**SUPPORTING THE IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN POLAND**

**(PHASE II)**

**Peer Learning Activity 7th July 2021**

**THE LEARNING OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK, MALTA**

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Introduction

The Phase II Action under the Structural Reform Support Programme in Poland aims to support the development of new legislation to improve the quality of education for all learners. The Polish legal process requires that prior to the preparation of new legislation, the underpinning assumptions are clearly identified and discussed with stakeholders. The assumptions form the conceptual framework for the new legislation, identifying the operational definitions and key concepts that will be the basis for the new law. They will inform the development of a clear rationale for the work and the vision, goals and objectives underpinning new legislation.

Presentation of work in Malta

This paper provides background information for the Peer Learning Activity (PLA ) on 7th July.

Country representatives from Malta will provide an input focussing upon the introduction of the Learning Outcomes Framework. This input will cover how the Learning Outcomes Framework fits into the wider curriculum and specifically how it is being systematically piloted and rolled out with different age groups and how evidence from the roll-out is being used to inform future work.

The development of the Learning Outcomes Framework in Malta specifically relates to two Assumptions for the new legislative framework in Poland:

*Assumption 5*

**The assessment system will support assessment for and of learning aligned to a flexible curriculum that recognises the academic and wider achievement of all learners. Effective assessment processes will enable teachers to recognise barriers to learning and provide support in flexible ways that do not depend on formal certification.**

**It is important for all stakeholders to understand the different functions of assessment and the relationship between them. Different assessments should fit together into a coherent framework that enables school teams to identify and share the information needed to support all learners.** **Teachers, parents/carers, specialist staff and multi-disciplinary teams should collaborate in the assessment of learners, in particular those with more complex support needs.**

One particular challenge in Poland is to move away from a system that focuses primarily on summative assessment across the curriculum (i.e. grades and high stakes examinations) towards a system of on-going assessment that focuses on supporting learning by providing high quality feedback.

The assessment system also needs to identify barriers to learning and to link into a system that can provide flexible support for learning where needed. Over time, building teacher skills in assessment will enable a move towards more prevention and intervention – away from compensatory measures. Support should be provided without delay and should not require a formal diagnosis or the labelling of learners (often reverting to a medical model).

A team approach is crucial and specialists should work not only with learners but also to further develop staff skills in assessing and responding to diverse needs.

Overall, MEiN wishes to develop a coherent framework that establishes clear relationships between the different functions of assessment and the subsequent use of information. While this will primarily be for learner development, it will also be needed to evaluate the curriculum, pedagogy and school organisation as well as the effectiveness of any additional support provided to learners.

*Assumption 6*

**Schools will work collaboratively and use the flexibility available in the curriculum to provide personalised learning and support. Learners, parents, multi-disciplinary professionals and local services will work with school staff to plan relevant programmes with the support needed to ensure the progress of every learner.**

**Personalisation allows learners to share their strengths, challenges, preferences and needs and be involved in planning how they access and process information, how they engage with content and ideas, and how they express what they know and understand. Rather than planning for most of the class and then differentiating for some, teachers should have a range of strategies to use so that learners do not need to struggle or fail before they can access support.**

Personalised learning and support can only take place within a flexible curriculum framework for ALL learners without separate curricula for certain groups which may limit expectations and opportunities (e.g. for learners with intellectual disabilities).

To ensure relevance, the curriculum should be based on widely agreed long term outcomes and priorities for learners, for example stakeholders should consider whether the emphasis should be on life preparation or passing examinations. Schools should have autonomy to make decisions about their curriculum content in line with their local situation and should also be able to design a coherent curriculum that is manageable within learners’ time in school.

The current pandemic has further emphasised the need for flexibility, not only regarding the use of digital tools but also to meet the needs of learners whose circumstances differ widely, resulting in ‘gaps’ in learning that should be a priority.

MEiN wish to take account of the voices of learners and families to develop a broad, balanced curriculum framework that provides opportunities for all learners to participate, with attention to social climate and relationships that will support preparation for further opportunities in education, the labour market and adult life.

