

Skills anticipation in Malta

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Summary

In Malta, a coherent system for producing and interpreting skills intelligence has not yet been developed. The country's small and open economy is exposed to external economic trends, requiring the workforce to be adaptable and flexible. There are a range of skills anticipation exercises but, as a whole, the skills anticipation process is fragmented with limited overall coordination. Policymakers view the lack of reliable and systematic data on future skill needs as potentially hindering future economic development. That said, a relative strength of the current skills anticipation activity is the high level of stakeholder involvement in skills anticipation. Especially employers and education and training providers are willing to cooperate with one another in trying to align the skills system with the demands of the labour market.

Recent surveys and studies, including the first National Employee Survey in 2016 and the development of the Employability Index (first results released in 2015) have helped expand the evidence on the match between skills supply and labour market needs. A National Skills Council with the capacity to better coordinate the national system of skills anticipation was launched in November 2016. These new initiatives will contribute towards a more developed, structured and coherent skills anticipation system in the coming years.

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Overview of the Maltese approach

Skills anticipation in Malta



Key actors

| | | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------|--|
| Governance | Ministry of Education and Employment | National Skills Council | Sectoral Skills Councils (under the remit of NCFHE) | | |
| Stakeholders | Employers | Jobplus | Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology | University of Malta | National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) |
| Target groups | Employers | Young people (to be added soon as target group) | | | |



Types of skills anticipation

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Quantitative forecasting | Limited to forecasting of employment levels but not by skill/occupation | |
| Skills assessments | Ad-hoc projects | |
| Foresight | Skills for the Future (one-off project) | BUILD-UP (construction sector) |
| Other | National Employers Skills Survey | Ad-hoc projects |



Dissemination

| | |
|----------|---|
| Channels | Mainly by reports (limited) and conferences |
| Use | Limited given piecemeal dissemination |

Description

In Malta there are a range of activities that shed some light on issues relevant to skills anticipation. Aside from regular surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the following exercises provide data about the supply of, and demand for, skills:

- Ad hoc skills foresight exercises – focusing on particular sectors of the economy
- Surveys among employers including the first [National Employee Skills Survey](#) in 2016 (by Jobsplus, Malta Enterprise and the National Commission for Further and Higher Education, NCFHE)
- Graduate tracer studies undertaken by the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)/the University of Malta (UoM)/the NCFHE
- The [Employability Index](#) (2015) (by the [Ministry for Education and Employment](#) [MEDE] and Jobsplus).

As a whole, however, these do not provide a comprehensive, integrated system of skills anticipation. Although skills anticipation falls under the responsibility of the MEDE, in practice skills anticipation activities have been spread across a range of organisations without much coordination. There have been policy proposals that have sought to coordinate skills anticipation, such as establishing a National Career Guidance Service, but these have not been taken forward.

A National Skills Council (NSC) was launched in November 2016 which, when it is fully operational, will have responsibility for identifying skills gaps in the economy and recommending remedial actions. The NSC will not only take stock of existing skills needs, but will also be expected to inform the education system on whether it is producing the skills the economy needs. It will work with a wide range of stakeholders and conduct research.

Aims

There are concerns in Malta about skills gaps and shortages in the economy. To date, relatively little attention has been paid to the information needs of (a) jobseekers and (b) young people faced with making a decision about which courses to choose. (An exception to this is the [Employability Index](#) (discussed in subsection 2.4), which is targeted at prospective students and their parents.) The role of skills intelligence as a tool for better aligning the outcomes of the education and training system with the needs of the labour market is widely acknowledged. This underlies the establishment of the NSC.

Legal framework

There are several regulations that are pertinent to skills anticipation. These include:

- The Employment and Training Services Act (1990 and subsequent amendments, with the latest in 2016) which regulates the activities of Jobsplus (the public employment service, PES).
- Legal Notice 19 of 2015 which regulates the processing of student data; these data have become an important source of information feeding into the [Employability Index](#).
- Legal Notice 278 of 2016 which establishes the NSC and its functions (e.g. to propose and plan strategies and training to reduce shortages in labour skills, improve skills and meet market demands).

