

Report on Case No CEDUC-25-6125

The complaint

1. The complainant is a teacher at a Church run school. On the 1st of June 2025 she lodged a complaint with the Ombudsman's Office against the University of Malta. She alleged that the UOM was unjustly refusing to recognise her Postgraduate Certificate in Education, awarded by the same said university, as an MQF Level 7 award. The University was insisting that it was in fact an MQF Level 6 award.

The investigation

2. The whole issue was triggered by a request from the Secretariat for Catholic Education of the Archdiocese of Malta to the complainant to obtain clarification from the UOM as to the correct MQF Level of her Postgraduate Certificate in Education that she had obtained in December 2013.

3. This request was made by the Secretariat for Catholic Education in view of the fact that, according to the terms of the 1991 Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta, employees serving in Church Schools are entitled to receive emoluments at a par to those of their equivalent counterpart serving in State Schools.

4. The emoluments are regulated by various collective or sectoral agreements in force from time to time. In the instant case, the relevant

collective agreement is the Collective Agreement for Employees in the Public Service, which came into force on the 1st January of this year and which, at page 19 of Appendix A states verbatim:

“Henceforth as from 1st January 2025 all employees who are in possession of an MQF Level 7 or higher full qualification or equivalent, irrespective of whether it is an entry requirement or not, shall become automatically entitled to the qualification allowance as established in the Manual of Allowances. For the avoidance of doubt any qualifications which are not accredited by the National Competent Authority are to be considered in line the principles in the EQF Referencing Report as issued by the European Commission from time to time.”

5. Mindful of its fiscal responsibility in view of the fact that ultimately Church School employees are paid from Public Funds, the Secretariat for Catholic Education, having seen the transcript of the 2013 award submitted by the complainant, requested her to verify with the University of Malta and to confirm the MQF Level.

6. As indicated above, in 2013 the complainant was awarded the Postgraduate Certificate in Education, with Geography as the main area of study. The accompanying transcript (‘Europass Diploma Supplement’), issued on the 9th of December 2013 under the signature of the *then* Registrar, stated that this award was a “*second cycle*” qualification and that it was pegged at MQF Level 7, even though the code for all the study units involved indicated that the content of the programme of studies was at undergraduate level! The indication, in the transcript, that the award was at MQF Level 7 was further reinforced by a reference to the award as a ‘degree’ and by diagrams (at pages 4 and 6 of the transcript) clearly showing the complainant’s award as pegged at MQF 7.

7. Upon further enquiries by this Office, the UOM admitted that between 2010 and 2013, it had mistakenly recorded and shown in the transcript the Postgraduate Certificate in Education as a second cycle. In the University's own words (correspondence with the undersigned of the 10th June 2025):

“In the 2009 Diploma Supplement, the PGCE qualification was correctly identified as a first cycle degree ... However, between 2010 and 2013, it was mistakenly recorded as a second cycle qualification, primarily due to the use of the term ‘Postgraduate’ in the course title, a terminology adopted from the UK many years ago and before the introduction of the Postgraduate General Regulations in 2008. This misclassification may have also arisen because the course required applicants to hold a Bachelor’s or Bachelor Honours degree. The error was corrected in 2014, and for all subsequent years in which the course was offered, it was accurately classified as a first cycle qualification at MQF/EQF Level 6.”

After the mistake was noticed, no attempt appears to have been made by the UOM to contact all those – including the complainant – who had been issued with an incorrect transcript, and to have the record set straight with them. It is most unfortunate, to put it mildly, that the university should have opted for the ‘let sleeping dogs lie’ option.

8. In its correspondence of the 26th June 2025, the UOM, after re-affirming the mistake committed between 2010 and 2013, state as follows:

“In view of the above reasons, the University’s opinion is that one reference in Diploma Supplement to the term second cycle does not render a programme of study as postgraduate especially if the academic content was never deemed to

be at that level. Furthermore, if the University had to establish that for a specific cohort of students the PGCE is deemed to be Level 7, such a decision would create an injustice with the rest of the cohorts. It would also be inopportune to give these graduates a higher-value degree if it does not merit such higher value – this would also lead to unjustified enrichment on their part, and later an expectation by other PGCE holders to be treated in the same manner.”

The undersigned cannot, in the circumstances, but agree with the above. It would be highly inappropriate for the UOM to recognise now, and as it were *ex post facto*, the university’s award to the complainant as pegged at MQF Level 7. That would simply amount to compounding a mistake or, in the words of John Milton, to making “*confusion worse confounded*”.

9. But where does that leave the complainant and the approximately 400 others who had successfully completed the Postgraduate Certificate in Education between 2010 and 2013? In a communication dated 17th July 2025, Pro Rector Prof Carmen Sammut informed this Office that:

“The Faculty of Education is planning to offer a top-up course for all PGCE holders as from October 2026, after the programme is formulated and approved by the necessary accreditation procedures as established by the University.

The plan is to offer the programme on a micro-credential basis so that students can study at their own pace and accumulate the necessary credits in order to be awarded a Postgraduate Diploma or a Master’s degree, in case the registered students complete a dissertation.

PGCE holders, who now have a number of years of teaching experience, will be exempted from part of the taught component (the Postgraduate Diploma) in terms of the RPL procedure.”

The undersigned is satisfied that the UOM is taking appropriate steps to make up for the serious mistakes in the transcripts issued in the years above indicated, and this Office is holding the UOM to their word. The undersigned would only add that if the complainant, or any other person who was issued with a wrong and misleading transcript, were to take up the offer in October 2026, they should be exempted from university tuition fees.

Vincent A De Gaetano
Commissioner for Education

7 August 2025