

The proposed
National Curriculum Framework 2011



YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE EDUCATION

A guide for parents

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Have your say

Dear Parents,

If your children are not due to leave school quite soon, the ideas found in this booklet will affect them greatly as they are intended to update what children learn at school and improve the way they are taught. This booklet offers the reader a bird's eye view of the proposed National Curriculum Framework 2011 (NCF), which will be implemented gradually over the next few years.

So what is the NCF? A national curriculum lays down broadly what students should know and be able to do at each stage of their schooling. (This is different from a syllabus, which is a detailed plan of what each subject must cover). The new curriculum, however, is called a Framework because it forms the basis for curricula to be drawn up for each learning area (more about these inside) and will also allow schools to be flexible in the way they implement it.

By law, the national curriculum must be renewed every few years to adapt to changing times. The one currently in force, called *Creating The Future Together*, was published in 1999. The new version being proposed by the Ministry of Education goes beyond this. Not only does it spell out the kind of teaching and learning that should take place in schools – some of which is already being practised – but also, for the first time, maps out how to achieve it.

It is, of necessity, a highly detailed document, taking up four volumes. It has been several years in the making, with the educational authorities working to a single aim: to raise the quality of education even further so that each and every child will make a success of their life.

A big effort is being made to allow everyone to have a say in the final document. Your child's school and teachers are among those being consulted. Now, as a parent, it is your turn. This booklet is aimed at helping you make a contribution to the guidelines that will shape your child's education in the near future.

“The process of consultation is crucial for the success of the updated national curriculum framework”

*Prof. Grace Grima,
Director General,
Directorate for Quality
and Standards in
Education.*

Meetings about the draft National Curriculum Framework are being planned for parents in all schools, where they can get more detailed explanations and ask questions. Take a note of any questions as they arise while you read through this booklet so you can raise them during these meetings. For more information go to: www.education.gov.mt



"In Malta we need a curriculum that prepares students not only for today but also for a demanding and more socially active society of the future. This National Curriculum Framework calls for greater responsibility at all levels as educators together with other stakeholders engage to create the essential education programme for all children to succeed"

*NCF Consultation
Document 2, Rationale
and Components, p11*

What are the **key concepts** of this curriculum?

The key concepts can be broken down into 10:

1. The main aim of education is to help students become lifelong learners.

By the time they leave school, children should have the ability to carry on learning throughout their lifetime. This will enable them to continue studying, find and switch jobs, succeed at work or in a career, be responsible citizens and play an active part in a constantly changing society and world.

2. All students, whatever their aptitudes, must be given the support they need to be a success.

In mixed-ability classrooms, teachers will focus on showing students how to learn, whatever their level of achievement, so they will experience both challenge and success. Teachers will allow for different rates of progress. There will be a fresh look at the role of the Learning Support Assistants in secondary school.

3. Colleges and schools will make some of their own decisions on how to meet the needs of their students.

An example of this is that state schools will be able to allocate a few lessons in the timetable to particular subjects as they deem fit. They will also be given more flexibility in the subject options they offer, such as in foreign languages and with the reintroduction of accounts and economics in senior secondary school.

4. Schools will become 'learning communities', going beyond their role of teaching students.

For example, all schools would be expected to develop policies on parental involvement in education and become places where parents and other members of the community can attend evening classes.

“The challenge is to match the needs of learners in a world that is changing with great rapidity. In order to meet this challenge, the local community needs to accept and actively promote the importance of learning throughout life – a process which acknowledges that everyone can become a successful learner along their own path”

NCF Consultation Document 2, Rationale and Components, p12

Key concepts CONTINUED

“The NCF presented in this document deliberately attempts to move away from a prescriptive curriculum to a framework. In so doing, a certain amount of flexibility is advocated thus encouraging stakeholders to have a greater say in determining the content to suit the needs of the learners”

NCF 2, p12

5. Students should be well-prepared for the move from early to primary and then to secondary school, so that the transition will be smooth.

