higher education, thus increasing vertical permeability from secondary to tertiary level. MCAST has now an attractive remit offering an array of full-time and part-time vocational courses ranging from certificates to Master degrees (EQF/MQF Level 1 to Level 7).

In addition, MCAST is the VET institution responsible for governing and managing the apprenticeship system at national level in Malta. The Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act, enacted in March 2018, provides a legal framework for the governance and administration of work-placements, apprenticeships and internships as part of accredited VET programmes. It covers: responsibilities and governance structure; rights and obligations of VET providers, employers and learners; compulsory minimum hours for all forms of work-based learning, linking remuneration to the minimum wage; the use of ECVET/ECTS credits; a single EQF-based qualification; and a training agreement register to support data collection and policy-relevant analysis. An apprentice now has the legal status of a paid employee rather than of an unpaid student. Learners on apprenticeship programmes have the right to an income equivalent to the national minimum wage per hour for the hours spent at the workplace as stipulated in the training programme plan.

At the same time, the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS), the other major VET provider in Malta, also developed from a leading Tourism and Hospitality Institute into a Mediterranean hub of excellence in the provision of studies in the sector <sup>(13)</sup>. Besides offering a vast selection of courses ranging from foundation to degree level, it ensures that students have the opportunity of specialising in areas best suited to their capabilities and interests with work placements in renowned hotels abroad and study periods abroad at distinguished partner Universities and institutions.

Today MCAST and the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) play a key role in creating a highly skilled and dynamic workforce.

So, understandably, rising VET participation coincided with an overall increase in further and higher education participation, from 45% in 2002 to 78% in 2016 (Figure 5) <sup>(14)</sup>.

<sup>(13)</sup> The Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) is an institution of higher education aimed at meeting the changing needs of the Travel, Hospitality and Tourism Industry. With MCAST, it is the second major VET institution in Malta. ITS was established in 1987 and consolidated by the Institute of Tourism Studies Act (2016) of the Laws of Malta. <https://its.edu.mt>

<sup>(14)</sup> NCFHE (2017a). *Further and higher education statistics 2015-16*. Malta, San Gwann: National Commission for Further and Higher Education. Available at:

Figure 5.

**Enrolment of 17 and 19-year-old student population in Further and Higher Education 2008-2016**

Age	Level	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
17	<b>Population:</b>									
	Further	2,138	2,300	2,438	2,480	2,391	2,418	2,360	2,477	2,059
	Further	994	994	1,332	1,473	1,305	1,137	1,196	1,043	1,149
	Higher	13	8	10	13	130	78	58	17	10
	Other							13	28	6
	Short course							209	120	190
	Total students	3,145	3,302	3,780	3,966	3,826	3,633	3,836	3,685	3,414
	Total	5,302	5,474	5,147	4,826	4,613	5,038	4,848	4,670	4,403
	<b>Participation rate:</b>									
	Further	40%	42%	47%	51%	52%	48%	49%	53%	47%
	Further	19%	18%	26%	31%	28%	23%	25%	22%	26%
	Higher	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%
	Other							0%	1%	0%
	Short course							4%	3%	4%
	Total Further	59%	60%	73%	82%	83%	72%	79%	79%	78%
	Others**	41%	40%	27%	18%	17%	28%	21%	21%	22%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>								

\* 'Other' refers to programmes by non-licensed education providers or programmes not accredited locally by the NCFHE.

\*\* 'Others' refers to those persons who are not registered in any of the institutions that participated in the survey.

Besides opening the access to higher education through vocational education, Malta is one of the EU countries that, in recent years, have expanded its VET provision to address more age groups, skills levels and special needs groups. Blended learning has been introduced to make lifelong learning more widely available and flexible for adults who need to combine it with professional and family commitments. The Directorate for Lifelong Learning, Research and Employability plays an important role in awarding scholarships in VET at Master's level.