National strategic documents that call for action in relation to skills anticipation include:

- Malta's National Reform Programme, which states that addressing skills gaps is a priority for government. [\(1\)](#)

- The Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014–2024, which suggests a variety of policy measures to bring education and training closer to the needs of the labour market.
- The Higher Education Strategy for Malta, which calls for research on skills needs to help higher education institutions adapt their courses to the labour market. (2)
- The National Vocational Education and Training Policy which, among other priorities, calls for a skills intelligence system incorporating a national tracer study and longitudinal skills gap analysis.
- The Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 which calls for lifelong learning to be better aligned with skills demand. (3)

Governance

The main organisation responsible for skills anticipation and related activities is the MEDE. MEDE has responsibility for Jobsplus (the PES), NCFHE, UoM and MCAST. The Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), which has a responsibility for identifying skill needs in tourism and hospitality, falls under the responsibility of the Ministry for Tourism. When fully operational, the NSC will have overall responsibility for identifying the country's skills needs and recommending policies and measures to address them.

The role of stakeholders

Employers' organisations, higher education and vocational education and training (VET) providers, social partners, Jobsplus and policymakers are all involved in the skills anticipation process. However, there is no central body bringing together the results of the anticipation activities, and as such there is relatively limited coordination of the range of skills anticipation activities taking place. The NSC, when fully operational, is designed to fulfil the coordinating role by bringing all stakeholders to the discussion table to facilitate a more coherent and structured approach to stakeholder consultation on skills anticipation. Stakeholders represented in the NSC will include UoM, MCAST, Jobsplus, ITS, the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry and Malta Enterprise.

An important platform for stakeholder dialogue is the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD), which involves social partners (government, business and trade unions) in dialogue about the needs of the country and how to collaborate on successful policy initiatives. MCESD also has the remit to commission studies dealing with economic and social development. Jobsplus and the MCAST have good relationships with the business community, and regularly meet employers to discuss how training offered by the two organisations can increase the skills levels of existing and future employees. Several sector-based organisations are also interested in pushing forward the skills agenda with regard to their sectors, such as BICC (construction), the Malta Financial Services Authority (finance) and ESkills Malta Foundation (ICT).

Target groups

The intelligence produced with skills anticipation activities aimed at a wide variety of users: policymakers, education and training providers, labour market intermediaries, employers, jobseekers, young people making decisions about what to study, and graduates from secondary and tertiary

education regarding their career options. As noted above, until recently there has been less emphasis on jobseekers and young people.

Funding and resources

Funding of skills anticipation activity is spread across a number of government departments and agencies depending upon the exercise being undertaken. The European Social Fund (ESF) has been a source of funding for some activities (e.g. the project 'Linking Industrial Needs and VET to Optimise Human Capital', run by MCAST, ITS and the Malta Qualifications Council [\(4\)](#) .

It is important to note that the NSC will have its own budget. Before its establishment, there was no clearly defined budget dedicated to skills anticipation.

Methods and tools

Skills anticipation is currently fragmented and underdeveloped, although the first steps towards a more structured and coordinated system have been taken with the launch of the NSC and recent new surveys and studies, such as the Employability Index (2015) and the National Employee Skills Survey (2016). They contributed to making skills challenges more transparent and have already filled information gaps.

Skills assessment

MCAST, Malta's main VET institution, has an outreach programme with employers to identify skills needs in industry and collaborate to devise relevant courses. Every year a national conference on VET and skills issues is held.

There are also assessments which look at specific skills and labour market issues. Examples include the work of the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), which analysed the skills of the inactive female population. Additionally, there was a Skills Profiling Exercise [\(5\)](#) in the public sector in 2011.