Each stage of learning will be built on the foundations laid in the last. There will be no sudden jumps in the skills to be learned. The child's level of achievement will be assessed in primary school and reported to secondary school ahead of the move. This way of reporting on progress and achievement by means of levels (levels 1-10) is recommended for both the Primary and Secondary years. It is not dependent on the students' age but on their rate of progress. This system does away with the concept of pass/fail and allows all students to progress accordingly to the next level.

6. Teachers will try to engage students actively in the classroom, tailoring lessons to their personal needs, interests and experiences.

Teachers need to be flexible in their approach to teaching because children learn in different ways and there are different ways to motivate them. ICT will be a key tool to be used for this purpose.

7. Students will not just be given knowledge but helped to understand it properly and apply it.

There will be a lot of hands-on work going on in the class-





room, with children exploring, analysing, investigating and experimenting. How much they know will be less important than how they use the knowledge, in areas ranging from environment and culture to entrepreneurship and creativity.

8. Subjects will be grouped into 'learning areas' and not taught in isolation.

This approach will allow more links to be created and less overlap to take place between subjects in each learning area, the better to reflect real life. The eight learning areas are: Languages; Mathematics; Science; Technology; Citizenship; Religious Education; Arts; Health.

9. Besides the tests and exams, assessment of students will take place throughout the year.

This will enable teachers to know where each of their students stand at any point in time so they can plan lessons accordingly and make decisions on how to improve their students' learning.

10. Schools shall continually evaluate their effectiveness and teachers will be offered further professional training.

Schools will be reviewed by an external body and encouraged to evaluate themselves internally in order to identify their needs, set targets and develop action plans. Training needs may focus, for example, on new ways of teaching, how to cater for the diverse needs of students, and the use of electronic teaching tools.

“The challenge that permeates all four documents is: ‘What is the purpose of education in a democracy in the 21st century? What must we do differently to leave a lasting impact on students so that they can ultimately lead more engaging lives and have a lasting impact on making this a better world to live in?’”

NCF 2, p11

FRIENDS

A+

DRAW

MATH

SCHOOL

HISTORY

LEARN

GRADE

STUDY

BOOKS

CLASS

NOTE



"The aims of education... prepare all children to become lifelong learners, confident, successful, creative, connected and engaged in the community and the world around them. Their education should enable them to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that make them capable of sustaining their life chances in the changing world of work, and to become actively engaged citizens"

NCF 2, p24

What kind of learners does the curriculum aim to produce?

The following quotations give a gist of the three educational aims of the NCF. The complete version is given in pages 26 to 33 of Document 2 of the NCF.

AIM 1 To become lifelong learners, students will need to:

- **Have personal and social skills**

“As they become independent and learn to take care of themselves, young children need to learn how to deal with their feelings, recognise and label emotions and learn to be comfortable with themselves”

- **Develop morally and spiritually**

“Through...individual, group and classroom experiences and through personal reflection, they need to develop the various skills that lead to moral and spiritual growth”

- **Be literate and numerate, as well as IT-literate**

“Becoming digitally literate involves developing understanding of data sources and manipulation of data...”

- **Be bilingual and also know foreign languages**

“Being multilingual implies being able to communicate in speech and in writing in at least three languages”

- **Be competent in science and technology**

“The aim is to ensure that learners experience a broad scientific education that will prepare them for a society where science and technology increasingly play a leading role”

- **Develop both their thinking and creative skills**

“During the primary years children’s imagination and inquisitiveness need to be developed as a means of investigating problems and using their imagination to explore possible solutions”

Aims of education CONTINUED

AIM 2 To be successful in the world of work, the qualities required include:

- **Confident and effective communication**

“Successful social and personal development requires children to express themselves in comprehensible and meaningful ways.”

- **The ability to re-train and learn new skills**

“Learning and teaching strategies need to enable children to be receptive to their own strengths and weaknesses, providing them with an ability to improve and adapt intelligently to changing realities and contexts.”

- **Economic stability and independence**

“Young people need to know how to use personal and global resources in order to maximise their economic value.”

