

The Emirates Academy

The Competency Levels and Occupational Standards in the Hospitality Industry:

A study of the Receptionist role in 5 Star Hotels in Malta

A Thesis submitted on

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## **Declaration**

I, *Angele Mallia*, declare that this is an original piece of work, produced entirely by me, and that all source material has been appropriately referenced. In addition, I attest that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of any other course, degree, or qualification at this or any other university or institute of learning.

*Angele Mallia*

Student's signature

## **Abstract**

This study focuses on receptionists working in 5-Star Hotels and the role of National Occupational Standards (NOS) on their recruitment, training, and career advancement. The study builds on a study conducted on the competency levels of receptionists in 2013. There have since been many changes in the role of a receptionist in the type of services required and a massive improvement in technology use within Hotels. This study compares what competences HR managers and receptionists believe are needed for the receptionist job, and for determining ongoing training, as well as identifies to what degree these reflect competences indicated in the NOS. The study also considers VET training providers in the hospitality sector and, if, and how are NOS used for programme design. The study also probed whether HR managers would be interested in validating the receptionists' learning, and whether receptionists would be motivated to validate their informal and nonformal learning.

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology involving semi-structured interviews with HR managers, receptionists, and lecturers in hospitality, combined with non-participant observations of receptionists at work across five 5-Star hotels in Malta. Analysis of the data collected shows that there is very limited awareness of the existence of NOS for the hospitality sector. While HR managers mentioned fewer competences than indicated in the NOS, they still reflected the main competences needed. Receptionists mention similar competences but focused more on specific aspects of the jobs which they considered important. HR managers appreciated the contribution which the NOS can make to the sector and were overall in favour of supporting the validation of their receptionists' learning. There were also positive reactions to validation among receptionists, even if not among all.

This study highlights that there needs to be an effort to make known the existence of NOS for the hospitality sector among managers as well as workers for recruitment, training of workers, and for validation of informal and nonformal learning among hotel workers, as in the case of receptionists.

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## **Chapter one: Introduction**

### **1.1 Title**

The Competency Levels and Occupational Standards in the Hospitality Industry: a study of the receptionist role in 5 star hotels in Malta.

### **1.2 The Hospitality Industry and the Competencies needed**

In an age and era whereby technology is advancing at a unprecedented rate, the hospitality sector, as most of the other sectors in society, needs to continually adapt to new technologies. This has a direct effect on the trends related to the quality of service expected from 5-Star hotels by the clients. Such a context creates a constant requirement for workers in this sector to keep on upskilling themselves.

Gonzi *et al.* (1990), and Hagger (1994), consider a competence as a set of “knowledge, abilities, skills and attitude” that one should possess to be able to perform a specific task. This description reflects an integrated approach to knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to perform a job. Competencies help training managers in the recruitment of workers and to develop specific training plans as per demand. For instance, a training manager would consider the hotel workers’ current competencies and then compile a tailored training plan which, for example, would be different for a receptionist than for that of a housekeeping attendant.

This study builds on a previous study conducted in 2013, entitled “Competency Levels within the Front Office Department in different 5 star Hotels” by Mallia in fulfilment for a Bachelor’s degree course. It focused on identifying competency gaps within the Front Office department and identified four competencies that Human Resources and Front Office managers looked for when recruiting front office personnel, namely language proficiency; positive attitude; being a team player; and knowledge of the hotel’s Property Management System (PMS). Results from this study show that such competencies could be achieved through ongoing training.

In this study, the researcher does not only consider these four mentioned competencies, but focuses as well on whether or not HR managers and Front Office workers are aware

of, and use the Malta's National Occupational Standards (NOS) developed specifically for the local scene by a group of experts in the hospitality sector commissioned by the Malta Further and Higher Education (MFHEA).

NOS are “statements of the standards of performance individuals must achieve when carrying out functions in the workplace, together with specifications of the underpinning knowledge and understanding” (ukstandards.org.uk). NOS are created to provide guidelines to both the employer and potential employees. That said it is expected that employers use these standards as criteria when filling a vacancy call for application, and as guidelines for training and development at both Initial Vocational and Educational Training (IVET) and Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET). On the other hand, employees are expected to use these guidelines to ensure that their skills and knowledge align with what the specific role entails, and to validate their informal and non-formal training against these standards.

The study also considers whether workers' developed knowledge, skills, and attitudes are acquired during their educational journey prior to their working experience, or as a result of their work experience.

Another aim is to identify the competency gaps between what HR managers expect when hiring Front Office personnel and what is stated in the NOS. As stated by Decoi *et al.* (2007), competency gap is the difference between the competencies a person requires to do a job and the actual competencies a person has. Narrowing these competency gaps can be achieved during initial training and study programmes or through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at the place of work. Furthermore, it felt natural for the researcher to delve into how HR managers have been changing their expectations over time when recruiting staff for the Front Office department as a result of technological advancement, hence the availability of new technological devices and services. Finally, this study considers the extent to which the NOS is referred to when HR Managers develop CPD programmes.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

Although the hospitality sector remains one of the most important industries on the Maltese islands, with a GDP of 17%, and a 15.9% of total employment in Malta (OECD, 2019), there has seen a decrease in GDP in the past few years. For example,

in 2005 the tourism industry generated a growth of 24% of the total GDP (MTA, 2005), whilst in 2019 there was a significant decrease in GDP (17%). Mainly, the reason is attributed to the introduction of gaming companies. In fact, in 2019 prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the gaming industry contributed to 12% of the Maltese GDP (<https://www.maltachamber.org.mt/>). The biggest drop in GDP was however more pronounced during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic, with the Tourism Sector registering a contribution of 664 million Euros, in comparison to a 2.15 billion Euros generated in 2019 (Statista, 2022). In fact, according to the Davahli *et al.* (2020), the Tourism Sector was one of the most impacted sectors by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Hotels' revenue has seen a drastic decrease of 90%. Consequently, as reported in the Times of Malta (2021), many foreigners who worked in Malta decided to move back to their country of origin due to a lack of job security. This translated into a huge gap between work demand and supply. The demand-supply gap might have impacted the qualities that HR Managers look for during the hiring process. Indeed, through this study, the researcher intends to find out whether HR managers are accepting less competency levels, due to lack of labour supply or not, and the approach adopted to upskill their employees as per the NOS.

Another aspect of this study involves the advancement in technology as a contributing factor to the various significant changes within the Front Office department. When the researcher started her career as a receptionist, the main technology used was the Property Management System (PMS), used mainly to checking in and out guests. Today, receptionists use other technologies and platforms, including but not limited to customer service platforms, mobile applications, review sites and more; ergo being able to use such tools has become part of the employees' remit. The researcher is thus curious to know whether HR Managers are also looking for proficiency in such technologies as a job requirement to fulfil vacancies.

This study aims to investigate as well whether educational programmes/courses related to hospitality, as organised by the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS), are based on the standards attributed in the NOS. It is also vital to first understand whether the occupational standards created by experts in the hospitality sector for the National Commission for Further and Higher Education Agency are being used as the basis for designing the official training and education curriculum at IVET (initial vocational education and training) by the Institute of Tourism Studies. Furthermore, this study will

also look at receptionists' awareness and perceptions of these occupational standards, whether they possess such competencies, and are willing to validate their learning or not. This study concentrates on 5-Star hotels in Malta, whereby research about the use of NOS is limited.

#### **1.4 Five Star Category for Hotels in Malta**

This study focuses on gathering data from the 5-Star Hotel sector in Malta, totalling to nineteen hotels. Most of them form part of bigger international chains, such as Marriott and Hilton, the Corinthia Company which is locally owned and forms a small international chain of hotels, and other independent hotels, such as the Phoenicia Hotel which was the first five-star hotel that opened in Malta in 1939. Table 1 below displays the list of 5-Star hotels in Malta.

Radisson Blu Resort, Malta	St. Julian's
Hilton Malta	St. Julian's
The Westin Dragonara Resort, Malta	St. Julian's
InterContinental Hotel – Malta, an IHG Hotel	St. Julian's
Corinthia Hotel St. George's Bay	St. Julian's
Malta Marriott Hotel & Spa	St. Julian's
Hyatt Regency Malta	St. Julian's
The Phoenicia Malta	Valletta
Rosselli	Valletta
Iniala Harbour House	Valletta
Grand Hotel Excelsior	Valletta
The Xara Palace Relais & Chateaux	Mdina
Palazzo Bifora	Mdina
Cugo Gran Marina, Grand Harbour	Senglea

AX The Palace	Sliema
Radisson Blu Resort & Spa	Golden Sands
Corinthia Palace Malta	Attard
Kempinski Hotel San Lawrenz	San Lawrenz
Hotel ta' Cenc & Spa	Sannat

*Table 1: List of 5-Star Hotels*

Malta forms part of the Hotelstar, which means Malta uses the same hotel classification as other countries in Europe (hotelstar.eu). The intention behind this strategic partnership between Malta and Hotelstar is to ensure high quality standards, quality control and most importantly transparency and standards for guests throughout Europe.

The five-star criteria have not changed since the HORTEC Seminar on hotel's classifications in Bengen, in 2004. (Hotelstars, 2004). The five-star criteria include the provision of the following services:

1. Reception operating day and night with language skilled receptionists;
2. Doorman service or valet parking;
3. Concierge Services;
4. Lobby with seated area and beverage services;
5. A welcome gift;
6. Minibar and Room service;
7. Guests' amenities;
8. Wi-Fi in public areas and guests' rooms;
9. Safe in room;
10. Ironing services and shoeshine services;
11. Turn down service; and
12. Mystery Guest appointed.

The Malta Tourism and Travel Act has created 270 service and amenities standards which are published in Chapter 409 of the Travel and Tourism Act (Leġiżlazzjoni Malta, 2012). Examples of such standards include: the possibility of online reservation via electronic reservations systems possible and not by email, and that the reception area should be functionally independent area.

All standards carry different ratings to them and together they accumulate to 1,021 points. Hotels must follow these standards to be rated from one to five stars categories. For instance, a hotel to be classified as a 5-Star hotel needs to collect at least 570 points. Hotels which are considered as Superior 5-Star hotels, must accumulate a total of 650 points.

### **1.5 The Research Question**

The researcher will use the competencies related to the receptionist role as identified in the NOS published by the Malta Further and Higher Education (MFHEA) as the basis of this study. In so doing, the researcher will try and establish to what extent these competencies are being used in the Hospitality sector. It also delves into whether the competencies that HR managers look for when recruiting receptionists, reflect those indicated in the NOS. Finally, the researcher will map out whether all the competencies are included in IVET study programmes for hospitality students, and fully achieved through CVET programmes.

Specifically, this research will investigate the following three research questions:

1. What are the competencies (skills and knowledge) expected by the 5-Star hospitality industry compared to those indicated in the National Occupational Standards when recruiting personnel for the receptionist role?
2. Are the National Occupational Standards used when VET, IVET and CVET providers, draw up their training programmes?
3. To what degree, if at all, do the occupational standards for the receptionist role influence recruitment, training and professionalisation of the role?

### **1.6 Thesis Organisation**

This study has been set in five chapters, each portraying a distinct stage of the work. The following sub-sections provide the reader with an outline of what each chapter entails.

#### 1.6.1: Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the rationale for carrying out this research. It briefly provides a description of the aims of this study and the research questions as the basis for this investigative process.

#### 1.6.2: Chapter 2: Literature Review

The next chapter presents a literature review focused on journals and academic articles related to competencies, training and skills needed related to the occupational standards in the role of a receptionist in 5-Star hotels, as well as the correlation between IVET and CVET training programmes. It also gathers findings of other studies in this field.

#### 1.6.3: Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 3 discusses the approach employed to collect necessary data. It includes arguments that justifies the use of qualitative research methodologies, including interviews and non-participant observations. Moreover, this chapter relates to the strategy engaged in the selection of the participants, and the format adopted for the interviews and the data collection process.

#### 1.6.4: Chapter 4: Research findings

The Research Findings are presented in chapter 4, which includes an account of how the data collected was analysed. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the interviews' transcripts and identify emerging themes. The researcher used a coding system to interpret the interviews' findings. This involved the researcher identifying both similar and different keywords / issues mentioned by the participants' answers.

#### 1.6.5: Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter 5 produces a treatise on the potential deductions from the findings as presented in previous chapter in light of the literature review and the outcomes of the study compiled by the student in 2013.

#### 1.6.6: Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This research culminates with a list of recommendations for the promotion of the NOS, and the opportunities for receptionists' validation of learning while at work. It also identifies any shortcomings and suggests improvements for possible future studies.



## **Chapter two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The literature review focuses mainly on the competencies required by receptionists in the hospitality sector. In particular, the National Occupational Standards (NOS), the theoretical lens used in this research, form a comprehensive part of this literature review. It also takes into account previous studies that looked at the relationship between what is taught as part of Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET), what hiring managers look for when recruiting receptionists, and on-the-job training for employees to reskill and/or upskill.

Considering that this research is based in Malta, there is also a review of literature on hospitality in Malta, the relationship between Malta and Tourism, and how competing industries, such as the gaming industry, and the information technology used today in reception services have impacted today's challenges within the hospitality industry.

### **2.2 Competency Gap and Competency Models**

Competencies are a set of capabilities that a person possesses which enable him/her to perform a task or job correctly (Parry, 1998, cited in Sisson & Adams, 2013). According to Parry (1998) and Lowry and Flohr (2005), a competency is composed of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA), based on a specific task.

Jauhani and Misra (2006), believed that competencies show one's value and ultimately what are they capable of achieving. Furthermore, a competency model is seen as a tool that encompasses the knowledge, the skills and the attitude an employee must have to be able to contribute productively to their place of work (Chung-Herrera, Enz and Lankau, 2003). De Ansorena (1996), and Lewy-Leboyer (1997), divided the concept of competency in two: Technical Competency, the needed knowledge and know how to perform a task effectively; and Generic Competency, the personal traits needed, such as motivation and attitudes, to perform a task effectively (Cited in Agut, S. and Grau, R, 2002).

The lack of ability to perform a task is often known as gap in competencies (Bee & Bee 1994, cited in Agut and Grau, (2003). Others, such as Ford and Noe (1987), consider it as a training need. Ford and Noe (1987), also defined a performance gap as missing a skill in a particular skill set.

According to Boyatzis (2007), ongoing training, job satisfaction and motivation can assist in developing the competencies required in the place of work. Albeit training may be considered as the best possible solution to mitigate competency gaps, there are various other alternative ways to do so. For instance, innovating the actual job content (Peiro, 1999), or redesigning some aspects of the job (Bee and Bee, cited in Agut and Grau, 2003), or a change in the work environment (Goldstein, 1993).

In this sense, Sandwith (1993), argued that when creating a competency domain model, which represents a general descriptive framework for the practice of a specific job or industry, one should identify the competency gap/s and ensure that training and development focus on bridging that gap. He identified five areas of managerial competencies:

- Conceptual, creative, and cognitive skills: understanding the job and finding ways for implementation;
- Leadership skills: how ideas will be delivered and actioned;
- Interpersonal skills: the skills required to communicate and interact with other people;
- Administrative skills: knowing the policies and procedures, and any financial information; and
- Technical Skills: the actual knowledge and skills needed to perform the task assigned.

Spowart (2011), classified competencies into hard (technical) and soft (interpersonal and communication) skills. Viewed in this way, Kindness (2021), explained how soft skills are connected to a person's emotional intelligence rather than their IQ. Hospitality has always been known as an industry where soft skills have greater value than hard skills (Jeffers J., and Hutchinson H., 2020).

## 2.3 Competencies related to Front Office

Many researchers have attempted to identify the main competencies required to work in the hospitality industry using samples of participants having different job roles. For instance, Brownell (1994) involved general managers as his participant sample, whereas Chung (2000) focused on hotel management graduates. Whilst the majority of the findings were different, some similarities emerged, such as: communication skills, customer relations skill, and professional behaviour. Particularly, Sisson and Adams (2013) show that soft skills, such as interpersonal, communication and leadership skills are the skills needed the most for career advancement in the hospitality sector, as these enable people to interact successfully with others.

A case study by Astuti, Ginaya, and Sadguna (2018), related to hotel front desk receptionist services shows how hotel front desk receptionist competences can be fostered and developed. It delves into how implementing local Balinese values Catur Paramita values in the reception department improved performance and service offered. Specifically, it concludes that using such values, receptionists were more inclined to continuous professional development and hence achieving the competencies needed. According to the authors of this study, Catur Paramita are the “four genuine main characteristics of a person” as shown in table 2 below.

<b>Catur Paramita</b>	<b>Personal Traits</b>	<b>Skills</b>
Maitri	Courteous, Gentle, Polite	Knowledge
Karuna	Compassionate, Sharing	Language
Mudita	Friendly, Cheerful, Smile	Attitude
Upeska	Forgiving, Sincere	Green Ethics

*Table 2: Catur Paramita values*

This study, which is related to hotel front desk receptionist services, of Astuti, Ginaya, and Sadguna (2018), focused primarily on Globalisation and its repercussions. Globalisation has increased competition in all the industries, especially in the hospitality sector. Hence, hotels need to find a competitive advantage to ensure constant growth. Since Bali’s way of living is very much linked to philosophy, their competitive advantage involves linking tourism to philosophy. Therefore, the Catur Paramita and

its four genuine characteristics can be adapted and implemented within the front office department to increase their competitive advantage.

From a previous study conducted by Mallia (2013), the managers interviewed indicated that it is vital that the front office team is familiar with the following procedures: 1) familiarisation with the hotel rooms' categories, and food and beverage and leisure facilities; and 2) awareness of the reservation's procedures. Furthermore, the main competencies mentioned by managers and front liners were: languages; Property Management Systems (PMS) knowledge; working well in a team; and having a positive attitude (Mallia, 2013). In this study, the researcher asked specific questions during interviews with HR managers to cross-compare the results with those enacted from Mallia's (2013) research, and deduct if there were any change in the expected / required competencies for roles within the Front Office department in the past decade.

## **2.4 The importance of Training at work**

Training professionals are a must-have investment in any company wanting to achieve the best results and return on investment. Today, training has become more dynamic due to changes in technology. Technology advancement and the knowledge level of the employees are two key elements when developing training programmes (Wong and Lee, 2017). The training aspect is considered crucial in the hospitality sector. Indeed, Chand and Katou (2007) clearly indicate the link between training and high customer service levels. Besides, Roehl and Swerdlow (1999) states that companies in Japan and Germany spent 10% of their time on training, and the Training Magazine USA (2021) announced that in 2021, American companies spent around one thousand seven hundred dollars per employee on training programmes. Nevertheless, such facts are not the reality within the hospitality turnover in the local context. The tourism industry does not tend to invest enough in training and thus does not provide a high career development path, which consequently results in high turnover (Hjalager and Anderson, 2001). For instance, the Jobplus (2021), Malta's Public Employment Service, declared that Malta reached a record 80% turnover rate in 2018 and 62% rate in 2019.

