

# **THE FINAL REPORT ON SKILLS AND COMPETENCES OF YOUTH - Malta**

**Country: Malta**

**Institution: UHM**

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## 1. Introduction

The surveys conducted are presented in this report with the aim of identifying key elements and contribute to the achievement of the project objectives. The first part of the report puts the survey in the context of relevance of youth unemployment and the reasons why it is important to address this issue. Subsequently the report indicates the methodological elements that have been taken into consideration when drafting, conducting and analysing the questionnaires.

Section 4 is the detailed analysis and description of the results obtained from the surveys conducted with MCAST students, University students and Employers. It provides interesting data and feedback, which is used to draw the conclusion of the work as well as to propose a number of recommendations.

## 2. Youth competences as a key element on the labour market

Competences are a key element on the labour market. The more the youth has developed competencies that are seen as ideal for the employers, the more the youth is susceptible to attaining an employment. (Teijeiro, Rungo, & Freire, 2013) It is apparent that employers search more for transversal competencies (general competencies) than professional ones that are directly related to the job itself. (Deaconu, Osoian, Zaharie, & Achim, 2014)

A number of studies underlined the fact that the educational system is failing in teaching these competencies but rather is more focused on teaching the academic subjects.

In the Bucharest study, the employers searched for accountability in completing tasks as most important and efficiently planning an activity or organization second. (Deaconu, Osoian, Zaharie, & Achim, 2014)

In conclusion, it is very apparent that employers seek general competencies when interviewing prospective employees and this study will try to determine whether these competencies are present on the labour market.

### **3. Methodology description - the concept and organization of research**

#### **3.1. Objectives of the research**

The objective of the research was to study whether the competencies of students studying either at a University or a College are the same competencies that the employers search for. For this reason, 3 Research Questionnaires were created.

#### **3.2. Description of the group tested and test methodology**

The two questionnaires which tackled the students were done primarily in the quantitative method with only one open ended-question. On the other hand, the employers' questionnaire was done in the qualitative method whereby an interview approach was adopted. The students' questionnaires were divided into University of Malta students and MCAST (Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology).

The University of Malta is the main tertiary educational institution in Malta. It comprises of 14 Faculties, 20 Institutes and 11 Centres. It awards Diplomas (EQF Level 5), Degrees, Masters and Doctorates.

MCAST is the leading VET Institution in Malta. The majority of the courses are done in the dual-education system whereby students work for a number of days with an employer and attend classes on the rest of the days. It comprises of 6 Institutes and awards Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees in EQF levels 1-6.

While the questionnaire did ask which institute and what level of education the students are performing, it did not distinguish in the other questions asked.

The employers' questionnaire was done in an interview format whereby the employers were assured of their anonymity in their answers. A number of questions were performed whereby it ended up into a discussion. The interviewer then wrote down a summary of what was said and the interviewee approved of what was written.

### 3.3 Date and place of the research

The dates of the research were between March and May 2015. The survey was conducted in different days when UHM staff visited University of Malta and MCAST to conduct interviews with the students.

The employers' questionnaire were performed during the period March - May 2015 and they were performed at the employers' workplace.

Given that the specific characteristics of the target group of this study, it is essential that the interviewer is well trained and prepared to deal with the specific challenges the target group may present whilst conducting the interviews.

In particular the interviewer needs to be provided with the tools to effectively conduct an objective survey.

The experience of the interviewer on the field, i.e. Mr. Gian Paul Gauci has been complemented with briefing with other colleagues at UHM with relevant knowledge and experience in similar activities. The common discussion and consolidation of the questionnaire has led to the definition of a final version of the questionnaire whereby all the main points have been shared and addressed.

Interviews were carried out over a 3 months period, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays). All interviews were conducted strictly with the individual concerned.

The interviewer has visited MCAST and University of Malta premises in this period proposing students met over there to take part in this activity.

The interviewer has visited employers at their premises.

## 4. Analysis of the results

In this phase all the data collected from the face-to-face interviews has been inputted in a database and analysed statistically. Data may be analysed in multiple ways, each of which may yield legitimate answers. The tests to be used was chosen to reflect the number and nature of dependent variables, and the nature of independent variables.