In addition, VET started to be understood as an integral part of compulsory education resulting in the embedding of IVET as an elective subject stream in mainstream secondary education, at par with other general education options. The need for the introduction of vocational subjects had long been signalled by secondary schools and advocated in a number of local reports and studies. For this purpose, as part of the *National Curriculum Framework for All* (2012) and in line with the *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024* <sup>(15)</sup>, vocational programmes <sup>(16)</sup> were re-introduced in 2015-16 at EQF/MQF levels 2 and 3 – with parity of esteem with the other mainstream subjects - in the final three years of compulsory schooling (ages 14-16). Three years on, almost 40% of all students in secondary schools are opting for vocational subjects <sup>(17)</sup>. The results obtained in the vocational subjects by the cohorts of students completing their compulsory education were quite superior to the grades obtained in the other mainstream subjects. This goes to show how much vocational pedagogy and formative assessment enable students to engage more in learning and try to perform to the best of their abilities.

It is likely that VET is also seen as an interesting education option – *VET as my first choice* – if it allows for flexible pathways. The 2010 Bruges communiqué and the Europe 2020 strategy stress that permeability is a precondition to having modern European education and training systems that encourage lifelong and life-wide learning<sup>(18)</sup>. The Cedefop survey reveals that respondents give mixed views on whether they think it would be easy for someone aged 16 to 18 who had started vocational education to switch to general education. 55% of Maltese respondents -the second highest country percentage after

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<sup>(15)</sup> Ministry for Education and Employment. *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024: Sustaining Foundations, Creating Alternatives, Increasing Employability*. Malta, 2014. Available from: <https://education.gov.mt/strategy/Documents/BOOKLET%20ESM%202014-2024%20ENG%2019-02.pdf>

<sup>(16)</sup> Namely Agribusiness, Engineering Technology, Health and Social Care, Hospitality and Information Technology. As from 2019-20, other VET subjects will be offered, namely Hairdressing and Beauty, Fashion and Textiles, Media Studies and Retailing. The selection of these subjects was informed by industry priorities and labour market needs.

<sup>(17)</sup> Data from the Human Resources Department within MEDE.

<sup>(18)</sup> Cedefop (2017), European public opinion survey on vocational education and training, p.44.

Poland (56%) – think that VET supports flexible learning pathways that allow flexibility between the different education and training subsystems.

Another significant development contributing to the attractiveness of VET was the national further and higher education quality assurance framework <sup>(19)</sup> that covers also formal VET, adult formal learning, work-based learning and the validation of informal and informal learning (VINFL). The framework ensures parity of esteem between further and higher education in terms of internal and external quality standards, leaving sufficient flexibility in terms of procedures so as not to have one-size-fits-all system. This has been achieved by building the framework on the 2014 version of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) enriched by EQAVET-based concepts and grounded in the Quality Cycle.

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<sup>(19)</sup> Available at:  
<https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/Quality%20Assurance/National%20Quality%20Assurance%20Framework%20for%20Further%20and%20Higher%20Education.pdf>

## 5. Experience and Satisfaction

In an EU Newsbreak survey <sup>(20)</sup> on general school experience and satisfaction in Malta, the Maltese respondents, at par with Denmark and Finland, expressed the highest level of satisfaction with the quality of the education system, facilities, staff expertise and professionalism, and the personal attention given.

This outcome tallies with the Cedefop's opinion survey that shows that Maltese students following a VET or general study route are quite satisfied with the education received in terms of general and work-related competencies. 96% of Maltese vocational education respondents – the highest in the EU – said they were very satisfied with the general skills developed at upper secondary education and with work-related skills that they developed. Moreover, 88% were quite satisfied with the quality of teaching and with the available equipment and resources. Overall, students following a general education pathway reported a slightly lower satisfaction with the education received especially in terms of work-related skills in their study programmes.

Figure 6

### Labour market outcomes of VET

Q18 The following statements are about the jobs that people can get after vocational education at upper secondary education. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of them? (%)		
	EU 28 (%)	MT (%)
People in vocational education learn skills that are needed by employers	86	92
Vocational education leads to well paid jobs	61	74
Vocational education leads to jobs that are highly regarded	60	73
Vocational education allows you to find a job quickly after obtaining a diploma or qualification	67	79

When responding to a set of questions linked to the outcomes of VET in relation to employment, most respondents have a positive outlook (Figure 6). Regarding the attractiveness of VET in relation to the demand side of employment, 92% of Maltese respondents – as against 86% of EU28 respondents - agree that employers need the skills acquired by VET graduates. Moreover, more than two-thirds of Maltese respondents agree

<sup>(20)</sup> Newsbreak February 2016. Available at <https://newsbreak.edu.mt/2018/02/06/kif-tikkompara-malta-fl-edukazzjoni-x-xoghol-u-c-childcare/>

that vocational education facilitates entry into the labour market and leads to jobs that are highly regarded and well-paid.