The solution to such challenges is a strong human resources department that focuses on training and development (Tesone, 2004). Chapman and Lovell argued in 2006, that

“human resources quality determines service quality, service delivery efficiency and customer satisfaction” (p.61). The hospitality industry faces competency challenges due to lack of motivation that can be derived from a lack of training needs. (Martin, McTaggart and Bowden, 2006).

Training needs assessment (TNA) is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of the training objective. TNA defines the scope of training, ensures training meets objectives and conserves corporate resources (Tao, Yeh and Sun, 2006, p61).

“Training provides opportunities for career development and job enrichment [... and thus ...] leads to more ongoing commitment from your employees, which also results in decreased turnover.” (Benjamin, no date). Similarly, Berta (2006) states that there is a direct relationship between lack of training and high turnover. In addition, Mullen (2004) found that 70% of employees would stay at their current place of work if training and development are provided. Consequently, hotels are nowadays investing more in their training and development departments. As a matter of fact, big hotel brands such as, Hilton, Marriott, and Hyatt, have specific roles related to training and professional development, including director of training and development, training managers and training associates. These hotels have been investing in adequate training plans that are relevant to current contexts. For example, the Hyatt Hotels Corporation developed a mentorship programme to support women in reaching leadership roles called Women@Hyatt. Training programmes include induction and orientation sessions to familiarise with the Brand and its values, on the job training and e-learning modules to follow. Furthermore, well designed training plans also consider the employees’ wellbeing. For instance, Hyatt Hotels Corporation allocated a budget for employees to take external courses, not necessarily related to their employment role, but can either be purposeful for future professional growth, or simply for personal growth.

## **2.5 ‘What is taught Versus What’s Sought’- The difference between the theory at school and the practice at work**

Many researchers agree that attitude is what makes or breaks a career and what makes a person employable. According to Fugate, Kinicki and Ashfort (2004, p. 3), employability is defined as “the ability to gain and maintain a job in a formal organisation”. There can be many reasons for unemployment, one of them being structural unemployment; i.e., the jobs available do not match with the skills available.

Chen, Kannan and Tretan (2011), concluded that structural unemployment is a big challenge in the United States. Structural unemployment is also an issue in Europe, and is the reason for the formation of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EafA). The EafA's objective is to encourage countries to review and upscale their apprenticeship programmes so that more unemployed youth will be attracted to apprenticeship. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, Cedefop, is working with several countries to enhance these apprenticeships as part of their "formal education and learning." (Cedefop, 2014). In Malta, apprenticeships were drastically reformed to attract more learners, as well as to establish more partnerships with companies. However, apprenticeships are not provided in the Tourism sector, with work placements instead. During a Eurostat survey in 2014, (EU Labour Force Survey), the scale of 100 was used to calculate the average of unemployment. The low level educated youths were the ones who were mainly unemployed. This trend reached its peak in 2012, where the index 100 grew to 121, and decreased to 101 in 2014 (Cedefop, 2014).

There is a gap between what is taught at school and what hiring managers are looking for (Ryes *et al.*, 2002). While education focuses mainly on knowledge and cognitive skills, the working environment favours social skills and capability to do things. HR Managers would rather hire someone with a lower Grade Point Average (GPA), but with higher social skills rather than the other way round (Hagan *et al.*, 2013).

There is an ever-changing environment within the hospitality industry (Sisson and Adams, 2013). To ensure that the education and training provided is always relevant to industry, the designing aspect of a curriculum remain ongoing and in sync with the changes happening in the hospitality sector. Curricula developers must identify the competencies required to equip trainees with industry-relevant competencies. Moreover, Sisson and Adams (2013) describe internships as a crucial part of an educative programme related to the hospitality sector. This is because trainees acquire first-hand experiences in applying theory into practice; ensuring the development of the required KSAs.

There is a gap between education and places of work (Roth, Mavin and Dekker, 2013). The education system teaches mostly theory-based schooling, and many times bypasses, or does not include enough practice-based training. Many theorists have

argued that knowing of and knowing how are two different concepts which, both need to be catered for. Unfortunately, the educational system tends to focus more on the “knowing of” Heidegger (1977). Lave (1996) and Roth (2010), argued that “knowing how” does not only mean that one actually knows how to do something, it also consists of knowing why something is done. Roth, Mavin and Dekker (2013), thus suggest that there should be a proper distinction between the industries which should be studied, based on practice and those that should adapt the theory-based approach. This would aid in bridging the gap between education and training for practice-based learning, and on-the-job competencies.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) type of training provides both the theoretical and the practical aspects to students who choose front office hospitality studies. Therefore, as Virtanen *et al.*, (2014) stated, VET providers need to have a close relationship with workplaces so that students can benefit from on-the-job learning.

Tynjala's Sociocultural Environment model (2013), an adaptation of Biggs 3-P Model of Workplace Learning (1999), focuses on work experiences, Communes of Practice and Organizational Learning. According to this model, training follows the below three elements:

1. Passage –how the student learns from the trainer. Therefore, the learning passed to the student is solely based on the trainer’s view. Ideally, this view is reflected on that of the workplace.
2. Process –how the student is learning. The process of learning can be through participation, collaboration and interaction.
3. Product –focuses on learning outcomes, such as task performance, and decision making, and problem-solving.

These three elements should form the basis of every training programme aimed at equipping trainees for the workplace. Besides, the aim of VET training, as opposed to theoretical study programmes, is to provide proper guidance to trainees during the learning process. This guidance should be provided by teachers and by trainers during work placements. In their study, Mikkonen *et al.*, (2017) reviewed eighteen articles to identify the different methods of guidance support during apprenticeships. They divided their findings into two types of guidance: direct and indirect guidance. Direct guidance refers to guidance provided by appointed trainers who work closely with the

trainees, and indirect guidance refers to observations and explorations. For example, observing other receptionists while interacting with customers involves indirect guidance, whilst doing the check-in while the trainer is watching, is perceived as direct guidance.

Both methods of guidance are important and hence both are included in workplace apprenticeships.

## **2.6 Effective Learning through Work Experience**

The importance of formal and informal learning is not a recent trend. Guile and Griffiths (2001) suggested the "connective model of learning". In their study, learning through work experience, they looked at the various models of learning and provided recommendations to improve the relationship between learning and experience. They used the concept of 'context', as a replacement to the terms 'work' and 'school', to explain what influences learning.

Before looking at these models, it is vital to understand the definition of vertical and horizontal development. Vertical development is also known as intellectual development, what is learnt at school, based on theory. On the contrary, horizontal development is the process of development at the place of work, based on practice. Connecting the vertical and horizontal development was the practice recommended by Guile and Griffiths, (2001).

Work experience can be achieved in a variety of ways. There are five main models of effective learning through work experience (Guile and Griffiths 2001).

1. The Traditional Model - encourages the student to launch into a place of work to gain experience. This refers to a full working experience with no space for the educational context, such as what happens in apprenticeships.
2. The Experiential Model - also known as the 'co-development model', whereby both education and training are of equal importance. This model is mostly used in VET programs. However, there is still a gap between education and workplaces.
3. The Generic Model - focuses more on work experience than educational development. Following major criticism regarding this model, it was then



adjusted to become more structured, and teachers became more involved in guiding learners.

4. The Work Process Model - introduced to avoid 'intert knowledge' (Kruse, 1996, cited in Guile and Griffiths, 2001). Intert knowledge is the information that the students learn at school about a particular topic which will not be useful at their place of work. Instead, the work process model is based on the actual 'labour process'.
5. The Connective Model - based on the strengths of the above four mentioned models. This model was recommended as it ensures that students are getting the right knowledge during their educational formation, and be able to apply it at the place of work. Both vertical and horizontal learning are given equal importance in this model so that the students gain the right knowledge, skills and identity. (Guile and Griffiths, 2001).

## **2.7 Vocational Education and Globalisation**

Globalisation is the main driver in the significant upgrade of Vocational Education and Training (Mouzakitis, 2010). Globalisation created larger competitive labour pools of job opportunities and one must ensure innovative VET programmes to keep up to date with today's changes and existing competition.

In his study, Mouzakitis (2010), looked at whether the school curriculum adequately prepares students for a future working environment, that is whether the students develop the right skills an employer is looking for to perform specific tasks. This study was based on a general workforce from all types of sectors, and 86% of the respondents agreed that the contribution of school alone was not enough to prepare for future careers. This intensified the need for work-based learning and continuous professional development.

According to Cedefop (2020), enhancing the technical, and vocational education and training curriculum should create a successful relationship between the school curriculum and the readiness of the students at their workplace. Training must be based on what the market requires; thus, the initial stage of modernising the VET programmes

involves conducting intense market research. In Malta, the NOS are the perfect guidelines to assist schools in designing their curriculum.

Globalisation has been causing changes in trends, innovation and the need for readiness to continuously face shifting competition. Consequently, it is essential that both trainees and employees develop global perspectives, thus nurturing global skills. It is, therefore, important that new Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curricula are based on the latest development in the sector. Tabborn and Yang (1998), argued that to do so, one must ensure that both academics and vocational trainers work together to develop educational curricula as relevant to current industry contexts as possible. As Kim (1999) stated, TVET syllabus plays a major role in improving the social and economic development of a country in a globalised world. It is therefore one of the reasons why this research investigates the importance of a combined curriculum consisting of both technical skills and academic studies.

It is well known that the academic curriculum is not enough to prepare students for future work opportunities. On the contrary, vocational education ensures the development of high level of skills and competencies. Globalisation will indeed change a variety of aspects and, workforce mobility is one of the benefits of globalisation (Kim, 1999).

## **2.8 Malta and the Tourism Sector**

In 2020, almost 48,000 of the Maltese population worked in the tourism industry, making it one of the biggest generating sectors of the Maltese economy (Statista, 2021).

For many years after Malta acquired independence from the British Empire in 1964, and in the subsequent years, the 70's, 80's and 90's, Malta was seen as a sun and sea destination, which attracted over a million tourists. (Briguglio and Briguglio, 1996). Mass Tourism, however, caused environmental concerns. As its first act, in 1988, the newly elected government worked towards the first "Malta Tourism Development Plan." (De Trafford, 2010). Following this development, Horwarth and Horwarth (1989) suggested that Malta should be advertised as a culture and sun destination to incorporate Malta's historical aspect in the marketing strategy. This new development plan brought about major changes in the education system through the setup of Heritage Malta, in 2002, and the foundation of the Institute for Cultural Heritage "to manage

excavations, data retrieval and documentation” (De Trafford, 2010, p.158). There were also changes in environmental policies because of issues and concerns raised by various environmental groups related to sustainability and preservation. In 2004, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) divided tourism in Malta into five segments, each targeting different times of the year. Summer and Winter Sun, History and Culture, Diving and other Sports, English Language Learning, and MICE – Conference and Incentive Travel (Sultana and Briffa Said, 2008).

As a result of intense marketing investment, nowadays the Maltese islands are very much renowned for their culture and heritage. Tourism in Malta has since remained one of the most important sectors on the Island, with 2.8 million visitors in 2019 with a total expenditure of almost €2.2 billion (NSO, 2020). In fact, conducting a quick online search on tourists’ blogs would result in various posts providing reasons for visiting Malta. For instance, Nina Ahmedow (2021) mentioned in her blog her attraction for the Maltese language, festivals, the architecture, the churches, the Mediterranean Sea, and Maltese beaches and sunsets.

## **2.9 Technology Advances in Hotels**

Technology advancements have been impacting all aspects of society, and the hospitality sector is not the exception. In fact, according to Collins and Cabanoglu (2008, p. 273), technology use in hotels have been a work-in-progress since the 1970s and have always been linked to “competitive advantage, productivity improvement and guest service expansion”. Similarly, Bilighan *et al.*, (2011, p.143) argued that information technology increases “hotel’s productivity, reduce their costs and add value to the service and products offered to their customers”. According to Aldebert, *et al.*, (2010), the tourism industry is a very dynamic sector and it will keep growing. In 2015, the UNWTO recorded 1186 million international tourists that make up 10% of the world’s GDP. (Derbeta, 2016). Innovation in tourism can be mainly associated with the introduction of new communication technologies. The purpose of such technologies is twofold; increase guest satisfaction by providing a more efficient and more personalised service; and provide the data needed by hotel owners and managers faster and more effectively. Some of these technologies include:

- Mobile applications whereby guests can book their stay, use their phone to enter their room, use the application for checking in/out online, make online requests which are directed to the concerned employees automatically, and more;
- Loyalty program applications in which guests can access their account, see their points balance, be familiar with the loyalty program benefits and more;
- Review websites, such as Trip Advisor, for guests to share their experiences and recommendations.

Besides, information technology not only impacted customers, but also the managers and employees using it. (Oltean *et al.*, 2014). While a survey by American Hotel and Lodging Association in 2018, identified technology as a key factor for high customer satisfaction, Cobanoglu (2009) reported that when such technologies are not used properly, they also create guests' dissatisfaction. According to a research study by Ko *et al.* (2016), employees' lack of knowledge and care are the main barriers for technological advances, and so hiring the right people with digital skills is crucial.

## **2.10 National Occupational Standards (NOS)**

This study, as the title indicates, is based on the competencies and the occupational standards for front office employees. The research questions asked in this study were designed to find out whether the National Occupational Standards are used during the hiring process, and also as guidance for training plans. Furthermore, this study also looked at whether the NOS are used for validation of training of receptionists. Before looking at the results of this research, the National Occupational Standards and their benefits are explained in more detail in the next section of the literature review.

The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA), identified various roles for the Front Desk department and created the Occupational Standards on a national level, which include a list of competencies required for the roles within this department. As MFHEA (2020) stated, the NOS are useful to set guidelines for VET providers, who offer IVET and CVET programmes, to create a competent labour market.

The NOS for hospitality in Malta includes all the Front Office roles, starting from the Front Office manager role to the luggage porter role. For the purpose of this study, the role of a receptionist was used as guidelines to conduct the interviews with HR

managers and with receptionists. These standards are categorised into five sections which will be discussed in the subsection 2.10.1 below. These include health and safety; customer service; the actual arrival and departure procedure; work ethics; and cashier duties. It is vital to mention that these occupational standards do not cover only the actual reception role procedures, but other areas that should be part of on-the-job training as a recruit. For instance, health and safety, and work ethics sections are crucial, and the researcher is indeed curious to see whether they are being taken on board in the hotels that this study focused on.

The researcher, having over fifteen years' experience in the hospitality sector, believes that besides the five mentioned standards, the customer service and the other official receptionist duties are always part of the on-the-job training, and so included them as guidelines for the interviews held in this study.

#### 2.10.1 The five sections of the NOS for Front Office Receptionists

As previously mentioned, the NOS in the role of a front office receptionist, guest care host or guest service agent are divided into five sections. According to MFHEA (2020), these roles should be fulfilled by individuals who possess qualification of level 3 or above as per the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) . The sections below provide a summary of the occupational standards for the receptionist role as set out by the MFHEA.

##### 2.10.1.1 Health and Safety

The NOS specify that the ideal candidate must have basic knowledge of the Health and Safety procedures and protocols at their place of work. The knowledge must be extended to ensure proper handling of emergency protocols, such as fire evacuation and bomb threats. Thus, the employee must understand, observe, and report potential risks such as slippery surfaces or unattended suspicious items. The receptionists must comply with the work processes to ensure that the work is completed within a safe environment.

##### 2.10.1.2 Customer Service

The employee must be fully knowledgeable on the standard operating procedures of the Front Office department to ensure that the right protocols are followed when performing a task. Such tasks may involve room movement, storing luggage, or delivering a message to a guest. As a guest care host, the receptionist must be well informed of the hotel's facilities and bedrooms and have the appropriate

communications and interpersonal skills to answer guests' requests, questions, or feedback whilst making sure to tackle any problems and follow up on guests' satisfaction. Communication skills are also vital in dealing with employees within other departments to ensure the smooth daily running of the hotel. The role also entails knowing how to operate the switchboard operator, as well as using the PMS and other online platforms.

#### 2.10.1.3 Arrival and Departure Procedure

Both the check-in and the check-out procedures must be aligned with the hotel's policies and procedures. At check-in, the receptionist needs to be fully aware of the reservation details. This includes, knowing how to deal with direct payments, routed or walk-ins. Furthermore, the receptionist is to provide the client with the exact details of the hotel's facilities and amenities such as the outlet hours, WIFI password, and other facilities information. At check-in, the receptionist must allocate the right room according to what the guest has booked and ensures that the room is ready at check-in time. At check-out, the receptionist must resolve any billing related issues when they arise and take the correct payment. It is vital that the receptionist asks about the guests' stay and bid a polite but warm farewell while inviting the guests to return.

#### 2.10.1.4 Work Ethics

The right candidate must always maintain a professional attitude when dealing with guests, even the challenging ones. The receptionist's main priority is to ensure the customer's satisfaction, thus ensuring challenges that might arise are resolved up to the guests' satisfaction. Being ethical should not only be towards guests, but also between colleagues. The receptionist should always respect colleagues, within the Front Office department and other departments. The rules and regulations of the place of work must be clearly understood and followed. Emotional management, the ability to acknowledge and handle both positive and challenging emotions in a constructive manner, is key to ensure the right work ethics.

#### 2.10.1.5 Cashier Duties

The candidate must be knowledgeable as well as be able to manage cashier payments using a float and electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) machines. Payments such as foreign exchange, deposits and cash payments must be dealt with efficiently and accurately, following the right procedure. Moreover, the receptionist should know how to: use the

PMS system utilized by the company; handle the end of day process; and process receipts as per the company's procedures.

#### 2.10.2 The NOS in the place of work

Quality assurance in the workplace ensures that a service or a product provided is suitable for what it is intended to do (TVET, 2015). In the hospitality industry, quality assurance is used to monitor processes and improve efficiency of those processes, whilst ensuring a 'fit for purpose' and 'the first time right' perspective, thus reducing mistakes during the process.

According to TVET (2005), the NOS are intended to help companies achieve these goals, supporting the recruitment of the right people and in creating a training process for personnel's growth. The NOS ensures that the right candidates are recruited, thus increasing productivity at the workplace. They also support human resources in identifying and highlighting training needs, which also contributes to giving the company a competitive edge. Training ensures that personnel acquire all the necessary competencies to perform their job appropriately.

The NOS should be used to develop employees' competencies, design training programmes that will fill the competency gaps, and give the opportunity to the employees to achieve vocational training certification. Having said that, such standards are not only a basis for a training plan, but for certifying workers through the process of validation of informal and non-formal learning, and to ensure quality of service.

Human Resources should use the NOS to improve the quality of service provided, have a more effective recruitment selection, and clear and targeted training plans. Employees, on the other hand would have a clear picture of the competencies and skills they need to perform their role well. Thus, employees will have the opportunity to improve their skills and competencies through certified and accredited training programmes (TVET, 2015).

#### 2.10.3 National Occupational Standards Benefits and Human Resources Development

In their study, Lee and Jacobs (2019), focused on the relationship between the NOS and Human Resources (HR) development. This study showed that while it is acknowledged that the NOS is a winning tool to use for a higher level of workforce, HR are still not

fully utilising such a powerful tool. The authors suggest that HR managers should make use of these standards to ensure appropriate training and development needs.