Data are analysed on three different levels:

Level 1 Analysis - After all the data has been entered into the excel and relevant information used

Level 2 Analysis - This form of analysis is used to identify categorical differences between variables

Level 3 Analysis - This form of data analysis is used to analyse the responses to the open-ended questions. This analysis involves bringing meaning to the responses through the identification of themes or patterns (e.g. ideas, concepts, behaviours, interactions, terminology, phrases used) and the organisation of the themes into coherent categories that summarise and bring meaning to the text.

All of these levels of analysis are required to make sense of patterns within the data and to draw valid conclusions on which further decisions and actions may be based.

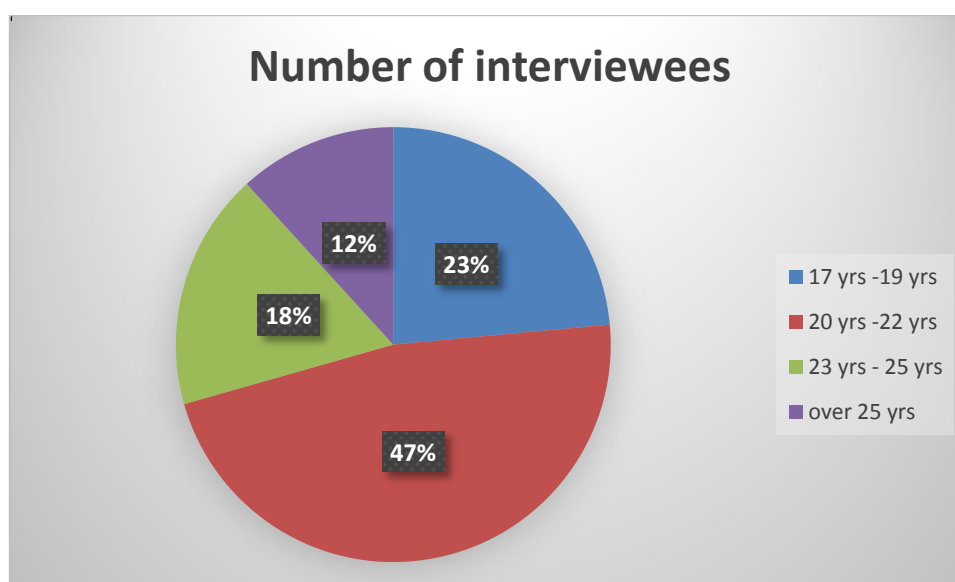
### 4.1. Interviews with students

The total number of students who accepted to be interviewed was 66, out of which 23 MCAST students and 43 University students.

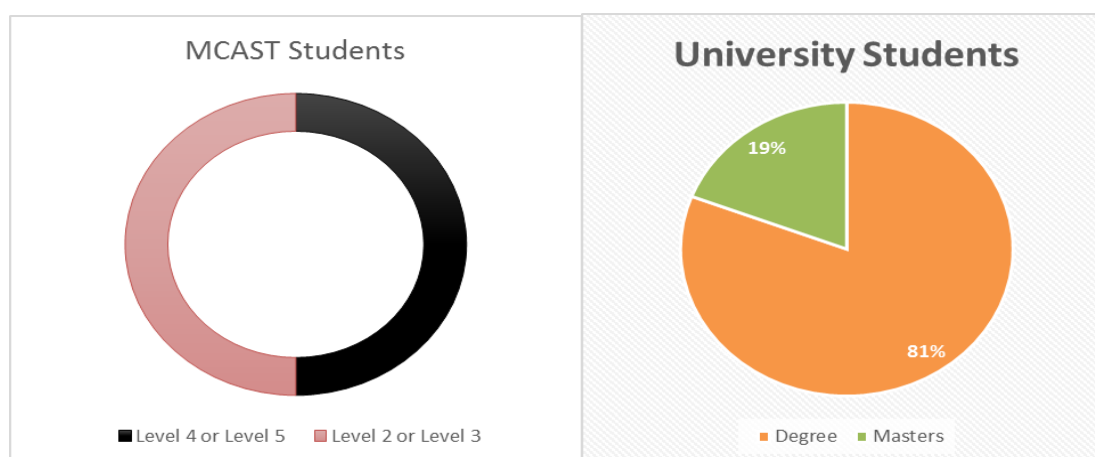


Their age group is as follows:

Age Bracket	Number of interviewees	%
17 yrs -19 yrs	16	23.53
20 yrs -22 yrs	32	47.06
23 yrs - 25 yrs	12	17.65
over 25 yrs	8	11.76
Total	68	



In terms of level of Education, amongst the University students interviewed, 76% have a Degree (level 6) and 18% have a Master (Level 7). Amongst the MCAST students instead 50 % have a level 4 or 5 while 50% a level 2 or 3.



