

# National Conference on the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning: Retelling for the Future

Malta Qualifications Council (MQC)  
Tuesday: 15th December 2009  
Westin Dragonara Resort, St George's Bay, Malta

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## **1. Welcome by the Chairman of MQC, Mr. Joseph Abela Fitzpatrick**

The role of the MQC is to maintain the Malta Qualifications Framework and to establish standards. Through the validation of informal and non-formal learning the individual can get the value for himself, for society and for the economy.

The deliverables of the INLearning Project: Validating Learning for an Inclusive Society includes a Lifepass which records the experience on a pendrive, a manual on the validation process and an extensive report for the validation of informal and non-formal learning through the INLearning Project with the participation of 10 partners from 9 different European countries.

Tiny Malta is the second European Member State after Ireland which presented the Referencing Report of the NQF and the EQF and the QF/EHEA to the European Commission, although the deadline to do so is by the end of 2010.

The Chairman mentioned also the other pilot projects in the validation of informal and non-formal learning such as the newly re-designed school leaving certificate which does not only include formal education. Art, music and sports are from now on being given value. This also applies for experience in carpentry, mechanics and other sectors.

Other local projects include collaboration with the Zagħżagh Azzjoni Kattolika (ZAK), the hairdressing and the care sectors.

He thanked the Council, Dr James Calleja and the MQC team for all the work they have achieved so far.

## **2. The Key Objectives of the Conference, Dr James Calleja – Chief Executive, MQC**

This discussion is a continuation of the consultation which has taken place before. The 3 main objectives of the Conference are:

- consultation on how to invest more in people;
- discussion on investing in people to encourage them towards upskilling and re-training to retain their job and/or improve career prospects; and the
- creation of a higher profile at a national, European and global level

At a national level:

- The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) was established in 2005.
- The Policy Document on the validation of informal and non-formal learning was launched in June 2008
- In August 2008 MQC submitted an application for EQF Leonardo da Vinci Projects and the INLearning Project was 1 of the 10 selected projects out of 33 applications.
- Malta is one of the contributors to the development of the European Tools which are used at national level.

At a European level:

- European Guidelines to which Malta contributed
- European Inventory
- European and National Tools: credits, Quality Assurance, Standards

The process of validation is a formal one, which requires professionalism and standards. Every certificate through the formal, informal and non-formal learning should have an MQF level so that it will have value.

The first challenge to produce the Referencing Report was that there were no other reports which serve as guidelines or model as Malta was one of the first to produce this report.

The key challenges following this conference are:

1. parity of esteem through a formal process of validation and certificate
2. participation of experts so that they will contribute to the sector skills councils

### 3. legal framework towards lifelong learning

#### **3. Inaugural speech by the Prime Minister, Hon. Dr. Lawrence Gonzi**

This Conference is very important as initiatives towards investing in our human resources are considered as advantageous for the economy of our country and beneficial to the country as a whole. Our human resources should adapt to sudden changes, and our education system and such initiatives should address this.

Education is the key and the foundation for everyone's development. Through discussion we should face opportunities. It is a national vision that builds on the human resources' competences. Through globalisation and technology our island and its economy is no longer isolated, it is competing on a level playing field with other countries which are bigger in size. Our economy is driven by the services sector which relies on technology. The nation is addressing these changes through providing solutions which are personalised for the individuals – a flexible structure away from the one-fits-all structure .

This initiative supports investment in formal education including the opening of a new school every year and investment in Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) and the University of Malta. Malta has two of five establishments for the aviation industry. One of the key Maltese assets is that the individuals adapt to change quickly. Another important development is that the qualifications provided in Malta have visibility and value at a European level through the Referencing Report.

NGOs and other organisations provide non-formal education which is a key element in the personal development and a lifelong learning opportunity for the individuals. This is a very good motivation for our children to be active and contribute to our society.

This reform is a tool which puts the individual in the centre, and the recognition of informal and non-formal learning contributes to attracting more Foreign Direct Investment to Malta.

#### **4. Recognising all learning – A Social Partners' Viewpoint, Mr. Vince Farrugia – Member, Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD)**

When one walks through our streets and witnesses the skilled labour, art and craftsmanship one realises that we have individuals who have competences which are not recognised. Quality skills were never certified and given value as they never had any certification of formal education. Therefore this is not statistically recorded as our national statistics record the lowest percentage of people in Europe who succeeded in the formal education system.

