

The Skills Pass for the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Information Pack



Launched on the 26th of October 2023, the public consultation for the Skills Pass project was scheduled until the 16th of November. The response was overwhelming, so much so that ITS carried on with Key Stakeholders meetings until the 12th December 2023 to ensure the widest possible consensus.

Parties which actively contributed to the course of the Public Consultation:

Key Stakeholders: MHRA, ACE, Malta Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of SME's, FELTOM, ELT Council, GTA, Gozo Business Chamber.

Other Stakeholders: Partit Laburista, General Workers Union.

Government Entities: MFHEA, Human Right Directorate.

Private Companies: Corinthia Group, DB Group, Phoenicia, Stivala Group, Future Focus Ltd., ACE English Malta, Think Talent.

Additional enquiries were forwarded by various companies and individuals via the Government Consultation Portal.

ITS has also consulted the EU and International Affairs Directorate within the MEEP, which concluded that this project is not discriminatory and given that the Skills Pass is a requirement for employees, not falling within the definition of self-employed, it falls out of scope of the Services Directive.

Feedback Received

The industry was in general very positive about the introduction of a vetting process for foreign employees wishing to offer their services in the local hospitality industry, however, a number of legitimate suggestions were put forward to ensure a successful process and transition.

These were taken into account and mostly implemented.

Registration Categories

There are different registration categories available whereby candidates can either self-register or have entities such as MTA licensed establishments or licensed education institutions registering them as per the following categories.

Candidates can self-register based on their category:

- Non-European Union/European Economic Area Countries (Non-EU/EEA) - Not Living in Malta
- Non-European Union/European Economic Area Countries (Non-EU/EEA) - Living in Malta for less than 1 year
- Non-European Union/European Economic Area Countries (Non-EU/EEA) - Living in Malta for more than 1 year
- Students carrying out a full-time course with a licensed local Education Institution

All of the above categories will be able to register on the system as a candidate through a dedicated portal.

Self-registration candidates have to provide the correct documentation in order to obtain a skills pass, this information will also be found on the skills pass certificate. Authorities will have access to this information, if a candidate fraudulently enters incorrect information ITS reserves the right to revoke the skills pass.

Certain candidates can only be registered by an entity, including:

- Sector Skilled Workers – can only be registered by local MTA licensed establishments
- Internship Students – can only be registered by their EU-licensed education institution
- ELT Students – can only be registered by a licensed ELT institution

At any point in time if the entity is found to have abused the process or has provided fraudulent information, ITS reserves the right to revoke access to the Skills Pass platform.

The Skills Pass Process

The Skills Pass is a verification process initiated by the Government of Malta that allows skilled individuals in the Tourism and Hospitality sector to gain recognition for their skills and be able to work in Malta in this industry.

The verification process is split into two phases.

Phase 1 - Online Training and Assessment

Following registration, the candidate is invited to purchase the modules which include four mandatory modules and at least one occupation.

Candidates must pass all mandatory assessments, including:

- English Proficiency Test
- Basic Customer Care
- Basic Maltese Tourism Product Course
- Basic English for Hospitality Course

Following successful completion of the mandatory assessments, the candidates proceed to the occupation selection. Candidates must select one occupation from the following job families:

- Food Service Staff
- Bar Service Staff
- Kitchen Staff
- Front Office Staff
- Housekeeping Staff

Once a candidate passes the mandatory and occupation assessments successfully, the candidates receive a Phase 1 Confirmation which confirms that the online assessment has been successfully finalised.

For each assessment, a candidate will be requested to take a photo on the online portal and the assessment process will take multiple screenshots of the users to ensure that the user undergoing the test is consistently the same user. These images will be used for vetting and verification purposes when required.

Each assessment contains a large question bank, millions of permutations are possible for each assessment and these question banks will be periodically updated from time to time. Through real time reports, ITS will determine if questions are deemed too easy or too hard and will update the question banks accordingly.

A percentage of candidates will be vetted on a weekly basis to ensure that no cheating has been detected. In the case of a dubious candidate an independent review panel will handle the case. ITS reserves the right to recall or stop a candidate from completing the Skills Pass if caught cheating.

Phase 2 - Online Interview via Video Conferencing

Upon successful completion of Phase 1, the candidate is invited to choose a time slot three weeks in advance for the Online Interview. Once the interview time slot is confirmed, the candidate shall receive confirmation and instructions via email.

On the interview day, candidates from countries not in the EU or European Economic Area that require a visa to enter Malta, are required to go to their nearest VFS Centre for their online interview. While candidates from non-EU or European Economic Area countries that do not require a visa to enter Malta are to visit the Institute of Tourism Studies in Malta for the online interview.

The candidate is verified through personal identification documents, candidate number, and Phase 1 completion Skills Pass certificate. Before the interview starts, the candidate is also verified by the assessor. The assessor, who will remain anonymous, shall ask questions to confirm the skills and knowledge in the candidate's respective occupation as well as the level of English Communication.