University students come from the following faculties

- Built Environment
- Arts
- Science and Health Science
- Medicine
- ICT
- Social Wellbeing
- Media and knowledge science
- FEMA (Economy and Accountancy)
- Tourism Studies
- Engineering

MCAST Students come from the following institutes:

- Agri Business
- Applied Science
- Art and Design
- Building and Construction Engineering
- Business and Commerce
- Community Services
- Electrical and Electronics Engineering
- ICT
- Mechanical Engineering
- Maritime Institute
- Gozo Centre

The 41% of the University students and the 52% of the MCAST students have a part time employment contract. In addition 9% of University students and 17% of MCAST ones are in apprenticeship schemes.

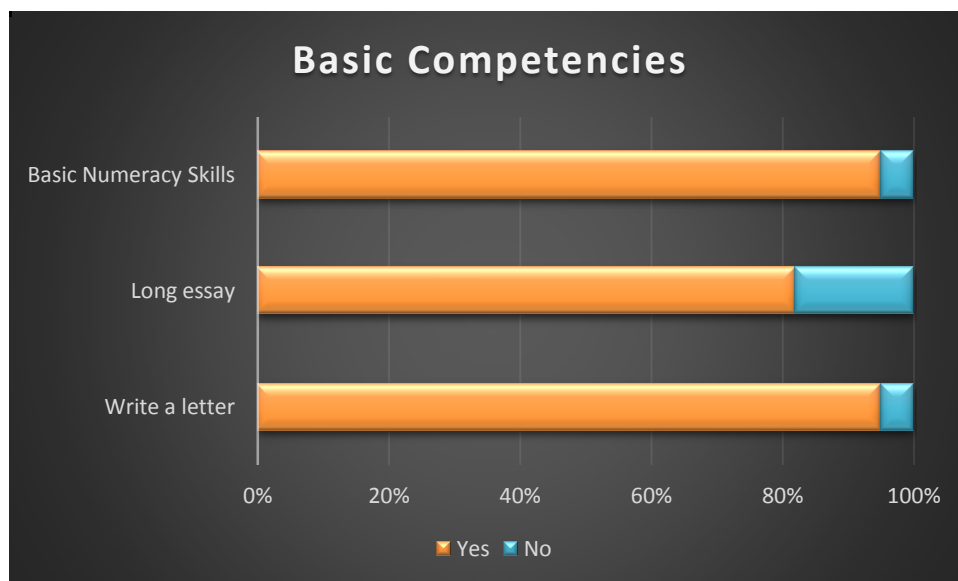
Nearly all interviewees (90%) believe that are employable and a number of them have been promised a contract of employment at the end of their studies (14% University and 17% MCAST)

Most of the interviewees feel part of the society (83%) while the 17% considers themselves as excluded.

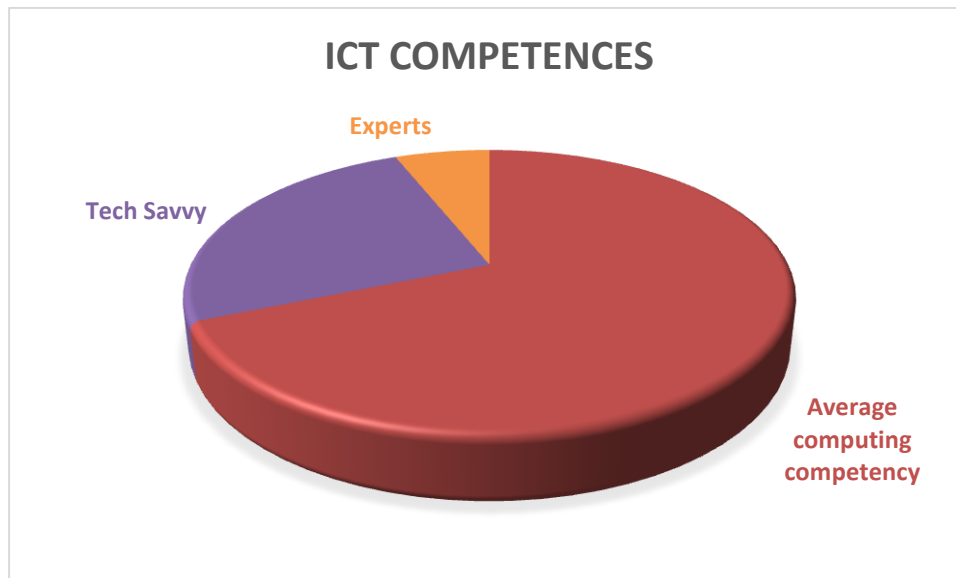
They nearly all have a CV (except one person) and 70% of the interviewees have it on EU format.