On a general attractiveness index constructed on the percentage of respondents agreeing to the four statements, Malta ranks first on the index with 58% of respondents agreeing to the four statements: “In six Member States, more than half of respondents agree with all four of the statements about vocational education and employment: Malta (58%), Germany (56%), Austria (55%), Cyprus (54%), Poland (53%) and Ireland (52%). The first three of these countries (Germany, Malta and Austria) are notable for being among the highest ranked countries on all four individual statements”<sup>(21)</sup>.

Figure 6

**Career Satisfaction**

<b>Q D15e Overall, how satisfied are you with your professional career? (%)</b>				
	EU 28 (%)	MT (%)	Gen (%)	VET (%)
Very satisfied	29	49	52	58
Fairly satisfied	52	41	42	41
Fairly dissatisfied	12	6	4	-
Very dissatisfied	4	2	2	-
Don't know	3	2		

From among those respondents who completed upper secondary education, practically all VET participants replied that they were satisfied with their career (99%), with participants in general education close behind, at 94%, reporting job satisfaction.

<sup>(21)</sup> Cedefop (2017), European public opinion survey on vocational education and training, p.44.

## 6. Outcomes and Effectiveness

Respondents from the EU generally agree that VET has a positive impact on the economy and employment rate and can help tackle social exclusion.<sup>(22)</sup> The perception on the contribution of VET to society is higher among Maltese respondents than among respondents in the EU 28. Nine out of ten Maltese respondents agree that VET has an important function in society both economically and socially. 94% agree that it strengthens the economy, 91% that it reduces unemployment and 90% that it contributes to social inclusion. This perception is consistent among both VET participants (94%) and general education participants (92%).

Figure 7

### Cedefop Vet opinion survey <sup>(23)</sup>

Respondents agree that (%)		
	EU 28 (%)	MT (%)
VET strengthens the national economy	84%	94%
VET plays an important role in reducing employment	80%	91%
VET helps tackle social exclusion	78%	90%

At 76%, Malta is also one of the majority of EU respondents which agrees that students with low grades are directed towards vocational education.

After the completion of one's education, the next step is to seek employment and start a career. According to EUROSTAT<sup>(24)</sup>, Malta has the highest rate of employment of recent graduates in Europe at 94.5%. This is higher than the ET 2020 benchmark related to the employment rate of recent graduates set at 82%. This is due to a buoyant economy where real GDP growth in 2017 was 6.7%, and is expected to be 5.4% in 2018 <sup>(25)</sup> and

<sup>(22)</sup> Ibid, p. 82, Figure 52.

<sup>(23)</sup> Ibid, p.82, Figure 53.

<sup>(24)</sup> EUROSTAT (2017) "Employment rates of recent graduates" [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment rates of recent graduates \(aged 20%E2%80%9334\)not in education and training, 2017 \(%C2%B9\) \(%25\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment_rates_of_recent_graduates_(aged_20%E2%80%9334)not_in_education_and_training,_2017_(%C2%B9)_(%25).png)

<sup>(25)</sup> European Commission (2019), Autumn 2018 Economic Forecast. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/malta/news/autumn-2018-economic-forecast-sustained-less-dynamic-growth-amid-high-uncertainty-0\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/malta/news/autumn-2018-economic-forecast-sustained-less-dynamic-growth-amid-high-uncertainty-0_en)

around 4.6% in 2019. The unemployment rate in July 2018 was 0.9% of the labour supply <sup>(26)</sup>.

