

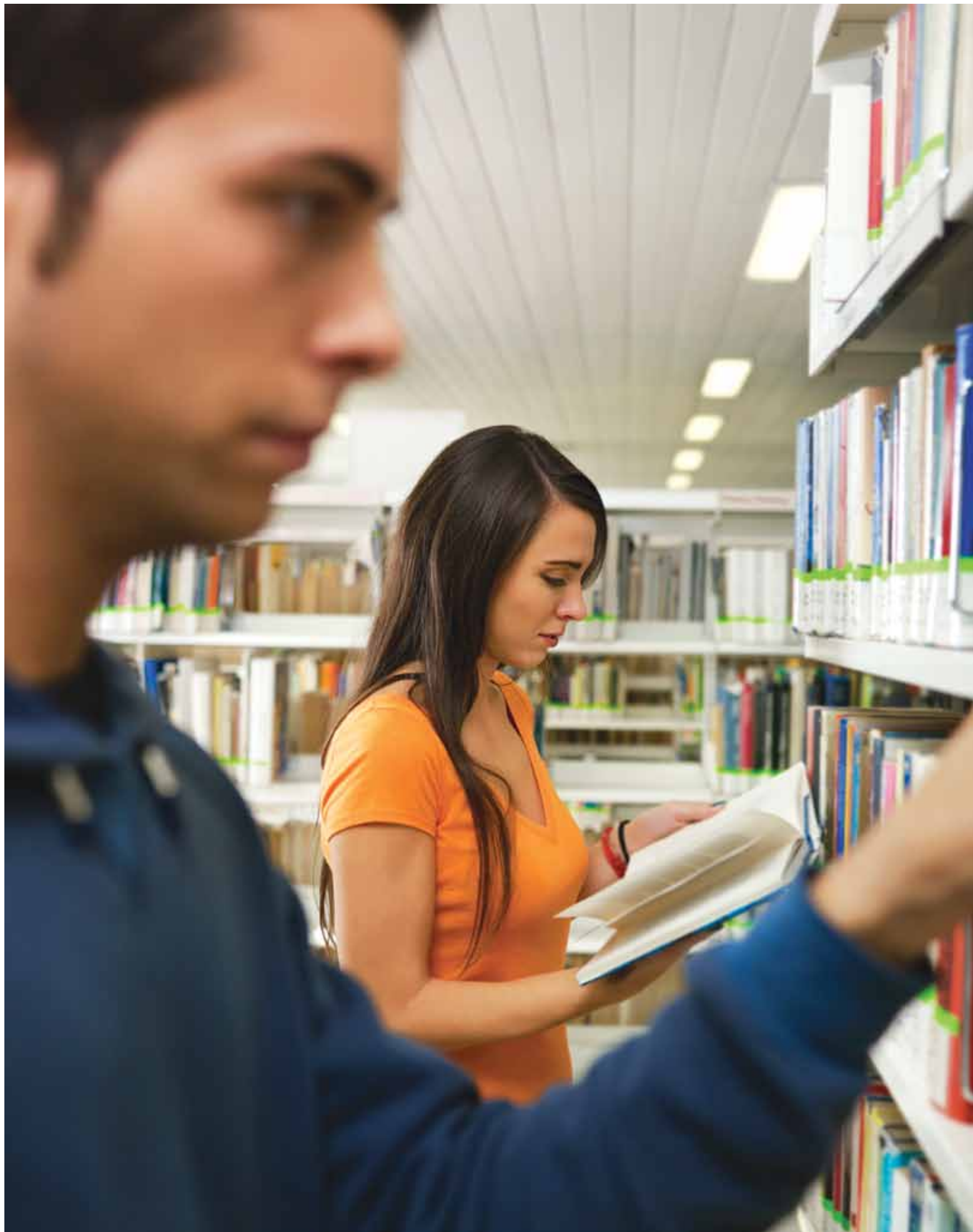
A NATIONAL
LITERACY STRATEGY
FOR ALL IN MALTA AND GOZO
2014-2019





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Ministry for Education and Employment
June 2014





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Minister's Foreword

We consider our efforts to improve levels of literacy to be an important factor in ensuring that everybody feels included in Maltese society. Over one hundred policy measures are being proposed by the National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta so that we continue to ensure that all our children, youths and adults have the opportunity to acquire the competencies required for them to lead fulfilling lives.

Literacy and the acquisition of literacy are complex issues which require a strong commitment from parents, caregivers, highly dedicated professionals and society at large. Our Strategy adopts a lifelong perspective, with a clear priority on the first and early years. It is at this stage that the foundations of literacy, that will influence highly later development, are laid down for each child. The Strategy promotes also lifewide and intergenerational dimensions by supporting the crucial roles of the family and the community in supporting the literacy development of each child.

Our bilingual status is a rich asset for us in many ways, where both Maltese and English are important for us. We need to continue finding ways of strengthening further this status by ensuring that our children and young people have appropriate exposure to both languages. Our educators need to keep developing and fine-tuning their language teaching and learning methods to enthuse their students and to motivate them to learn more, through the use of technology and beyond. More time is to be devoted to actual reading in both Maltese and English as part of the daily school timetable.

We invite you to join us in this highly challenging and ambitious project as we seek to collaborate with various individuals and entities to create a better society!

Evarist Bartolo
Minister for Education and Employment





Executive Summary

The overall purpose of the National Literacy Strategy for All is to promote and enhance lifelong and lifewide, high quality literacy practices among children, youths, adults, third country nationals and persons with learning difficulties. It strives also to improve literacy outcomes, resulting in inclusive practices, higher educational qualifications, and better job prospects.

The National Literacy Strategy for All seeks to:

- Consider literacy as an important element in the field of **social inclusion**. Therefore concrete measures are to be taken in order to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to obtain the skills required for them to participate fully in society.
- Promote a **literate community** which provides opportunities for learners to make sense of their experiences and to make connections with their histories, cultures and communities. Through increased access to books and the language arts **participatory democracy** is strengthened.
- Promote a policy of **bilingualism** and **biliteracy** in Maltese and English.
- Ensure that parents and the class teacher have **a primary role** in the literacy development of the child. The support services in schools should complement the vital work of the classroom teacher.
- **Consolidate and integrate** better existing initiatives and programmes in the field of literacy to ensure increased effectiveness and impact.
- Promote **Balanced Literacy** teaching and learning where the technical aspects of reading and writing are taught in the context of making meaning through text. Balanced literacy is a curricular methodology that integrates various modalities of literacy instruction. Assessment-based planning is at the core of this model. The balanced literacy approach is characterized by explicit skill instruction and the use of authentic texts. Through various modalities, the teacher implements a well-planned comprehensive literacy programme that reflects a gradual release of control, whereby responsibility is gradually shifted from the teacher to the students.



- Promote the **integration of the skills** of oracy, reading and writing.
- Introduce increased opportunities for **Reading Time** in Maltese and English throughout the curriculum, within the frame of reference of the National Curriculum Framework.
- Decisions about **the most appropriate literacy strategies** are to be taken at the school level, that is by those who have the best knowledge about and are closest to the learners. In this regard schools are to receive support from the central services.
- Promote **professional development** opportunities for educators at different levels in literacy learning and teaching.
- Promote the use of new **technologies** in the teaching and learning of literacy.
- Promote **research** studies that will provide a better understanding of literacy practices in Malta and Gozo.
- Promote **literacy awareness** through national initiatives, the media and family-oriented measures.

The main objectives for the **First Years (0-3) are as follows:**

- Recognise the importance of oracy as a precursor to literacy.
- Engage parents and caregivers in the literacy development of their children through programmes which promote story-telling, etc.
- Book-rich environments are to be promoted, especially with learners and families who lack literacy material at home.
- Improve early screening and intervention procedures.
- Provide increased opportunities for the professional development of staff.
- Improve the collaboration in the promotion of literacy among various ministries and agencies.

The main objectives for the Early Years (KG1 to Year 2) are as follows.

- Recognise the importance of oracy as a precursor to literacy.
- Book-rich environments are to be promoted, especially with learners and families who lack literacy material at home.
- Put emphasis on adult/child meaningful dialogue.
- Promote Balanced Literacy teaching and learning.
- Provide extended opportunities for Reading Time across the curriculum.
- Consolidate screening and profiling procedures to ensure timely intervention.
- Parents and caregivers are to receive the necessary support to be able to promote the literacy skills of their children.
- Extend class and school libraries.
- Schools are to have clear policies for the teaching and learning of literacy in Maltese and English.

The main objectives for the Junior Years are as follows:

- Establish College based Literacy Teams involving a Head of Department in Literacy, Literacy support teachers and other support staff.
- All schools are to feature literacy as a priority in their development plan with relevant action plans.
- All schools have the necessary data on which to base their development and action plans.
- Promote Balanced Literacy teaching and learning.
- Provide increased opportunities for Reading Time across the curriculum.
- Disseminate Shared and Guided reading strategies.
- Consolidate screening and profiling procedures to ensure timely intervention.
- Extend class and school libraries.
- Establish procedures to promote dyslexia-friendly schools.

The main objectives for the **Secondary Years are as follows:**

- A Literacy Policy is to be featured in the School Development Plan by the school management team.
- Each school is to assess the situation in literacy and draw up action plans with the support of the literacy team and in consultation with the Education Officers in Maltese, English and Literacy.
- Promote Balanced Literacy teaching and learning.
- Provide increased opportunities for Reading Time across the curriculum.
- Develop a literacy performance portfolio for each student with literacy difficulties.
- Develop further the Alternative Learning Programmes..
- Offer increased opportunities for capacity building and continuous professional development.
- Extend school libraries.
- Establish procedures to promote dyslexia-friendly schools.