While in the past, nearly 95% attended a job interview the 90% of them declared that they succeeded.

In terms of basic competences such as numeracy and literacy 95% of the interviewees are able to write a letter, 82% to write a long essay while 95% have basic numeracy skills.



With reference to ICT related competences, 68% considers themselves average computing competent, 25% Tech Savvy and circa 6% are Experts.



Communication skills are quite well developed within the respondents to the survey, as the vast majority is able to write a short and long essay, they possess the basic numeracy skills and they are able to deliver a presentation with confidence. As far as organisational skills are concerned, over the 50% of respondents keep an updated agenda and timetable.

With reference to question number 26, students had to provide an opinion on a number of statements aimed at assessing their main personal skills.

Most of the interviewees are determined to achieve their objectives in spite of the difficulties; nearly all of them are self confident, problem solvers and team-workers.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents do not like doing their exams and do not like to start conversation with strangers.

In terms of expectations from the employers in a candidate the interviewees have provided different replies which can be categorized as follows:

- Professional competences
- Experience and professionalism have been identified as key factors that employers seek in candidates for a job.
- Competences related to the working environment
- Communication skills have been identified by a number of students as a key factor both during the interview and during the actual work.
- Teamwork and the ability to coordinate with other colleagues are also considered crucial aspects that successful candidates must show.
- Finally, students remarked how the commitment to the job and a “hard working” attitude are elements that employers appreciate in a candidate.

With reference to their individual attitude, many interviewees have identified the confidence in carrying out the job can be a key aspect that the employers appreciate.

Another aspect that has been remarked by a number of students was that of being polite and have appropriate manners and behaviour when working.

The candidate is expected to be trusted by the employer and by the colleagues, hence this element has also been considered important for employers when selecting candidates for a job.

## 4.2 Interview with Employers

During the same period, UHM has conducted interviews with 20 different employers that have led to the following results.

The employers were all classified as SMEs, out of which 10 were micro enterprises as defined by the Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC.

The most interesting information emerged is that all the employers, irrespective of their size and area of business, check the information available on the person on social media and this has a weight in the selection process. The “weight” referred to is not formalised, but the way the person is presented in the social media has definitely an impact on the selection process. This means that:

- The selection process is not limited to the interview, but employers tend to investigate more about potential candidates
- Social media can represent a critical point for jobseekers as they might give wrong impressions of the person and compromise the selection process

All the respondents indicated that they have a combination of full-time and part-time employment, in particular the operators of the services sector have a predominance of part-time workers possibly due to the higher volatility of the market.

The majority of the respondents (60%) require a tertiary level education, the 30% secondary level and the 10% lower levels of education.

All the employers require a CV for the selection of candidates, while only 25% require also a presentation letter.

All the employers indicated that the CV/Letter of presentation shall provide clear and concise information on experience and qualifications of the candidate.

While some of the employers indicated that there are no standard questions being posed in all interviews, others remarked that inevitably a first batch of questions related to past experiences and qualifications are asked to all candidates, even though in different forms.

Past experience has been identified by all the employers as the most important aspect that is evaluated in a CV. All the employers stressed that although not a requirement for the selection of candidates, the fact that a person is active in the voluntary sector brings a positive added value. The 10% of the employers interviewed also indicated that the involvement in any non-profit organisation is a key factor that they check in the CV.

Moreover, 65% of the employers remarked that communication skills and IT literacy are very important when selecting a candidate, while the 35% of the employers added that organisational skills and writing skills are strongly taken into account when assessing candidates.