Respondents were asked whether they had difficulty in finding a job after completing their highest level of education and how long did it take them to find their first long-term job. The survey data shows that around 95% of general education participants and around 90% of vocational education participants found a job within a year. This highlights the abundant employment opportunities. VET graduates are very in demand in all areas of the economy.

Respondents were also asked whether they had difficulty finding a job after completing their highest level of education. 82% of all respondents report that they had “never” experienced this, with a higher percentage of participants in general education (85%) than participants in VET (81%) reporting this.

Moreover, 65% of both Maltese VET and general education students said that they had found their first long-term job before or within a month of finishing their studies and another 25% and 30% respectively found a job within a year. This suggests very favourable labour-market availability.

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<sup>(26)</sup> National Statistics Office (NSO); News Release 012/2019, Registered unemployed December 2018. [https://nso.gov.mt/en/News\\_Releases/View\\_by\\_Unit/Unit\\_C2/Labour\\_Market\\_Statistics/Documents/2019/News2019\\_012.pdf](https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_C2/Labour_Market_Statistics/Documents/2019/News2019_012.pdf)

## 7. Main Conclusions and Further Research Studies

The main indications coming out from this survey is that, notwithstanding a certain lingering bias in favour of academic education by those in position of major influence on learners – parents, teachers and guidance teachers - VET is perceived as most attractive and the level of the Maltese learner satisfaction with VET is among the highest in Europe. VET students in Malta are very satisfied with their education and the opportunities it creates for both further education and career development. Moreover, the Maltese have a strong belief that VET strengthens the economy and it plays an important role in reducing unemployment. Both this survey and statistics show that the employment prospects offered by VET are very encouraging.

Today VET features as a central theme in Malta's education policy as outlined in the *Framework for the education strategy for Malta, 2014-24*. The strategy inspires the reform of compulsory secondary education *My Journey – Achieving through different paths* that will be launched in scholastic year 2019-2020 (MEDE, 2016b). The goals of the reform include moving away from a one-size fits-all system to more inclusive and equity-oriented learning programmes. Beyond the core curriculum, students will be able to choose from several educational routes among general, vocational and applied elective subjects.<sup>(27)</sup>

Because of the increasing attractiveness and effectiveness of VET and the steady attainment in the parity of esteem with general education, VET has finally started to be considered as a first choice for learners. Through recent other developments in VET, including legislation about the validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFL)<sup>(28)</sup>, a

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- (<sup>27</sup>) A. General learning programmes fall under the transitional stream, aiming to prepare students to further their studies in general programmes at upper secondary and VET schools
- B. Applied learning programmes provide practical hands-on learning in a dynamic and progressive environment. These fall under the qualification stream that prepares students for work while also offering them opportunities to pursue further education VET programmes at EQF levels 1-3 and progression to EQF level 4 (and possibly higher) level programmes
- C. Vocational learning programmes combine general education with learning basic technical knowledge and skills to meet sectoral skill needs. They fall under both transitional and the qualification streams and allow students to progress to further secondary general and VET programmes or employment

(<sup>28</sup>) Subsidiary legislation 327.432 validation of non-formal and informal learning regulations, (2012). Legal Notice 295 of 2012, as amended by Legal Notice 194 of 2014. Available at: <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=11928&l=1>

vast range of opportunities has been opened to learners and workers to further their education and skills through different learning paths.

We recommend that this survey becomes a regular triennial feature of CEDEFOP work programme. It provides evidence to influence policy making both at the EU level as well as country level. It may be further enhanced by gathering more demographic data of respondents and the possibility of having parents, teachers and employers included in the sample of respondents. One can also formulate a longitudinal study to see how the perceptions of the same respondents change over time. Another aspect that may be included is the impact of the European Commission's VET week activities on the perception of VET.

## 8. List of abbreviations

CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DRLLE	Directorate for research, lifelong learning and employability
ECTS	European credit transfer system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in VET
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESG	The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area
GDP	gross domestic product
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
IVET	initial vocational education and training
MATSEC	Matriculation and Secondary School Certificate
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment
MQF	Malta qualifications framework
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
NSO	National Statistics Office
SEC	Secondary education certificate
VET	Vocational education and training
VINFL	Validation of informal and non-formal learning

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