Each interview is recorded and stored as per GDPR regulations for vetting purposes. A sample of the recorded interviews will be verified on a weekly basis to ensure that the standard is kept throughout, the process is transparent and conducted professionally. Protocols are set in place to tackle issues present when vetting these interviews. A candidate's Skills Pass may be revoked in the case of foul play. The Skills Pass team at ITS will conduct 'mystery shopping' as well as randomly spot checks at multiple VFS centres throughout the year to ensure compliance with our expected standards.

Upon successful completion of Phase 2, the candidate will then receive the permanent Skills Pass and will be able to work in the Hospitality and Tourism Sector in Malta.

Certificates

The certificates will be issued according to the respective category. Each certificate will include full details to ensure that they are easy to understand.

The Blockcert system will allow full API integration with other government entities to automate the processing of certificates and ensure compliance. All certificates issued will be Blockcert to ensure that the certificates can't be tampered with. Certificates can be verified through a QR code reader.

Protocols are set in place to ensure that every batch of certificates is reviewed accordingly to ensure no foul play.

General Vetting and Verification

The user interaction within the system will be logged, with trails in place so that if an audit can be conducted with full visibility of system access and user action when interacting with the system. All data is to be kept for vetting purposes as per GDPR regulations.

Regular security tests are done on the system to ensure that the data is secure. Protocols are set in place in case of breach to ensure that we comply with established regulations and ensure that all user information is kept as per GDPR regulations.

With regards to the assessment, there will be regular updates to question banks and analytics on questions themselves to ensure a good quality standard is set.

ITS will be publishing quarterly reports in the skills portal with relevant data to ensure full transparency and compliance with high quality standards.

It is to be noted that the Skills Pass process is an ongoing process, the system will be updated and changes will be performed to always ensure that a high-quality service is provided to all stakeholders involved.

Concessions

Full Time Students registered with Local Education Institutions

Students deciding to work for a short term within the hospitality and tourism industry and registered with Local Education Institutions can obtain a temporary Skills Pass, valid for six consecutive months for short-term hospitality work by applying through a dedicated section in the Skills Pass portal. This will be free of charge.

A student registering for such skills pass would need to obtain a letter signed by the Head of the respective licensed local education institution proving that they are currently following a course within the same education institution.

If the student opts to continue working in the tourism and hospitality industry beyond the six consecutive months covered by the temporary pass, they will need to undergo the Skills Pass process accordingly.

Student Internships from Licensed Institutions in the EU

The platform being used provides for Licensed Institutions in the EU that deliver tourism and hospitality programmes, to register with ITS their interest and intent to send their students to perform Internships in Malta. The due diligence procedures by ITS may include desktop research, contacting the relevant authorities within the relevant countries as well as submission of documents that prove the legitimacy of the said educational provider.

The entity is to be approved by ITS following the necessary due diligence procedures, the entity can then register their students coming to Malta for an internship as 'candidates' on

the online portal.

Such interns will be issued with a Tourism & Hospitality Student Pass valid for the duration of the internship, up to a maximum of 1 year, and will be able to register through a dedicated section in the Skills Pass portal. The issuance of this temporary pass will be free of charge and valid only for the specific place of work they will be carrying out the internship.

ELT Students

ITS fully understands the importance of the ELT sector within the tourism and hospitality Industry, and therefore in an endeavour to keep this sector as competitive as possible, it is being proposed that ELT students, opting to work within the hospitality industry for the summer period will also be entitled for a temporary pass valid for six consecutive months.

Should the student opt to pursue their engagement in the hospitality and tourism industry, then they would need to undergo the Skills Pass process accordingly.

The platform being used provides ELT registered schools to register with ITS their interest and intent to encourage and send students to work in the hospitality and tourism industry in Malta. Once the entity is approved by ITS following the necessary checks and due diligence procedures, the entity can then register any ELT student as a 'candidate' on the online portal. Checks will be done throughout the year to ensure that the institute has retained the licence.

In the event that the student would need to obtain the Skills Pass to work beyond the 6 consecutive months covered by the temporary pass, then they will be required to undergo the assessments in English and Hospitality English against a nominal fee of €10 per test. The other assessments will be done and charged for as per normal procedures.

Sector Skilled/Specialised Applicants

An MTA licensed establishment will be able to register advanced skilled or specialised applicants that the licenced establishment deems exceed the requirements of the basic Skills Pass. The establishment will need to register on the online portal. Once the establishment is approved by ITS following the necessary due diligence procedures, the entity can then register the sector skilled applicant as a 'candidate' on the online portal. The candidate will receive an email link that will allow them to finalise their registration process, hence this process is by invitation only.