In questions 9 to 11, employers have been asked to provide an opinion on a number of issues

The 25% strongly agreed and the 35% agreed that social awareness makes a difference when selecting employees

All the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the attitude of workers towards the job makes a difference when selecting them and/or promoting them

The 50% of employers would severely punish the use of inappropriate or vulgar language makes a difference when selecting or promoting workers, in addition 30% of the employers commented that that would be a reason for immediate termination of the employment.

Finally, 75% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the fact that a candidate is nervous during the interview makes a difference in the selection process.

In question 12, the interviewees were asked to rank statements based on their importance.

The 35% of the employers identified Problem solvers, Knowledgeable, Persistent and Team Workers as key element and were all ranked 1= very important.

The 75% of the employers identified the Trustworthy as very important

The 25% of the employers indicated that it is very important to employ people who seem successful and ambitious.

The 50% of the employers indicated that IT literacy is very important.

Finally 10% of the employers indicated that being a quiet person is very important.

The options chatty person and Yes-no man/woman were not given any mark 1 or 2 meaning that they are not considered important by the employers.



## 5. Conclusions

The most interesting aspect of the survey conducted with MCAST and University students is the confidence that they expressed towards their employability prospects.

The majority of the interviewees believes that they can find a suitable job connected to their educational path. This aspect is quite unusual in the Regional Mediterranean context where neighbouring countries have higher unemployment rates, particularly in relation to youth.

The confidence is generated by a number of factors:

Economic bonanza. Malta is experiencing a period of strong and steady growth with increasing investments both from the public and the private sector. The different sectors of the economy, particularly Tourism, ICT and Services are demanding more and more skilled workers and offer adequate working conditions and wages.

Students already working. Nearly 50% of University students and over 50% of MCAST students have been working part time or through apprenticeships during their course of studies and have therefore developed familiarity with the labour market. They all have a CV (apart from one person) and most of them are based on the EUROPASS format. Another indicator that confirms the positive attitude of the interviewees towards the labour market is that they nearly all sat for a job interview and most of them were successful at least once.

Use of EU funds. The Government has rolled out a number of initiatives in the last 2 years aimed at bridging education and employment through schemes

providing incentives to employers to employ youths in a learning-by-doing framework. Traineeships and Apprenticeships have become quite popular and have often translated into stable contracts of employment at the end of the testing period.

The students have a strong ICT. Nearly 95% of the interviewees are either average computer users or Tech Savvy.

Although the overall result of the survey is quite positive, this has to be read in the context of the Maltese socio-economic scenario whereby in terms of youths and employment the main issue is not related to those that have achieved a level of education but to those who exit the educational path prematurely.

Malta, although performing quite well in the general unemployment rate, has a worrying 12% youth unemployment, that is particularly concentrated amongst those youths who left school and did not achieve any qualifications. Those who are Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEETs) are very often people who left school due to different factors and are now at risk of social exclusion and long term dependency.

## 6. Recommendations

On the basis of the survey and on the analysis of the results, the following recommendations are proposed to the attention of the project partners as well as to the stakeholders with an interest in the project:

The CVs of jobseekers should be clear and redacted in the EU format. The past experiences and the qualification need to be prominent and shall be directly identifiable. The personal skills with more relevance for the employers, which should be described in a CV are organisational skills and communication skills.

Jobseekers shall use social media carefully as it might have negative repercussions in the whole selection process, considering that the information posted there would be available to the general public including potential employers.

Voluntary work means not only having a social conscience but volunteers develop specific skills and abilities that are relevant for the labour market. It is important to lobby to give a more standardised weight to voluntary work. At the moment this only “looks good” in the eyes of the employers but there is no specific value or mark given in the selection process. On the contrary, voluntary work, apart from having a personal emotional value, contributes to strengthen specific skills that are relevant to other jobs. This information should be clearly incorporated in the CVs as part of the experience of a person with related skills and competences developed.

Employers consider Education and IT skills are being considered minimum requirements to compete for many positions.

In addition, they consider that horizontal skills like team working, persistency and attitude towards problem-solving are crucial for employment.

Finally, in terms of specific competences related to the job, employers expect that candidates would have an appropriate technical basis certified by appropriate qualifications.