The main objectives for **Youths are as follows:**

- Consolidate and extend further current programmes in Basic Skills intended for young people.
- Promote the accreditation of basic skills programmes to ensure their wider recognition for further studies and by employers.
- Ensure that persons with learning difficulties and disabilities are helped to improve their literacy skills through bespoke programmes, also through the use of technology.
- Increase opportunities for the development of embedded learning programmes and other innovative methodologies.
- Promote the organisation of formal and non-formal community literacy programmes in community centres.
- More effective use of new technologies and social networks in the teaching of literacy to young people.

The main objectives for Adults are as follows:

- Increase opportunities for the professional development of adult literacy educators of Maltese and English.
- Promote the development of tools and materials for the teaching of literacy to adults in Maltese and English.
- An efficient and reliable accreditation system for adult Basic skills programmes. Service providers are to be made aware of the benefits of such accreditation.
- Increase opportunities for family literacy programmes.
- Involve further Local Councils and local Libraries in community based strategies for adult literacy.
- Make further provision for Literacy for Employment programmes for unemployed and low- skilled adults.
- Basic skills and literacy programmes are to be offered to prison inmates for better reintegration in society. These may be linked to the parole system in order to encourage increased participation.
- Ensure that persons with learning difficulties and disabilities are helped to improve their literacy skills through bespoke programmes, also through the use of technology.
- Promote training schemes with employers to provide literacy and basic education courses at the workplace.

The main objectives for Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities are as follows:

- Reinforce the three-tiered referral system, involving the class teacher, school-based and external professionals.
- Promote continuing professional development for teaching and support staff in the development of literacy skills.
- A broader spectrum of learning difficulties should be covered by the specific learning difficulties services.
- Promotion of multisensory teaching in the different school subject areas.

- Students with severe literacy difficulties are to be provided with intensive literacy courses over an identified period of time.
- Classroom assistants, who have received basic training in literacy, are to provide support to students who are struggling with literacy under the guidance of teachers and literacy specialists.
- Make provision for training courses for parents/caregivers to enable them to support the literacy development of their children.
- Implement family-friendly measures to enable families to be included in the support and intervention process of children with learning and literacy difficulties.

The main objectives for **Third Country Nationals are as follows:**

- Promote small group language and literacy support classes where students can receive individual attention. In this way they feel comfortable taking risks with the language and literacy skills being taught.
- Promote the teaching of literacy skills in a meaningful context.
- Teaching and support staff involved in the area of teaching literacy to Third Country Nationals are to be provided with continuing professional development opportunities.
- Guidelines and materials for the teaching of Maltese as a second or additional language are to be developed further.
- Book -rich environments are to be promoted, especially with learners and families who lack literacy material at home.

The main objectives for **Digital Literacy are as follows:**

- All stakeholders are to have a shared vision regarding the objectives for the development of language and literacy abilities through the new technologies.
- All the stakeholders in schools are to be involved in all the stages of decision-making regarding the one to one vision to ensure the school has full ownership of the project.

- Professional development programmes for members of the school management team, who are to act as mentors to the teachers involved, are to be organised.
- Colleges and schools are to be supported to adapt the relevant eContent to the literacy needs of their learners.
- Capacity building in eLearning through continuing professional development is to be provided to teachers.
- The eContent made available to schools is to be adapted and graded according to the language and literacy needs of the different learners.
- Parental education sessions are to be offered to parents in order to enable them to assist their children when accessing the relevant e-content from home.
- Pilot projects involving one to one technologies are to be implemented and reviewed.
- The relevant pedagogical, technical and administrative support systems are to be implemented based on the results of the pilot projects.



Introduction

It is the intention of the Maltese government to do its utmost to ensure that every one in Malta and Gozo is provided with the best opportunities to acquire the required literacy skills. This goal will be achieved through a National Literacy Strategy for All and a complementary National Literacy Campaign which will target different sectors of society. The Strategy will be implemented also in the light of recent results obtained by Malta in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)¹ where the mean reading score (477) of Maltese ten year-olds was significantly lower than the international average (500) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2009+)² where the percentage (36.3) of 15 year-olds who were low achievers in reading literacy was significantly higher than the EU average (19.7).

The PIRLS (2011) Malta results in Maltese and English show that students scored higher in tasks that required retrieving information and making straight forward inferences than in tasks that required interpreting, integrating and evaluating information. The language instructional time in a school year in Malta as reported by teachers is 51 hours less than the international average. The time spent reading as part of language instruction in a school year in Malta is the lowest in all countries and is 34 hours less than the international average. The time spent reading across the curriculum, including time spent on reading instruction in a school year in Malta is 42 hours less than the international average. From the PISA (2009+) Malta results it emerged that students attending Area Secondary schools and boys attending Junior Lyceums scored more than 100 points less on the reading literacy scale than their counterparts.

¹ *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2011), Malta Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta.*

² *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2009+) (2013), Malta Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta.*

Defining Literacy

Literacy can be defined as a set of cultivated skills and knowledge that serve as a basis for learning, communication, language use and social interaction³. Literacy ranges from the basic ability to read, write, listen and comprehend, to higher level processing skills where the learner is able to deduce, interpret, monitor and elaborate on what was learnt⁴.

Since the advent of digital media, the definition of literacy has widened and progressed. Digital media forms part of everyday literacy practice through the addition of visuals and animations, as well as the increased amount of information made available through electronic devices⁵. When using digital media it is standard that learners transfer and process information through various means (textual, visual, audio and so on). It is necessary that learners are able to evaluate and manipulate the multimodal means to generate meaning⁶.

Literacy acquisition is not only one of the most important goals of schooling and the highest of academic responsibilities, but it is also the foundation for future learning and participation in society and employment. It also allows access to sources of personal enrichment such as social interaction and cultural activities.

³ New South Wales (NSW). Department of Education and Training (2009). *An Introduction to Quality Literacy Teaching*. Wales.

⁴ Henry, M.K. (2004). *Unlocking Literacy: Effective Decoding & Spelling Instruction*. Maryland: Paul Brookes Publishing co.

⁵ Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the New Media Age*. Routledge: London.

⁶ Wiegel, M, James, C & Gardner, H. (2009). Learning: Peering Backward and Looking Forward in the Digital Era', *International Journal of Learning and Media (IJLM)*, 1 (1).



The Role of Literacy in Personal and Social Development

Literacy is a key element for success in education and at the workplace. The correlation between poverty and literacy is well-established^{7,8}. PIRLS also shows that children from a low socioeconomic status and migration backgrounds are the biggest group among poor readers⁹.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, 1996¹⁰, highlighted the role of literacy in promoting competitiveness and employment, democracy and social cohesion, and addressing poverty. Literacy is essential for the building of a knowledge society and the strengthening of people, families, communities and nations.

Individuals who have higher levels of literacy are rewarded by society. Schools are responsible for the literacy of children and young adults. However, there are many young people who finish school with low levels of literacy, or who are illiterate. There are also adults who are reluctant to read and this limits their participation in society.

Socio-economic factors are seen as major determinants of levels of literacy acquisition. Children coming from families with a lower socio-economic status are likely to lag behind in cognitive and educational performance.

This happens as early as kindergarten¹¹. In Malta, the level of education and the type of occupation of the parents were found to correlate significantly with the level of literacy achievement of their children¹². The National Literacy Strategy for All will address this situation by seeking to reduce as much as possible the number of individuals who are socially excluded because of a lack of or a low level of literacy skills.

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2009). *PISA 2009 Assessment Framework: Key Competencies in Reading, Mathematics and Science*. Paris.

⁸ Bailey, I (2006), Overview of the Adult Literacy System in Ireland and Current Issues in its Implementation, in *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy: volume 6: Connecting Research, Policy, and Practice*, eds J Comings, B Garner, C Smith & N Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, pp.197-240.

⁹ Mullis, I.V.S., Martin, M.O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K.T. (2012). *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011 international results in reading*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College.

¹⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1996), *Lifelong Learning for All*, OECD, Paris.

¹¹ Lee, V.E. & Burkam, D.T. (2002). *Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children begin School*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

¹² Mifsud, C.L., Grech, R., Hutchison, D., Morrison, J., Rudd, P. & Hanson, J., (2004) *Literacy for School Improvement – Value Added for Malta*. Agenda Publishers, Malta.

In the last two decades there has been a large scale movement of people from around the world. Most countries are experiencing high levels of multiculturalism. Many communities are comprised of multilingual groups who may be literate, but not in the language of the country where they reside¹³. In recent years, Malta has experienced an influx of irregular migrants. These third country nationals are faced with cultural and language integration issues. Most of them lack financial means and are unemployed which gives them a low socio-economic status. A number of these third country nationals are school-age children who find themselves entering Maltese schools at different levels¹⁴. The National Literacy Strategy for All should provide the framework for ensuring that third country adults and children are empowered further through the acquisition and development of the required literacy skills.

The National Curriculum Framework for All

In the National Curriculum Framework¹⁵ literacy is identified as a cross-curricular theme and as essential for the education of all students and for achieving the aims of education. The Framework states:

Literacy

Placing Literacy as the first cross-curricular theme highlights the fact that all learning happens primarily through language in its various forms, and that therefore all educators need to see themselves as guarantors of the language mastery required of their learners in their particular area of knowledge. This implies that literacy competence is not only the concern of the Primary class teacher and the language teachers in Secondary school but in fact it is the responsibility of all educators. Additionally, the school community as a whole needs to embrace the primacy of literacy competence: this implies the active involvement of parents and the local community among others (p 37).

¹³ European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) *Act now! Final report: EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹⁴ Vassallo, J. (2013). *The Integration of Third Country Nationals in the Maltese Education System*. Department of Quality and Standards in Education, Ministry for Education and Employment.

¹⁵ Ministry for Education and Employment (2012). *A National Curriculum Framework for All*. Malta: Salesian Press.

The Overriding Principles of the Strategy

In Europe the phenomenon of children who go through the statutory years of schooling without obtaining the basic skills which allow them to move ahead is increasing¹⁶. There is also concern about the long term benefits of intervention programmes and what can be done to ensure that there is not a 'fade out' of effects¹⁷.