Before the Government's involvement in the development of the NOS, such standards were called Performance Standards. As Trinder (2008) explained, these were company-based standards to measure one's performance. Once such standards became national guidelines, the name was changed according to the geographical location. For instance, they were called National Occupational Standards in the United Kingdom, Workforce Skills Qualifications in Singapore, and National Qualifications Framework in Africa. Although the NOS are related to a particular geographical area, as Jacobs (2019) stated, these standards are the basic common knowledge and skills required for a specific task, irrelevant to which geographical location it is performed. Besides, these standards provide insights to the relevance of certifications vis-à-vis the hospitality industry and thus "offer guidance for effective training in industry and allowing consistent recognition of occupations across a nation" (Heywood *et al.*, 1992, p. 50). It can therefore be stated that the NOS offer a direct guidance to personnel within the HR department, as also accentuated in the findings of Lee and Jacobs (2019).

It is the main objective for the NOS to be used by all hospitality entities across a nation. Indeed, if all hotels in Malta use the NOS for training purposes, it will create greater benefits in the long term. New recruits who would already have had experience as receptionists in Malta, would have already the right set of skills that were achieved in their previous role. This means that while the new employees still need training on the specific brand standards, the basic reception training would have already been fulfilled.

As mentioned earlier in this study, NOS guidelines give a competitive advantage to HR and Training Managers who make use of them. The standards can give clear guidance in compiling job descriptions for certain roles, can be used to identify training needs, and ultimately in creating training material. In countries such as the United Kingdom, the NOS are very helpful and tend to be the foundations of Human Resources development and incentives. As a result, those who usually tend to lack performance in their roles are more incentivised to improve their performance. (Cho and McLean, 2004).

Bridging the gap between education and the place of work is another benefit of the NOS. It helps employers look for the right people with the right skill set, and it aids



employees to choose the right studies for their future careers (Park 2013). The NOS create consistency in the matter of recognition and training for a specific skill in a specific industry (Heywood, 1992). NOS help in creating standards which ultimately can be used by managers as guidelines against which to benchmark their assessment of employees.

## **2.11 Validation Of Learning**

Malta is one of the countries in Europe that highly invests in education. Despite the investment in quality education, Malta is still struggling with finding competent personnel for the different roles in the Front Office department (Cedefop, 2020). Consequently, in 2007, Malta started implementing a new structure of qualifications for formal and non-formal learning known as the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). This framework is divided in eight levels to encourage lifelong learning.

The main purpose of formal learning's is to learn in a structured manner. Examples of where formal learning is achieved are, universities and places of work (Times of Malta 2021). Informal learning and non-formal learning, although not the same, are similar in that neither leads to any formal qualification. Nonetheless, they both lead to learning knowledge, skills and competencies (Times of Malta 2021). The main difference is that during the non-formal learning the learning objectives are planned and identified, such as a short course leading to a certificate of attendance. On the other hand, in informal learning, learning is unintentional and not part of the experience, such as learning how to do the work of a cashier in a new job (Gatt and Gatt, 2008).

Today, among other industries, the hospitality sector is included in the process of validation of non-formal and informal learning (MFHEA). This means that employees, for the purpose of this case study, receptionists, can validate their competencies and skills they acquired through work and other experience. All receptionists who have been working within the front office department for the past three years are eligible to such validation of non-formal learning. The Institute of Tourism Studies in Malta is responsible for the validation process of non-formal learning through interviews with the candidates, and subject to practical and written tests to proof they have indeed the right competency skillset for the role.

The Lifepass portfolio pilot project was created by following the below four steps in an attempt to help develop a digital tool for the validation process (Curmi and Gatt, 2011). The Lifepass is a new tool that has been tried for the purpose of documenting non-formal learning through the use of Information Communication Technology tools (ICT). The process proposed involved the following steps:

1. The candidate must first compile evidence of his/her competencies;
2. The collection of evidence is then compared to the NOS and the information is organised for the next step;
3. The candidate must now confirm that all the evidence is correct and reflects his/her skill;
4. The candidate will now compile all the documentation and makes sure that nothing is missing.

In their research, Curmi and Gatt (2011), highlighted the main limitations of the Lifepass portfolio pilot project which include:

- The programme could not be secured and thus others can access the candidate's work, and
- It lacked interchangeable languages on the same Lifepass.

The authors concluded their research by suggesting further advancements that needed to be implemented for the Lifepass project to be successful.

- Having enough space for the participant to express their considerations of such learning, and
- Have a designated area where the subheadings are explained in details for the participants.

The PATH Scheme (Proficiency Acknowledgement in Tourism and Hospitality), is a programme to promote career progression and lifelong learning (MTA 2021). It presents a form of validation of informal and non-formal learning. Once the applicant is deemed successful by the Institute of Tourism Studies, and Hospitality Tourism SSU-NCFHE, he/she will receive a skills card that recognizes the applicant's "knowledge, skills and competencies" (MTA 2021).

## **2.12 Conclusion**

This literature review provided a detailed overview of the key aspects of competences in international literature and information already collected regarding the competency gaps and models. It has also highlighted the importance of training and effective learning at the workplace in the Tourism sector.

The next chapter, the methodology, identifies the research questions set and explains how the NOS formed the basis of this study and the research tools utilised. Besides an account of the research tools, sample, data collection, and data analysis used to conduct this study.

## **Chapter three: Research Method**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter rationalises the research methodology used for this study and is further divided into six sub-sections. It starts with a description of the nature and the purpose of this study including its main research questions. It then moves on to provide a description of the type of research employed, a rationale for choosing semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations as the data collection tools, and an explanation of the context in which this research was carried out. All of this eventually develops to provide details about the process of conducting the interviews and observations including the target population, sampling approach and size, the design of the research tools employed, and the ethical issues that were encountered during the study. The concluding sub-section presents an account of the data analysis approach adopted.

### **3.2 Research Questions**

This study focuses on the specific competencies that are required for the receptionist's role in 5-Star hotels in Malta. In view of the competency levels and occupational standards published for Malta, the study aims to establish the extent to which HR managers and Front Office managers are aware of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) when recruiting and drawing up training programmes for receptionists in 5-Star hotels. The research also delves into the degree at which the NOS are being used to ensure that such competencies are developed during Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) formation of hospitality students in Malta

Concisely, the research questions that guided this study are the following:

1. What are the competencies (Skills and Knowledge) expected by the 5-Star hospitality industry compared to those indicated in the National Occupational Standards when recruiting personnel for the receptionist role?
2. Are the National Occupational Standards used when VET, IVET and CVET providers, draw up their training programmes?

3. To what degree, if at all, do the occupational standards for the receptionist role influence recruitment, training and professionalisation of the role?

### **3.3 Main Research Methodology**

This study used qualitative methods to answer the research questions set. Unlike quantitative research, a qualitative research “is an empirical research approach where the data is not in the form of numbers” (Punch, 1998, p.1-2). According to Mifsud (2020), a qualitative research is derived from experience, motivation, process and meaning behind one’s behaviour, whereby the researcher wants to discover the “meaning” and not the “frequency”. It was indeed the researcher’s aim to understand the participants’ experiences and perceptions surrounding the research questions, extract trends and, in light of the literature review, map them into conclusions.

Since the researcher used a qualitative methodology, it is interesting to identify the advantages and disadvantages of such research method. A researcher uses qualitative information to understand better the attitudes behind behaviour observed. Qualitative Data is also more flexible as it is derived from human experience. When participants are asked open ended questions, they can provide an honest opinion while also being creative and raise relevant issues in their answers. Overall, qualitative research provides potential insights and explanations for behaviours observed (McLeod, 2019).

Qualitative data can be, however, very time consuming to collect. It is also not possible to draw generalisations but to mainly provide insights of the case or phenomenon under study. It also has an element of bias as it reflects the researcher’s perspective. There is, thus more chance for errors in the interpretation as the researcher might not understand the participants correctly or vice versa. This form of research thus requires a professional unbiased approach while conducting the interviews and asking questions, making sure that the researcher is aware of potential bias and taking measures to make the data more reliable and through minimal loss in translation. Qualitative research tackles the issue of bias through triangulation which is achieved by collecting data about the same phenomenon from different sources (McLeod, 2019).

This study focuses on understanding the factors that influenced the concerned individuals when developing the job description for receptionists, and when developing the curriculum for IVET programmes. Hence, as part of the triangulation exercise,

several experts from the educational and industry sectors were asked to participate in a semi-structured face-to-face interview, involving a set of open-ended questions.

### **3.4 Main Research Tools**

The qualitative tools used in this study involved the use of semi-structured interviews with HR managers and receptionists working in 5-Star hotels in Malta, and IVET course providers at the Institute of Tourism Studies (I.T.S.). It also involved non-participant observations of receptionists while at work. Documentation, such as the job description and the training plans used by HR managers were also collected.

During semi-structured interviews, the interviewer can observe non-verbal movements that can help the interviewer assess the interviewee's responses (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Moreover, while the interviewer already has a set of questions in mind, participants could freely discuss and express their own opinions. This allowed participants to express insights that went beyond the questions planned. It was then the role of the researcher to keep the discussion relevant to the main topic. During these interviews, the interviewees feel more comfortable in expressing themselves (Steber, 2017). Semi-structured interviews can however consume a lot of time from both parties. Firstly, both parties need to be available at the same time, and then, the interview itself is more time consuming when compared to data collection tools, such as surveys. Questions asked by the interviewer can be misunderstood by the interviewee, whereas the interviewer can misinterpret the interviewee's answer and thus loses its authenticity. Hence why, the researcher must ask the questions as clear and simple as possible to ensure there is no loss of translation.

According to Thompson (2016), non-participant observations are beneficial as the researcher will be undistinguished and thus the subjects will act more natural. Therefore, the researcher would be able to collect authentic data. However, Thompson (2016) also argued that during observations the observer cannot interfere in any way, and thus non-participant observation can lack flexibility in the way the researcher obtains data.

Interviews were carried out with HR managers and receptionist staff at five 5-Star hotels in Malta. It was considered important to interview both the managers as well as receptionists themselves to obtain insights from the different parties and ensure

triangulation. The interviews with the ITS professionals provided insights with respect to IVET for the receptionist role. The interviews were semi-structured, that is, the researcher asked specific questions with the hope of encouraging an open discussion with the previously mentioned experts. The intention was to use the qualitative research method with the use of open-ended questions.

#### 3.4.1 Interview with HR managers

HR managers were interviewed mainly to obtain answers to the first research question which related to competencies that HR managers look for as part of their recruitment process. The data gathered contributed also in answering the second and the third research questions, regarding CVET training and professionalisation of the role. These interviews focused on gathering data related to the identification of the competencies HR look for when recruiting reception personnel, and to understand the criteria used to identify training needs. This study aimed to also learn whether HR managers are aware of the NOS and if these are used for recruitment purposes, or whether they would consider using them in the future. The researcher was curious to learn how HR managers identify any gaps within the front office department and the training done / certifications achieved by employees, and whether they will encourage the team to validate their informal and non-formal learning. Finally, the researcher wanted to know their opinion about the training provided for hospitality students in the receptionist role.

The first part of the interview with HR managers collected some background information about the hotel in terms of size and number of employees. HR managers were then asked to state what competences they expect from receptionist staff and what do they look for when they recruit receptionist staff for their hotel. They were also asked how they determine the training needs of their receptionists. The HR managers were also asked about their awareness of the NOS and whether they use them in their work. Their opinion on the opportunity for receptionist staff to validate their informal and nonformal learning was also requested. Finally, the researcher wanted to learn what is the opinion of the HR manager about the IVET training and if they would be interested in a partnership to validate the receptionists' learning.

Since the researcher used in depth interviews with HR and Front Office personnel, there was indeed a risk of the researcher being biased. The researcher, being a Front Office manager, might have caused the possibility to affect her judgment to the answers

collected. The researcher thus made sure that the questions were explained correctly, and the answers were understood without prejudice.

The interviews in which a sample of the questions asked is available in appendix B, were audio-recorded and transcribed. The researcher also tried to obtain the job description and the training sheets for reception roles used by the participating 5-Star hotels. Only 3 training plans were shared with the researcher out of the 5 hotels who participated in this study, available in appendix D. The researcher collected all 5 job descriptions, also some are available in appendix C.

### 3.4.2 Interviews with Receptionists

These interviews aimed to understand whether receptionists were aware of the skills and competences required to carry out the job and whether they received any relevant training. The interviews also probed whether receptionists were interested in obtaining training to develop their skills and to achieve qualifications as part of their CVET Training. The data gathered from these interviews aimed at answering the second part of the third research question, which is whether the NOS are being used for receptionists to validate their learning.

The receptionists were asked a set of questions related to the following aspects: whether they were familiar with the competencies needed for the receptionist role and whether they believed they possessed the said competencies. The researcher also wanted to understand if the hotel offers any on-the-job training to gain these competencies and whether they are aware of the National Occupational Standards. Finally, the researcher wanted to gauge whether they would be interested in validating their training.

This interview started by asking receptionist about their background, both education and work experience. The researcher then asked the receptionists what they considered to be the right competencies for the role of a receptionist, and whether they believe that the education they received prepared them for their professional journey. The last part of the questions was based on the validation of learning. The researcher asked the receptionists whether they were aware of the existence of the NOS and whether they would be interested in achieving certification through CVET training.



#### 3.4.3 Interviews with IVET course providers at I.T.S

The researcher wanted to understand whether the ITS is using the NOS to design and develop the curriculum of the various training programmes available in their prospectus and such curricula are aligned with, and relevant to the Maltese hospitality industry. These interviews contributed to the answer the second research question which related to the use of NOS to design curricula.

In particular, these interviews aimed at answering the following aspects: how they developed their training programmes and the training approach that is used. The researcher wanted to understand also whether the programmes cover all the competencies needed in this sector and what competencies the trainers believed are crucial for this role. Furthermore, the interviewer wanted to find out if the trainers were familiar with the NOS, if these are used during the designing phase of the training programmes, and the assessment processes.

#### 3.4.4 Documentation

During the interviews with HR managers, the researcher obtained the receptionist's job description and the on-the-job training material that is provided to new recruits. These documents served as data that the researcher used to 1) validate the data achieved from the interviews, and 2) compare job descriptions and training programmes with the NOS. Eventually, the aim of this research is to present recommendations for the enhancement of the development of job descriptions and training programmes, such as suggesting a training plan which incorporates the use of the NOS and thus facilitating validation of learning.

#### 3.4.5 Non-Participant Observations

Non-participant observations were carried out in the same hotels where the interviews were conducted. The researcher spent approximately two hours of non-participant observations in the lobbies of the participating hotels. The researcher was observing the behaviour and job performance of receptionists in general, the check-in/out processes and the overall interaction between the receptionists and guests. Consequently, such an exercise provided the researcher with first-hand experience of what guests experience themselves.

### 3.5 Sample

This study focused on doing the investigative process in 5-Star hotels, thus the participants within the industry were employees within this hotel category. In the Maltese islands, there are nineteen 5-Star hotels of which five were chosen and accepted to participate in this study.

The sampling methodology applied was a non-probability one, in which the researcher selected the hotels participating in this study based on a particular purpose rather than randomly. Due to time consideration as well as the specifics of this study, the researcher already knew which sample was needed for this research. Since this research was based on 5-Star hotels in Malta, the researcher made sure to only reach out to 5-Star hotels on the Island. HR managers were approached to seek permission to conduct the study at their hotel. It was not difficult for the researcher to obtain contacts and knowledge of the hospitality sector, being that the researcher has a vast experience working in the hospitality sector. The ITS professionals were chosen particularly because of their role being related to this study. The course coordinator and the lecturer teaching the front office module were the right participants for this study.

The sample population size for qualitative studies is a much-debated topic with various researchers, such as Guest *et al.* (2006), and Crouch and McKenzie (2006), attesting that the sample size for qualitative research is comparatively lesser to the sample size required for quantitative study. This depends on several aspects including the:

- Research objectives and questions;
- Data collection methodology. If triangulation of data is involved, the sample size required could be much lower; and
- Type of participating individuals. For example, if top management of organizations are interviewed to get an understanding of the *modus operandi* of a particular department, the number of samples might be lesser when compared to a study where consumer feedback is analysed.

Besides, the researcher wanted to decrease the probability of data saturation, where the participants' replies become repetitive with no new insights. Guest *et al.* (2006), proposes that saturation often occurs at 12 participants, while Crouch and McKenzie (2006) suggest that less than 20 should be maintained for better relationship with the

participants. In this study, a total of 17 participants were interviewed and five were observed. Table 3 below provides a summary of the individuals who participated in this study.

<b>Data Collection Tool</b>	<b>VET Providers</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>Five 5 Star Hotels in Malta</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
<b>Interview 1</b>	Course Coordinator	1	HR Manager	5
<b>Interview 2</b>	Front Office Lecturer	1	Front Office Host	10
<b>Non-Participant Observations</b>			Lobby & Front Office	5

*Table 3: Summary of participants*

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

When collecting primary data through a qualitative approach, such as the methodology used in this research, ethical considerations must be identified and respected.

First and foremost, the researcher ensured that the Academic Research and Publications Board (ARPB), issued ethical clearance of forms and the process of recruiting of participants and obtaining permissions. The ethical clearance allowed the researcher to start collecting data both by interviewing employees and managers at hotels, as well as interviewing I.T.S. professionals.

When using such data, the researcher first ensured that permission was given by the relevant gatekeepers within the 5-Star hotels in which the study was carried out. In addition, consent was obtained from participants based on ensuring that the identity of participants is protected. Permission letters were sent to the hotels CEO/manager with details about the research and a request for permission to carry out the research and act as intermediary to distribute information letters and consent forms among potential participants. Each potential participant received an information letter which described what the research was about, the aim of the interview and that it was audio-recorded, how observations (in the case of front desk workers) were carried out, how data was stored and then deleted, as well as guarantees about how the identity of participants was protected. Based on this information, all participants in the study were asked to sign a

consent form before any data was collected. Observations in hotel lobbies also required a signed consent form. Some of these letters and consent forms are found in appendix A.

### **3.7 Data Collection**

To ensure a thorough process and an in-depth analysis, the researcher in this study used both primary and secondary sources of data. According to Surbhi (2016), data collection is indeed vital when conducting research looking to either creating a new theory or supporting an existing one. The data was obtained from semi-structured interviews with HR managers, receptionists and professionals from ITS, observing receptionists during work, and obtaining documentation of the job-descriptions and the curriculum of training programmes offered by ITS.

The interviews were conducted face to face so that the interviewer had the opportunity to observe both the verbal and the non-verbal behaviour of the interviewees. Through the in-depth interview method, the researcher hoped to establish a relationship with the participants which would hopefully encourage more honest answers from the interviewees. There was no peer pressure dynamic that can be created in focus groups and the interviewer hoped for a higher quality of its sampling. The researcher sees the in-depth interviews as an opportunity to ask any follow up questions that can emerge from the open discussion through the open-ended questions that were asked. The researcher in this study was also aware that this type of data collection is time consuming and needs to ensure that the right participants are being interviewed. This data was supplemented by analysis of documentation and observations of Front Office staff at work.