Mr Farrugia pointed out that all levels in the framework are important not only higher education. The fact that there is a shift of emphasis from knowledge only to knowledge, skills and competences which show what a learner is capable of doing. Efficiency and qualifications witness what are the skills and competences of our labour force.

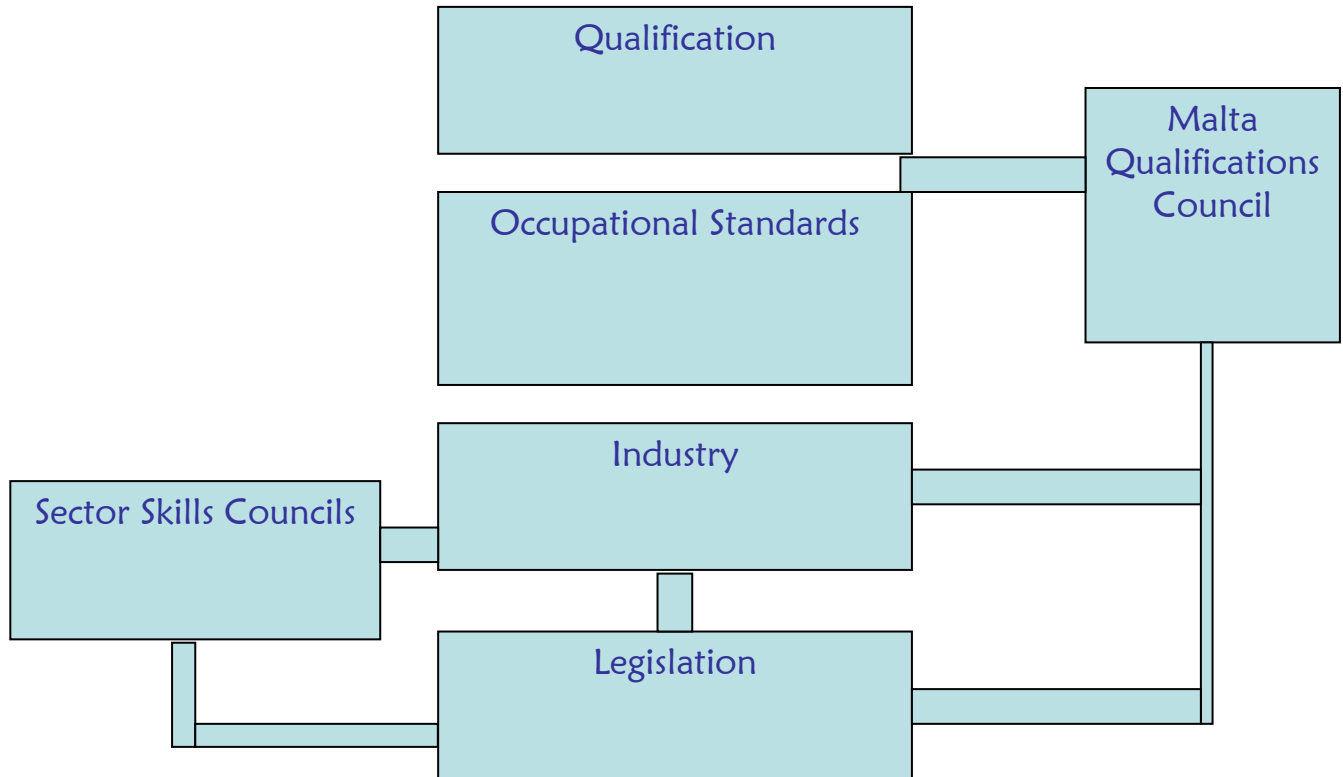
#### **5. Validation of informal and non-formal learning – MQC's Roadmap, Mr. Richard Curmi – Senior Manager Assessment & Accreditation, MQC**

Validation makes invisible learning visible through validation and certification.

The individual should first identify what needs to be certified, valued and recognised personally, socially and economically. Informal and non-formal learning is achieved during our free time or on the work place.

The individual is at the centre of the validation process. It won't replace the formal education but it complements the formal education and encourages lifelong learning. Through validation one is given a second chance as sometimes circumstances prevent an individual from progressing to higher levels in formal education system beyond compulsory education.