The goal in educational intervention is to have lasting effects. How do we structure programmes that produce lasting effects? Empirical evidence points to the need for comprehensive interventions that span multiple years and target key transition points. These should be crucial elements of programmes addressing the learning needs of children¹⁸.

It is necessary to reduce the fragmentation of educational services and literacy programmes. We need to integrate better our strategies and the services being offered in order to achieve a better sense of continuity. Literacy programmes¹⁹ are to be an integral part of or complement the educational programmes in schools.

The National Literacy Strategy for All proposes a number of measures, which should have profound and long-lasting effects for implementation with diverse groups of Maltese society. The current literacy programmes are to be consolidated and extended further in order to ensure increased effectiveness and added value. A number of new measures which will affect different strands of Maltese society are proposed. For the National Literacy Strategy for All to be a success the commitment of government, various ministries, departments and other agencies is required. There is also a need for the involvement of different groups of Maltese society and of every individual.

In order to reach everybody the National Literacy Strategy for All features elements of both lifelong and lifewide education. It also places emphasis on aspects of intergenerational education as espoused by the UNESCO Institute of Education²⁰. This is because of the strong relationship which exists between the levels of literacy of children and the level of education of those who care for them²¹. This should lead to a better integration of the educational programmes offered by schools and other agencies for children, parents and other adults.

¹⁶ European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) *Act Now! Final Report: EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹⁷ Spodek, B., & Saracho, O.N. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of Research on the Education of Young Children*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

¹⁸ Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003). Do You Believe in Magic? What We Can Expect From Early Childhood Intervention Programs. *Social Policy Report*, 17(1), 3-14.

¹⁹ Brooks, G., Giles, K., Harman, J., Kendall, S., Rees, F., & Whittaker, S. (2001) *Assembling the Fragments: A Review of Research in Adult Basic Skills*. National Foundation for Educational Research. London: DfEE.

²⁰ Kaplan, M.S. (2001), *School-Based Intergenerational Programs*. Hamburg, Germany: UNESCO.

²¹ Mifsud, C.L., Grech, R., Hutchison, D., Morrison, J., Rudd, P. & Hanson, J., (2004) *Literacy for School Improvement - Value Added for Malta*. Agenda Publishers, Malta.

Family and Community-based Literacy Programmes

Family literacy programmes are effective in improving both child literacy and parental support skills. They have a greater impact than most educational interventions²². However, it is important that such programmes complement school literacy activities.

Research shows that there are long-term cognitive and non-cognitive gains for disadvantaged children participating in these programmes and long-term returns for society, such as better employment opportunities²³. They are particularly effective when parents are trained to teach specific literacy skills and they have clear guidelines about tasks and techniques²⁴. Such programmes are more effective when they provide parents with training in socio-emotional support skills, and not only in educational support skills²⁵.

Family literacy initiatives are to be run in a way that they complement classroom literacy programmes. This can be achieved by developing a national literacy policy which includes a range of complementary programmes which are targeted to the needs of specific groups. Greater attention needs to be given to the cultural validity of such initiatives, in order to ensure that the needs of low-income families and ethnically diverse target groups are met successfully. These programmes should seek to improve child literacy and socio-emotional development, while also developing the parents' capacity to support their child's reading ability, for example through dialogic reading programmes. The National Literacy Strategy for All will seek to consolidate existing programmes like those run by the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) like NWAR, Klabb Ħilti, Id F'Id, Malta Writing Programme, Klabb Naħla and Klabb Arzella. Existing programmes should be reviewed on an ongoing basis and new initiatives developed.

²² Carpentieri, J., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Litster, J., & Vorhaus, J. (2011) *Family Literacy in Europe: Using Parental Support Initiatives to Enhance Early Literacy Development*. London: NRDC, Institute of Education.

²³ Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç., Sunar, D., Bekman, S., & Cemalcılar, Z. (2005). *Continuing Effects of Early Intervention in Adult Life: Preliminary Findings of Turkish Early Enrichment Project Second Follow Up Study*. Istanbul: Mother Child Education Foundation Publications.

²⁴ Sénéchal, M., & Young, L. (2008). The Effect of Family Literacy Interventions on Children's Acquisition of Reading from Kindergarten to Grade 3: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 880-907.

²⁵ Desforges, C. & Abouchar, A. (2003). *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustments: A Literature Review*. London: DfES.



School Literacy Programmes

Teachers, heads of schools and principals are to be empowered to plan and implement their own projects to provide literacy support to individual students who may require it. This is to be achieved through the award of grants for projects proposed by schools.

National Initiatives

The National Literacy Strategy for All will seek to consolidate current national programmes. In recent months a number of initiatives have been launched:

The Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me programme seeks to promote literacy education in the crucial first years (0-3). It will provide regular, interactive and fun sessions in literacy and numeracy for children and their parents/caregivers.

Mobilising home and classroom libraries: This is a drive to equip classroom libraries in primary schools with appealing and attractive readers in Maltese and English. It is envisaged that through a related national campaign, parents and caregivers are encouraged to engage in shared reading with their children. There is a direct link between the availability of books, especially at home and levels of literacy ²⁶.

Reading Ambassadors: The Ministry for Education has appointed a number of local personalities who will be promoting reading in schools through organised events involving different classrooms. These personalities will be sharing their experiences of reading and seeking to act as role models to inculcate positive attitudes towards reading.

Alternative Learning Programmes (ALP): These programmes are intended for secondary school students who require additional support and for school leavers who do not aspire to sit for the Secondary Education Certificate examinations. It provides these students, who are in their final year of compulsory education, with an alternative educational programme which features Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) Level 1 training courses in vocational subjects. Courses in Basic Skills in Maltese, English and Mathematics are also offered to these students.

Reading Champions and Reading Buddies programmes in schools. It is intended that these programmes are run in schools and summer schools to encourage children and teenagers to inspire others to read.

It is important that programmes are reviewed and evaluated on an on-going basis.

²⁶ European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) *Act Now! Final Report: EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

The National Literacy Strategy Framework

	Formal Education	Non-formal Education	Additional measures
The First Years		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family support - Health screening - Child Development and Assessment Unit (CDAU) - Child Care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination among the health, education and social services authorities. - Shared Reading programmes - Book-rich environments
The Early Years Cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balanced Literacy teaching and learning - Increased Reading Time. - Guided Reading - Shared Reading - Baseline Assessment - Core Competencies Extended Profiling system - Early Intervention - Oracy Programme - Complementary Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family Literacy programmes - After-school programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Book-rich environments - Better resourced classroom Libraries
The Junior Years Cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balanced Literacy teaching and learning - Increased Reading Time. - Guided Reading - Shared Reading - Core Competences Strategy - Literacy Intervention - Oracy Programme - Complementary Education - School Initiated Action Plans (SIAPs) - Assessment for Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family Literacy programmes - After-school Literacy programmes - Malta Writing Programme (MWP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Book-rich environments - Better resourced classroom Libraries

	Formal Education	Non-formal Education	Additional measures
The Secondary Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balanced Literacy teaching and learning - Increased Reading Time. - Adolescent Literacy - Core Curriculum Programme - Specific School Literacy programmes - Reading clubs - Assessment for Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic Skills courses in Youth and Community Centres - courses run by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth literacy - Literacy for Employment - Strengthening the connection between learning and work - Better resourced local and public Libraries
Transition from Secondary education to Higher Education, training or work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embedded literacy programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link programmes for transition from Secondary to Higher Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening the connection between learning and work
Youths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic Skills programmes for young people - Embedded literacy programmes - Employment and Training Cooperation(ETC) courses - Malta College for Arts Science and Technology(MCAST) courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic Skills courses in Youth and Community Centres - courses run by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Youth literacy - Literacy for Employment - Strengthening the connection between learning and work - Better resourced local and public Libraries
Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adult Education courses - Embedded literacy programmes - Employment and Training Cooperation (ETC) programmes - Local Council programmes - Access Centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic Skills courses in Community Centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literacy for Employment - Strengthening the connection between learning and work - Better resourced local and public Libraries

The Structure of the National Literacy Strategy for All

The National Literacy Strategy for All describes the various strategies employed throughout the Maltese formal and non-formal educational systems and beyond to enable children, young people and adults to acquire the necessary literacy skills.

Children and young people are expected to become accomplished in oracy, reading and writing across the curriculum. The focus is on the learners' acquisition of and ability to apply the skills and concepts they have learnt to complete realistic tasks appropriate for their stage of development.

The National Literacy Strategy for All seeks to make explicit the various measures and strategies employed at different levels and across a number of situations. This should allow for better coordination and integration of strategies to ensure increased effectiveness.

A Bilingual Policy

One of the essential elements of a bilingual country is the ability of its people to switch easily between languages. This capability is valuable because it allows people in Malta, wherever possible, access to both Maltese and English and other languages. Such a policy enables also access to a wide and varied linguistic heritage and provides learners in Malta with a head start in literacy skills that can be further developed and applied to European and world languages. Increasingly we need to refer to plurilingual individuals, as promoted by the Council of Europe²⁷, who have competence in more than one language and can switch between languages, according to circumstances.

An early start in language learning is essential for young children to gain appropriate levels of competence²⁸ and for shaping children's overall progress. It means that learning can take place over a longer period, ensuring more permanent results in language learning and an enhanced capacity to learn languages²⁹.

Some concern has been shown that a child exposed to more than one language may become confused and mix them up, inhibiting their language development process. This should not happen if there are favourable circumstances. Research has shown that children tend to transfer into the second/foreign language the concepts and terms they have learned through their first language/mother tongue, stimulating cognitive competences³⁰.

²⁷ Council of Europe (2007). *From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education* Language Policy Division, Strasbourg.