- **A sense of entrepreneurship**

“Through risk-taking, planning, perseverance and the use of their imagination, children will understand and develop the ability to think critically and create and value new products that help them and others adapt to changes in society”

- **Playing a part in sustainable development**

“Through their school experiences...they need to become aware of a range of plausible solutions and take action to improve their immediate environment”





AIM 3 To stay engaged in the ever-changing world around them, learners will need to:

- **Respect and value diversity**

“Children discover similarities and differences around them through their experience of different cultures and languages”

- **Respect and promote Maltese culture**

“Children should actively engage in projects that assist in the conservation of their regional and national heritage”

- **Learn to operate with different cultures**

“Participation in e-twinning, Comenius and other projects among schools both at local and at international levels facilitate intercultural experiences”

- **Uphold social justice and democracy**

“Young people need to develop their understanding of social justice and democratic principles and assume greater responsibility for these as part of the life of the school”

"A teacher dominated pedagogy, which relegates learners to a passive role, emphasises memorisation and limits interactions between learners, is unlikely to promote effective learning"

NCF 2, p50



What kind of learning will take place in the classroom?

- Teachers will build on students' current knowledge and help them progress from that.
- There will be no room for passive learning. Students will be helped to make sense of new knowledge and develop their understanding of it by interacting with the teacher and their classmates.
- Learning will be challenging and engaging for all learners, from the lowest to the highest achievers.
- Understanding and application of knowledge and skills will be more important than the memorisation of facts.
- Students will be given feedback that they can use to improve their learning. The emphasis will be on showing learners how to learn.
- Teachers will try to create an environment in the classroom that appeals to their students' interests and can be explored in ways that challenge them.
- Students will be given direct, hands-on experiences that encourage them to get involved so as to improve their understanding and recall.
- Classroom activities of this nature entail good planning on the part of teachers so they can promote a whole range of skills, attitudes, knowledge and values.

“Learning programmes need to be more competence-based rather than knowledge-based only... particularly in the context of a society where knowledge is readily accessible”

NCF 2, p50

What are the learning areas?

- 1. Languages.** Fluency and competence in both English and Maltese. The start of a third language at primary level. A third and possibly a fourth language at secondary level.
- 2. Mathematics.** A sound knowledge of basic maths concepts in primary school and, in secondary school, preparation for further studies.
- 3. Science.** Knowledge of fundamental principles and skills to understand and explore their impact on everyday life; further studies that could lead to careers.
- 4. Technology Education.** This area includes Design and Technology ('design and make') and Digital Literacy (use of ICT).
- 5. Health Education.** Physical Education and Sport; aspects of Personal, Social and Health Education and of Home Economics.
- 6. Religious Education.** This is understood as Catholic Religious Education, which falls under the responsibility of the Church. It is recommended that learners who opt out will follow an Ethical Education Programme.
- 7. Citizenship Education.** This includes History, Geography, Social Studies, Environmental Studies and aspects of PSHE and Home Economics.
- 8. Arts Education.** This embraces Art, Music, Dance and Drama – creative expression.



“...a body of relevant, purposeful and connected knowledge and skills... This does not imply the elimination of traditional subject content but the establishment of links across subjects to enforce learning”