Figure 1. MQC's Roadmap



The validation process:

- access and motivation: what are the opportunities after validation?
- MQC guides the individual to the Sector Skills Council
- Evidence: How to present the documentation? Through CV and portfolio
- Other courses before validation to fill in the missing gaps
- Results can be partial as they may/may not satisfy all the occupational standards

Who is involved in the process:

- MQC
- Assessors
- External observers for Quality Assurance
- Industry and social partners
- Human resources
- Counsellors
- Unions, associations, employers
- Voluntary organisations

Figure 2: The validation process

## The Process (Choices for the Individual)

Access and Motivation

What opportunities exist?  
Is it worth being validated?

Initiation

Identification of knowledge,  
skills and competences to be  
validated

Pre-documentation

What needs to be  
done/acquired?

Documentation

Evidence needed  
How to present it  
(cv/portfolio)



## The Process (Choices for the Individual)

Further training

Is there a need for attending any  
courses?

Submission for validation

Results  
Partial or full qualification?

Further qualification

The need for lifelong learning



Assessment methods:

- Presentations
- discussions

- interviews
- observations
- simulations
- portfolio
- tests and exams

#### Sector Skills Councils:

- qualified to be able to assess
- expertise in the sector

#### Occupational Standards:

- reference points based on good practice agreed at a national level
- used to design demand-driven qualifications
- used by employers when issuing a call for applications and by assessors of validation of informal and non-formal learning

The INLearning Project is a Leonardo da Vinci Project co-ordinated by the MQC with a consortium of 10 partners from 9 different European countries. Malta is focusing on the printing and agribusiness sectors, there are five other sectors including care, hospitality, security, construction and transport. There are more details on the website: <http://www.inlearning.eu>

Validation is done through a continuous process including appeal. It is a tick boxes system, not a pass or fail system.

## **6. Roundtable Discussion ONE with Social Partners and Voluntary Organisations Chair: Mr Richard Curmi, Senior Manager Assessment and Accreditation, MQC**

### **6.1 Mr Andrew Mizzi – National Secretary, General Workers Union (GWU)**

How do you consider the union's contribution to the proposed system and specifically to training aspects?

The Reggie Miller Foundation incorporates eleven schools and provides formal and non-formal learning. The foundation believes in flexible learning. Informal learning is achieved without formal certification through experience, such as when someone has the capabilities to work as a shopsteward one is given the opportunity to do so. He added an example of a person who has years of experience in automechanics but has no formal education, and he is considered the best person in the company to train new recruits, but unfortunately so far without validation he has nothing to show for it. Therefore formal certification is welcome by the Union. He mentioned that the foundation uses a tool pack to evaluate personal development.

### **6.2 Mr Jesmond Bonello – Assistant Secretary, Union Haddiema Maghqudin (UHM)**

"Human resources are among the assets of civilisation." Education and recognition of skills and competences are part of human resources. Do you agree? What role can your union play in the process of validation of informal and non-formal learning?

In practice on the job only academic qualifications are recognised even though individuals have a lot of skills, competences and experiences. It is difficult and embarrassing for an adult of 40 years to join a class with students of school age. Therefore the Salvinu Spiteri Foundation within the union helps adult learners return to the class with peers and to non-formal education.

Some University graduates find it difficult to be employed due to lack of experience, on the other hand there are many others who have a lot of experience but is not recorded as achievement through certification and qualifications. Facts show that skilled workers do not find it difficult to be employed. Like EU members we should exploit what we have, get the true potential of the individuals through validation and then we'll be making good use of the learning to the full.

### **6.3 Mr William Portelli – President, Confederation of Malta Trade Unions (CMTU)**

One of the objectives of the CMTU is to help improve the employees' economic and social conditions. How do you envisage that these conditions will improve with the employees' recognition of skills and competences?

Within the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD) CMTU discusses such issues as education and training. This union encourages its members so that when they issue a call for applications they make it accessible also to unqualified but experienced people such as having a particular qualification or five or ten years experience which is considered as equivalent to a qualification and therefore recognition of informal learning. This facility gives more flexibility to the labour market and the employee is motivated to learn more and retrain oneself so as to be able to apply for further opportunities. Training has a wider meaning than on the job training but it has a value in terms of personal development.