²⁸ Johnstone R (2002), *Addressing 'the age factor': Some implications for languages policy*, Council of Europe, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/JohnstoneEN.pdf>

²⁹ European Commission (2011), *European Strategy Framework for Education and Training. Language Learning at Pre-primary School Level: Making it Efficient and Sustainable – A Policy Handbook*, Brussels. http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/ellpwp_en.pdf

³⁰ Edelenbos, P, Johnstone, R, Kubanek, A. *The Main Pedagogical Principles Underlying the Teaching of Languages to Very Young Learners*, European Commission, 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/doc/young_en.pdf

In early language learning we need to consider issues of equity, quality, consistency and continuity. In order to ensure that these are in place, the appropriate pedagogical processes are to be adopted. These processes need to be age-specific, sound and measurable. Language immersion can help children to acquire language spontaneously. Language learning methods to be adopted may include **Language Exposure** where students are immersed in the target language, **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)** where the second language is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of nonlanguage content, and **Language Tandems** where different staff use different languages. This is usually based on the 'one person-one language' principle.

The National Literacy Strategy for All focuses on the range of literacy skills required to ensure competence in Maltese and English. In order to develop dual literacy skills, where learners can switch freely between the Maltese and English languages, learners need to be provided with specific learning opportunities that will help to ensure proficiency in both languages. They should also have access to learning materials in both languages to engage in meaningful tasks and within a range of subject-specific contexts as appropriate. The National Literacy Strategy for All supports dual literacy and seeks to ensure that it is fully embedded within the education system in Malta.

Gender Considerations

In the PISA 2009+ ³¹ study, Malta had by far the largest scale point difference between girls and boys, with a difference of 72 scale points compared to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 39 scale points. In the PIRLS 2011 ³² study, girls in Malta scored 18 scale points more than boys on the English test and 25 scale points more than boys on the Maltese test.

This strategy is not gender neutral. The gender mainstreaming of such a strategy is important to ensure equity and increased effectiveness. Gender desegregated data should allow us to identify the different issues boys and girls contend with, in the field of literacy. Interventions are to be targeted accordingly.

³¹ Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2009+) (2013), Malta Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta.

³² *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS, 2011), Malta Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta.

The Consultation Process

The National Literacy Strategy Framework for All was launched in May 2013 for wider consultation. Interested parties and the general public were invited to write in with their feedback to a designated email address. Concurrently with this, eight consultative working groups were appointed by the Minister for Education. Each working group was tasked with identifying the state of play in their specific area. They were then asked to specify relevant issues and make relevant recommendations according to a specific remit by the end of July 2013.

The consultative working groups were asked to provide:

- a presentation of the current situation with regard to literacy.
- a consideration of some literacy issues which may be of concern and which may require action.
- a strategy with clear objectives for the formulation of plans of action for literacy.

Specific consideration was to be given to the following:

- integrating the skills of oracy, reading and writing.
- a policy of bilingualism with dual literacy in Maltese and English.
- increased opportunities for Reading Time in Maltese and English were to be promoted throughout the curriculum, within the frame of reference of the National Curriculum Framework 2012.

The consultative working groups dealt with the following areas:

- 1 The First and Early Years.
- 2 The Junior Years.
- 3 The Secondary Years.
- 4 Youths
- 5 Adults
- 6 Specific Learning Difficulties and Disabilities.
- 7 Third Country Nationals.
- 8 Digital Literacy

The proposed National Literacy Strategy for All is based on the work of the consultative working groups, the feedback received from the stakeholders and the general public, and general policy and implementation considerations. In the first place a draft National Literacy Strategy for All will be produced for wider consultation.

The Implementation Process

Following the finalisation of the National Literacy Strategy for All a number of action plans are to be formulated to ensure the implementation of the various policy objectives. These will be drawn up by the various departments and agencies responsible for their respective sectors.

The First Years

Literacy acquisition starts from birth. There needs to be an increased focus on literacy in the first years (0 to 3 years) and this is to feature more highly on the Maltese educational agenda. It has long been established that early achievement in literacy plays a crucial role in determining future success in schooling³³.

Early literacy achievement is associated also with lower rates of early school leaving. Parental involvement programmes should have a strong early literacy component that guides parents and caregivers in providing early literacy experiences at home³⁴. Early childhood educators need to promote and enhance perceptions of literacy attitudes and knowledge³⁵. This can be achieved by supporting parents and caregivers in providing integrated, stimulating activities and positive literacy experiences at home and beyond.

Situational factors, such as socio-economic status, limited language proficiency, learning difficulties or disabilities, and parents or caregivers who have themselves experienced reading difficulties, may prevent children from gaining the appropriate experiences that encourage learning^{36,37}. On a national basis there is a need for a collaborative effort by relevant ministries, Local Councils, Public Libraries, early years professionals and the media to seek to raise public awareness of the importance of literacy acquisition in the first years.

³³ Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.). (2009). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth to Age 8*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children Literacy Panel. Retrieved October 11, 2013, from <http://www.nifl.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf>.

³⁴ Strickland, D.S. & Riley-Ayers, S. (2006). *Early Literacy: Policy and Practice in the Preschool Years*. Rutgers: New Brunswick.

³⁵ Neuman, S., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

³⁶ National Center for Family Literacy. (2008). *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*.

³⁷ Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

This section makes recommendations for the provision of enriching literacy opportunities for babies and toddlers, and parents and caregivers to bring about increased levels of literacy within a whole generation. This can be achieved by promoting early learning standards and consolidating early screening mechanisms. Improved standards may be achieved through an increased investment in parental education and efforts to nurture rich literacy environments in homes and within the community.

The Policy recommends that:

- 1 The role of oracy should be recognised clearly and opportunities for adult-child meaningful dialogue are to be promoted.
- 2 There is promotion of the engagement of parents and those who have the care of children in the literacy education of children, like the Aqra Miegħi/Read with Me programme. There should be better coordination of school and family literacy programmes run by other agencies.
- 3 There is promotion of national initiatives and schemes to ensure that as many families with young children as possible have a library at home
- 4 There is improvement in the quality of the provision of early childhood education through pre-service and continuing professional development of the educators.
- 5 There is better coordination of early screening procedures to ensure appropriate intervention by multidisciplinary teams. Increased inter-ministerial collaboration is to facilitate this.
- 6 We embark on national and popular initiatives for the promotion of effective literacy practices in homes with a specific focus on the importance of parent/adult-child meaningful dialogue through parental education programmes and the media.
- 7 There is better integration of the efforts to promote literacy in the first years through enhanced collaboration by various ministries.



The Early Years

In the Early Years (ages 4-6), literacy is nurtured by generating the initial skills and knowledge used in oracy, reading, writing and language. Cognitive and linguistic proficiency become apparent and as early as age five, differences in literacy performance between children are evident³⁸. During the early years, children move from optional education to compulsory education where informal teaching methods become formal instruction³⁹. Children begin to link the literacy awareness that they obtained in the preschool years to basic written and spoken language. Letter sounds are gradually blended to create simple words. Learning strategies and associations take place. There is an initial understanding that what was learnt previously is related to future learning⁴⁰.

Parental involvement in the early years is seen as an essential criterion for successful literacy development. Parents and early childhood educators need to surround their children with enriched learning environments where literacy exposure is promoted and broadened.

For these requirements to be implemented a number of policies need to be present. There is a need for parental education and the continuing professional development of early childhood educators. Further research is required to understand better the implications that bilingualism has on early literacy development in Malta. Furthermore opportunities for school improvement, methods for initial screening, and guiding principles for literacy learning for educators and parents are to be given priority.

The Policy recommends that:

- 8 The role of oracy should be recognised clearly and opportunities for adult-child meaningful dialogue are to be promoted.
- 9 Promote Balanced Literacy teaching and learning where the technical aspects of reading and writing are taught in the context of making meaning through text.
- 10 There should be increased opportunities for Reading Time in Maltese and English across the curriculum.
- 11 Screening and profiling procedures to ensure appropriate intervention by class and complementary teachers and other support specialists are to be developed further.

³⁸ Entwisle, D. R., & Alexander K. L. (1993). Entry into School: The Beginning School Transition and Educational Stratification in the United States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19(1), 401-423.

³⁹ National Institute for Literacy (2006). *The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study*. Retrieved October 11th from <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/ECLS.html>.

⁴⁰ Tabors, P.O. & Snow, C.E. (2003). Young Bilingual Children and Early Literacy Development. In S.B. Neuman & D.K. Dickinson (Eds), *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*. New York: Guilford Press.

- 12 The role of for class libraries is strengthened and better provision is made for them.
- 13 The issue of improved standards of literacy in Maltese and English should be the concern of parents, those who have the care of children, and schools. The development of literacy should be perceived as a priority area by teachers, school management teams, college principals and education officers.
- 14 Each school should establish clear policies for the teaching of literacy for Maltese and English through the support of Literacy Support Teachers, Heads of Department of Literacy, Maltese and English, and Education Officers for the Early Years, Literacy, Maltese and English.
- 15 There needs to be a better understanding of the acquisition processes of Maltese and English and the teaching and learning strategies for the two languages in the early years. There are to be increased opportunities for research in these areas to guide relevant policies with specific emphasis on gender differences, etc.
- 16 There are to be opportunities for capacity-building and continuing professional development in literacy for all stakeholders.

The Junior Years

In the Junior years, specific areas of literacy learning are introduced. Students learn comprehension strategies, grammar, vocabulary acquisition, reading fluency and spelling patterns⁴¹. The inability to acquire basic literacy skills in the junior years generates problems for the mastering of future learning in the secondary years. The primary schools should guarantee that all students make the necessary progress by screening and supporting those who are at risk of falling behind. It is critical that all teachers in the junior years are trained in literacy so as to be able to obtain an essential insight into students' competences, learning styles, interests, and learning requirements⁴².

For effective literacy learning to take place, school standards and policies for literacy need to be planned and implemented. The accomplishment of specific targets, appropriate resource allocation, specialised staff, curriculum content, and professional development should be priorities. There is also a need to promote a team effort, requiring the support of educators at all grade levels, school management, support and complementary staff, parents, and members of the wider community.