Upon registration, the application will receive access to the Skills Pass portal. At the payment and final registration stage, this category of applicants will be asked to complete

two assessments and a Skills Verification Interview. The assessment includes an English proficiency test, Basic Maltese Tourism Product course.

The assessor for the Skills Verification Interview shall be an expert on the candidate's skill set which will be identified through an internal rigorous process including matching candidate details such as the CV, job role and expertise.

If the applicant fails the Skills Verification interview they will not be allowed to proceed through this process but will be diverted towards the basic Skills Pass process against a balance payment.

Such sector skilled applicants may include knowledgeable sommeliers, mixologists, specialised chefs, gueridon service trained personnel, experienced, concierges, maitre d'Hotel and seasoned butlers.

The applicant will have the right to do a 1st resit free of charge and a 2nd resit against payment for the English proficiency test and Basic Maltese Tourism Product course. If an applicant fails the Skills Verification Interview online, they will have a right to appeal the decision via the same portal against a charge of €100. Upon receiving the appeal ITS will engage an independent verifier to go through the recorded interview. The independent verifier's opinion is final.

Changes in the Visa Duration for Tourism and Hospitality Workers

Individuals acquiring a residence and work permit through this project, at the renewal stage will be awarded additional extensions as detailed hereunder:

New non-EU/EEA

A new non-EU or European Economic Area citizen who acquired the Skills Pass and has just gone through the verification process required by ITS and Identità will be given the Skills Pass and a residence and work permit for a year, subject that there is no objection from the other stakeholders i.e Jobsplus and the Malta Police Force.

After a year wherein no objections are raised by Jobsplus, the Malta Police Force or any other pertinent authority, they may be given a residence and work permit for two years instead of one, subject that they meet the following criteria:

1. By the time of renewal, they would have progressed to at least the next skill pass level (being Orange equivalent to MQF level 2); and
2. They are directly employed with an MTA licensed tourism and hospitality operator as defined in the Tourism and Hospitality Skill Pass Regulation; and
3. At the time of renewal, they provide necessary documentation proving that they

- have at least a two-year definite contract (applicable from the date of renewal) or is employed on an indefinite basis with an MTA licensed tourism and hospitality operator as defined in the Tourism and Hospitality Skill Pass Regulation; and
4. They provide necessary documentation proving that their gross annual income is of at least twenty thousand (€20, 000) euros.

Implementation Dates

The legal notice regulating the introduction of the Skills Pass process in the tourism and hospitality will be officially published by March 2024.

Phase 1 online courses and assessments shall be available as from the 8th of April 2024.

From April 2024, the Malta Enterprise will launch a scheme intended to assist local enterprises that opt to pay for the courses and assessments through tax credit.

Phase 2 online verification interviews shall be available as from the 6th of May 2024.

In May 2024, after a two-month standstill period from the publication of the legal notice, the Skills Pass requirement becomes mandatory. This standstill period emanates from the Small Business Act.

From January 2025, all non-EU or European Economic Area employees seeking renewal of their work permit will have to pass through the Skills Pass verification system.

From January 2026, all EU and European Economic Areas and Maltese working within the Tourism and Hospitality Industry will also require the Skills Pass certificate to work within the industry.

Implementation Date	
March 2024	Publishing of Legal Notice.
8 th April 2024	Phase 1 online courses and assessments will commence.
April 2024	Malta Enterprise will be launching a scheme in the form of tax credit intended to assist local enterprises opting to pay courses and assessments required for their existing employees to obtain the Skills Pass.
6 th May 2024	Phase 2 online verification interviews will commence.

May 2024	<p>After a two-month standstill period from the publication of the legal notice, the Skills Pass requirement becomes mandatory. This standstill period emanates from the Small Business Act.</p> <p>Any person being non-EU/EEA coming to Malta to work in the tourism and hospitality sector is to apply for the Skills Pass by registering online and paying the applicable fee (listed below).</p> <p>The online portal will open for Phase 1 as from April 2024.</p>
January 2025	All tourism and hospitality workers who work within the tourism and hospitality industry in Malta and who will be seeking to renew any applicable work permits with the relevant government entities are to apply for the Skills Pass.
January 2026	Remaining employees, including EU/EEA/Maltese working in the tourism and hospitality industry, will require a Skills Pass.

Fees

Revised fees, following the public consultation carried out may be found here under:

Category	Fee
Non-EU/EEA living abroad (coming to Malta to work in tourism and hospitality industry)	€475
Non-EU/EEA living in Malta for less than a year	€455
Non-EU/EEA living in Malta for more than a year	€375
Non-EU/EEA ELT Student	€335
Sector Skilled Workers (registered by an MTA licensed establishment)	€280
Non-EU/EEA Internship Student	€0
EU/EEA/Maltese employees working within the tourism and hospitality industry	€0
Students carrying out a full-time course with a licensed local Education Institution	€0