### **6.4 Mr Joseph Farrugia – Director General, Malta Employers' Association (MEA)**

The employer has different responsibilities such as the relations with the employees and the employer ensure that the work force are employed enough to compete locally and in international markets. As an employers' association what contribution do you think you can make to the process of validation and how does the validation contribute to the association?

The Employers' Association welcomes the redesign of the School Leaving Certificate which now gives a clear picture of what the student knows as the certificate will also include informal and non-formal learning. When someone demonstrates that one has leadership skills as one is active in a voluntary organisation this is valued by the employer. Other skills gained through membership of such organisations include budgeting. These skills are valued by employers when they are evaluating potential employees.

The level of workers' mobility in Malta is very low, which reflects the level of the European Union. However, this is not the case in the United States. One someone has a certificate showing one's skills and competences, the certificate makes oneself more mobile.

When one leaves school before the compulsory age of sixteen and starts working fails to get a School Leaving Certificate but a number of years' experience gained on the job will eventually be valued through informal and non-formal learning. Therefore certification is beneficial for those people who lack certification in formal education.

### **6.5 Mr Josef Debono – Zghazagh Azzjoni Kattolika (ZAK) – Youth Catholic Action**

The ZAK is an organisation where youth meets to socialise and to learn from information and experience. How can ZAK contribute and benefit from the validation process?

Validation is for everyone not for those who lack certification of formal learning as it gives new opportunities to those who have certification. When youth organise activities they achieve skills which may not be achieved in class. Mr Debono explained that although his academic background is not youth work as he graduated as a teacher, the informal and non-formal learning achieved through ZAK membership motivated him to proceed to formal higher education and is reading for a Masters in Youth Work at the University.

He emphasised that this is a voluntary process which gives an opportunity to the individual it is not a race for certificates.

### **6.6 Mr Gordon Cardona – Kunsill Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilita' (KNPD)**

The law Equal Opportunities (for people with disability) safeguards the rights of people with disability so that there will be no more discrimination against them. How can a validation system help disabled persons who choose to have their competences recognised integrate into system and get fair treatment?

The law sets a framework of what has to be done. This initiative gives value to non-formal and informal learning is very helpful for disabled persons as the latter are a disadvantage within the formal education system.

## **6.7 Prof. Paul Micallef – Malta Federation of Professional Associations (MFPA)**

The MFPA represents various professions including engineers, architects, medical associations and social u youth workers. Most if not all are certified by the formal education system. What is MFPA's opinion about the same parity of esteem of certificates issued for skills and competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning?

All members have a higher education qualification. However there are other self-employed who are not members of MFPA such as fishermen, mechanics, builders such as "*mastru*" and others who must also be taken into consideration. When the client is aware that the service provider is qualified and was assessed one is assured that standards have been met and one expects a quality service. However, the validation of informal and non-formal learning must not only be based on practical experience, there must be an element of theory provided for within the University and MCAST's structures. It is a very good opportunity that now skills such as communication skills and leadership will be recorded.

### **7. Questions from the public:**

Ms Irene Dillon, Employment and Training Corporation (ETC)  
How can theory and personal development be balanced through validation?

Mr Robert Cilia, Guidance Teacher, Higher Secondary  
One of the challenges is early school leavers in the EU. Many students do not even attend school, some work in the hospitality industry under-age in hte . How can validation help them?

Mr. Smith Headmaster Hamrun Lyceum  
What documents will the portfolio include?

Mr Anthony Saliba, Deputy Principal, MCAST  
How to educate civil society particularly parents in the shift from formal education?  
How many certificates are we going to give? Too much of the same.  
How are we looking at the individual in terms of their dignity. Holistic education is for personal development and social status not in terms of the number of certificates.

Chev Frank Gatt, Principal, Gozo College  
Validation is important for mobility and visibility of qualifications within and outside Malta. Languages are important tools for mobility not only through formal education but as co

Ms Mariella Cassar Education Officer (Music)  
We should do justice with the use of terminology such as extra curricular activities. Music may not be extra for some academic subjects may be. We do not have the specialised schools but these subjects should be considered as extra. There should be a shift from a one-fits all structure.

## **8. Roundtable Discussion TWO with Public and Private Stakeholders Chair: Dr James Calleja, Chief Executive, MQC**

Dr James Calleja introduced this session by assuring that the key competences and compulsory and formal education will not be replaced by the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

### **8.1 Mr Evarist Bartolo – shadow Minister for Education, Partit Laburista**

Some students get out of compulsory education without certification in formal education and therefore are labelled as unqualified and unskilled. How does the validation process help these students to remove this labeling and eventually be motivated to improve their situation for personal and social benefit?