⁴¹ Literacy for Learning (2004): *The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4-6 in Ontario*. Retrieved 15th October 2013 from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/literacy/panel/literacy.pdf>.

⁴² Loudon, W., Rohl, M., Barratt Pugh, C., Brown, C., Cairney, T., Elderfield, J., House, H., Meiers, M., Rivalland, J. & Rowe, K. (2005) *In Teachers' Hands: Effective Literacy Teaching Practices in the Early Years of Schooling*; Monitoring Learning. Retrieved 15th October, 2013 from http://research.acer.edu.au/monitoring_learning/2

This section makes recommendations for a literacy policy in the junior years, where literacy is taught in a supportive and stimulating environment. The overriding objective is that literacy is endorsed by parents, members of the school staff and the community and promoted throughout the lives of children and the curriculum. This National Strategy for All seeks to build upon, consolidate and extend further the National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education (2009). That Policy laid emphasis on the early identification of literacy difficulties and the provision of relevant intervention and support⁴³.

The Policy recommends that:

- 17 In the state sector, Literacy Teams composed of class teachers, complementary and literacy support teachers, are to be set up within each College and led by a head of department in charge of literacy in consultation with the Education Officers for Maltese, English and Literacy.
- 18 These Literacy Teams shall use the Literacy Handbook procedures as their point of departure, but shall be at liberty to seek alternative ways of reaching their literacy targets. Learners with literacy difficulties are to be identified by the end of Year 3 by the schools. Plans to address this situation effectively as a matter of priority are to be made explicit and should form part of the School Development Plan (SDP).
- 19 State schools shall have available the following data sources with respect to literacy performance so as to inform their School Development Plan process:
 - the yearly Year 3 Literacy Competence Assessment.
 - annual results for Maltese and English for Years 4 and 5.
 - the End of Primary Benchmark results for Maltese and English
 - Results from the consecutive cycles of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).
 - information about the learners in the Complementary Service per year.
 - where applicable, the Core Competences Checklist and reading/spelling tests used in the Early Years.
- 20 State primary schools shall also have available the following data, as applicable:
 - learner-by-learner data;
 - school-level data;
 - aggregated averages of 'school families'. School families are composed of schools that are comparable on a number of factors, including gender, school size and socioeconomic background, so that schools within the same 'family' can compare their results with the aggregated average of their 'family' and so compare like with like;
 - national averages.

⁴³ National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education (2009), Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Malta.

- 21 State primary schools are to have literacy action plans in their School Development Plans.
- 22 State primary schools are to have School Initiated Action Plans (SIAPs) that will include the following components:
 - mechanisms to assess literacy needs as early as possible;
 - reading and writing strategies and related resources to ensure the expected literacy competences for all learners;
 - strategies to include families and local communities in literacy programmes;
 - plans to ensure the frequent and systematic use of these reading and writing strategies;
 - expected literacy attainment improvement targets;
 - actions to become dyslexia-friendly schools;
 - plans for literacy-related Continuing Professional Development for school staff.
- 23 Schools that are models of excellence in the development and implementation of such plans, and who are demonstrating proven success as a result, shall be identified and celebrated as Literacy Beacon Schools. Resources shall be made available so that other schools in state and non-state sectors can seek to understand better their success, and to emulate them as applicable.
- 24 The Curriculum department shall draw up procedures and schemes for schools to become dyslexia-friendly. Dyslexia-friendly schools shall be identified and celebrated nationally.
- 25 Through the development of the College Literacy Teams, the literacy support teachers can redefine their role so as to champion the lifewide aspect of the Literacy Strategy for All, through greater liaison between the school and families and the local community.
- 26 The Literacy Team shall engage with State primary schools to ensure that there are frequent and systematic opportunities for Shared and Guided reading, as part of the mainstream teaching and learning process. It is expected that these opportunities feature in the School Initiated Action Plans (SIAPs).
- 27 The Literacy Teams shall also engage with staff in the various peripatetic curricular services giving provision in their College. This is to enhance mutual understanding of the literacy challenges faced by that College and to seek to achieve a common purpose.
- 28 The Year 3 Literacy Competences Test shall be administered to all Year 3 learners in state primary schools. Non-state schools shall be invited to participate.
- 29 More efficient procedures are to be used in the identification and assessment of literacy needs.
- 30 Continuing professional development shall be provided to teachers, Learning Support Assistants and Senior Management Team (STM) members to enhance their capacity to plan, deliver effectively and review the implementation of the school-based literacy strategy. Such Continuing Professional Development programmes shall be offered to the Colleges and to non-state schools. The Curriculum Department shall also consider specific requests made for targeted training.

The Secondary Years

The Secondary school equips students with the required qualifications and skills to be successful beyond compulsory schooling. Knowledge of unique skills are provided to gain a deeper understanding of specific learning subjects ⁴⁴. By the age of fifteen a student is expected to read and write fluently and independently, have high levels of expressive and receptive language and use language in a correct manner ^{45,46}.

In the Secondary school years there may be a decline in levels of literacy ⁴⁷. Many students leave Secondary school with low levels of reading comprehension and writing skills, making it difficult for them to move on to Further Education. Low levels of basic literacy proficiency make it difficult for school leavers to cope with employment and daily activities. Some secondary students in Malta have been found to have low levels of literacy as they perform below the expected levels ⁴⁸.

The overriding objective of this policy for the secondary school years is to seek to increase student motivation to literacy learning through dedicated teaching and learning, peer collaboration, media usage and technology. It recommends that the methods and materials used for teaching and learning are relevant and appealing for the teenage years. It seeks also to strengthen the literacy programmes within and outside school settings and calls for the increased role of libraries, more focused professional development, smoother transitions from primary to secondary for students and increased research.

The Policy recommends that:

- 31 A Literacy Policy is featured in the School Development Plan (SDP) by the School Management Team (SMT) in consultation with staff, heads of department, Education Officers, and College Principals.
- 32 Each College should draw up a Language Policy which reflects the need of the students in that college. Based on this each school introduces a Language in Education Policy.
- 33 The Literacy Team of each College assesses the situation of literacy in their respective schools and draws up action plans to address the needs of struggling readers.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Education and Employment (2012). A National Curriculum Framework for All. Malta: Salesian Press.

⁴⁵ Goodwyn, A. & Findlay, K. (2003) Shaping Literacy in the Secondary School: Policy, Practice and Agency in the Age of the National Literacy Strategy. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 51 (1), pp. 20-35.

⁴⁶ European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) Act Now! Final Report: EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁴⁷ Jacobs, J. E., Lanza, S., Osgood, D. W., Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002) 'Ontogeny of Children's Self Beliefs: Gender and Domain Differences Across Grades One Through 12', *Child Development*, 73, 509-527.

⁴⁸ Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2009+) (2013), Malta Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta.

- 34 Class-based screening is to take place at the beginning of each school year in order to appraise each student's level of proficiency with the support of the College Literacy Team.
- 35 Learners who are struggling in literacy may be provided with additional sessions by specifically designated tutors. These sessions are to be adapted to the level of ability of these students.
- 36 A clear chain of responsibility is established in order to ensure that learners who are assessed for specific learning difficulties are provided with the required intervention.
- 37 Following the results obtained in PISA (2009+) specific attention needs to be given to underperforming students.
- 38 Particular attention is paid to gifted students.
- 39 Appropriate reading material to motivate all readers is provided.
- 40 That the involvement of parents in the learning process of their children is defined better. They are to be better informed about the systems prevailing in schools. Parents are to be briefed about the teaching and learning strategies adopted in schools in order to strengthen school-home links and allow them to play a larger role in the education of their children.
- 41 In the first year of secondary school, each student is to have a portfolio from their primary school years. At least this portfolio should be available for those students who are exempted from the Benchmark Examination. This could feature evidence of pieces of writing from different subjects, student retellings to assess construction of meaning, continuous records of independent reading, self-evaluations, goal-setting checklists that will help in self-assessment, and anecdotal notes explaining achievement over time. This should provide learners, teachers and parents with an opportunity to discuss the learning progress of the students, plan how to meet targets and encourage learners to assume responsibility for their learning.
- 42 There should be increased opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice and to evaluate, plan and devise programmes that are deemed necessary by the School Literacy Policy.
- 43 The pre-service training of teachers is to ensure that newly-qualified teachers have the necessary skills to meet the literacy challenges in their classrooms.
- 44 Capacity-building of teachers is to continue throughout their professional careers. Teachers are to be upskilled in assessment and evaluation processes to engage in continuous assessment for learning.

- 45 There are increased opportunities for continuous professional development in the fields of the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy for all teachers, support staff and school and College management teams.
- 46 Teachers are to have increased freedom and flexibility with regards to the content and application of the Maltese and English syllabi.
- 47 The content of the syllabus is to be revised and where necessary it is to be reduced and Reading Time is increased.
- 48 Teachers of English and other subjects are encouraged to express themselves in English even outside the classroom. This will foster a positive attitude towards the language among students.
- 49 Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is used more extensively. This may involve that some non-language subjects are taught exclusively through English or Maltese.
50. There is increased exposure to the English Language through additional reading opportunities, the media, new technologies, etc.
- 51 A Centre for Maltese Language and Literature and related educational resources is to be set up. Such a Centre should provide teachers with high quality materials and resources.
- 52 Specific funds are to be allocated to schools for textbooks, related software and other literacy resources. There is increased collaboration between the school and the parents and the wider community for the creation of reading and literary clubs for students, teachers and parents. Local Councils and businesses are to be involved in order to ensure the support of the wider community.
- 53 There is a concerted effort among all stakeholders in schools, parents and local communities to promote the acquisition of language skills from the early years.
- 54 The benefits of adequate levels of literacy are promoted in the media.