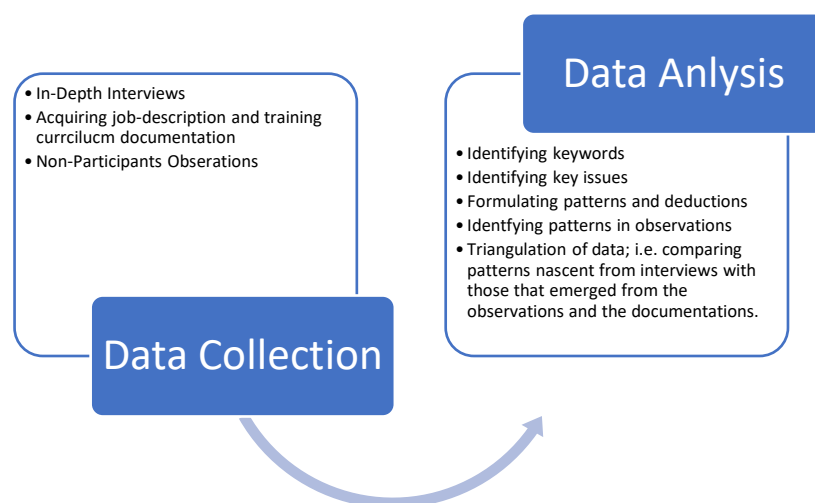
By interviewing HR managers and Front Office receptionists, the researcher had the opportunity to observe and interact with the front desk team and gain some more insight by observing. The researcher wanted the interviewees to feel comfortable and at ease. Therefore, it was their decision as to where they wanted to meet. Each interview took between fifteen and thirty minutes on average, and they were all audio-recorded.

The researcher wanted to collect data from the main IVET provider in the hospitality sector. Hence, interviews were conducted with the team responsible for the curricula and the lecturer teaching the front office syllabus. The researcher reached out to the

course coordinator to assist in organising the interviews. The interviews were held through a video call due to health concerns. Each interview took between fifteen and thirty minutes on average, and they were both audio-recorded. A sample of all the interview questions asked are found in appendix B.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

The researcher used a ‘Thematic Analysis’ approach to analyse data and identify emerging themes. The researcher used a coding system to interpret the interviews’ findings. This involved the researcher first identifying both similar and different keywords in the available data. For example, if all or most of the participants mentioned Opera as a technical skill required to answer question 1, ‘Proficiency in Opera’ was an identified keyword that was highlighted under the similarity’s column. This then could be identified as a competency required to work in a 5-Star Hotel within the front office department. The next step of the coding system was to identify key issues which emerged. This was followed by the researcher describing in more detail the findings from the interviews’ transcripts and eventually identify answers for the research questions. Patterns enacted from the interview were then triangulated with documentation and observations made. Figure 1 below summarises the data collection and analysis process.



*Figure 1: Summary of the data collection and analyses process*

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The research methods utilised and the implementation of the data collection exercise have been explained in detail in this chapter. It highlighted how semi-structured interviews and the non-participant observations were the main research tools used in the study. It also described how triangulation was respected by adding secondary resources to this research.

In the next chapter, the data collected is analysed and overall insights to the research questions are put forward.

## **Chapter four: Research Finding**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations carried out as part of the study. The analysis presents insights and potential answers to the three research questions set.

The research in this study was conducted in five 5-Star hotels in Malta and at the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). Five human resources managers and ten receptionists were interviewed through a set of open-ended questions. Moreover, non-participant observations were carried out in the hotels' lobby. The researcher also interviewed the course coordinator and the lecturer teaching the front office module at the ITS.

The five 5-Star Hotels in this research are International hotel chains and have their own branding standards. All the participating hotels have more than hundred guest bedrooms with the smallest one having 151 bedrooms, and the largest having 481 bedrooms. All the interviewed HR managers were female managers with a vast experience in the hospitality sector. Most HR managers were of Maltese Nationality, and only one was a foreigner.

The researcher started the interviews with the HR managers by asking information about the hotels' number of bedrooms and their staffing levels. From the data obtained it was clear that all hotels employ staff on full-time and part-time basis and have several interns as well.

#### **4.2.1 Reasons for working as receptionist**

The interviews carried out with the 10 receptionists showed that there were various reasons for which they decided to work as a receptionist. The majority chose this line of work (front office) because of the interaction with guests. One receptionist explained that she is working as a receptionist after ended up being redundant during COVID-19. Another participant mentioned that since he/she possesses the right skills for the job, then it was the obvious choice to make. The below table showcases all the participants' reasons for working in reception.

Interaction with guests from different Nationalities & Culture	5 Participants
The first contact with the guest	3 Participants
Problem solving role	2 Participants
New challenges on a daily basis	2 Participants
Knowledge of various languages	1 Participant
COVID-19 reasons	1 Participant
Love for traveling	1 Participant
Always learning new things	1 Participant

*Table 4: Receptionists' reasons for working as receptionists*

#### 4.2.2 Receptionists' background

The ten receptionists interviewed come from different education background and experience. They were also a mix of Maltese nationals and foreigners. Six receptionists had both experience and an educational background within the hospitality field. Two receptionists are currently doing their internship, this being their first role within the front office, and two receptionists have the experience but no educational background within the hospitality industry. Summarised in table 5 below, experience in the role of the receptionist is indeed the most common denominator.



<b>Receptionists</b>	<b>Education in Hospitality</b>	<b>Experience in Hospitality</b>	<b>Trainees</b>
Receptionist 1			X
Receptionist 2	X	X	
Receptionist 3			X
Receptionist 4	X	X	
Receptionist 5	X	X	
Receptionist 6	X	X	
Receptionist 7	X	X	
Receptionist 8	X	X	
Receptionist 9		X	
Receptionist 10		X	

*Table 5: Receptionists' Background*

### **4.3 Analysis of responses relevant to each of the research questions**

This section presents the trends nascent from the analysis of the data collected and in so doing, answers to the research questions are then formulated.

#### **4.3.1 Skills and competences expected of receptionist staff by 5-Star hotels**

This section focuses on data relevant to answering the first research question; i.e., What are the competencies (Skills and Knowledge) expected by the 5-Star hospitality industry compared to those indicated in the National Occupational Standards when recruiting personnel for the receptionist role? To answer this question, the researcher asked several questions to the different roles that have participated in this study.

The HR Managers provided insights to this research question when they were asked questions related to: What key components they look for when employing receptionists, and whether they usually go for/find recruits who are already trained? The HR managers were also invited to identify the competencies, qualifications or experience they look for/require for such job. Table 6 below shows the competences identified by the five interviewed HR managers.

Although all the answers varied from one HR Manager to another, there were a few common requirements. It was also noted that there were some answers which contradict others, such as, having an education background in hospitality. As can be noted from the table 6 below, all the HR Managers agreed that personality and attitude are crucial factors to consider when recruiting receptionists. This is understandable as the role of a receptionist involves providing a service and often is the first point of encounter by guests in a hotel (grandhotelier.com). Language skills were also considered important, reflecting the advantage of having reception staff who can communicate with guests through different languages. Knowledge of the Management Information System called OPERA was also mentioned by three HR managers. On the other hand, only two HR managers mentioned experience. This may reflect the existing problems with recruitment where it is difficult to find persons with experience applying for the receptionist job. Many hotel professionals are indeed leaving the industry (Evans, 2021). The need for eye detail, technology and hospitality education were only mentioned by one HR manager respectively.

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Personality & Attitude	5 Participants
Language Skills	3 Participants
Opera Knowledge	2 Participants
Experience	2 Participants
Eye for Detail	1 Participant
Technology	1 Participant
Hospitality Education	1 Participant

*Table 6: Key components expected by HR managers*

To compare with the competences identified by HR managers, receptionists were asked to identify the competencies they possess and which they deem important vis-a-vis the role of a receptionist. The receptionists' answers were varied too. Similar to how HR managers replied, six out of the ten receptionists interviewed considered having a customer service-oriented attitude as a 'must' competence. Unlike HR managers, however, receptionists focused more on competencies related to specific tasks that they must fulfil. Four of the participants mentioned 'multi-tasking' and 'complaint handling' as two other important competences; two competences related to work related stress as

they reflect means of how receptionists can cope with the demands of the job. Like HR managers, some identified the need to have communication skills, local knowledge (knowledge of the area the hotel is located in), knowledge of the Opera PMS, and be able to work in a team, knowledge of languages and time management. Table 7 below summarised the key competencies identified by the participating receptionists.

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Customer service oriented	6 Participants
Complaint handling	4 Participants
Multitasking	4 Participants
Communication skills	2 Participants
Local knowledge	2 Participants
Opera knowledge	2 Participants
Teamwork	2 Participants
Hotel knowledge	1 Participant
Flexibility	1 Participant
Languages	1 Participant
Time management	1 Participant

*Table 7: Key competencies identified by the participating receptionists.*

The view of competences needed was also obtained by interviewing two professionals from ITS. They were asked to identify the best courses to take for a career within the Front Office department and what competences students would achieve once they undertake the offered training programmes. Both ITS professionals agreed that the best course to take is the Higher Diploma in Hospitality Management, if the students have the necessary pre-requisites. Others can start their training at foundation level and work their way up to a Diploma and/or a Degree.

The two professionals interviewed mentioned different competences that students develop after completing the training delivered at ITS. These are summarised in table 8 below. The ITS course coordinator focused more on the structure of the training course, highlighting how receptionists are trained in public policy, finance, human resources, communication skills and guest relations. The front office lecturer focused more on competences related to fulfilling the specific job duties, such as giving good

first impressions, collaborating with other departments to ensure good client service, efficient running of reservations, maximising sales opportunities, and respecting legal requirements of clients.

<b>ITS Coordinator</b>	<b>Front Office Lecturer</b>
Public policy	First impressions
Finance module	Collaboration with other departments
Human resources module	Reservations
Communication skills	Maximise on sales opportunities
Guest relations	Comply with the legal requirements

*Table 8: Competencies developed during training*

The researcher could not help but notice the different competencies mentioned by all the participants interviewed in this study. Whilst positive attitude, customer service and guest relations were somewhat mentioned by all participants, the rest of the competencies varied significantly.

#### 4.3.2 Use of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) when drawing up training programmes

This section focuses on the second research question, i.e. Are the National Occupational Standards used when VET, IVET and CVET providers, draw up their training programmes?

HR managers were asked whether they use the NOS for guidance during the induction process, and in designing the training plans for receptionists. In the case of the ITS professionals, the focus was mainly on whether the NOS were used in drawing up the syllabus for the training courses for receptionist staff.

With regards to the induction process, the majority of the HR managers ensure that both the induction process and the on-the-job training are completed by all new recruits. One HR manager mentioned safety and security as an aspect included in their induction process, and two managers mentioned the use of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The most common challenge identified for new recruits is learning the product knowledge.

While only three HR managers were aware of the NOS, none of the managers use them to design their training plan or to identify any training needs. An interesting insight is

that one HR manager uses the NOS when working on work permits for non-European Nationals; *“Yes, I used it when I needed to compile a work permit. I need to prove that the work permits recruit have the right experience and education based on the NOS.”* (HR Manager 1).

It was interesting to see the different methods adopted by HR managers when designing a training plan and when identifying training gaps. While most managers rely heavily on the new recruit’s supervisors and head of departments for feedback, the strategy used varies according to the processes adopted by the participating hotels. While the training plan for most branded hotels is already designed by their corporate teams, the training gaps are identified at property level. As mentioned earlier, all the participating HR managers rely on the departmental heads and the departmental trainer to identify the areas of developments for new and ongoing training. Besides, two managers also mentioned frequent check ins and job chats with employees, and the progress on their career development plan, as a tactic to identify training and competency gaps. Table 9 below highlights the induction and training material highlighted by HR managers for receptionists.

<b>Induction &amp; Training Material</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
On-the-job training	4 Participants
Online training	4 Participants
Property knowledge	4 Participants
Orientation/Brand standards	3 Participants
Cross training	2 Participants
SOP’s	2 Participants
Systems training	1 Participant

*Table 9: Induction and training material that HR managers highlighted for receptionists*

The receptionists were also asked to indicate what type of training their hotel provides to ensure that the required competencies are achieved and whether training helped them to develop the competences needed to perform their job well. Most of the receptionists mentioned that they received on-the-job training and e-learning courses as new recruits.

*“We received the Hotel’s Brand Standards, and the on-the-job training given in the front office.”* (Receptionist 2).

*“We have an induction for everyone, we go through safety and security, and HR policies. We are also given a training plan to follow during the on-the-job training, and e-learning course. (Receptionist 1).*

*“We have an orientation day, on-the-job training and e-learning.” (Receptionist 8).*

<b>Type of training provided</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
On-the-job training	8 Participants
E-Learning	6 Participants
Orientation/Brand standards	3 Participants
Monthly training	1 Participant
Safety & Security training	1 Participant

*Table 10: Training provided to receptionists.*

Almost all stated that the training provided at the beginning of their employment was enough to perform their job well and they believed that the training plans followed had indeed developed their competencies. Table 10 above, summarises the data gathered in relation to the type of training opportunities that hotels offer to their receptionists.

*“Yes, I had few weeks of shadowing and online training to help me perform my job well.” (Receptionist 6).*

*“Yes, I think I have achieved these competencies through training and experience.” (Receptionist 10).*

It is very interesting that very few mentioned receiving orientation and ongoing training on health and safety policies and procedures. Only one receptionist mentioned training organised on a monthly basis, where employees are exposed to a variety of training, such as customer service. On the contrary, another receptionist mentioned that very little training was provided due to shortage of staff.

*“Mainly, I was provided with e-learning courses. There was not much training given due to shortage of staff.” (Receptionist 4).*

The receptionists were also asked if they were familiar with the NOS. Only two out of the ten participants knew about the National Occupational Standards who happened to have followed training programmes at the Institute of Tourism Studies.

*“Yes, I have learned about them [the NOS,] during the lockdown where we were given the opportunity to attend to free courses.” (Receptionist 1).*

All the other receptionists were not familiar with the term NOS. However, after the researcher explained what the NOS are, the participants showed very brief knowledge of these standards and most of the participants had no difficulty in relating to them.

When interviewing ITS professionals, the researcher wanted to understand the training pedagogies adopted and the what assessment processes are used to ensure that the trainees become industry-ready. The researcher also wanted to learn whether the NOS are used by ITS when designing the curriculum. The ITS professionals highlighted that training and assessment methods vary from course to course. For example, during their Diploma, students are exposed to both theory and practice learning. Students have to conduct a national work placement and an international internship. While the national work placement is conducted during summer, the international internship is a one-year work experience abroad. The ITS professionals confirmed that the Degree level, on the other hand, is all based on theory and no work placements are conducted during this course. Both the course coordinator and the front office lecturer stated that they were familiar with the NOS, which they use as guidelines when designing a new course or when reviewing and updating the current curricula.

*“We check the NOS before we create a course, indeed we base it on NOS. We do this even when we are reviewing a course.” (ITS Professional 1).*

From this data, it could evidently be presumed that the NOS are popular with the educational infrastructure, but lacks awareness with the hospitality industry and its employees.

#### 4.3.3 Influence of the NOS on the hospitality sector in recruitment, training and professionalisation

This section focuses on the third research question; i.e., to investigate the degree, of which the occupational standards for the receptionist’s role influence recruitment, training and professionalisation of the role. To answer the third research question, the researcher focused on the usage of the NOS in hotels, and whether hotels would be interested in using them in the future. The researcher wanted to find out whether HR managers are interested in validating their employees’ learning by working together with ITS to certify their training through learning schemes. All the HR managers

admitted that they had not used the NOS, neither to create the job description, nor as recruitment guidelines, and not even to identify training gaps. Having said that, all HR managers showed an interest in getting to know about the NOS, and three HR managers stated that they will consider using them in the future.

HR managers were also asked to consider whether they would encourage their unqualified receptionists to validate their learning through learning schemes in partnership with ITS. All the HR managers stated that it is beneficial to introduce the NOS to their reception employees, in particular those employees whose educational background is not within the hospitality industry. All the HR managers agreed that they would encourage their employees to validate their learning as an added value to their knowledge.

*“Yes indeed, they add value to our training, and I would be interested in including them in our onboarding process.” (HR Manager 1).*

When the HR managers were asked if they would consider it an advantage to the hotel if their reception staff were certified as qualified workers, there was a unanimous agreement.

*“Indeed, validating their learning is always a plus, I believe in successful learning.” (HR Manager 4).*

They added that they encourage their employees without hospitality training to get certified by carrying out on-the-job training. One HR manager further explained that risks are never taken, in particular on the receptionist’s role, and that they always hire hosts with qualifications in hospitality

*“We do not take the risk at reception and we always hire qualified receptionists, so yes it would be beneficial locally.” (HR Manager 1).*

The HR managers were also asked if they would be interested to work with the ITS to include the NOS in formal and non-formal learning offerings. The motive was to understand whether, HR managers would be interested in validating their learning or not, in a context whereby the researcher is assured that the HR managers are aware / were already been introduced to the NOS. While four HR managers mentioned that they are already in a partnership with the ITS to offer work placements to students



studying at a Diploma level, one HR manager admitted that although there is potential, they have stopped working with the ITS.

*“We used to have a partnership with ITS but the quality of the students coming for an internship did not match our expectations. However, we are willing to try again for the purpose of validation of learning.” (HR Manager 1).*

Overall, all HR managers showed interest in working with the ITS so that their employees can validate their learning during the on-the job training. There was also a unanimous agreement with regards to the development of a standard on-the-job training plan which can be followed by all hotel brands.

The researcher wanted to also understand whether the receptionists would find the NOS useful to identify training gaps for future growth. All the ten participating receptionists thought that it would be a great idea if their employers would use the NOS as guidelines to identify training gaps.

The receptionists were asked if they would be interested in validating their learning and be certified. While six out of ten receptionists were already qualified in the hospitality sector, they insisted that if they did not study hospitality, they would be thrilled to validate their learning and gain certification. The four receptionists who had a different educational background were also very interested to validate their learning while at work.

The participating receptionists were then asked whether they thought that validation would help them with career advancement or not. Nine receptionists were convinced as such whilst Receptionist 1 was in disagreement, because *“having finished my diploma, I am not sure if I would be interested as I already have the qualifications needed.”*

The researcher was very interested to know whether ITS professionals see value in making students aware of the NOS and how they can make use of them to plan their further training and their career by validating their learning. While the course coordinator believes that students should be made aware of the NOS and validation of learning, it was never part of their teaching process. In fact, the lecturer interviewed, strongly believes that students should be aware of and be familiar with the NOS, and that the NOS should be included in the module descriptor.

The ITS professionals were also asked if they would be interested to: 1) work with local 5-star hotels; 2) in promoting the use of the NOS in curriculum design, and 3) in validating informal and non-formal learning of receptionists who do not have any formal training in the hospitality sector. Both participants firmly believed that this would be very beneficial and that they would be interested in working with 5-Star hotels to validate ongoing on-the-job learning.