Skills forecasts

There is no information available on any skills forecasting exercises using statistical modelling methods undertaken in the country. Malta's economy is small, open and characterised by fast-changing and sometimes unpredictable developments, and therefore long-term skills forecasting is considered especially difficult.

However, relevant data for [Malta](#) can be found through CEDEFOP's pan-European skills forecasts. The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and industry in cooperation with PriceWaterhouseCoopers carries out monthly surveys among employers which include forecasts of short-term employment needs.

Skills foresight

The 'Skills for the Future' study, carried out in 2009 by the National Commission for Higher Education (later renamed the NCFHE), sought to identify skills gaps and growth prospects in key sectors. The report's findings became the basis for the recommendations in Malta's Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020 (2009). The BUILD UP Skills Project from 2012–2013 aimed to 'build up skills' in the construction sector through a national qualification platform and roadmap to 2020.

No other recent foresight activities have been undertaken in Malta.

Other skills anticipation practices

Jobsplus together with Malta Enterprise and the NCFHE conducted the first National Employee Skills Survey in 2016. This is a survey of employers which collects data on vacancies, recruitment difficulties, expected number of vacancies over the next 12 months/three years, and the qualifications and experience that will be required of applicants. It also collects information on employers' appraisals of apprenticeships and traineeships schemes, internal skills mismatches and in-house training, and their collaboration with educational institutions.

The annual Malta Attractiveness Survey conducted by EY collects data from foreign-owned companies in Malta and presents their expectations of the future skills needs of the labour market. Results are published each year through a national conference. (6)

The National Statistics Office (NSO) regularly publishes information on both the labour market and the education system. This is normally on the basis of analysis of the LFS and administrative data from Jobsplus and educational institutions. Jobsplus also gathers data about job vacancies. These are not currently published in full, but headline figures are published in its annual reports.

Graduate tracer studies are conducted but there is no systematic approach: the Centre for Labour Studies at the UoM is normally commissioned to undertake such research for higher education, and the MCAST conducts tracer studies at the secondary level. The Student Services Department within the MEDE has an annual publication which provides information about the educational and employment choices of young people who have recently completed compulsory education.

The Employability Index provides information on whether employed graduates (at present the classes of 2012, 2013 and 2014) are underemployed (both horizontally – i.e. whether the economic sector matches the field of study – and vertically, i.e. whether their occupation requires their level of education). This is disaggregated by institution, the type of qualification obtained and broad field of study. Other institutions, such as CEDEFOP, have been instrumental in conducting both country-specific research and wider comparative studies which have included Malta.

Dissemination and use

Use of skills anticipation in policy

It is difficult to pinpoint the influence of skills anticipation exercises on policy. The government and stakeholders recognise that alignment between the skills system and the labour market needs to be improved if skills gaps in the economy are to be remedied. The National Employee Survey and the Employability Index were launched to improve data on the extent to which skills supply is meeting demand. The 2016 launch of the NSC signals recognition of the need for skills anticipation results to feed into policy.

Target groups' use of skills anticipation outputs

Some labour market and skills intelligence is available online or upon request. But a large part of the information collected through skills anticipation exercises remains unavailable.

National conference showcase the results from some studies and some information is made available on the websites of the NSO, Jobsplus, the NCFHE and the UoM. However, these organisations do not publish all the data they collect. For example, vacancies data collected by Jobsplus or microdata on the labour market held by NSO are not in publicly available. The reasons for this in part relate to protecting privacy of people and employers included in the data, as the small size of Malta's population (and thus of the survey samples) may jeopardise anonymity in some cases.

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Endnotes

(1) See Ministry of Finance (2016).

(2) See NCFHE (2015).

(3) See MEDE (2014).

(4) See <http://e3i.mcast.edu.mt/esf2.85/>

(5) See Office of the Prime Minister (2015). Results from the audit remain unpublished.

(6) See EY (2016).

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