Background and focus

This paper starts by giving a brief overview of Malta’s National Inclusion policy that has been launched in 2019 and further enhanced in 2021. This policy defines Inclusive education holistically in accordance with the conclusions of the Council of the European Union in 2017. Hence education should be available and accessible to all learners of all ages, including those facing challenges, such as those with special needs or who have a disability, those originating from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, migrant backgrounds or geographically depressed areas or war-torn zones, regardless of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion of belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Therefore, Malta’s Inclusion policy is the overarching measure that includes various SMART goals related to disability, attendance, gender, promoting a healthy lifestyle and managing behaviour that will address inequalities in our schools. Different timeframes and stake holders have been added to such goals to map out a strategic implementation of such policy. The inclusion policy will allow more effective work towards inclusive education that is mirrored in accordance with the conclusions of the Council of the European Union. Hence it is placed in the context of *The Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond* (2021-2030) by:

* ensuring quality and inclusive education and training for all.
* encouraging, access to inclusive quality education for persons with disabilities in line with the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006).
* Supporting persons with specific learning needs, learners with migrant background and other vulnerable groups
* Further supporting quality early childhood education by providing early screening and intervention for learners with a disability
* Promoting training to ensure that all learners are supported by highly qualified and motivated teachers and trainers, as well as other educational staff.
* developing gender sensitivity in the learning processes and in education and training institutions and challenging and dissolving gender stereotypes, especially those that constrain the choices of boys and girls for their field of study

This policy also adopts a whole-school approach philosophy of how schools are to develop conducive learning environments for all stakeholders supporting the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal 4 – to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable quality Education for all (UN, 2015). It supports transforming schools into inclusive settings with a required shift from a ‘one size fits all’ educational model towards a socially just education that aims to increase the system’s ability to respond to all learners’ diverse needs. Goals are built on 4 benchmarks that are related not just to disability, but also to other areas as mentioned above. More specifically, Benchmark 2 states that all teachers employ effective teaching approaches that are more representative of and responsive to diversity that foster a Universal Design for learning environment.

School management and educators engage in curriculum design that satisfies every learners’ entitlement as outlined in the National Curriculum Framework (MEDE, 2012). Curriculum design for inclusion aims at providing learning experiences that contain material that is differentiated and adapted to cater for learners’ individual needs and ability with more hands-on, active, and co-operative learning. Also, curriculum design includes the methodology and pedagogy of the process of learning based on learner-centred and assessment for learning principles. Content, process, and outcomes are designed to offer learners with diverse needs the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. This is done through delivery of scaffolded lessons that motivate learner involvement, respecting different needs, abilities, and learning preferences.

Policy vision, aims and objectives

The vision of equity and entitlement to curriculum in compulsory education in Malta evolved as a result of the legislation of the National Minimum Curriculum (NCF, 2000). A student-centred holistic vision of education was developed through the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC, 2012). The LOF builds on the NCF’s student-centred and lifelong learning perspective catering for better transitions across educational cycles. The introduction of an assessment system that supports assessment for and of learning aligned to a flexible curriculum that recognises the achievement of all learners strives to lie at the core of the LOF. Such assessment processes help teachers identify and provide access to a variety of teaching and learning experiences and acknowledge both in- and out-of-class learning. The Framework supports schools and other stakeholders to identify, document and share information gathered on student learning to be able to identify and obtain the support required for the individual and specific needs of all learners.

The Learning Outcome Framework (LOF) – an inclusive Framework

The Learning Outcome Framework may be defined as an inclusive framework, since it builds on principles conducive to inclusive pedagogies and approaches to teaching and learning laid down by the National Curriculum Framework (2012), namely ‘encouraging young people and children and teachers to work together and to learn from each other […] so that all children fulfil their capacity’ (NCF, 2012, p. iii). The notion of learner-centred education and inclusive education has been placed at the core of discourse on teaching, learning and assessment practices. It recognises the need to ensure access to quality education for all learners irrespective of their backgrounds, needs and requirements providing space for more inclusive teaching and learning scenarios. The Learning Outcome framework serves as a backdrop for educators to develop flexible pedagogical approaches aimed at the development of competences, skills, knowledge, values and attitudes for personal growth and inclusivity of all learners, safeguarding individual learning potential.

Curricula embedded within the learning outcomes-based approach help educators provide a seamless transition across cycles of schooling through clearly defined outcomes, from the Early Years (0 to 7 age group), Primary (8 to 10), Middle and Secondary School Cycles (11 and 12, and 13 to 16 respectively). The discussion which follows delves into how the Learning Outcome Framework (2017) supports the idea of inclusive education and helps learners work their way towards achieving their full potential, within a lifelong learning perspective in mainstream education from the Early Years to secondary education.