Education whether formal, informal and non-formal should address the needs of society and the labour market not to change the statistics. We need to change the education process not the benchmark for certification. Skills are important and should be encouraged but should not replace the key competences. Skills at school

should not translate themselves into productivity in schools, but should focus on creativity and innovation and music and the arts should be integrated into the curriculum.

Support for students who are facing difficulty in learning. There must be pressure so that students should aim for achievement. We should integrate the SEC and the MATSEC in the reform in education, otherwise the assessor determines the education system.

MQC needs more resources to be able to address its increasing responsibilities.

There needs to be a cultural change, and education should not be equated with status but education should address skills, attitudes, knowledge and acquisition.

## **8.2 Mr Charlo' Bonnici – Group Human Resources Manager, CareMalta**

The care sector, like other sectors should place the client in the centre of its services. One of the objectives of CareMalta is to provide physical and emotional support to its clients. How can this be assured through the introduction of the recognition of the employees' skills and competences? How are gaps and skills needs identified?

It is a problem as an employer to have employees coming for an interview without the school leaving certificate. ITS are providing tailor-made courses with the collaboration of the employers such as for people who have experience as a cook but not formal education and certification. Caremalta are introducing a hands-on training through experiencing the service as a client such as being fed and handled with gentleness and care. It is very important for the care sector to introduce the Occupational Standards. CareMalta looks forward to collaborating with MQC on this project.

## **8.3 Mr Norman Mifsud – Human Resources Manager, Environmental Landscape Consortium (ELC)**

When one looks at our main roads one can admire the beauty of plants, trees and flowers. However behind this beauty there is a whole process of skills and competences which are invisible. Do you think that with a system that values learning irrespective of how and from where was it achieved your employees will have more motivation and interest in what the company is trying to achieve? As a human resources manager how can this system help you in your training plans?

In recent years ELC invested in internal training which are rewarding more than the financial rewards as they have personal satisfaction and pride. Training improved their status and they are not shy of saying that they are gardeners. This proved that the employees can be very flexible. Most of them had no background in formal education.

## **8.4 Mr Massimo Schiavone – Secretary General, Malta Printing Industry Association (MPIA)**

MPIA is working closely with MQC on a Project co-funded by the European Union to develop a new tool that records all documentation showing one's skills and competences. Occupational standards play a pivotal role in this project entitled: **INLearning: Learning for an Inclusive Society**. What made you contribute to this project and how did you design the occupational standards?

There are four categories in the life cycle of the printing process:

- Pre-press,
- press,
- post-press and
- management

Most of the people employed in the printing sector are not academically qualified but they have experience and with time developed their skills.

## **8.5 Mr Sam Cutajar – Vice President, Hair and Beauty Federation**

**How can the validation process help regulate professional sectors, particularly that of hairdressing?**

There are many hairdressers who lack adequate experience or adequate qualifications. This has a negative impact on the consumer and on them individually particularly when one considers that chemicals are used. On

the other hand there are professional schools which provide training and education of high standards. Therefore there must be quality control to safeguard the interests of society, we are all users of this service.

Dr Calleja said that every profession must be regulated.

### **8.6 Ms Anna Borg – Assistant Lecturer Centre for Labour Studies and President of Malta Confederation of Women’s Organisations (MCWO)**

A practical example: Maria worked for a number of years and decided to quit her job due to parenting responsibilities. When Maria’s children were older and Maria decided to return to the labour market she found that when she was not gainfully employed has achieved a lot of skills and competences which so far are not recognised. Can the system of validation help women returnees like Maria?

Validation definitely helps Maria, but this raises a number of challenges such as how difficult or easy is this to do so? Automatically society expects that the mother of the newly born child or the daughter of a sick mother should be the one to take care. According to the Labour Force Survey Inactive women amount to 118,081. The support for working women is inadequate such as the availability of child care facilities.

Skills of the inactive:

- raising children
- nursing elderly parents
- PTA
- Housekeeping
- Helping with the homework

Soft skills:

- Negotiating
- Multi-skilling
- Co-ordination, planning and budgeting

Are these skills going to be helpful for employment? For retraining? For exemptions from some credits?