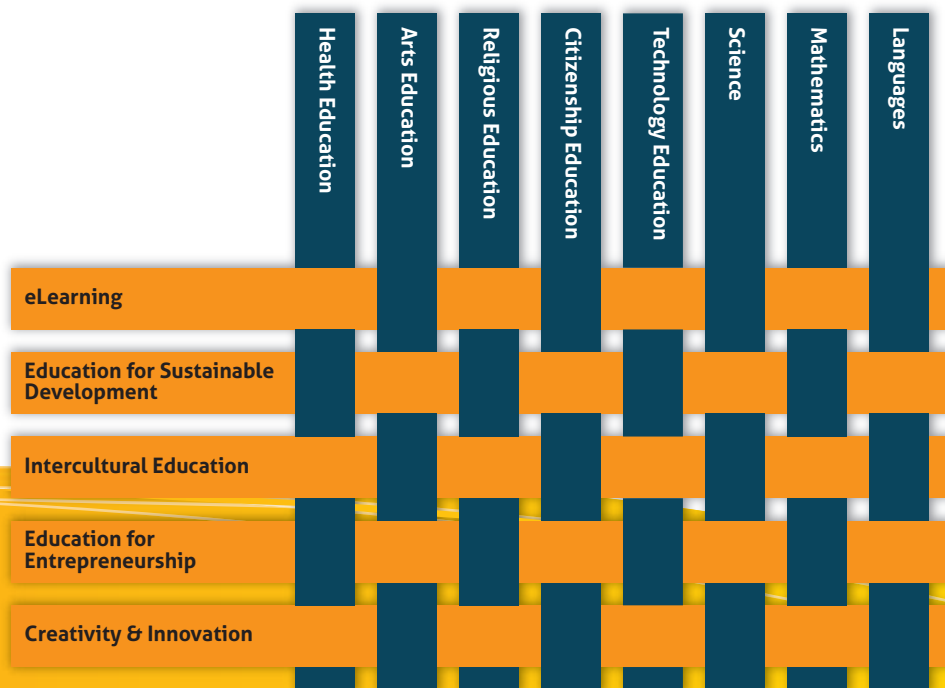
NCF 2, p33

“The current system of partitioning the primary and secondary curricula into independent single subjects presents learners with a fragmented view of knowledge which is not conducive to holistic education”

NCF 2, p33

Five themes will be present across the whole curriculum:

1. **eLearning.** The use of digital content in teaching and learning.
2. **Education for Sustainable Development.** Learning to become active in decision-making that improves the environment and quality of life.
3. **Intercultural Education.** Respect and understanding of different cultures and ability to function across cultural divides.
4. **Education for Entrepreneurship.** Ability to turn ideas into action, respond to change, take risks, plan and manage projects.
5. **Creativity and innovation.** Nurturing each student’s talents and fostering qualities like problem-solving, leadership, lateral thinking and self-expression.



The integration of whole school cross-curricular themes



What kind of teachers are needed?

According to the NCF, these are some of the qualities of effective teachers:

- They are knowledgeable not only in their own subjects but have the ability to draw on other subjects and apply this knowledge to their own areas.
- They are flexible and “alert to teachable moments”.
- They believe in the varied capabilities of their students, constantly challenging them and setting high expectations of them.
- They understand their students and can tailor their teaching methods to their needs.
- They reflect on their work and can adapt the principles of the curriculum to the circumstances of their own classrooms.

The NCF proposes that teachers be given plenty of support to improve their teaching skills. In primary schools, for example, support teachers will be available to help classroom teachers plan and deliver lessons in Science, Technology, IT and PE.

To update their knowledge and skills, they will be given regular in-service training and opportunities to further their professional development within the school. They will also be given access to mentors and networks of professionals who can guide and support them.

“Shifting our mental models about what we teach, how we teach, how students learn and how we assess students’ learning growth will take some getting used to. Such changes require open-mindedness, flexibility, patience and courage.”

NCF 2, p19

"Assessment of the students' achievement for summative purposes should not be dependent on one-off performances in tests and examinations"

NCF 2, p57



How will children be assessed?

- Assessment of class work and projects will take place throughout the year to provide teachers, students and their parents with ongoing feedback. This is compared with expected levels of achievement so that decisions and plans can be made along the way about meeting each child's needs.
- Tests may be carried out at the end of a unit or period of time, such as mid or end of year, with reports sent to parents and teachers in the next class.
- Children will be made aware of what is expected of them, so they can learn to evaluate their own progress.
- Assessment will start in the **early years** (pre-school) with the observation and recording of children's achievements.
- In **Years 1, 2 and 3**, a checklist based on an established national policy will be used to spot children with learning difficulties in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy and give them extra support.
- From **Years 3 to 6**, assessment will be school-based and include speaking and listening skills in English and Maltese.
- Exams will be introduced in **Year 4**, along with the other forms of assessment.
- At the end of **Year 6**, there will be national benchmarking in Maltese, English and Maths. This is voluntary for Church and independent schools.
- In **secondary school**, teachers from different subjects within the same learning area could set and assess projects and coursework together. This would promote transfer of skills and help avoid overloading students with work.
- Assessment of vocational subjects will be based on coursework.
- In state schools, some annual exams may be set by the College instead of centrally.