The shift from teaching to learning through a learner-centred approach

The shift to a learning outcome-based approach required a shift in focus from teaching to learning. The move away from more traditional types of approaches set on teaching objectives to ones focused on learning, place the learner at the centre of teaching and learning programmes. Such a shift demands alignment of teaching, learning and assessment practices that provide space for manoeuvre for different kinds of learners within mainstream education. Pathways for teaching and learning are clearly defined through specific outcomes that define what learners are able to do, but that allow them the space to develop and grow along their learning journey. The pedagogical journey with these learners is mapped out as a result of the learners’ participation in the process of learning as active and capable agents, supported to engage and take responsibility for the learning journey. Through sensitivity to, and observation of learner needs, interests and learning styles, opportunities for learning are created to ensure access to learning. It is in this way that programmes of learning and assessment are tailored to their needs. An inclusive curriculum seeks to eradicate the one—size-fits-all approach that excludes a number of learners from participation and achievement in classroom learning within mainstream education. From the perspective of critical social theory, a curriculum may be defined as socially just, if it provides learners access to participation, as peers (Fraser, 2009).

Overview of developments

The introduction of the Learning Outcomes Framework in the state and non state sector in Malta was initiated through consultation meetings with educators from the state and non-state sectors in 2017 to gather feedback and make necessary amendments prior to implementation. In 2015 the Train the Trainer programme was launched to enable a number of educators to become LOF trainers. Scholastic year 2017/2018 witnessed the roll out of implementation in the Early Years for the first two years of Kindergarden, Years 3 and 4 in the Primary sector and Years 7 & 8 in the Secondary Middle School sector.

Continuous Professional development sessions continued during scholastic year 2018 /2019, however scholastic year 2019- 2020 brought training and implementation to a halt due to the Covid-19 pandemic and implementation and training were brought to a halt in Years 1, 5 and 9. Following a year of discussion amongst stakeholders from the state and non-state sectors, and the Malta Union of Teachers, it was decided that training will continue during scholastic year 2021/2022 in preparation for implementation in 2022/2023.

Steps taken in implementation

The implementation of policy related to the Learning Outcome Framework by the Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes (DLAP) rests on two main courses of action, namely professional development and training, and support during the implementation phase to ensure that all teachers are confident and competent to adjust and align programmes of teaching, learning and assessment to the underlying principles identified in the Framework. Consultation sessions were organised for educators and teachers in the state and non-state sectors prior to the start of the implementation phase of the Learning Outcome Framework. The Learning Outcomes documents were amended according to feedback received during these sessions. Support was furthermore provided for teachers in the form of professional development sessions, supporting documents and specimen papers on assessment tasks uploaded on Curriculum websites. Support is offered through meetings and visits in schools by Heads of Department working in schools and in collaboration with DLAP Education Officers, addressing themes related to teaching, learning and assessment practices.

As a result of the continuous flow of feedback gathered from consultation and support meetings with educators and teachers, and visits in schools, Education Officers and Heads of Department have worked on the following areas; redrafting of Curricula, creation of specimen papers for class-based and summative assessment tasks, organisation of Professional Development sessions and training on teaching, learning and assessment practices in the various cycles (e.g. Early Years) or in subject areas (in the Primary, Middle and Secondary school years).

Key participants and partnerships

Early Years educators in the Kindergarden area, teachers in Middle and Secondary schools in both state and non state sectors and their learners are the key participants in the LOF reform.

Parents who receive feedback on assessment through the newly introduced class-based assessment system have also become key stakeholders and provide valuable feedback to schools. Education Officers and Heads of Departments working on teaching, learning and assessment programmes play a central role in implementation since they are responsible for the creation of supporting documents, the planning of training and professional development sessions, organisation of meetings with educators, teachers and other stakeholders and visits to offer support to teachers and Senior Leadership teams in schools. Heads of Department coordinate and support the development of the specific area they are entrusted with in a number of schools, contributing to the coordination of initiatives in their field in collaboration with the respective Education Officers and other stakeholders involved in training and professional development of teachers.

Development

The first implementation phase mainly addressed the alignment required between teaching, learning and assessment.Teachers were introduced to a new system of class-based assessment. The main aim remains the need to safeguard the flexibility required in the teaching and assessment programmes and to keep track of learning outcomes reached, through learning experiences which pedagogically make sense for different learners in class. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate on tasks and include exemplars of learning opportunities of how Learning Outcomes may be attained.