Challenges:

- New tools and methodology are needed.
- There should be willingness, efforts and commitment
- Malta is denying itself the full benefit of one of its key resources – women. For social and economic reasons, this area merits attention (Barroso, Malta’s visit 2007)

A high percentage of women would like to work but the lack of education and training is preventing from doing so. Through the validation of informal and non-formal learning more women would be given an opportunity to get a level, retrain and work.

### **8.7 Mr Emmanuel Zahra, Director, Institute of Mechanical Engineering, MCAST** **MCAST is an education institution that prepares its institution for the labour market. On what basis are MCAST’s courses designed? Do you think that with the introduction on Occupational Standards for every sector the course content will improve?**

The learning outcomes of the VET are distributed into the following 3 pillars:

- Practical competences (including non-formal education such as entrepreneurship through seminars and case studies, apprenticeship on the job training in collaboration with industry a key factor which is contributing to the students’ success at the institute and in the labour market).
- Underpinning knowledge and
- Key skills

Qualifications are modelled on benchmarks offered by foreign awarding bodies

Mr Zahra emphasised that validation of informal and non-formal learning is not a fast route towards alternative certification.

## **9. Questions from the public**

Mr Mario Pace, MCAST

In the validation process we should distinguish between two different clients:

- adult learners with a number of years of experience – on the basis of merit
- the student who has limited experience and who should be attracted and encouraged to achieve formal learning.

Ms Anne Marie Vella, Career Guidance Teacher

The individual's free time should have a healthy balance and one needs to consider:

- doing something for personal development and holistic education; or
- doing something for the pleasure of learning / helping others and achieve self-fulfillment such as from voluntary work; or
- getting certificates

Ms Pauline Tufigno, Youth Worker, St Theresa College, BKARA

Mechanics, electricians – how are they going to be certified?

How are personal skills going to be assessed?

As guidance teachers they need to know how to assess and record the skills of students in compulsory education.

Ms Margaret Buhagiar – President MPIA, Manager Salesians Press

MPIA are adapting the occupational standards for the printing sector in Malta. MCAST is providing a course in printing in MQF Level 3. MQC will authorise the assessors and through the Sector Skills Councils ensures that the key competences are in place. According to the occupational standards those employed in the printing industry will have a qualification which is higher than MQF level 3.

Ms Corinne Farrugia, Beautytec, and Hair and Beauty Federation

The federation are working on establishing the sector skills councils. Bari Conference

Validation of prior learning is considered as very important as someone who has around 20 years experience or even more are more competent as one who is newly qualified.

Ms Tanya Borg, student and teacher

What is MQC doing towards lifelong learning?

Mr Laurence Borg, National Parents' Society of Persons with Disability

VINFL is important for people with disability to be integrated in the NQF. MQF level 1 is beyond the expectations of people with disability. They are suggesting an Entry Level so that people with disability will be level rated. 80% of people with disability have no qualifications. 93% of people with intellectual disability have no qualifications whatsoever. He recommended that there should be a disabled person with an advisory role in the council to represent the interests of people with disability.

Mr Gordon Cardona – Kunsill Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilita' (KNPD)

The structures should be reformed so that there should be accommodation, such as the curriculum which takes into consideration the different needs. They should be treated in a level playing field

Mr Reuben Mifsud, Guidance teacher Kullegg San Benedittu

There should be more emphasis on attitude and the sense of community learning – we learn from each other and together.

Mr Joe Vella, Bands Association

There should be more emphasis on the value of the artistic qualifications. We should be careful that those who teach are professional.

Mr Vince Farrugia, General Retailers' and Traders' Union (GRTU) and MCESD

MQC is establishing the standards of knowledge, skills and competences so that through validation the individual will be assessed in terms of what one has achieved and what needs to be added. A new concept of quality control is introduced. These standards that safeguard the interests of the client, the self-employed and the sector.

## **10. Concluding remarks**

Mr Joseph Abela Fitzpatrick, Chairman MQC thanked the audience for the participation and encouraged active participation and ongoing dialogue. He referred to the MQC website for information about MQC's projects, publications and activities.

The Conference ended at 1315hrs and discussions continued informally during lunch.

Ms Doris Mangion, Senior Manager, Standards and Qualifications, MQC  
18th December 2009