Youths

Further education and employment demand high levels of literacy skills from youths. Sociological reasons (such as family issues, absenteeism), or learning difficulties may disrupt the progress of literacy acquisition among young people ⁴⁹.

Increasingly employers expect applicants to have adequate levels of literacy and high qualifications ⁵⁰. Appropriate levels of literacy are also necessary for an individual to function in society at large, where technological devices, such as the use of mobile phones, computers and social networks have become the order of the day. Even applying for a low skilled job or filling up a health form requires at least basic literacy ability.

The number of early school leavers in Malta is relatively high ⁵¹. Nygaard (2009) ⁵², points out that there are strong associations between early school leaving, school drop-outs, anti-social behaviour and literacy difficulties. Youths in Malta are offered a number of programmes for the improvement of literacy levels beyond compulsory education by the Department of Life Long Learning (DLL) and the Malta College of Arts Science and Technology (MCAST). These programmes target youth and adult learners (16 years +) without formal qualifications. Individual support and group courses are run in core competences such as language skills and computer literacy.

Policies targeting youth literacy skills should seek to strengthen existing programmes or introduce new ones. The pooling of established service providers' knowledge and resources should lead to more successful literacy initiatives involving more vulnerable youths. Networking opportunities are to be geared towards collaborating on projects in partnership with initiatives by young people themselves.

The Policy recommends that:

- 55 Networking mechanisms between different entities and agencies are set up in order to implement the Strategy.
- 56 A review of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) Level 1 and Level 2 accredited programmes provided by different entities are reviewed.
- 57 That the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE);

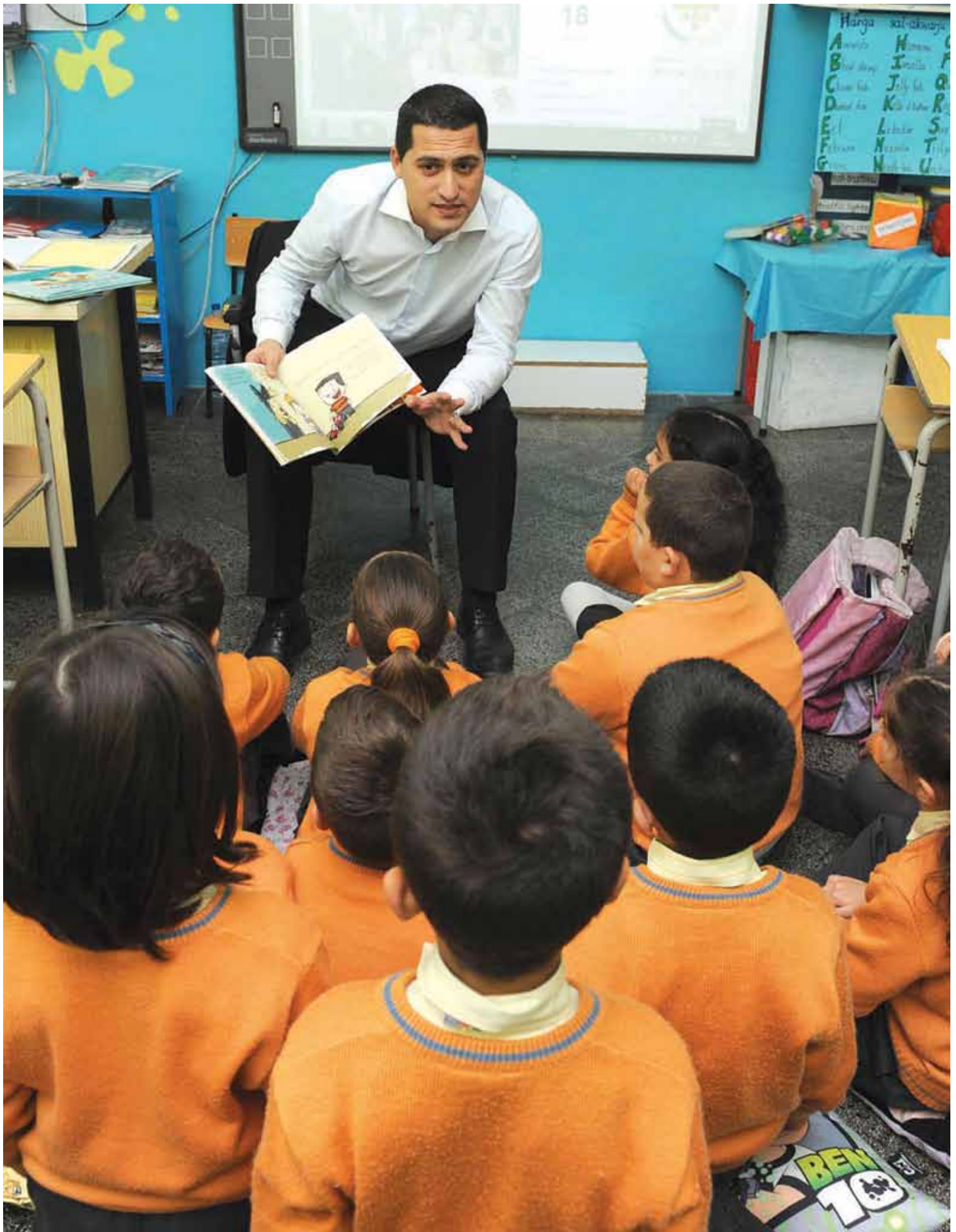
⁴⁹ Mifsud, C.L., Grech, R., Muscat, D. & Rudd, P. (2006) *A Study of Young People following Basic Skills Courses in Malta*. Department Further Studies and Adult Education, Education Division, Malta: Government Printing Press.

⁵⁰ Lindsay, D. (2012,). Maltese Literacy Rates of 'Particular Concern' *The Malta Independent*, retrieved from <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2012-09-09/news/maltese-literacy-rates-of-particular-concern-315767/>

⁵¹ Ministry of Education and Employment (2012). *An Early School Leaving Strategy*. Malta.

⁵² Nygaard, C. (2009) *Students' Antisocial and Violent Behaviour in State Secondary Schools. Unpublished Thesis*: University of Malta, Masters in Youth and Community Studies.

- designs a Framework for Entry Levels below Level 1; this is especially relevant to initiatives such as the Pathway to Independent Living Programme at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST).
 - makes adaptations that reflect the needs of vocational education and training programmes with specific adaptations to Key Skills components.
 - clarifies equivalence and accreditation issues. Non-formal accreditation should not be restricted to programmes run by private entities.
- 58 Set up an inter-entity network in which formal and non-formal entities can collaborate on development and research projects like living libraries within both formal and non-formal settings.
- 59 Courses in Information Literacy Skills are held for youth workers and youth mentors.
- 60 Youth mentors are trained to establish the buddy system in formal and non-formal settings. Mentors can also serve as an important link between education professionals and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and youth workers within non-formal contexts.
- 61 Living Libraries projects within formal and non-formal education institutions are embarked upon. Living Library projects invite people working from different industries to give presentations to youths. Learners create a living installation with the help of library and literacy staff using self-produced print and audio-visual material based on various information sources.
- 62 Language programmes are embarked upon. This could entail reviewing Level 1 and Level 2 course content to reduce overloading and emphasise the acquisition of oral, reading, writing and digital literacy skills.
- 63 Level 1 and Level 2 literacy courses offered by the Department for Life Long Learning (DLL) based on the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) are reviewed.
- 64 There are increased opportunities for the development of embedded learning programmes and other innovative methodologies.
- 65 Youth workers organise non-formal and formal community literacy programmes in Community Centres.
- 66 New technologies and social networks are to be used effectively in the teaching of literacy to young people.



Adults

Low levels of literacy in adulthood have a negative impact on personal, social and economic aspects. According to the EU high level group of experts on literacy report (2012), 20% of adults do not have the satisfactory literacy levels to cope effectively with the demands of the 21st century. Adults in many European countries (including Malta), possess only basic reading and writing skills, creating a situation where individuals have minimum qualifications and do not proceed beyond compulsory education⁵³. The children of such adults are more likely to struggle with literacy themselves, and therefore are more prone to fail at school .

There have been a number of initiatives and programmes to improve literacy levels amongst adults in Malta. Such programmes are offered in the community, in adult learning centres and the work place by a number of organisations. Other programmes are offered also to irregular migrants, prison inmates and persons with a disability⁵⁴.

The Policy seeks to enhance the learning experience of adults, by increasing learning opportunities through funding, resource enhancement and support to employers.

The Policy recommends that:

- 67 There are increased opportunities for the professional development of adult literacy educators for Maltese and English at the certificate, diploma and degree levels.
- 68 There are increased opportunities for empirical research related to adult literacy in Malta with specific reference to gender differences, etc.
- 69 There is an efficient and reliable accreditation system for adult literacy programmes. Service providers are made aware of the benefits of accreditation of literacy courses.
- 70 An adult Literacy Curriculum Framework is drawn up. This should follow upon the current National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for the school years.
- 71 There are increased opportunities for family literacy programmes.
- 72 Local Councils are given a statutory remit in relation to adult education so that they can invest part of their budget in adult literacy.
- 73 Local Councils are urged to collaborate with Government entities, Non-Government Organisations (NGO) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in order to respond to the needs of the local community for adult literacy programmes in an inclusive and organised manner.

⁵³ European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) Act Now! Final Report: EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁵⁴ National Center for Family Literacy (2008). Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel.

- 74 Local libraries are involved in local community-based strategies for adult literacy. Efforts are made to 'move out the library into the community' and to 'move the community into the library'.
- 75 Local and EU Funds are sought to develop tools and materials for the teaching of literacy to adults in Maltese and English.
- 76 Literacy for Employment programmes are offered to unemployed and low-skilled young adults.
- 77 Basic skills and literacy programmes are offered to prison inmates for better reintegration in society. These may be linked to the parole system in order to encourage participation.
- 78 Persons with learning difficulties and disabilities are helped to access literacy through bespoke programmes, including also the use of technology.
- 79 Trade unions and employers include training in literacy and basic skills in collective agreements.
- 80 Training incentive schemes are offered to employers to provide literacy and basic education courses at the workplace.
- 81 Literacy and basic skills education is featured in Employment Training Cooperation (ETC) apprenticeship and placement schemes, with the full participation of both the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and for Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS).

Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

Literacy plays a central role in our lives and yet so many young people and adults appear to encounter difficulty in developing sufficient literacy skills. The reasons for literacy difficulties are multifaceted, among which are learning difficulties and disabilities.

It has been shown that individuals with learning difficulties struggle to find stable employment, with many either being unemployed, working for longer hours or working for lower wages compared to individuals without a learning difficulty or disability ⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ Kaye, H. S. (2005). *Unpublished Tabulations of 2005 Data from the U.S. Survey of Income and Program Participation*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

One of the fundamental reasons for this is lack of fluency in reading, writing and other literacy specific tasks ⁵⁶. In Malta a high number of people with a disability are enlisted as being illiterate (23.5%), resulting in the inability to obtain appropriate qualifications to proceed beyond compulsory education ⁵⁷.

In the Primary and Secondary school years, the majority of students gain literacy skills without any effort and without the need for any additional intervention. However, some students require professional identification of their needs and specialist individual support. Early observation and monitoring should lead to the identification of literacy difficulties ⁵⁸. Multisensory intervention which focuses on the individual abilities of students with literacy difficulties can be effective in supporting students. The input of professionals, who have training in the assessment and intervention of literacy difficulties is central to empower other educators to act as learning scaffolds for those in need. Furthermore, clear instruction needs to be available for the use of assistive technology or adaptive apparatus for programmes, training, and material that is specific to literacy acquisition ⁵⁹.

In Malta a number of services for children with learning difficulties and disabilities are offered at school and within the community. These take the form of multidisciplinary assessment, statementing, complementary education, literacy enhancement programmes, and counselling. This policy seeks to ensure better integration and further development of the existing programmes.

The Policy recommends that:

- 82 There is a review of referral procedures and assessments. The three-tiered referral system, involving the class teacher, school-based and external professionals is reinforced. Teachers should be able to determine at what stages they are to embark on the referral procedures.
- 83 Teachers should be supported better and well-equipped to include children within the classroom when they are still in the first phases of identification

⁵⁵ Kaye, H. S. (2005). *Unpublished Tabulations of 2005 Data from the U.S. Survey of Income and Program Participation*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

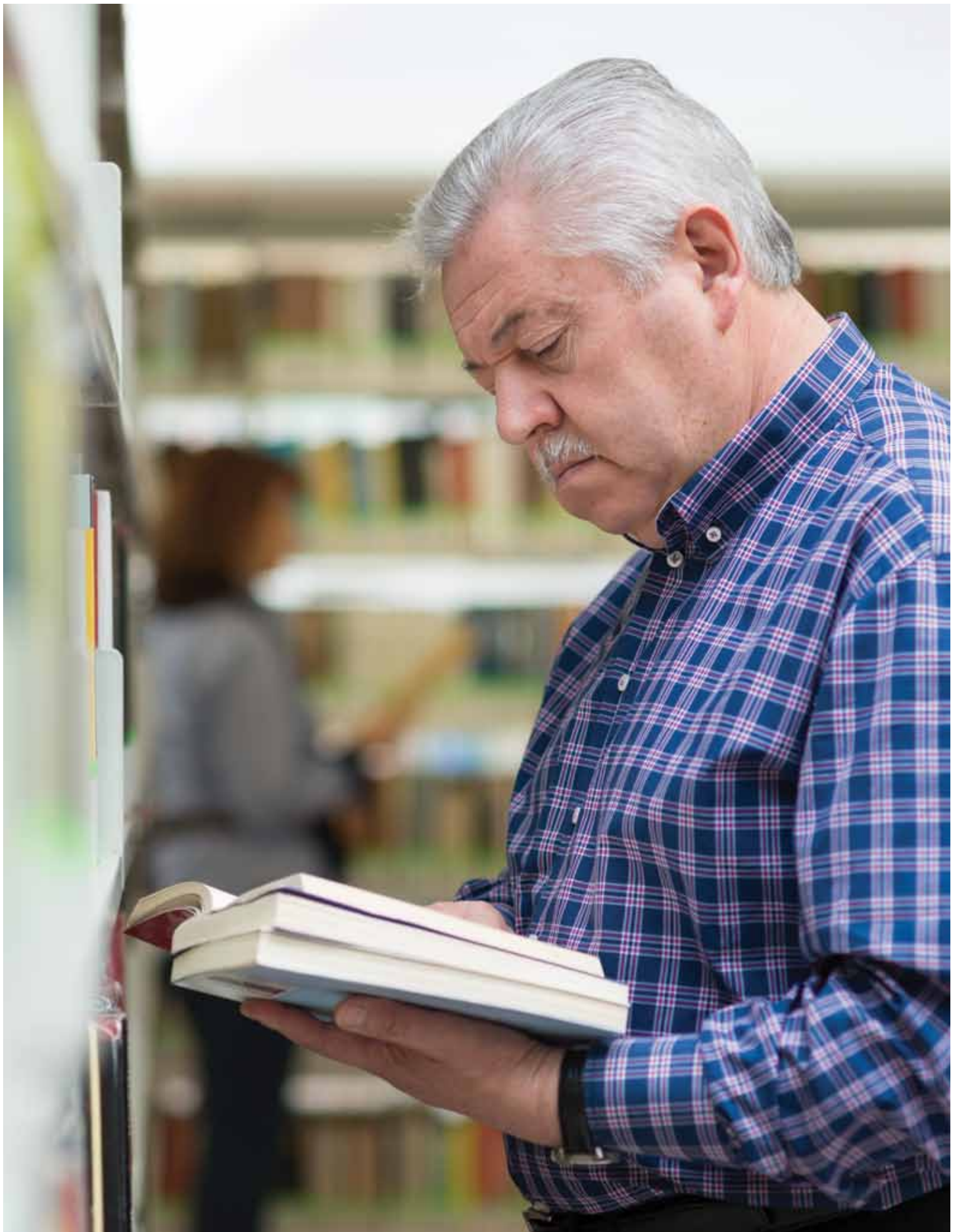
⁵⁶ Mooney, M. & Pacuilla-Silver, H. (2010). *Literacy, Employment and Youth with Learning Disabilities: Aligning Workforce Development Policies and Programs* retrieved November 1st 2013 from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED512296.pdf>

⁵⁷ Bezzina, F., Callus, A.M. & Cardona, G.C. (2010). *The Quality of Life of Disabled People: Some Answers from Census 2005*. Malta: KNPd, available from: <http://www.knpd.org/>

⁵⁸ Report by a Working Party of the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (1999). *Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment*. U.K: The British Psychological Society.

⁵⁹ Gregg, N. (2009). *Research-Based Best Practice: Assessing and Accommodating the Adolescent and Adult Populations with Learning Disabilities and AD/HD*. New York: Guilford Press.

- 84 There is continuing professional development for:
- a Child Care Assistants to be able to refer and support children with learning difficulties.
 - b Teachers in primary schools in the identification of children with learning difficulties. They should be familiar with a set of strategies for appropriate literacy intervention, particularly once the three-tiered referral system is implemented.
 - c Secondary teachers to be able to support the development of literacy through their subject area and to appreciate the importance of literacy skills across the curriculum.
 - d Teaching and support staff in the development of pre-literacy skills for children with mild, moderate and profound learning difficulties.
 - e Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) to enable them to form part of a multidisciplinary team.
 - f Complementary Education and Learning Support teachers to extend their literacy expertise.
- 85 The services for children with Specific Learning Difficulties are strengthened and extended to include a wider range of learning difficulties and multisensory teaching in relation to the different subject areas. Specific learning difficulties staff could serve as multipliers for other teachers.
- 86 Students with severe literacy difficulties are provided with intensive literacy courses over an identified period of time.
- 87 Students following relevant undergraduate courses are sensitive to the array of learning difficulties through hands-on experiences with learners at schools.
- 88 Schools are offered more opportunities to invest in resources appropriate for children with learning difficulties.
- 89 Classroom assistants who have received basic training in literacy are engaged. They are to provide support to students who are struggling with literacy under the guidance of literacy specialists.
- 90 There should be opportunities for the sharing of good practice regarding the time spent on literacy in classrooms, the nature of reading materials and the level of support offered.
- 91 -Family friendly measures are implemented to enable families to be included in the support and intervention process of children with learning difficulties.
- 92 There are courses for parents/caregivers to enable them to support the literacy development of their children.
- 93 Public libraries offer reading material and software that are appropriate for learners with reading difficulties.



Third Country Nationals

Third country nationals (TCNs) living in Malta are to be supported to develop their literacy skills to be able to communicate better their needs, to seek to fulfill their rights and to realize their present and future aspirations. Proficiency in one or more languages used in their wider community increases their chances for better education and employment. A lack of basic language skills can cause migrants to become secluded and susceptible to exploitation ⁶⁰.

In the primary school, a large number of migrant children do not have the literacy levels expected to be able to cope effectively in their host country language and tend to struggle with the work presented ^{61,62}. In Malta it is expected that the children of migrants master Maltese and English to be able to follow the work presented to them in schools. The influx of irregular migrants in Malta, quite a number of whom are accompanied by school-age children, has made it necessary to review the Maltese education system with regard to the participation of migrant children in schools ⁶³. The number of migrant children in all schools in Malta, but especially in state schools, is increasing significantly ⁶⁴.

In most state primary schools, complementary education and literacy support teachers are asked to support the language acquisition of such learners so as to facilitate their social, cultural and educational integration. In the secondary sector some of these learners are provided with programmes in Maltese and English as additional languages or assigned to a Core Competences Support Programme. However some lack such support ^{65, 66, 67}.