Main outcomes – impact/added value for different stakeholder groups

This section presents three Curriculum scenarios across the educational journey, to illustrate how the Learning Outcomes Framework addressed opportunities for learning during the different cycles of schooling. These three different scenarios illustrate how space for manoeuvre during the learning journey was created from the Early Years to secondary education for different learning needs. Observing and supporting learner needs and interests through learning opportunities in the Early Years, scaffolding of learning through the breakdown of outcomes in the Primary years and the provision of an array of outcomes both academic and vocational within mainstream secondary education are the main themes that will be elaborated upon.

The Learning Outcomes approach is a framework that encourages educators and teachers to view teaching and learning as a holistic experience. The Pedagogy and Assessment sections are presented as a tool to help stakeholders create, design and develop learning opportunities and experiences for all learners, as intended by the NCF (2012).

The Early Years

The first area to look into, is that of the Early Years where principles of inclusion are embedded within all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment practices. Providing flexible pathways for learning through the Emergent Curriculum enables young learners to find their direction in learning and is proclaimed as fundamental for the development of children aged zero to seven. In the Early Years, Learning Outcomes are conceptualised as a compass not a map, indicators that point in possible directions to help children learn and grow. It is a move away from a programme of teaching, learning and assessment that all learners must follow within a one size fits all approach, since learning in these early stages is viewed as a highly integrated process which cannot be easily separated into domains. Rather than teaching a subject-based curriculum where learning is fragmented in individual units, a curriculum built around children’s interests is favoured. Teachers in the Early Years work at developing an integrated approach to teaching and learning which scaffolds children into higher levels of competence. Pedagogy with three to seven year-olds builds on the children’s prior knowledge and stimulates them to pose questions, link concepts, and increase their emerging understanding of the world.

Implementation indicates that the Early Years focus on an inclusive philosophy that ensures that each and every learners’ potential is maximised within the classroom environment. Within this environment the educator observes and provides learning opportunities for the learners according to their interests and needs. Planning is based on the outcomes of observation of activities learners engage in and their interests, providing them with further opportunities to support their next steps in learning. Curriculum is not prescriptive and Learning Outcomes are to be interpreted as possible routes a child may embark upon. Assessment is authentic and reflects the child’s actual achievement. It is a direct result of what the learners engage in and opportunities linked to the areas that the educator takes note of for each individual child and groups of children. It is not based on a one-fits-all assessment structure that requires the educator to tick specific learning outcomes on pre-set programmes of learning that all must follow and reach at specific moments during their educational journey and at the same time as their peers. Assessment is authentic since it follows the stages the learners are at and is both continuous and formative in nature. It is based on the actual engagement of the learners with the learning opportunities that the learners are drawn to from the ones offered in class and others that the learners themselves bring to class, and that the educator builds upon. This occurs as a result of their observations and consecutive planning, creating a teaching and learning environment that follows learners’ interests and needs through sensitivity to their constantly evolving learning paths. Assessment reflects the stages of development highlighted in the Learning Outcomes that the educator selects according to the observations made and progress noted throughout the learning process. The pedagogical approaches proposed in the Early Years policy documents, foster child-led initiatives and promote the co-construction of knowledge and learning. Assessment is the direct result of such processes. The teaching and learning process is built on a pedagogy of listening, where the child is the absolute protagonist of one’s own learning. This pedagogical approach ensures the inclusion of all children.

The Primary, Middle and Secondary School years

The LOF framework helps educators ensure that a seamless transition takes place across the various cycles of schooling from the Early Years to secondary education. Policy supports schools to develop programmes based on flexible teaching and learning approaches, placing the learner at the heart of pedagogical decisions on teaching, learning and assessment. The LOF approach brought about the move away from complete reliance on centrally-based summative assessment practices and the introduction of systems of continuous assessment.

Learning Outcomes in a number of subject areas indicate aspects that learners need to focus on in the specific subject area and that they are assessed on through class-based assessment practices. Additional outcomes have been added at Secondary level that students may opt to work on when selecting VET (Vocational Education and Training) subjects. This provides learners with a broader range of possibilities to follow their interests and to shape their educational pathways through a combination of academic, vocational and applied routes.