“Everyday interactions between teachers and pupils in oral and written work and other activities, and interactions among the pupils themselves, provide valuable information about each child's strengths and weaknesses”

NCF 2, p55

“In secondary schools, a number of criteria need to be considered to ensure that the NCF is put into practice in a timetable which maximises learning time”

NCF Consultation Document 3, The Three Cycles, p57

DAY	15 minutes	75 minutes	15 minutes	135 minutes	30 minutes	90 minutes				
MON	Assembly & Settling in class	Religious Education 30 mins	Maltese 45 mins	English 45 mins	Maths 45 mins	Technology 45 mins	Mid-day break	Health Education 30 mins	Science 30 mins	Arts Education 30 mins
TUE	Assembly & Settling in class	English 45 mins	Citizenship Education 30 mins	Health Education 60 mins	Religion Education 30 mins	Maths 45 mins	Mid-day break	Arts Education 45 mins	Maltese 45 mins	Health Education 30 mins
WED	Assembly & Settling in class	Religious Education 30 mins	Maths 45 mins	Maltese 45 mins	English 45 mins	Citizenship Education 45 mins	Mid-day break	Arts Education 60 mins	Arts Education 60 mins	Health Education 30 mins
THU	Assembly & Settling in class	Maths 45 mins	L3 30 mins	Religious Education 30 mins	Science 60 mins	English 45 mins	Mid-day break	Maltese 45 mins	Maltese 45 mins	Health Education 45 mins
FRI	Assembly & Settling in class	English 45 mins	Science 30 mins	Maltese 45 mins	Maths 45 mins	Health Education 45 mins	Mid-day break	Religious Education 30 mins	Citizenship Education 60 mins	Citizenship Education 60 mins

Model timetable for primary schools according to suggested distribution of learning time.

How will school timetables be affected?

The aim is to make the most of the limited number of hours:

Primary school:

- In Years 1 and 2, allocation of lessons should be based on themes rather than subjects: science, religion, arts, health and so on.
- Between Years 3 and 6 there will be an average of 800 hours of teaching in a school year, not including exams, break-times and assembly time.
- Lessons in these four years could vary in length between 30 and 60 minutes and should provide for a good balance between learning areas.
- PE and sport would be allocated 30 minutes a day during Health Education, plus schools should organise sport activities during the midday break.

Secondary school:

- A minimum of 38 lessons a week will be needed to cover curriculum requirements.
- Lessons of between 40 and 45 minutes long, and not less than 42 minutes if this includes travel time between classrooms.
- Assemblies to be timetabled as well, outside of actual learning time.
- Midday breaks long enough for sport and other non-formal activities.
- Five alternative timetables are proposed for secondary schools. Depending on which timetable is used and the Year addressed, among the proposed changes are:
 - More lessons in Maltese – a minimum of four per week.
 - Five English and four Maltese lessons, or vice versa, at the school's discretion, depending on its students' needs.
 - More lessons in subjects under Arts, Technology, Health and Citizenship Education areas.
 - PE increased from two to three lessons a week.
 - Two lessons a week to be allocated at the school's choosing.

How can parents become more involved in school?

Research shows that the more the parents are involved with school, the higher the chances of educational success for their children. The NCF proposes that a national policy be drawn up about the different ways in which parents can interact with the school, in order to strengthen their involvement. There are currently four ways in which parents in Malta interact with their children's school:

- **Home-school links.** Regular correspondence between schools and parents, such as through notes, circulars and emails. Attendance at school ceremonies and functions. Parents' days or meetings to discuss subject or exam options. Coordination between home and school to improve behaviour or performance.
- **Parental participation.** Assistance in school events and activities such as sports days and outings. Offering of service in the library, classroom assistance or in reading groups.
- **Parental involvement.** Influencing school agendas and decisions. Membership in Parent Teacher Associations, School Councils, Board of Governors, as well as local or international parent associations.
- **Parental lifelong learning.** Parents who make use of the school for their own personal growth, from attending talks or other educational activities organised by the school to the training of parent leaders within the school and local community.