*“I believe it should be done and incorporated.” (ITS Professional 2).*

Overall, all participants have welcomed the idea of the NOS as a way to identify training needs, as well as to validate learning to non-hospitality educational background receptionists. Furthermore, it was clearly established that the educational provider, as well as the professionals in the industry, would be happy to work together to validate the receptionists' on-the-job learning process.

#### **4.4 Further insights from Non- Participant Observations**

The researcher wanted to find out whether receptionists are following the right standards, even though they were not familiar with the NOS. Furthermore, the researcher looked at whether the skills mentioned in the interviews reflected the receptionists' behaviour at their place of work. The researcher thus conducted two hours in each participating 5-Star hotel. The researcher, being directly involved in the front office services in the hospitality sector, and having an educational background in Hospitality Management, had already identified key functions performed by the receptionists to observe. These aspects were extracted from the NOS (Hospitality & Tourism: Receptionist – MQF Level 3).

##### **4.4.1 Work Task Observed: Acknowledging and welcoming guests in a friendly manner**

This was the first task that was observed by the researcher when arriving at each hotel. It was noted that the level of customer-service varied from one hotel to another. In a nutshell though, while in three hotels, the researcher was acknowledged with a friendly welcome, in the other two hotels the researcher's presence was ignored and not welcomed. When the researcher approached the reception desk, the receptionists were busy and did not acknowledge the researcher in front of them.

#### 4.4.2 Work Task Observed: Explaining the hotel's procedures, opening hours of hotel's facilities and location of the guest room upon arrival (check in).

The researcher made sure to observe at least one arrival at each hotel. It was ensured that the check-ins were conducted by the participants in this study. When asking the receptionists what are the competencies they should have for this role, almost all mentioned customer service orientated. However, interesting enough, only two mentioned communication. This was indeed reflected in the check-ins observed. While all the receptionists were friendly, only one out of the five receptionists explained to the clients the hotel's facilities and their opening times. As can be corroborated with the data gathered from the interviews with receptionists, summarised in table 7, communication is an issue that required immediate attention. For instance, upon one of the arrivals observation, the receptionist could not answer queries raised by the guests about the spa facilities. The receptionist instructed the guest to request such information later, when another reception is in place. In such an instance, the receptionist could have offered to call the guests in their room upon acquiring the right details. When comparing data from interviews with those gathered from observations, it was evident that while the receptionists interviewed believe that they have the required competences for the role, they do lack in certain competencies. Consequently, ongoing training is deemed as vital element even for employees who are already qualified in the sector.

#### 4.4.3 Work Task Observed: Thanking guest and providing a warm farewell before departing (check out).

The researcher managed to also observe a departure experience in each participating hotel. In this case, it was not always possible to observe the same receptionists who participated in the interviews. It was noted that all the check-outs observed were perfectly performed according to the NOS and also the researcher's experience. All receptionists highlighted pending bills and ensured all payments were settled without mistakes. They also enquired about their guests' stay, asked for feedback, and provided a warm and a sincere farewell to the guests. Hence, the researcher can confidently say that this competence was achieved with success by all the observed receptionists.

#### 4.4.4 Work Task Observed: Valuing the customer by adopting a professional and courteous attitude by showing a proactive approach.

During this task, the researcher managed to observe all the ten receptionists who participated in the interviews. As listed in table 7, other competencies that were mentioned by the receptionists as a requirement to perform well in this role were multitasking, local knowledge and complaint handling. Thus, the researcher tried to observe such skills when observing the receptionists' interaction with their guests. While on many occasions these competencies were positively noted, in few other instances it was evident that there is room for development. It is worth noting that observations were conducted at the start of the peak season, and thus many new recruits were still learning the role. This may be the reason why on a couple of occasions, the receptionists could not answer any local knowledge. In other instances, while trying to multitask, they did not listen properly to what the guest was asking, and thus provided incorrect replies. Another reason for incorrect replies could have been the lack of knowing the right answer. Nevertheless, all interactions observed with guests were warm and friendly.

The researcher's overall opinion is that the receptionists have the right competencies to perform well in their role. The most important competence, which is the warm and friendly attitude, has clearly been achieved by all receptionists observed. The researcher believes that training and experience will bridge the gap for those competencies that seem to be lacking, such as local and facilities knowledge, and communication skills.

### **4.5 Summary of Findings**

The researcher obtained many insights from the interviews and the non-participant observations conducted. The main emphasis was indeed to find out whether people working within the hospitality industry are familiar with the NOS and whether the NOS have an influence in recruitment and training in the hospitality sector. Very few HR managers and receptionists knew about the NOS. None of the HR managers use these NOS as guidelines to create their job description, to identify training gaps, or for their employees to validate their learning. It was however also noted that there is interest in getting to know about the NOS, and adopt them as a means for validation of learning, especially for employees with no educational background within the hospitality industry.

The researcher could also realise that although the participants were not familiar with the NOS, they were still following the same, or similar standards. This could indicate that the on-the-job training provided at the participating 5-Star hotels follows similar standards as those listed in the NOS. This would render the validation of learning process easier for the employees to achieve, as they are already learning the right competencies and skills during their on-the-job learning.

In the next chapter the implications of these findings vis-à-vis the hospitality sector, and the role of the NOS, and their visibility and usability within the hospitality sector will be discussed.

## **Chapter five: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The analysis carried out in the previous chapter provided interesting insights about HR managers' knowledge, and the use of the National Occupational Standards, what competences they look for when recruiting receptionists, and the competences they promote when drawing up training programmes. Perceptions were also obtained with respect to the receptionists' beliefs about the competencies they possess, how training helps them develop further these competences, and whether they would be interested in validating their informal and non-formal learning. In this chapter the findings resulting from the data analysis are discussed and interpreted within the theoretical lens developed from the literature review.

### **5.2 Overview of the results**

The research results highlight and bring together useful information regarding the use of National Occupational Standards (NOS) and the validation of learning at the place of work. Studies, such as that of Wong and Lee (2017), highlighted the importance of on-the-job training for employees to develop and/or to enhance their competencies and capabilities. The responses obtained from the receptionists who participated in this study supported this view, as all believed that they had achieved their competencies through experience and on-the-job training. A past research conducted by the researcher in 2013 also highlighted the need of effective training for employees to develop their competencies. It was in fact also attributed by all the participants, who agreed that training is vital and that every hotel had an allocated budget for training programmes (Mallia, 2013). Moreover, the study conducted in 2013 concluded that training plans employed by hotels varied and thus there were no standardized training plans for 5-Star hotels in Malta to follow. Although this research is not a longitudinal study, that is a continuation of the study in 2013, nearly ten years after, the researcher couldn't omit the fact that whereas findings show that there has been an improvement in the provision of training, the NOS are not yet utilized in existing on-the-job training programmes. This, despite the potential of the NOS to serve as a guide in the various aspects within

the hospitality sector, including the development of training plans, to standardize the competences required, and validation of learning.

It was interesting to note that HR managers and receptionists have different impressions of the skills and competencies that receptionists working in 5-Star hotels should possess to be competent and professional in their work. For instance, HR managers emphasised on the need for receptionists to possess positive personality and attitude, language skills, systems knowledge, and experience. On the other hand, receptionists believed that the main competences required are customer service, complaint handling, multitasking, and communication. However, both agreed on the type of training needed and what is currently available to achieve and/or enhance the right competencies. On-the-job training, e-learning, and brand standards are amongst the most fruitful training materials that support receptionists to perform well in their job.

The data obtained from the non-participant observations highlighted a few discrepancies from what was shared in the interviews. Whilst communication was highlighted as an important competence during the interviews, there were few occasions during the observations where the researcher noticed the lack of proper communication. In contrast, observations demonstrated that interactions with guests were warm and friendly and thus in sync with the receptionists' belief that customer service is a very important competence. However, the researcher could observe that the lack of multitasking and of product knowledge, have an adverse effect on customer service competence. During the observations, the researcher could clearly identify whom of the participant had experience and whom did not. Their interactions with the guests, their confidence in the role, and their product knowledge differed drastically between experienced and inexperienced receptionists.

Considering that both HR managers and receptionists lack knowledge about the NOS, it can be argued that this might be the reason why HR managers and receptionists failed to agree on a set of standard competencies that receptionists require. That said, HR managers showed interest to use the NOS for any modifications in the recruitment process and existing training plans, as well as for the development of new training programmes. According to the participating HR managers, the NOS are very detailed and include certain competences that might usually be overlooked, such as health and safety training. The receptionists also had a positive response towards the NOS and the

overall feeling was that the NOS provides clear indications of what is expected of them. It can therefore be postulated that the use of the NOS would create clear standards of what HR managers look for when recruiting employees, and aid in the identification of any existing training gaps. As a result, the receptionists would also have a better understanding of the competencies they should possess and of their employers' expectations.

Another issue worth identifying was that both HR managers and receptionists were not aware of the possibility of the validation of informal and non-formal learning for the receptionist's role. The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA), together with other partners such as the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) worked on setting up the validation process whereby receptionists can validate their informal and non-formal learning. This means that receptionists can get qualified through official recognition for their learning obtained from work experience and/or training received. This was a positive news to both HR managers and receptionists, and both could measure out the benefits of being 'officially' qualified. HR managers believed that qualified receptionists would be a benefit to their business, and receptionists agreed that this would be a step forward towards their career goals.

The fact that neither HR managers, nor receptionists in this study were familiar with the NOS and with the validation of non-formal learning, leads to a conclusion of lack of awareness and promotion of these initiatives. The introduction of the NOS and the PATH scheme introduced by the MFHEA, in conjunction with the Institute of Tourism Malta (ITS) and the Malta Tourism Associations (MTA) are great tools that are available but are not well known by the professionals in the hospitality industry.

The ITS front office module lecturer also believed that students would benefit from being introduced to the NOS and stated that it would be an advantage to their career, hence "it [,the NOS,] should be done and incorporated even in the module descriptor." (ITS Professional 2). Another factor worth mentioning is that there are still very few modules at the ITS that specialise in the front office department. The ITS is still being perceived as a culinary school and most of the placements are in fact being conducted in the Food & Beverage departments. The ITS representative suggested that a specific program for the receptionist role should be created and that the institute needs to create



an aggressive marketing campaign to target students who are looking at a career in front office and management roles.

Whereas this section presents an overview discussion, the coming sections review the specific issues as nascent from the research findings.

### **5.3 Limited awareness of the NOS**

The analysis of data suggests that there is limited knowledge of the existence of NOS in the hospitality sector. Key actors within the hospitality industry, including the education boards, hospitality professionals and hospitality organizations, such as the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA), should learn about the NOS. The concerned governmental ministries need to raise awareness of their existence and their purpose. Though the NOS framework has been published since 2007 (Cedefop, 2018), and the Education Act, Subsidiary Legislation 327.432, has been amended in 2012 to enable the validation of informal and nonformal learning, the NOS are still not recognized by professionals in the industry. A primary cause for this concern is the lack of awareness of the NOS.

Noticeably, the competencies mentioned by the participants, differ from those included in the NOS. For example, health and safety is a very important subject in the NOS, however this competence was never mentioned by any participants. The NOS also highlights the need of having a work ethic that emphasises on professional behaviour towards guests and colleagues. Again, this competency was not mentioned by any participants. This, however, does not imply that the participants are far detached from what the hospitality sector entails. The participants mentioned several competencies that show that they are familiar with the basics of NOS. It was also notable that certain competences required for the receptionist role are recognised prior to them getting employed as a receptionist. For instance, a significant number of participants indicated that 'interaction with guests' is the reason why they opted to work as a receptionist. Now that the participants have gained experience in the job, they kept emphasising that being 'customer-service oriented' is one of the most important competencies needed. Ergo, prior and post perceptions are very much aligned.

#### **5.4 Limited awareness of how the NOS can be used within the sector**

Patterns extracted from the data obtained clearly show the lack of awareness of how the NOS can be used for recruitment, drawing up training programs as well as for validation of informal and nonformal learning. It is not about just being aware of the NOS, but to realise the potential benefits of their use and implementation. According to MFHEA (2020), the NOS provides clear indication to employees of what is expected of them and help managers in establishing job descriptions and roles of staff. Furthermore, they act as guidelines to training managers when creating training plans for receptionists. In recent studies, such as that of Torres & Kline (2013), professionalization of hospitality roles has become more profound, especially due to the high pressure and intensity of the hospitality roles. Hoteliers, thus, must ensure that all their employees possess qualified hospitality certifications. This can be achieved through non-formal and informal learning at their place of work. The NOS can support hotels and HR managers in working towards professionalizing the sector and their employees.

During the interviews, the researcher asked about the approach taken when developing training plans and the ways and means for the identification of training gaps. Whilst all the training plans are very in depth and are useful for the receptionists to gain knowledge and perform the tasks well, they lack the specific standards highlighted by the NOS. The training plans are focused on meeting the brand standards rather than the NOS. Identifying training gaps seems also very subjective since HR managers rely heavily on the head of department's feedback, instead of using specific standards to identify such gaps.

Another noticeable competence that was not mentioned by the participants is the Information Technology (IT) skill. Literature clearly shows how technology advances has become very important because of the competitive advantage that it bolsters, as well as, for improving productivity of hotels (Collins & Cabanoglu, 2008). It may be the fact that IT has become so ingrained in our lifestyle that the participants took for granted such a competency. Surprisingly, though, the NOS does not mention IT related skills as part of the competency skills set for the receptionist's role. Consequently, this indicates the need for the NOS to be reviewed constantly to stay aligned with social trends.

## **5.5 Insufficient collaboration and information channels**

Coordination and collaboration between the hospitality sector and government entities play an important role in professionalizing the sector. Findings clearly indicate that information about developments in training and occupational standards was not reaching HR managers within the 5-Star hotel sector. As the ITS professional suggested, the NOS should be included in the course curriculum as part of the module descriptor. Students will then have the benefit to familiarize themselves with the NOS both during their IVET and their CVET training. Furthermore, receptionists who do not have an education background in the hospitality industry can become familiar with the NOS. Other entities, such as MHRA and MTA can continue to provide courses and encourage long life learning, helping workers to develop competences and to validate their learning. MHRA president, Mr Tony Zahra indeed supports such initiatives.

“We [, MHRA,] support the initiative spearheaded by Minister Julia Farrugia Portelli to provide opportunities of upskilling and reskilling of the workforce operating across the tourism sector in order to be better prepared to meet the new challenges that our sector will be facing in the coming months” (mhra.org.mt, 2020).

In fact, as some participants stated, they learned about the existence of the NOS through the courses sponsored by MHRA.

## **5.6 Lack of knowledge about the possibility to validate informal and nonformal learning**

While partners such as MTA, ITS and MFHEA were involved in the creation of the validation of learning, the participants interviewed in this research were not aware of the opportunity. It can therefore be argued that having the right tools is not always enough. Promoting such tools with the respective audience is another facet that concerned entities must consider. During the interviews, all participants expressed a lot of interest regarding the validation of learning. All HR managers agreed that validating the receptionists' learning would indeed be very beneficial for the business. All receptionists, mainly the ones without a hospitality background were very interested in an opportunity to achieve a certification and professionalise their work. This clearly indicates that while there is a high level of interest to such validation, there is lack of awareness in the industry and hence further promotion of such initiatives is required.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The researcher believes that all the research questions in this study have been answered. The main competence for the role of receptionist was identified to be that of having a positive and friendly attitude. This is the same competence that was highlighted in the researcher's previous study in 2013.

The results highlighted that whilst IVET providers refer to the NOS when creating their course curriculum, hospitality professionals do not, as is the case with most of the participants of this study. This means that, currently, the NOS do not feature in the recruitment process and in the training programmes. It is therefore crucial that proper promotion of the NOS and related schemes/policies is conducted at a national level, and most importantly with people working in the hospitality sector.

The results of the interviews also showed that whilst there is lack of awareness about the opportunity of validation of learning, both HR managers and ITS professionals would be interested to work together for the purpose of validating learning of workers within the hotel.

The following concluding chapter encompasses implications of this research and practical recommendations directed towards hoteliers and education providers. It then indicates any limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter six: Conclusion**

This chapter encompasses implications of the research and practical recommendations for future studies. The concluding sub-section indicates any limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for further research.

### **6.1 Implications of the research**

A set of implications with respect to the inquiries that led this research were identified from the analysis and the discussion carried out in previous chapters. These include:

- **Diversified perceptions towards required competencies:** The competencies for the receptionist role identified by HR managers varied from those identified by receptionists. This indicates that the expectations of HR managers are not aligned with what the receptionists' standpoint towards this job. Different generations maybe have different perceptions and ways of doing things. HR managers and receptionists maybe have indeed been nurtured with different values according to their generations. Hence, having a standard guide to follow might aid in the alignment of the different viewpoints.
- **Limited awareness of National Occupational Standards (NOS):** It was very clear that the majority of the participants are not aware of the existence of the NOS. From the interviews conducted it emerged that although the NOS guidelines are similar to the guidelines used in training plans provided by hotels, the NOS are not used to create such training plans. Data clearly shows that notwithstanding the fact that lecturers at the ITS are aware of the NOS, such standards are not part and parcel of the training programmes offered by them to prospective employees.
- **Sporadic use of the NOS for recruitment and the development of training programme:** Since there were limited knowledge of the existence of the NOS, these were not used by HR managers when recruiting new personnel or drawing up training plans for receptionists. On the other hand, ITS lecturers used the NOS when drawing up their course curricula. During the interviews, they mentioned that the NOS should be part of the students' studies in their module descriptor.

- Limited awareness of the opportunity to validate informal and nonformal learning: This investigative process indicates that there is limited awareness about the possibility to validate one's learning and thus professionalize the industry. In other words, HR managers are not taking the opportunity to use the right tools provided to encourage receptionists to validate their learning, especially those who do not hold any qualification in the field.

## **6.2 Limitations of this study**

This study was carried out and presented in the best way thought out possible to identify and investigate the questions presented in this research. However, this section presents any shortcomings that could have limited the investigative process.

- Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, many professionals had left the industry. One of the main reasons for this reality was the opportunity to change to jobs which offer a better work-life balance (Evans, 2021). Thus, some of the participants were new recruits which might have impacted the data collected. This might have had an effect on the lack of knowledge of the NOS identified and also on how certain questions were answered;
- Due to the researcher's relocation to another country during her studies, the data collection exercise was conducted within a short time span, in April, the period in which hotels were still starting to allocate their resources for the peak season. This means, that whilst there was more time for the research to be conducted, the participants who were trainees were still new to their place of work, and maybe not all the training usually provided by the hotels was yet delivered to them. This reason, thus, might have also influenced their responses;
- There are nineteen 5-Star hotels in Malta, and this study was carried out in five of these hotels. Surely such a sample size cannot render generalized results. However, the aim of this study was not to provide generalized results, but to provide a set of recommendations for hotels and training providers to reflect and improve the training they offer;
- The data collection of this research was a qualitative one. Even though the researcher ensured to conduct an unbiased data collection exercise, during the interviews some answers might have been misunderstood or lost in

translation. While the researcher made sure to record all the interviews for accurate data collection, certain answers might have been understood differently than what the receptionists meant, and vice versa.