Broad outcomes, each broken down into more specific outcomes in a number of subject areas, indicate what the learner should be able to master along the process of working towards the outcome in question. In this way, all learners are able to work on the same curricular outcome with their peers at the stage of development that they are at. Learning outcomes have been expanded upon to outline what a learner may be able to do at different levels in relation to broad learning outcomes. The specific stages of what a learner is able to do in relation to the broad outcome are reflected in documentation of assessment indicating where the learner is at in relation to each broad learning outcome. In the case of foreign languages, outcomes are based on Common European Framework descriptors. A CEFR-based language proficiency and assessment programme offers possibilities to differentiate between language competences and skills at different proficiency levels, providing learners with the possibliltiy to work on productive, receptive and/or interactive skills. A learner may be able to gain higher language competences in one or more modes of communication, and does not have to master all skills at the same level of competence.

Challenges and possibilities

This section illustrates challenges and limitations that have surfaced along the journey of LOF implementation that will serve to critically analyse and discuss possibilities that still need to be explored. The Learning Outcomes support transition across the teaching and learning cycles, however challenges remain in terms of the type of learning experiences they are provided with, that address their needs and interests.

One of the main challenges in the implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework remains the extent to which teachers are able to embrace the possibility of working flexibly with the Curriculum, providing diverse opportunities for learners with diverse needs and interests to progress in their learning. Further insight is required on the extent to which approaches adopted may further encourage teacher and learner autonomy for the implementation of programmes as intended by the LOF. The main challenge remains the development of learning experiences which are flexible enough to address the individual needs of students, and specific enough to be measured and reported. The system of assessment in the Primary and Secondary school cycles required the identification of level of achievement of the Learning Outcome. The documentation of stages that the learners reached in relation to each broad learning outcome provided a personalised form of assessment. This form of assessment provided teachers, parents and learners with a clearer picture of areas to focus upon. Moreover, assessment of this kind provided teachers and learners with the feedback required for planning of possible next steps in learning. The process of documentation, both formative and summative provided learners with the possibility to self-assess their learning and to take further responsibility for it. teachers are provided with a clear picture of areas that may be addressed learning henceforth will refer to, when assessing learning. It ensures that opportunities in view of next steps in learning for individual learners safeguarded

As previously noted, implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework was halted due to the Covid Pandemic during scholastic Year 2021 and will continue in scholastic year 2021/2022. Continuation of programmes of training (Continuous Professional Development sessions) and support in schools (through meetings and support visits) during scholastic year 2021/2022 were announced in June 2021, following discussion amongst stakeholders from the state and non-state sectors held in collaboration with Teacher Unions. The Learning Outcomes framework was launched for all teachers and learners to follow, and one of the main limitations that remains to be expanded upon is the extent to which teachers embrace its flexibility in view of teaching, learning and classroom-based assessment practices.

Further analysis of the impact of teaching and assessment practices that reflect the needs of learners, and feedback provided by teachers is moreover required to encourage,

* a whole school approach in the implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework to ensure that goals of inclusion and equity are met;
* analysis of approaches adopted in view of learner-centred pedagogies and levels of flexibility required (analysing levels of centrally-imposed curricular measures);
* focus on training that promotes flexible teaching and learning approaches that facilitate learning for learners with diverse needs and interests across the various cycles of schooling;
* the introduction of further supporting features, such as discussion on how to help learners keep their language learning profile, to provide support to learners who lack competences in the languages of schooling and to acknowledge and support learners’ first/home language, when not used or provided as a subject area in school.

Success in learning is not limited to certification. Self-assessment as well as other forms of teaching and learning experiences such as projects, events and competitions organised by the different Departments within the Directorate of Learning and Assessment Programmes (DLAP) are recognised on the learners School Certificate and Profile. Moreover, The LOF provides access to outcomes that were previously non-existent, such as the Vocational Education and Training (VET) outcomes within an array of programmes offered as option subjects at secondary school level. Other outcomes for the benefit of learners with a migrant background complement the programmes for Maltese Language at both Primary and at Secondary school levels. These Learning and Assessment Programmes provide further opportunities for learners through vocational education and academic routes within mainstream education. The LOF in the Early Years, Middle and Secondary Schools offers teachers the opportunity to align programmes of teaching, learning and assessment to address diverse learner needs and interests and make learning more accessible to all learners. Collaborative work amongst educators and teachers working in the same school and across school sectors has increased, providing teachers with the possibility to create their own professional communities of practice.

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