The NCF also proposes stronger school links with the community, such as by organising:

- Site visits or talks for students by persons from the community.
- Evening classes for members of the community.
- Work orientation experiences for students with businesses in the community.
- Partnerships with the business sector to explore other forms of collaboration.



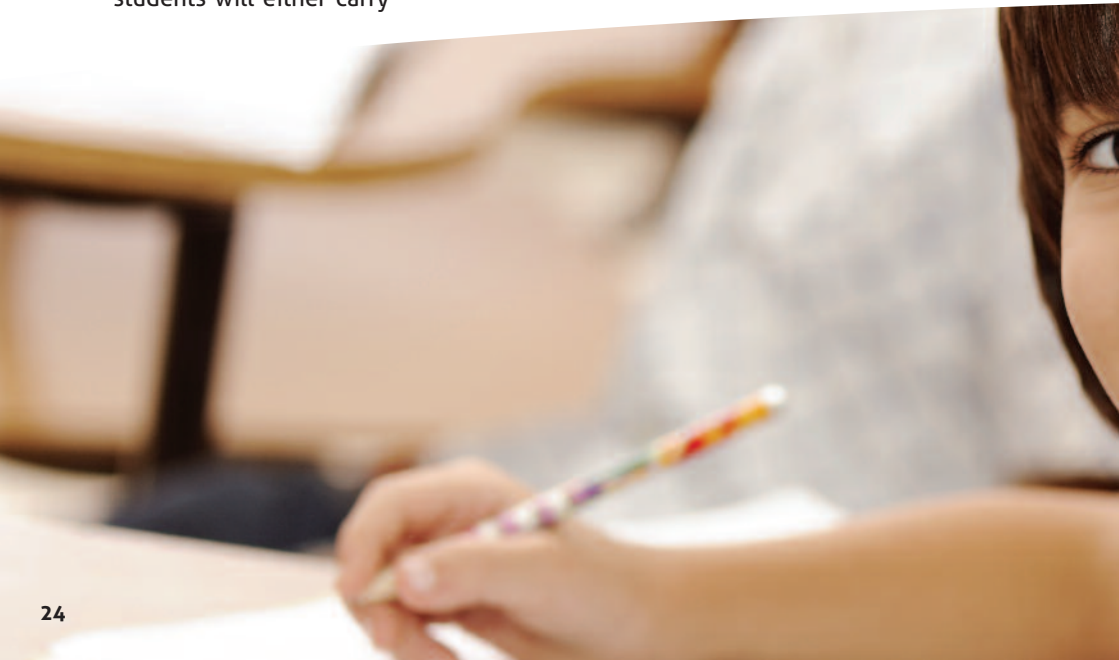
“Home-school links, parental participation and involvement as well as parental lifelong learning are different entry-points for parents who are encouraged to consider more and more diverse forms of parental interaction with schools. The four categories are important for parents, their children and schools to ensure the most holistic educational development of all the stakeholders concerned”

NCF 2, p61

Any other important recommendations?

Yes, plenty. Here are a few more that need to be mentioned:

- “Learning outcomes” will be drawn up – basically what each child is expected to learn in every area, at every level.
- Levels of achievement will be measured on a 10-point scale that covers learners of all abilities throughout all of primary and secondary education. This will help teachers plan lessons around their students’ different needs.
- The years of compulsory schooling are to be renamed Years 1 to 11 to reflect the continuity between the primary and secondary cycles.
- Primary school teachers will be responsible for Maltese, English, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Religion, Citizenship and Health Education (including PE and Home Economics). Specialist teachers will take over classes for Art, Music, Drama, PSHE and foreign language awareness.
- In secondary school, special programmes will be developed for students who are still experiencing difficulties in Maltese, English or Mathematics.
- Foreign languages may be offered other than Arabic, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish.
- All students in Years 7 and 8 will learn Core Science. In Years 9, 10 and 11, students will either carry



on with Core Science or specialise in Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Materials Sciences. More of this in the next section on the Science Vision.