#### **6.4 Suggestions and improvements for future studies**

Throughout this study, care has been taken to ascertain that the methodology applied was as comprehensive as possible while preserving data integrity. However, certain limitations were observed. The list below encompasses an evaluative record of shortcomings and how these can provide a backbone for future research in the hospitality sector with the aim to further elaborate on the outcomes presented in this study as well as to present additional conclusions.

- Whilst this study raised awareness of the NOS and the validation of learning amongst the participants, a bigger sampling size could be used and hence obtain a bigger insight on the matter and produce generalised conclusions. This would in turn offer recommendations that are more relevant on a nationwide basis;
- As mentioned earlier, the participants in this study had varied experiences in the hospitality sector, some with extensive experience and some with much less. Thus, future studies may use certain criteria to choose the participants of its study. This would create value in understanding whether participants with similar background and experience would give similar answers or, if it would vary like it did in this study. The researcher believes that different answers were in fact due to different experiences of the participants selected;
- Whilst this study was based on the receptionist's role in 5-Star hotels, it would be interesting if further studies focus on the difference in the receptionist's role between 5 and 4 Star hotels. It would be interesting to see whether the competencies required are the same in both hotel categories, or whether it varies accordingly.

## **6.5 Recommendations by the researcher**

Based on the research results, a number of recommendations can be put forward.

- More awareness can be created about the National Occupational Standards and their benefits to the hospitality sector. HR managers and receptionists need to not only be familiar with the NOS, but to also understand their benefits for the professionalization of the role;
- There should be more visibility of, and emphasis should be made on, the validation of learning and professionalization of the hospitality sector. Both HR managers and receptionists need to know that these opportunities exist and that receptionists without hospitality background can still obtain a certification and qualification while at work;
- Developing a National Training Plan for 5-Star hotels: All the hotels that participated in this study hold orientation sessions as part of their induction training. During the orientation session, new recruits start becoming familiar with the hotel's brand standards, HR policies and procedures, and a brief health and safety session to follow. By analysing three training plans, the researcher noticed that all plans provide an in-depth training agenda on the PMS systems used at the front office. All training plans start with a welcoming session where new recruits are explained the front office structure, the facilities provided at the hotel and a general product knowledge session in terms of room types and their features available for guests at the hotel. Moreover, all plans include protocols on how emails are to be handled, how the PMS system is used to check-in/out a guest and for other purposes. According to the researcher, all training plans cover the right functions that a new recruit needs to know to be able to perform the role of a receptionist well.

These recommendations can be achieved through a strong marketing campaign to raise awareness of NOS and validation of learning, and by introducing a national training plan for 5-Star hotels to be used as a tool to the professionalization of the hospitality sector. Stakeholders of the hospitality industry such as hoteliers, hospitality organizations, and tourism schools should work together and develop a successful marketing campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of using the NOS for recruitment



and continuous training. Furthermore, there should be greater appreciation for validation of learning and professionalization of the hospitality sector. According to Wagner (2022), to create a winning marketing campaign, the stakeholders should follow these six steps;

1. identify the main goals for the campaign;
2. identify the right target audience and how can they be reached;
3. use professional marketing / digital marketing trends to showcase the benefits of the campaign;
4. choose the right media platforms to reach your targeted audience;
5. ensure the implementation and the scheduling of the campaign are going according to plan; and
6. make sure to look at the results for continuous campaign improvements (Wagner, 2022).

The researcher also believes that a national training plan for 5-Star hotels would be ideal as it would definitely support receptionists who wish to validate their learning. The researcher, therefore, recommends that hotels include aspects of the NOS in their training plans to support receptionists in getting a certification while training at work. The on-the-job training for new recruits can be divided into two parts: one involving training already being provided by the hotels that participated in this study, and the other part focusing on aspects which are in the NOS but not targeted by hotels. A model of such programme can look like the one below:

Part 1: Training already provided:

- Introduction to the hotel and the departmental structures;
- Introduction to the hotel's facilities, such as opening times and locations of food & beverage outlets, spa, pools and other facilities the hotels have;
- Training of the PMS system used;
- Standard Operating Procedures for front office;
- Loyalty Programs; and
- Dealing with guests' complaints.

## Part 2: Training suggested by the researcher incorporating the NOS:

- In addition to the health and safety procedures introduced at orientation day, the researcher suggests a full two-day training to ensure that comprehensive training is being provided to new recruits. According to the NOS, receptionists must understand their legal responsibilities while at work, know how to identify potential risks, understand emergency procedures, and more;
- Another important aspect of the NOS is the guest relations and customer service. The researcher suggests that this training is to be given prominence due to the nature of the receptionist role. Once again, a structured customer service training should be included in the training for new recruits. It is important that receptionists know how to address a guest in a professional manner and how to listen carefully to guests' needs;
- Work ethics should also be given its fair share of importance when providing training. Receptionists are to be trained not only on systems and procedures, but also on their behaviour towards guests and colleagues whilst at work. It is vital that training is given to focus on active listening, courteous communication and respect.

Whilst it is recommended that these suggestions are incorporated into the hotels training plans for new recruits, it is also advised to use these training plans to encourage continuous learning for all the team.

This study showed that collaboration and cooperation amongst all stakeholders within the hospitality sector is key to create a strong marketing campaign and a comprehensive national training that covers the NOS that will go a long way in the purpose of professionalization of the hospitality industry.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

Overall, this study highlighted that whilst professionalization of the hospitality sector is not yet achieved, there is positive outset towards it being realised. Clearly, the introduction of the NOS in the IVET and CVET training programs, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning while at work are two crucial aspects in professionalizing the sector.

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## **Appendix A: Consent forms**

## Participant's Consent Form - Receptionists

### The Competency Levels and Occupational Standards in the Hospitality Industry:

#### A study of the Receptionist role in 5 Star Hotels in Malta

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Angele Mallia. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased anonymously.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in a face-to-face or online interview and to be observed for 2 hours while at work in which the researcher will engage in non-participant observation to explore and analyse the front office competencies. I am aware that the interview and observations will take approximately two hours. I understand that the interview and observations are to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risk.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study/there are the following direct benefits to me.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, if I give my consent, the interview will be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed). Field notes will be taken in an anonymous format
10. I am aware that, if I give my consent, extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, using pseudonyms.
11. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.  
I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: [REDACTED]

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 07-04-22

[Signature]  
Angele Mallia

[angele.mallia001@its.edu.mt](mailto:angele.mallia001@its.edu.mt)

[Signature]  
Prof. Suzanne Gatt

[Suzanne.gatt@um.edu.mt](mailto:Suzanne.gatt@um.edu.mt)

2340 2926

## Participant's Consent Form (HR Managers, ITS Lecturer)

### The Competency Levels and Occupational Standards in the Hospitality Industry:

#### A study of the Receptionist role in 5 Star Hotels in Malta

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Angele Mallia. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
  2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased anonymously.
  3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in face-to-face or online interviews where the researcher will ask questions and observe to explore and analyse the front office competencies. I am aware that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
  4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risk.
  5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study.
  6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
  7. I understand that all data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study
  8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
  9. I am aware that, if I give my consent, the interview will be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).
  10. I am aware that, if I give my consent, extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym
  11. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.
- I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: [REDACTED]

Signature: 

Date: 07/04/2022

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Angele Mallia  
[angele.mallia001@its.edu.mt](mailto:angele.mallia001@its.edu.mt)

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Prof. Suzanne Gatt  
[Suzanne.gatt@um.edu.mt](mailto:Suzanne.gatt@um.edu.mt)  
2340 2926

**Participant's Consent Form (ITS course coordinator)**

**The Competency Levels and Occupational Standards in the Hospitality Industry:**

**A study of the Receptionist role in 5 Star Hotels in Malta**

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Angele Mallia. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased anonymously.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in face-to-face or online interviews where the researcher will ask questions and observe to explore and analyse the front office competencies. I am aware that the interview will take approximately one hour. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risk.
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, if I give my consent, the interview will be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).
10. I am aware that, if I give my consent, extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, that my contribution will be attributed to my position which may make me identifiable.
11. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

26.04.2022

\_\_\_\_\_  
Angele Mallia  
[angele.mallia001@its.edu.mt](mailto:angele.mallia001@its.edu.mt)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof. Suzanne Gatt  
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2340 2926

## **Appendix B: Interview questions**



### **Semi-structured interviews with HR managers**

1. How big is the hotel? How many employees do you have within the Front Office Department? How many of them are on full-time or part-time basis?
2. What is your front office team turnover?
3. How do you develop your job description for reception staff?
4. What are the key components you look for when employing receptionists? Do you usually go for/find recruits who are already trained? What competencies, qualifications or experience do you look for/require for such job?
5. What is your induction process? How do you train new recruits? What are the most common challenges (knowledge, skills, competences) that new recruits experience when starting their job?
6. Are you familiar with the National Occupational Standards?
7. If yes, do you use them to identify training needs? If not, what criteria do you use to identify training needs for the receptionist staff? (researcher explains what NOS are and presents the one for the receptionist role)
8. If the NOS are not used, would you consider using them in future as a reference?
9. Will you be interested to introduce the National Occupational Standards to receptionists and encourage them to validate their learning?
10. Do you consider it an advantage to your hotel if your reception staff are certified as qualified workers?
11. What is your opinion about the educational providers of hospitality learning? Are graduates well prepared for the job?
12. Would you be interested to work with ITS to include the National Occupational Standards during the formal and non-formal learning?

### **Semi-structured interviews with ITS professionals**

1. What are the best courses to take for a career within the front office department?
2. This depends on the level of application. The best courses would be Certificate Diploma  
What do you think that the competencies of a receptionist should be?
3. What are the competencies one should achieve from this course which are relevant to working in reception?
4. How are the students trained? Theory / Practice?
5. Are there particular competences which you help students develop through work-based learning? If so, which ones?
6. Do you think that the students leave ITS prepared for their working life in the hospitality sector and specifically to work at reception?
7. How is the ITS curriculum designed?
8. Are you familiar with the National Occupational Standards and their role for training and employers?
9. Looking at such standards, have you used them/consulted them as guidelines for the course curriculum?
10. Do you think that at the end of this course, the student would achieve such competencies?
11. Do you see value in making students aware of the NOS and how they can make use of them to plan their further training and their career by validating their learning?
12. Would you be interested to work with 5 Star hotels on the Island to promote the use of these NOS in curriculum design as well as to promote the validation of informal and non-formal learning of people working in reception who do not have any formal training?

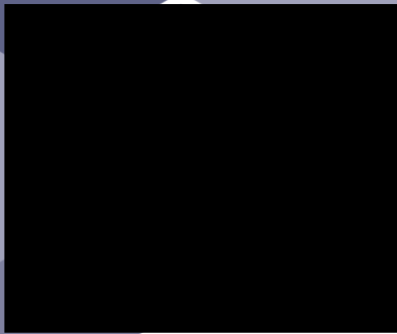
### **Semi-structured interviews with 10 receptionists (2 at each hotel)**

1. How long have you been working here?
2. Is this your first job as a receptionist? Where were you before and what was the reason to leave?
3. Why have you chosen to work as a receptionist?
4. Did you attend a hospitality school? What are your qualifications?
5. Do you know what are competencies you have, and which of these competencies do you think are needed for the role of receptionist?
6. Do you think you have achieved all the said competencies? Did you have them all at the beginning or did they develop some as a result of your work experience, in which case which ones?
7. What training does the hotel provide to ensure these competencies are achieved? Have they helped you develop competences that you need to perform your job well?
8. Are you familiar with the National Occupational Standards? (if not, explain what they are and shows the one referring to the receptionist role)
9. Looking at these standards, do you think that you have achieved all these competencies?
10. Looking at these standards, do you think that you have achieved all these competencies?
11. What do you think if your employer were to use these standards to identify where you still need to develop skills and competences and targets them in your training programme?
12. Do you think that it would help you with your career advancement?

## Observation Sheets

Time	Work Task Observed	Skills/knowledge/competence observed
	Acknowledging and welcoming guests in a friendly manner.	
	Explaining the hotel's procedures, opening hours of hotel's facilities and location of the guest room upon arrival (check in).	
	Thanking guest and providing a warm farewell before departing (check out).	
	Valuing the customer by adopting a professional and courteous attitude by showing a proactive approach.	

## **Appendix C: Job descriptions**



## JOB DESCRIPTION

**Position:** Front Office Agent

**Scope of Job:** Reporting directly to the Front Office Manager and forming part of the Front Office team, this position requires an individual with a proven track record in customer service. The post is being offered on a shift basis

**Responsible for:** Customer Service

**Our Purpose:** We care for people so they can be their best.

Care comes from a place of empathy and authentic human connection. We **care** by truly seeing **people** and getting to know them as unique individuals so we can design and deliver personal experiences. We want to make a difference in the lives of all those we touch: colleagues, guests, owners, operators, community members, and shareholders. **Being your best** is about being your authentic self in each moment – engaged, fulfilled, and ready to take on the world.

Through our values we put our dedication to care into action:

### **Respect:**

- Be inclusive
- Value diverse points of view
- Care for people and your environment

### **Integrity:**

- Tell and accepting the truth
- Honor your commitments
- Take ownership and acting with pride

### **Humility:**

- Let actions speak for themselves
- Share the credit
- Put others first

**Empathy:**

- Truly listen
- Respond with compassion
- Walk in the shoes of others

**Creativity:**

- See things anew
- Fail often to succeed sooner
- Be curious: learning & relearning

**Fun:**

- Don't take yourself too seriously
- Laugh out loud
- Build joy into your work

**Brand Target:**

Focused guests seeking a seamless, intuitive experience for specific occasions (Ambitious Loyalist)

**Brand Promise:**

To make travel free from stress and filled with success

**Brand Principles:**

- Designed for productivity & peace of mind
- Stress-free environments for seamless gatherings
- Tools to stay connected and energized
- Responsible & empathetic service that anticipates needs

And it is your role to assist in delivering to **signature experiences** for each of the **touchpoints** a customer has during a [REDACTED] journey:

**Arrival:**

We connect with our guests upon arrival, simply and efficiently.

**Guestrooms:**

We connect our guests to all the essentials, simply and intuitively.

**Social spaces:**

We connect our guests to spaces they need, whether for work or play.

**Events:**

We connect guests to endless possibilities.

**Drinking and dining:**

We connect guests to regionally inspired food and drink, whenever and wherever.

**Activities and services:**

We connect guests to their routine.

**Departure:**

We connect with guests through memorable goodbyes.

#### **Main Duties and responsibilities:**

- Handling all formalities for individual and groups' arrival, departures and queries
- Greetings and checking in of guest
- Putting guest care as a priority, with every effort being made to meet guests' needs and demands
- Answering phone calls and emails promptly and in a professional manner that reflects the Hotel Brand
- Performing General switchboard duties
- Familiarization of the Hysat Scores and other Review Platforms
- Maintaining a working knowledge of the sales and front office areas, credit policy, different room types and hotel services
- Working closely to other departments to ensure proper communication

#### **Experience and Qualifications:**

- Have a positive attitude and a professional disposition
- Possess ITS qualification or equivalent
- Be computer literate and familiar with Opera PMS system and Microsoft Office applications
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills in English and preferable another language
- Have exceptional Customer Service Skills
- Be able to work in a dynamic environment
- Be willing to work evening shifts, weekend and night shifts



<b>Position Title: Receptionist</b>	
<b>Department: Front Office</b>	
<b>Location</b> [REDACTED]	

<b>Position Level</b>	Professional
<b>Employment Status</b>	Full Time
<b>Reports to title:</b>	Front Office Supervisor /Manager

**Position Statement:**

A Receptionist provides reception services for Guests to contribute to an overall exceptional experience from check-in through check-out and complete audits, as required. Receptionist contributes to the first impressions of our Guests

**Position Summary:**

- Achieve positive outcomes from Guest queries in a timely and efficient manner
- Ensure an efficient reception experience for Guests, including check in/out, and complete audit procedures, as required
- Ensure that both the Front Office Manager and Reception Supervisors are kept fully aware of any relevant feedback from guests and, or, other departments
- Demonstrate a high level of customer service at all times
- Attend appropriate training courses, when required, and assist with the Night Team's training and development efforts
- Demonstrate a knowledge of hotel room categories, room rates, packages, promotions and other general product knowledge necessary to perform daily duties
- Maximize room occupancy and use up-selling techniques to promote hotel services and facilities
- Use the correct procedures regarding the acceptance of foreign currencies, credit cards and cash in accordance with the hotel credit policy
- Comply with hotel security, fire regulations and all health and safety legislation
- Act in accordance with policies and procedures when working with front of house equipment and property management systems
- Follow company brand standards
- Assist other departments, as necessary

**Health and Safety:**

- To be fully aware and competent in accident report procedures, maintenance fault reporting procedure, fire policy and procedures, bomb threat procedure and company code of conduct
- To have knowledge of and to understand the company's Health and Safety Policy and to act accordingly
- To inform General manager of any issue you believe to be a risk to yourself or others
- Act in accordance with all security and emergency procedures and manage the instigation of these, as required

**Please complete the below section for the Hotel positions:**

**Team Member Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## JOB DESCRIPTION

<b>POSITION</b>	Receptionist
<b>DEPARTMENT</b>	Front Office
<b>REPORTS TO</b>	Front Office Manager

---

### PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF POSITION

To increase customer satisfaction by providing efficient, prompt, trouble free and courteous Front Office service connected with arriving, and in-house guests, in line with the hotel's guidelines, and [REDACTED] corporate guidelines and service concepts.