⁶¹ Geva, E. & Verhoeven, L. (2000) Basic Processes in Early Second Language Reading. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 4, 261-353. (Special issue).

⁶² Driessen, G., Van Der Silk, F & De Bot, K. (2002) Home Language and Language Proficiency: A Large-Scale Longitudinal Study in Dutch Primary Schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 20, 175-194.

⁶³ Calleja, C., Cauchi, B., & Grech, M. (2010). Education and Ethnic Minorities in Malta. Malta: e-SPICES Learning Partnership.

⁶⁴ Bezzina, F., Callus, A.M. & Cardona, G.C. (2010). *The Quality of Life of Disabled People: Some Answers from Census 2005*. Malta: KNPD, available from: <http://www.knpd.org/>

⁶⁴ Vassallo, J. (2013). *The Integration of Third Country Nationals in the Maltese Education System*. Department of Quality and Standards in Education, Ministry for Education and Employment.

⁶⁵ Frendo, V. (2005). Children's Rights and Cultural Diversity in the School. A Focus on the Integration of Non-Maltese Speaking Children in the Primary Classroom. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Malta, Malta.

⁶⁶ Galea, S., Attard Tonna, M., & Cassar, J. (2011). Young Migrant Women in the Making. Educational Experiences in Maltese Secondary Schools. In J. Christodoulou (Ed.), *Young*

Migrant Women in Secondary Education. Promoting Integration and Mutual Understanding Through Dialogue and Exchange (pp. 87-124). Cyprus: University of Nicosia Press.

⁶⁷ Sammut, S. (2004). *The 'Alien' Experience: Returned Migrants in Gozitan Secondary Schools*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Malta, Malta.

Schools and other educational institutions are to celebrate cultural diversity. The National Literacy Strategy for All acknowledges the unique position of such groups. Students who belong to different ethnic minorities are to be included in an inclusive and friendly environment. For this reason there is need for a provision and strategies that are directed specifically towards third country nationals (TCNs).

The Policy recommends that:

- 94 Migrant parents are provided with information about childcare and schooling options.
- 95 Migrant parents are encouraged to enrol their children as soon as possible since this will support their integration and literacy development.
- 96 Language support classes should be small in order to create a safe environment where the learner can deal with the culture shock of mainstream class. Here the learner will be able to receive individual attention and feel comfortable taking risks with the language and literacy skills being taught.
- 97 There should be ongoing communication between the tutors of literacy support classes and mainstream teachers.
- 98 Literacy teaching should be interdisciplinary, multicultural, and interactive and linked to past experiences.
- 99 Literacy skills should be taught within a context and with a meaningful real life purpose.
- 100 Literacy programmes should be graded according to the child's ability.
- 101 Schools are to implement ways of determining the school readiness of the new learners. Most of these learners may have had their education disrupted through conflict and have experienced acute stress. It may be feasible to set up links with translators or parents who speak the same language who can help both the school and the new entrants in this inception process.
- 102 Age appropriate guidelines on how learners can be assessed should be considered. The use of online resources as well as translation facilities will further enhance and provide for an effective and efficient way of assessment with regards to literacy.
- 103 The literacy practices of learners' families and communities should be fostered so that the school can provide the best educational experience for all learners. There is to be awareness that conventional school literacy practices may serve as instruments of control and disempowerment which supersede and displace those existing within families.

- 104 Continuing Professional Development opportunities in the area of teaching literacy to Third Country Nationals are offered to the teaching and support staff involved.
- 105 Guidelines for the teaching of Maltese as a second or additional language are developed.
- 106 There is coordination with the Health Department for timely prevention and intervention measures, especially with regard to Speech and Language Pathology in order to screen for any difficulties which may impede effective literacy development.
- 107 Book- rich environments are to be promoted especially with learners and families who lack literacy materials at home.
- 108 Parents need guidance as to how they can affirm and value their sharing of literacy for socially, culturally and historically responsive schooling. Home-school links, parental awareness sessions, parental education and buddy support schemes may help in this regard.
- 109 Parents are encouraged to read to their children and provide ample opportunities to develop phonological awareness through rhymes and songs.
- 110 Parents are supported to use different skills and strategies to promote literacy at home.
- 111 The Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLL) collaborates with agencies running the open centres for migrants in the organisation of literacy and other basic skills courses.
- 112 The Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLL) collaborates with the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS) in order to reach out to migrants living in the community to help them access literacy courses.
- 113 Language and literacy programmes for adult migrants take into account their personal stories and their aspirations.
- 114 Adult literacy educators working with migrants in targeted programmes or in mainstream provision are trained to deal with multicultural settings in their classrooms.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy plays a central role in people's lives. The ability to communicate, learn and work through different technologies is a huge asset⁶⁸. It equips individuals with the abilities and knowledge to be able to participate actively in community, cultural, commercial and intellectual activities.

⁶⁸ Evans, J (ed) (2004). *Literacy Moves On: Using Popular Culture, New Technologies and Critical Literacy in the Primary Classroom*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Learning through digital modes, even from the first and early years, has been receiving a great deal of attention⁶⁹. Digital literacy is one of the cross-curricular themes identified in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF)⁷⁰. The integration of digital literacies in the Maltese curriculum can only be successful if educators themselves are proficient in their use. Such literacies can bring about high levels of learner motivation and participation which are crucial for effective learning^{71,72}.

This policy makes a number of recommendations for nurturing digital literacies in the classroom and within the community. There is a call for stakeholders to develop a clear vision of the implementation of the technology for learning purposes. They are to evaluate their technology-enhanced practices in order to determine whether goals are being reached. Collaboration is to be nurtured and opportunities for the sharing of good practices are to be promoted.

The Policy recommends that:

- 115 Teacher’s digital competences and teaching and learning behaviours through digital technologies are investigated.
- 116 The Directorate of eLearning assumes the role of promoting and monitoring the skills of children and educators and the methodologies employed for digital literacy.
- 117 Assessment tools for digital literacy in schools are designed and implemented.
- 118 Research in digital literacy management, pedagogies and technologies is promoted.
- 119 The school administration is involved in all stages of decision-making regarding the one to one vision to ensure the school has full ownership of the project.
- 120 From the onset all stakeholders are to have a shared vision regarding the objectives for the development of language and literacy abilities through the new technologies.
- 121 Colleges and schools are supported to adapt the relevant eContent to the literacy needs of their learners.
- 122 Information and parental education sessions are offered to parents to allow them to be able to assist their children in accessing the relevant e-content from home.

⁶⁹ Hague, C & Payton, S (2010), *Digital Literacy across the Curriculum*. Futurelab, retrieved 26th October from www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/digital-participation.

⁷⁰ Ministry for Education and Employment (2012). *A National Curriculum Framework for All*. Malta: Salesian Press.

⁷¹ Herrington, J., Oliver, R., & Reeves, C. (2003). Patterns of Engagement in Authentic Online Learning Environments. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, 19(1), 59-71.

⁷² Mills, K. (2010). "Shrek Meets Vygotsky." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54(1): 35-45.



- 123 There is increased school- based support for eLearning through support teachers.
- 124 Best practice in eLearning is promoted in schools through the identification of Digital Literacy champions.
- 125 There is capacity building in eLearning through Continuing Professional Development.
- 126 The undergraduate programmes for intending teachers are to reflect new developments in digital literacy.
- 127 Libraries in Malta are rendered digital, making eBooks widely accessible in order to support digital literacy pedagogy including inquiry-based learning.
- 128 There is a review of the use of the Fronter Virtual Learning Environment to support the promotion of oracy and literacy skills.
- 129 There is increased support for the use of mobile technologies in teaching and learning.
- 130 The e-content made available to schools is adapted to and graded according to the language and literacy needs of different learners. This can be achieved by offering tracking facilities and monitoring progress through online portfolios.
- 131 Strong home-school links are established so that children are supported in their use of digital literacy for educational purposes.
- 132 There is a campaign for the raising of awareness among the wider community about the educational benefits of digital literacy.
- 133 The programme for the use of tablets in schools is framed within the National Literacy Strategy for All.
- 134 The assessment of the digital competences of teachers, pilot studies for the introduction of one-one technologies and the necessary evaluations are carried out.
- 135 Based on previous experiences with 1:1 technologies (e.g. Netbooks Project), pilot projects with tablets are developed.
- 136 An online support system for the implementation of one-one technologies is set up on a nationwide basis.
- 137 A review and analysis of the pilot projects on one to one technologies is conducted.
- 138 Based on the pilot projects the relevant pedagogical, technical and administrative support systems are set up.

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Appendix: **The Consultative Working Groups**

The First and the Early Years

Rachael Agius, David Agius-Muscat, Raymond Facciol, Helen Grech, Tania Mangion, Mariangela Schembri Meli, Rita Micallef, Josanne Schiavone, Suzanne Vassallo.

The Junior Years

Christopher Bugeja, Antoinette Debattista, Marika Farrugia, Charles Mifsud, Anita Seguna, Sandro Spiteri.

The Secondary Years

Mary Anne Camilleri, Anthony De Gabriele, Joanne Grima, George Mifsud, Maria McNamara.

Youths

Ruth Baldacchino, David Muscat, Carmen Nygaard, Josephine Saliba, Miriam Theuma.

Adults

Mario Cardona, Fr Vince Magri, Carmen Mamo, Pauline Miceli.

Children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

Paul Attard Baldacchino, Nathalie Buhagiar, Jane Farrugia Buhagiar, Christine Firman, Carmen Gauci, Kurt Mizzi.

Third Country Nationals (TCNs)

Jane Farrugia Buhagiar, Dunstan Hamilton, Sharon Micallef Cann, Rachel Schembri, Josephine Vassallo.

Digital Literacy

Patrick Camilleri, Martin Debattista, Tania Gatt, Emile Vassallo, Emmanuel Zammit.