- Four initial vocational subject areas will be introduced as options from 2013: Engineering, Hospitality, IT Practitioner and Health and Social Care. These are being piloted in a number of state and non-state schools from September 2011.
- Setting will initially be employed for students in the core subjects of Mathematics, English and Maltese but the grouping of students into classes will eventually more closely resemble the mixed-ability primary classrooms.
- All schools are to have a language strategy to implement the National Language Policy, with strong participation by families and communities.
- Apart from this, three other national policies are proposed: for assessment, diversity and inclusion, and parental involvement.
- More attention to fluency in the mother tongue in early primary school, as well as exposure to the second language.

“The NCF calls for a paradigm shift in the way learning, teaching and the curriculum are perceived. This document does not present a magic formula which brings about this paradigm shift but acknowledges that we need to engage together to challenge the status quo, to challenge entrenched views and positions and to create meaning with different stakeholders. The success of this process depends on the commitment of all the stakeholders over the years to come during the consultation and implementation stage”

NCF Consultation Document 4, The Way Forward, p35



Science education

The four NCF documents are supplemented by a fifth: **A Vision For Science Education In Malta**. The outlines a way forward for the area based on current and future national needs.

It holds that the present system of teaching science is “riddled with piecemeal strategies and decisions based on intuition rather than empirical evidence...” In other words, changes did not always emerge from a clear vision and overall plan.

The purpose of science education is “to develop the scientific literacy of all learners”. This would enable them to make informed decisions when striving to improve their quality of life within a changing world. It also develops skills and ways of thinking that use evidence to make decisions. And it lays the foundations for those who want to pursue science-related careers.

The aim is to increase the number of students taking science options and also improve their performance. Achieving this vision would require:

- Pupils in the **early years** learning to be curious, to observe, to investigate and ask questions.
- A flexible Core Science curriculum in the **primary years**, where individual schools can make the programme relevant to their students.
- Core Science offered in **secondary school**, leading to a SEC examination for those who do not continue studying the sciences.
- The option to take Materials, Life or Physical Sciences, in various combinations, by those wishing to study the sciences in more detail from Year 9.

Core Science. Concepts, principles, theories and methods of investigation organised into themes that bring together knowledge from different areas.

Materials Science. The study of natural and synthetic materials, how they are used in everyday life and how they can be combined to make new products.

Physical Sciences. Matter, energy and the interactions between them, on both a microscopic scale as well as on the level of the earth and the universe.

Life Sciences. Biological and chemical concepts. The study of organisms small and large. Life on our planet as a system.

These ‘new’ subjects are a way of approaching chemistry, physics and biology with more attention being paid to the way they apply to real life and to making them more interesting.

Useful information

Recommended reading:

Towards A Quality Education For All.
The National Curriculum Framework 2011

- Consultation Document 1. Executive Summary
- Consultation Document 4. The Way Forward.

The other two volumes are:

- Consultation Document 2. Rationale and Components
- Consultation Document 3. The Three Cycles: Early Years, Primary Years and Secondary Years

See also:

- A Vision For Science Education in Malta. Consultation Document 2011


All five documents can be downloaded from the website of the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family:

www.education.gov.mt. Click on **National Curriculum Framework 2011**.

Feedback can also be left on the website.

More information can be obtained by sending an e-mail to: curriculum.meef@gov.mt
You may also call Customer Care on Freephone: **1571**





The standard of education in Malta is at the point of taking another leap forward.

The national curriculum, on which schools base their teaching and learning, is in the process of being updated. A draft document, called the National Curriculum Framework 2011, has been released for consultation. It is a formula for excellence in Malta's educational system and will entail changes to the way things are currently done in order to achieve this goal.

Parents are among those being asked to contribute actively in the consultation process by becoming familiar with the proposals which are outlined in this booklet and giving their feedback which will be used for finetuning and finalising the document in 2012.