---

### TASKS, DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### PROVIDE THE HIGHEST STANDARD OF SERVICE TO GUESTS

- Is available to register, process, and greet customers promptly
- Checks the daily arrival list
- Welcomes customers to the hotel
- Responds to customer requests for information about the hotel and its surroundings
- Arranges for special services requested by the customer
- Stays current with developments in the hotel by reviewing the communication log book each shift; updates log book for next shift
- Arranges fulfilment of customer services by working with Bell staff, Housekeeping, Reservations and Room Service
- Allocates rooms and issues appropriate keys
- Follows-up and verifies arrivals by updating registration cards in regards to spelling of guest's name, address and method of payment
- Changes room rates and guest rooms if approved by Service Manager
- Handles incoming guest room reservations
- Handles reservations for guests with rental cars, restaurants, etc.
- Is aware, at all times, of current room status and room availability
- Is fully aware of [REDACTED] service concepts
- Is fully aware of, and knows how to handle, all current and future hotel promotions
- Utilises yield management to maximise room revenue
- Increases hotel revenue by promoting food and beverage alternatives within the hotel
- Knows the names of key people within [REDACTED]

- Minimises loss of revenue by adhering to all established credit procedures
- Insures all guests establish credit upon check-in
- Monitors customer accounts to insure adherence to hotel credit limits by completing high balance reports and verifies accuracy of registration information
- Improves timeliness of cash flow by adhering to established credit and inventory control procedures
- Receives proper approval codes for cash and credit card paying customers
- Identifies and records special billing instructions and notifies accounting and Service Manager
- Completes shift closing accurately by getting appropriate approval signatures and authorisation codes
- Adheres to hotel policies regarding the use of cash banks
- Communicates effectively with guests, colleagues, and supervisors
- Demonstrates teamwork by co-operating and assisting colleagues as needed
- Handles difficult situations effectively
- Communicates open and closed dates, availability and condition of rooms to the Service Manager
- Keeps effective key control
- Ensures that guest mail and messages are delivered promptly
- Demonstrates a working knowledge of all services and facilities of the hotel, and effectively assists the hotel's guests
- Issues safety deposit boxes to guests upon request
- Uses the ABC approach to respond to negative comments and complaints; and notifies Service Manager immediately for appropriate follow-up

#### KNOWLEDGE OF FRONT OFFICE TECHNOLOGY

- Is fully conversant with the hotel reservation system
- Is able to operate switchboard, telefax, key equipment, credit card machines and printers, hotel alarm systems, and other Front Office equipment

#### SECURITY, HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Ensures that own cash is secure at all times
- Ensures all discrepancies in own cash are declared to the Service Manager and Controller
- Ensures that guest details are not disclosed
- Maintains high confidentiality in regards to guest privacy
- Reports any suspicious behaviour of guests and staff to the Service Manager, and Security
- Notifies Service Manager and Executive Housekeeper regarding lost and found objects
- Ensures that all potential and real hazards are reported appropriately immediately
- Fully understands the hotel's fire, emergency, and bomb procedures
- Follows emergency procedures to provide for the security and safety of guests and employees
- Works in a safe manner that does not harm or injure self or others
- Supports a safe hotel by applying hotel regulations, and adhering to existing laws and regulations

- Anticipates possible and probable hazards and conditions and notifies the Service Manager
- Maintains the highest standards of personal hygiene, dress, uniform, appearance, body language and conduct

#### MISCELLANEOUS

- Assists the Service Manager when requested
- Attends meetings and training required by the Service Manager
- Accepts flexible work schedule necessary for uninterrupted service to hotel guests
- Maintains own working area, and materials clean, tidy and in good shape; reports defective materials and equipment to the Service Manager
- Continuously seeks to endeavour professionalism in own job function
- Knows:
  - Hotel fire, bomb and emergency procedures
  - Hotel health and safety policies and procedures
  - Hotel facilities and nearby sights of interest and importance (i.e. hospitals, stations, tourist sights)
  - Hotel and corporate marketing and promotional programs
  - Corporate clients and clients generating high business volume

## **Appendix D: On-the-job-training**



# Welcome to our Team!

We understand that starting a new role can feel challenging. This booklet includes a comprehensive list of all the things you will need to learn to become effective in your new role within our Front Office Team.

You will be supported by a trainer who will guide you every step of the way. You will be invited to sign-off each aspect of the work to show that you are confident to move on.

Please take care of this booklet and keep it with you as needed. You can find some blank spaces at end of every topic where you can write your own notes.

## Orientation day

Orientation Day .....

During the Orientation day you will have an overview of the hotel and a deep description of the [REDACTED] values and brands. The Orientation day is an instructive and fun opportunity to start knowing your work place and some of your future colleagues from several departments. You will also get to know the basic rules that you have to adhere to, and amazing benefits that you will enjoy as a [REDACTED] Employee.

The basic topics of today are:

- Our [REDACTED] Story
- [REDACTED] Brands
- Our [REDACTED] Values
- [REDACTED] Purpose Platform
- [REDACTED] Honors Guests
- Blue Energy
- Tour of the hotel/outlets
- SALT
- Emergency Procedures Training
- Hotel Security / Fire 1a Training
- Disability Awareness
- HR Policies
- Your [REDACTED] Benefits
- Make it Right Classroom Training

## **Day One (from 09.00 to 17.30)**

As a new team member we want to be sure that you will feel comfortable and confident in your role before you actually start operating at the front desk. For this reason you will attend some trainings and role plays in order to fully understand the responsibilities and the tasks that are required on your role. On your first day you will get familiar with the following topics:

1. Uniforms, name badge and changing room
2. Employee areas, canteen and back office
3. Grooming standard
4. Structure of the Front Office Department
5. Roster and vacation leave requests
6. Hotel layout, Guest facilities and Food and Beverages Outlets
7. Familiarization with the main software and tools
8. Attending Handover

### **1. Uniforms, name badge and changing room**

As first step a colleague from Human Resources (HR) will show you the location of the laundry and the place where you can collect your uniform. You will receive a uniform and a name badge that you always have to wear during your shift and in the hotel.

### **2. Employees Areas, canteen and back office**

You will be shown the employee entrance, the punch in machine; they will explain you where the canteen is located and its timing and finally you will have a look at our back office area.

### **3. Grooming Standard**

As front liner employees we are one of the first point of contact between the guest and the hotel. The way we present ourselves and we act at the front desk are representing the hotel and the ██████ values. For these reasons we must adhere to certain grooming standards and be proud to be the first image that our valued guests have of the hotel. We have listed here some basic grooming rules:

#### Uniforms

- Uniforms must be worn in the appropriate manner and kept in good condition at all times.
- Uniforms shall not be soiled or bear signs of wear and tear.
- Name badges are to be worn and are legible at all times;



- Uniforms are to be worn only whilst on duty – all uniform is to be kept in the uniform room or lockers or laundry.
- No one is to leave the hotel premises wearing the uniform.
- No one may alter any uniform without the permission of the hotel management.

#### Personal hygiene

- Shower daily and use an un-perfumed or lightly scented deodorant;
- Teeth to be brushed and visibly cleaned
- Hands and nails to regularly cleaned or sanitized.

#### Women

- Make-up should be kept natural
- Shoes must be polished, low heeled and comfortable to work in.
- Nails are to be kept short and neat. No elaborate designs or vivid colours.
- Long hair is to be held tied back with a black hair band, away from the face at all time;
- No hoop earrings are permissible. Small stud-earrings only (natural colour).
- Neat necklaces are permissible

#### Men

- Beards may be maintained otherwise shaven
- Clean shirts to be worn with a neatly done tie.
- All collars and cuffs to be fastened.
- Socks must be black;
- Shoes to be black, well-maintained, polished and plain.
- Black belt;
- Nails have to be clean and neatly trimmed;
- Hair is to be kept short and above the collar.

### **4. Structure of the Front Office**

The front office is the main point of contact between the guests and the hotel. You will interact with guests and perform a huge variety of task to enhance their well-being and satisfaction during their stay. Your trainer will explain quickly how the front desk is structured and/ he will introduce you to the team members on shift.

The Front Office department is divided in 5 main sections:

- Front Desk
- Executive Lounge
- Concierges and porters
- Night Team
- Phone operator

## **5. Roster and Leave requests**

The Roster is usually issued on Friday and it will show how you are going to work on the following week. You will receive it on your personal email and on Beekeeper. There are mainly 4 shifts and they are divided as follows:

- AM shift from 06:45 to 15:15
- MID Shift from 11:00 to 19:30
- PM Shift from 14:45 to 23:15
- NIGHT Shift from 23:00 to 07:30

Shifts don't always follow these exact timings, on the roster you will have the precise indication of the beginning and the end of your shift.

You can request a vacation through the calendar that you can find on the folder "Roster - vacation request" (THIS PC > Group L> FO> 09\_Front Office> Roster - Vacation Request); always remember to send an email to the Front Office Manager (FOM) and Senior Supervisors. Before booking any flight or activities wait for your leave to be confirmed. It is very important to keep in mind that the approval of the leave depends from numerous factors (hotel occupancy, events in-house or other TMs' requests) but we will do our best to honor your requests.

## **6. Facilities and F&B Outlets**

In the hotel there are 11 floors for a total of 413 rooms (rooms categories will be explained in details).

In the hotel you can find the following facilities:

- Executive Lounge (on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor)
- Business Centre (on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor)
- Conference centre (on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, entrance close to the reception)
- LivingWell Health centre
- Myoka SPA
- Tony and Guy Hairdresser
- Pools
- Kids Club

In the hotel you can find the following F&B Outlets

- Oceana Restaurant
- Blue Elephant
- Vista Bar
- Quarterdeck
- The Catch

- Merkanti

## 7. Software and tools familiarization:

In our department we are using several programs and tools to perform our daily tasks and to communicate with guests or other departments. You will be provided with all the necessary usernames and passwords. Remember that the passwords are confidential therefore don't share them with anyone and always log out when you leave your station. The main programs and platforms that we are using are:

- Opera: The Hotel Program Management System
- Kipsu: SMS service to communicate with guests
- Beekeeper: Malta's own social platform
- Synergy: to communicate with maintenance (POMEC)
- Outlook: e-mail client
- The Lobby: the base of all the culture

## 8. Attending Handover

At the end of every shift the supervisor prepares the Handover Sheet. The handover sheet is a document divided in section where important information for the department are listed ( House status, events, issues with billing or credit limit, VIP Arrivals, PMs, relevant information about guests or the hotel, metric targets etc...). Before the beginning of every shifts the team will gather on the back office and the handover sheet is read together so every team member is aware of what is going on in the hotel. The handover sheet and the event list are shared on Beekeeper so that every TM can keep a copy and always be updated with the latest news. It is important that a piece of information must always be kept in the handover until it is relevant.

The handover is a very important moment, we encourage you follow it with the utmost attention, take notes and ask questions if nything is not clear.

Day one:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Uniforms, name badge and locker			
Employee areas, canteen and back office			
Grooming standard			
Structure of the Front Desk Department			
Roster and Vacation leave request			
Hotel Layout, guest facilities and F&B outlets			
Software and tools familiarization			
Handover			

## **Day two (from 09.00 to 17.30)**

At the beginning of your second day you will review with your trainer the topics of the previous day.

Your second day will be focused mainly on the Introduction of Opera PMS (Property Management System) and on the show round of the room categories:

1. Introduction to Opera
2. House status
3. Control Panel
4. How to search for a reservation
5. How to read a reservation
6. How to update a guest profile
7. Room categories – show round
8. Attending Handover
9. Observation of arrivals

### **1. Introduction to Opera**

Opera is our Program Management System. With Opera you will perform the majority of the tasks requested by your job description: check-ins, check-outs, billing, postings, enrollments, upselling, room allocation etc... Since Opera is a huge and complex system, you will learn to use it gradually during your training.

### **2. House status (CTRL + F3)**

House Status - 29/04/06

Room Summary			
Total Physical Rooms	157		
Out of Order	3		
Total Owner Rooms	0		
Total Rooms to Sell	154		
Out of Service	0		

Activity			
Room	Persons	VP	
Stayovers	1	1	0
Departures Expected	1	2	0
Departures Actual	11	14	3
Arrivals Expected	15	16	0
Arr. Exp. Made Today	15	16	0
Arrivals Actual	29	34	3
Extended Stays	0	0	0
Early Departures	9	12	3
Day Use Rooms	10	14	3
Walk Ins	0	0	0
Day of Arrival Cancels	0	0	0

Complimentary and House Use			
Room	Persons	VP	
Complimentary Arrivals	0	0	0
Stayovers	0	0	0
Departures	0	0	0
House Use Arrivals	0	0	0
Stayovers	0	0	0
Departures	0	0	0

End of Day Projection			
Min. Available Tonight	95		
Max. Occupied Tonight	59	49	3
Max. % Occupied Tonight	38.31		
Blocks not Picked Up	15		
Individuals	36	39	3
Groups & Blocks	8	10	0
Room Revenue	108.49		
Room Revenue Avg.	1.84		

Housekeeping Room Status			
	Vacant	Occupied	HIR
Inspected	11	29	1
Clean	2	1	0
Dirty	29	1	0
Pickup	11	0	0
Out of Order	3	0	0
Out of Service	0	0	0
Queue	0	1	0

Turndown Status			
Required	33		
Not Required	1		
Completed	0		

Property:  Room Class:

Date: 29/04/06 Room Type:

### 3. Control Panel (ALT + F2)

MLAH - Control Panel

Start Date: 22.05.20

	Fri 22.05.20	Sat 23.05.20	Sun 24.05.20	Mon 25.05.20
Total Physical Rooms	413	413	413	413
Out of Order	8	8	8	8
Inventory Rooms	405	405	405	405
Overbooking	0	0	0	0
Sell Limits	405	405	405	405
Deducted Blk. Rooms Not P/U	0	0	0	0
Deducted Block Rooms P/U	0	0	0	0
Total Deducted Rooms	11	12	12	12
Non Deducted Blk. Rms Not P/U	0	1	1	1
Non Deducted Blk. Rooms P/U	0	0	0	0
Total Non Deducted Rooms	0	1	1	1
Out of Service	335	333	333	333
Available Physical Rooms	394	393	393	393
Maximum Availability	394	393	393	393
Minimum Availability	394	392	392	392
Min Occupancy %	02.72	02.96	02.96	02.96

### 4. How to Search for a reservation:

- Guest in House
- Arrival
- Future reservation
- Reservation checked out
- CTRL + F4

### 5. How to read a reservation

MILAH - Reservation 1025626 CHECKED IN

Name: [Redacted] ent: [Redacted]  
 First/Title: [Redacted] any: ALTA CARE LABORA  
 Phone: [Redacted] up: [Redacted]  
 Email: [Redacted] rce: [Redacted]  
 Member Info: [Redacted] Colour: CYAN

More Fields: Last Stay 12.03.20 Total stays 10 d by a Manager

Arrival 17.03.20 Tuesday  
 Nights 75 EC 18+ 1  
 Departure 31.05.20 Sunday  
 Adults 1 Child 0 Infant  
 Room Type K1KFU1 Fixed Rate  
 Room 0809 Dirty DNM  
 Block Code Curr. EUR  
 Rate Code CORLC Print Rate  
 Rate 150.00  
 Market LNR Local Negotiated  
 Res. Type CHECKED Checked In  
 ETA 18:34 CO

CRS No. 3193578951-19083  
 Payment  
 Credit Card No. [Redacted]  
 Exp. Date  
 Approval Code  
 Approval Amt. 8,200.00  
 No Post Board Basis BB  
 Confirmation Billing PD  
 Prevent Comm. N  
 Preferences  
 Features NS  
 GPM  
 Suite With

Guest Balance 2,996.90  
 Disc. Amt. %  
 Reason  
 Packages  
 Specials NE EXL COMPBB  
 Comments Guest has paid 8  
 Arr Flight  
 Dep Flight  
 Car Rental  
 Item Inv.

Daily Details Traces Comments Preferences Profile Notes Member Alerts

Created By TVAM On 17.03.20 14:44 Updated By LASC On 13.05.20 16:35

Save OK  
 Force Sell Options Close

## 6. How to update a reservation

For more detailed information please refer to the CSA Bibles

## 7. Room Categories

In the hotel there are 413 rooms. The rooms are divided into 13 categories, each category has different view, decor and characteristics, different benefits and prices. Today your trainer will show you some rooms and s/he will highlight for you the main characteristic of every category and the maximum capacity. S/he will also show you where the rooms are located and how to get from the reception to the different levels.

Deluxe rooms or standard rooms. They have three different view typologies. Please note that when a guest books a room we have to honor the view and the bedding type that s/he booked.

- K1GV - T2GV Deluxe king and Deluxe Twin Garden view room (18 King, 16 Twin)
- K1RV - T2RV Deluxe King and Deluxe Twin Marina view room (19 King and 75 Twin)
- K1RF - T2RF Deluxe King and Deluxe Twin Sea view room (79 King and 57 Twin)

Executive rooms. The executive rooms come with two different view typologies: Sea view and Marina view. All the executive rooms are entitled to Executive Lounge access. Ideally the check-in of these rooms is done at the Executive Lounge so that guests can enjoy a fully luxurious experience from

the start. Also in this case we must respected the view and the bedding type that the guest reserved.

- K1E – T2E Executive King Marina view and Executive King Marina View room (11 king and 7 twin)
- K1KV – T2EVO Executive King Sea view and Executive Kind Sea view room (74 King and 20 Twin)

Suites. Our suites are the pride of the hotel. All of them have stunning characteristics and some of them are real gems. All suites come with access to the Executive Lounge. Your trainer will highlight to you the main feature of each suite.

- K1RFU1 Relaxation suite (7 rooms)
  - K1CFU2 Corner Suite (9 rooms)
  - K1JV Junior Suite (5 rooms)
  - K1RRF Studio Suite (6 rooms)
  - K1KFU1 Panorama suite (5 rooms)
  - K1DFU1 Deluxe Suite (3 rooms)
  - K1AFU3 Ambassador Suite (1 room 1060)
  - K1ZFU1 Presidential Suite (1 Rooms 1005)
- 
- Accessible rooms
  - Elevators location

## 8. Observation of arrivals

After attending the handover you will spend the rest of the shift observing the check in procedure. You are not required to interact with the guests

Day two:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Introduction to Opera			
House status			
Control Panel			
How to search for a reservation			
How to read a reservation			
How to update a guest profile			
Room categories – show round			

## Day Three (from 09.00 to 17.30)

On your third day you will attend a cross training with the phone operator. You will learn how to answer the phone properly and the main functions of the phone operator.

1. Review of day 2 with the trainer (30 minutes)
2. Introduction to the phone operator
3. How to manage calls
4. Synergy and the logging of maintenance and Housekeeping issues and requests
5. Kipsu
6. Calling departures (11.30)
7. Registration cards pull out
8. Attending Handover
9. Assortment of correspondence
10. Sick report
11. Save downtime report
12. Wake up calls report
13. Restaurant reservations

Day three:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Introduction to the phone operator			
How to manage calls			
Synergy - maintenance and HSK Log			
Kipsu			
Calling departures			
Registration cards pull out			
Assortment of correspondence			
Sick report			
Downtime report			
Wake up calls Report			
Restaurant reservations			

## Day Four (from 09.00 to 17.30)

On your fourth day you will attend cross training within the Concierge/Porter department.

The concierge team takes care of our guests' requests about restaurants, tours, shop suggestions, taxis and any inside knowledge about the Maltese Islands. The Porters take care of our guests' luggage, they can park cars and book taxis.

1. Review of day 3 with the trainer (30 minutes)
2. Introduction to the roles of Concierge and Porters
3. Luggage tagging
4. Dispensary of Maps, Brochures, Tours



5. Taxi procedures
6. Shadow and observation of Porter (luggage down, luggage delivery, storage)
7. Attending Handover
8. Shadow and Observation of Concierge

Day Four:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Introduction to Concierge and Porter			
Luggage tagging			
Dispensary of Maps, Brochures, tours			
Taxi procedures			
Shadow and observation of Porter			
Shadow and Observation of concierge			

At the end of the shift you will receive the passwords and usernames to have access to Opera, Beekeeper, Kipsu, Synergy, Outlook and Window.

## Day Five (from 8.30 to 17.00)

On your fifth day you will attend cross training at the Executive Lounge. The executive lounge is located on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor. It is a space exclusive for guests who booked Executive rooms and Suites. On this floor you can find a second reception where executive guests can check-in and check-out and find assistance. The Lounge also offers F&B services - Breakfast, Afternoon tea and pre-dinner drinks – and soft drink and coffee facilities throughout the day.

1. Review of day 4 with the trainer (30 minutes)
2. Introduction to the Executive Lounge
3. Service periods
4. Services offered
5. Guest who are entitled to have access to the Executive Lounge
6. Observation with host at the desk

Day Five:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Introduction to the Executive Lounge			
Service periods			
Services offered			
Guests entitled to EXL			

## Day Six (from 7.00 to 15.30)

On your sixth day you will attend a cross training at the Housekeeping department. You will see several areas of the hotel and you will be followed by different team members. During this day you will acquire a variety of knowledge that will be very useful in your role.

1. Order taker (+ Lost & Found procedure) - 2 hours
2. Laundry (collection and delivery of guests' laundry, employee uniforms) - 1 hour
3. Shadowing maid in the guest room (how to clean a room) - 2 hours
4. Shadowing maid in the public areas - 1 hour
5. Shadowing supervisor - 2 hours

Day Six:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Order taker			
Lost and Found procedure			
Laundry			
Shadowing maid in guest room			
Shadowing maid in public area			
Shadowing Supervisor			

## Day Seven (pm shift)

On your seventh day we will start analyzing the Arrival Experience.

The first experience that the guest will have in our hotel is the Check in. It is important to perform a flawless check in and in general to guarantee a good arrival experience as the first impression can impact all stay. In this paragraph you will find some key points to analyze in depth with your trainer.

1. Short review of day 5 and 6 with your trainer (30 minutes)
2. Detailed full check in procedure - step by step explanation
3. Which documents are valid for the check in
4. Board basis
5. Billing instructions
6. Pre authorization policies
7. Traces, comments and alerts
8. List of possible scenarios - discussion with the trainer
9. Observing and shadowing of the rest of shift.
10. Attending handover with the night manager

### Check in Procedure

Your trainer will print out the flow chart of the check in procedure. Together you will analyze in depth all the steps.

### Documents valid for the check in

All the guests must present a valid documentation upon check in:

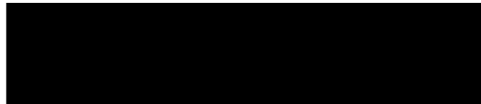
- For Maltese citizens: Identity Card, Residence Permit, Drive License or Passport
- For non-Maltese Citizens: Identity Card or Passport

## Board Basis

The main board basis are:

<b>BB</b>	Bed & Breakfast
<b>HB</b>	Half Board
<b>FB</b>	Full Board
<b>BEL</b>	Breakfast In Executive Lounge

Here you can find the codes for the board basis



MLAHI - Reservation 1028572 CHECKED IN

Name	Siarmpalos	Address	Eptanisou 1
First/Title	Dimitrios Mr	City	Metamorphosis
Phone	00306948810522	Country	GR
Email	dsiarabalos@yahoo.com	Zip/State	14452
Member Info	HH 1175700671 D	Language/VIP	E

More Fields Last Stay Total stays 0

Arrival	02.04.20 Thursday	CRS No.	3195908043-1916
Nights	74 EC 18+ 1	Payment	CA
Departure	15.06.20 Monday	Credit Card No.	
Adults	1 Child 0 Infant	Exp. Date	
Room Type	K1E Fixed Rate	Approval Code	
Room	0802 Dirty DNM	Approval Amt.	
Block Code		No Post	
Rate Code	COR40	Board Basis	BB
Rate	125.00	Billing	AC
Market	LNR Local Negotiated	Confirmation	
Res. Type	CHECKED Checked In	Prevent Comm.	N
ETA	12:51 CO	Preferences	
		Features	NS
		GPM	
		Suite With	

Here you can find the billing instruction

For more detailed information please refer to the AM Bible.

## Billing Instruction

There are mainly three Billing Instruction

<b>PD</b>	Payment Direct	Guest must pay for all charges
<b>ED</b>	Extras Direct	Company covers for some charges, as per routing
<b>AC/ FC</b>	All Charges to Company/Full Credit	Company will pay for all the guest's charges

For more detailed information please refer to the CSA Bible.

## Pre-authorization Policies

Guests are required to guarantee for their stay and incidentals in advance (unless fully covered by the company or third party). The pre-authorization is a hold on the guest's card that guarantees that a certain amount is available to cover all expenses. The pre-authorization can be completed at check-out – when the amount is used to settle the bill – or released after check-out (within 7 business days)

How much shall we pre authorize? It depends from the billing instruction:

- Payment direct: We need to preauthorize an amount to cover the room rate + 50 euro per adult per night as guarantee for possible incidentals (minibar, restaurant bills, room service orders, SPA treatments...)
- Extras Direct: In this case the room rate is already covered, we shall authorized 50 per person per night for the extras

There are some instances when the guest refuses to leave an extra amount to cover the extras. In this case we have mainly two different scenarios:

- Payment Direct: we need to take the payment to cover for the room rate and the Environmental Contribution – the guest will be in no post
- Extras direct: the guest will be in no post

When a guest is in No Post it means that they will not be able to charge the room in case of consumption at the restaurants or room service, they will need to settle their bill directly at the outlet (when leaving the restaurant, the SPA, when receiving the room service order). They will not be able to use the Mini bar either. It is important to explain the guest all the limitations before putting the reservation in No POST.

## Environmental Contribution

You will hear frequently the term “Environmental Contribution” and the guests will often ask you the meaning of “Environmental Contribution”.

*“The main objective of this Environmental Contribution is to improve quality along the tourism value chain. In fact, all revenue generated from this initiative will be directed solely and exclusively to upgrade and embellish the local infrastructure in touristic areas around the Maltese Islands.*

*The contribution is payable by all tourists who are 18 years or older irrespective of nationality (including locals). It amounts to €0.50 per person for each night spent on the Maltese Islands at any type of accommodation such as hotels, guesthouses, hostels, resorts, apartments, farmhouses, villas, timeshare and host families, amongst others. The contribution is capped at a maximum of €5 for each continuous stay."*

To summarize the Environmental Contribution is a sort of "city Tax" that goes directly to the government, it is mandatory (also for Maltese Citizen) and amounts to 0.50 euro per person, per night up to a maximum of 5 euro.

## List of Possible Scenarios

After analyzing the check in flow chart, have a discussion with your trainer about some of the possible common scenario that you can occur upon the check in procedure:

- The guest does' not have / refuse to give a valid document
- The room is not ready
- How to store the luggage
- Looking for an inspected room
- Guest wants to change the bedding type
- Guest wants to add extra people

## Shadowing

For the rest of the shift, shadow an agent: pay attention and take note of all the actions taken. For today you are not required to interact with the guests

Day Seven:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Check in procedure – flow chart			
Identification documents			
Board Basis			
Billing instructions			
Pre authorization policies and NO POST			
Traces, Comments and Alerts			
Environmental Contribution			
Possible scenarios			

## Day Eight (PM Shift)

During your eighth shift you will continue the training for the PM shift with particular focus on payment methods, credit cards and cash handling.

1. Review of day Seven
2. Float Management

3. Cash handling
4. Credit Card Handling
5. How to save a Credit card on Opera
6. Electronic points of sale (EPOS) – how to use them
7. Check in Role play on the back office
8. Close observation of check in – minimal interaction with guest
9. Attending handover with night shift

## Float Management and Cash Handling

Every agent receives a float of 500 euro. At the end of every shift you MUST store your float in the safe box at the back of house. Once per month, a finance controller will count you float.

## Credit Card Handling and how to save the Credit card number on the system

MLAHI - Reservation 1015767 CHECKED IN

Agent: [Dropdown]  
 Company: MY MALTESE GUIDE [Dropdown]  
 Group: [Dropdown]  
 Source: [Dropdown]  
 Colour: [Dropdown]

More Fields | Last Stay: [Text] | Total stays: 0

Arrival: 20.02.20 Thursday  
 Nights: 99 EC 18+ 1  
 Departure: 29.05.20 Friday  
 Adults: 1 Child: 0 Infant: [Text]  
 Room Type: K1KFU1  
 Room: 0822 Dirty DNM  
 Block Code: [Text]  
 Rate Code: COR531  
 Rate: 204.00  
 Market: LNR Local Negotiated  
 Res. Type: CHECKED Checked In  
 ETA: 14:18 CO: [Text]

CRS No.: [Text]  
 Payment: [Text]  
 Credit Card No.: [Text]  
 Exp. Date: [Text]  
 Approval Code: [Text]  
 Approval Amt: 250.00  
 No Post: [Text]  
 Confirmation: [Text]  
 Prevent Comm: N  
 Preferences: [Text]  
 Features: [Text]  
 GPM: [Text]  
 Suite With: [Text]

Guest Balance: -2,757.85  
 Disc. Amt: 343.40 %  
 Reason: DM  
 Packages: [Text]  
 Specials: EXL,CORB  
 Comments: do not take extra  
 Arr Flight: [Text]  
 Dep Flight: [Text]  
 Car Rental: [Text]  
 Item Inv.: [Text]

Routing | Daily Details | Traces | Comments | Profile Notes | Fixed Charges

Created By: EDCA On: 19.02.20 11:28 Updated By: LASC On: 11.05.20 17:29

Save OK  
 Force Sell Options Close

The most commonly used credit cards are MasterCard, Visa, American Express and BOV. Every time we do a transaction with a card, and especially when we take a pre authorization, we need to save the credit card number and the expiration date. To save the credit card number you need to swipe the card on the small scan located on the upper right part of your computer. Once you swipe the card the number will automatically appear on the credit card section (in Orange). If the credit card number is not be save automatically it can be inserted manually. It is important that you always save your actions with the “Save” button (In green).

Since Credit card numbers are extremely confidential information, just the last 4 digits are visible. If you need to visualize all the number just double click on them.

## EPOS

At the reception we have two different kind of epos machines: GLOBAL PAYMENTS and BOV.

You can use both epos machines to process payments with all most credit cards, main restriction being that AMEX payments shall not be processed with BOV machines

The two epos work slightly differently, your trainer will show you the main functions

Day Eight:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Float Management			
Cash handling			
Credit card handling			
How to save a credit card in the system			
EPOS			

## Day Nine

On your ninth day you will:

1. Review of day eight
2. Practice of full check in on the back office
3. Start doing some assisted check ins (always shadowed by your trainer)
4. Introduction to the PM check list (for a full detailed explanation please refer to the PM Bible)

## Day Ten

On your tenth day you will:

1. Review of day nine
2. Practice of full check in on the back office
3. Keep on doing some assisted check ins (always shadowed by your trainer)
4. Start doing the check list assisted by your trainer



## Day Eleven (AM Shift)

Like the arrival experience, also the Departure experience is extremely relevant for the guests, representing their last and most vivid image of the hotel, influencing their opinion about the stay. The departure is also the last possibility to *Make It Right* and compensate the guest if something went wrong during his/her stay; for this reason it is very important to always ask about their satisfaction. Read the check-out flow chart with your trainer and learn all the steps that allow to perform a proper check out.

1. Short review of check in procedure
2. Full detailed check out procedure with flow chart
3. Billing introduction
4. Billing divided into windows
5. Explanation of the routing
6. How to Complete a pre authorization
7. How to post a payment
8. Handover

For a full explanation of the Billing (how to access it, how to divide it into windows, how to print it etc) please refer to the AM Bible

### Routing

The screenshot shows a hotel reservation system interface. The 'Routing' tab is highlighted with a red circle. The interface includes fields for guest information, arrival/departure dates, room details, and payment options. The 'Routing' tab is highlighted with a red circle.

The purpose of **routing** in reservation is to ensure that the correct company or Travel agent is invoiced.

A routing is a payment instruction that identifies who needs to pay what. A certain charge can be routed (addressed for payment) to a travel agent, to a PM, to a company or to another room. Your trainer will show you some examples that will simplify the concept.

For a full explanation please refer to the Glossary



## Pre authorization completion

When the guest decides to settle the bill using the pre authorization you can face two main scenarios:

- The bill is lower than the pre authorization (Completion and release of the difference)
- The bill is higher than the pre authorization (completion + sale)

Your trainer will explain in detail how to proceed in these two cases and how the pre-authorization release works. It is very important to understand the differences because these are the points where the guests are getting confused the most.

Also, in case of completion the two epos machines work differently. Please refer to the AM Bible to see how to use them.

## How to Post a Payment

The screenshot shows the 'Payment' window in the Opera PMS. The window title is 'MLAHI - Payment [Wind. 1 - Siarmpalos, Dimitrios - Room 0802]'. The main form has the following fields:

- Payment Code:** A dropdown menu showing 'MC' (Master Card) with a green circle around it.
- Currency:** A dropdown menu showing 'EUR' (Euro) with a green circle around it.
- Amount:** A text box containing '12.00' followed by 'EUR', with a red circle around it.
- Credit Card N.:** A text box containing 'XXXXXXXXXXXX5454' with a yellow circle around it.
- Exp. Dt:** A text box containing '01/22' with a yellow circle around it.
- Post:** A button with a purple circle around it.
- Close:** A button.

On the right side, there is a grid of logos for various payment methods: VISA, VS, MasterCard, MC, DV, QC, JCB, JCB, Maestro, MA, American Express, AX, Diners Club, DI, APS, and RVL.

At the bottom of the window, there is a status bar with the text 'Siarmpalo...' and '15% discount of laundry'. Below this, there is a row of buttons: 'Select All', 'Post', 'Edit', 'Folio', 'Options', 'Payment' (with a blue circle around it), 'Settlement', and 'Close'. Above the 'Payment' button, there are two red buttons: 'Member' and 'Routing', and two red buttons: 'Traces' and 'Profile Notes'.

\*Before posting a credit card payment on Opera, ensure that the transaction went through on the epos machine\*

Then, on Opera:

1. Press "Payment"

2. Insert the credit card type
3. Check that the amount is correct
4. Insert the credit card number and expiration date (you can swipe it or insert it manually)
5. Press "Post"

You can post also a cash payment. Instead of the credit card type you can use code 9000 and post the correct amount.

Day Eleven:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Check out procedure with flow chart			
Billing introduction			
Dividing Billing into windows			
Routing			
Pre authorization completion			
How to post a payment			

## Day Twelve

On your twelfth day you will keep on analyzing the check-out procedure with particular focus on rebates and Paid outs.

1. Review of day eleven
2. What is a paid Out
3. What is an allowance and how to do it
4. Shadowing of Am shift with no guest interaction

### Paid Out

Paid outs are expenses made by the hotel on behalf of the guest, who is later charged on the room.

The most common paid out is for taxi service. Your trainer will explain how to post a paid out, under what conditions and how to claim it from Finance.

### Allowance

Your trainer will explain in depth what is an allowance, when to apply it, which codes to choose and which kind of back up you need.

- Transactions from 0 EUR to 50 EUR - **Folio and your signature**
- Transactions from 50 EUR to 120 EUR - **Sup. Signature**
- Transactions from 120 EUR to 500 EUR - **AFOM/FOM Signature**
- After 500 EUR - **Finance manager or assistant**

Day Eleven:	Trainee	Trainer	Date
Paid out			
Allowance			

## Day Thirteen

On your thirteenth day you will keep on training on the check-out procedure.

1. Review of day twelve
2. Practice full check out on the back office
3. Shadowing AM Shift
4. Introduction to the check list

## Day Fourteen

1. Review of day thirteen
2. Start doing assisted check-outs (always with your trainer)
3. Start doing the check-list with your trainer

## Day Fifteen (from 09.00 to 17.30)

On your fifteenth day you will attend cross training at the reservations department.  
You will mainly see:

1. Booking.com portal
2. Expedia
3. Travel agencies and companies correspondence

You have seen now some of the basic tasks of the front desk. During your path you will learn everyday something new and you will live a lot of new and exciting experiences. We encourage you to ask questions, take notes and practice with you trainer and colleagues.

At the beginning you may meet some difficulties but do not get discouraged: getting used to a new environment takes time, but your Team is here to support you! Rely on you superiors and on your more experienced colleagues... don't be afraid to ask!

Welcome on board!

Training Plan For Front Office												
Training Description	Trainer's Name	SOP	Trainer's Comments	Trainer's Signature	Trainee's Signature							Date Completed
Induction												
Showround of Hotel Facilities												
Familiarisation with Diff. RM Types												
Opera Familiarisation												
Learning												
WOH Programme												
Checklists												
BOB												
Emails												
SOPs												
Product Knowledge:												
Where is the Spa												
Opening Hours of Seed												
Fitness center timings												
Indoor/Outdoor Pool information												
Room Service Timings												
Check In Step by Step:		SOP 001										
Routed												
Payment Direct												
Check Out Step by Step:		SOP 002										
Routed												
Payment Direct												
When and How to do:												
Trace												
Wake Up Call		SOP 018										
Messages		SOP 020										
Profile Notes and V8												
Room Moves:		SOP 012										
How to check												
Room on OOS												
Room Move Procedure												
Profiles:		SOP 014										
Filling a Profile												
Adding an Accompany												
Booking a Taxi		SOP 020										



## On boarding

Basic on boarding plan that follows the method – Explanation → Demonstration → Questions → Practice

The speed can vary based on experience and time available

Week	Material to cover	Resources	Other
1 – During this week the new employee gets to know the department, the different terminology and how the team works together – ideally all credentials will be available during this week, however, if not it is alright	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Welcoming into the department</li> <li>-Getting to know where to find things</li> <li>-Getting familiar with the different parts of the department and how do we work with the rest of the departments</li> <li>-Getting familiar with Opera</li> <li>-Introduction to checking in, checking out and billing–</li> <li>Explanation and demonstration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome pack,</li> <li>On boarding PP,</li> <li>Training checklist and FO pack</li> </ul>	<p>The first week will be overwhelming but make sure to introduce the daily checklist and towards the end of the week go through the tasks on it. This needs to be based on the new person's shifts – if the first week is mid shift.</p> <p>Use the first days to go over the onboarding power point and show the rooms and the hotel</p>
2 – As the first week is quite overwhelming, the second week needs to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Checking in, checking out and billing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HUB manual and the membership – manual</li> </ul>	<p>From the 2<sup>nd</sup> week onwards it is crucial to add the checklist to the</p>

concentrate on only a few things – more specifically on explanation, demonstration and questions - practice can be started in some things but it is alright if most is left for the following weeks	<p>Demonstration, questions and practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to membership and the HUB</li> <li>- Shift checklist – explanation, demonstration, questions and practice (if possible)</li> <li>- Emails and handovers – explanation and demonstration</li> </ul>	new employee's training, as the sooner it is explained, easier it will be for them to see the connection between the different tasks
3 – Since the first two weeks are over, by week 3 the new colleague should have credentials and should be ready to practice everything that was explained during the previous two weeks with supervision – make sure to be open to questions and check regularly if everything is clear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to credit limit – explanation, demonstration, questions and practice</li> <li>- Introduction to the rooms</li> <li>-Shift checklist - explanation, demonstration, questions and practice (if possible)</li> <li>- Emails and handovers – questions and practice</li> </ul>	Rooms walkthrough  Week 3 should be based on what the new employee needs to practice the most and should allow for the new person to try and start doing things and asking the questions they have

- Introduction to guest compensation – explanation and demonstration – connected to checking out and memberships

<p>4, 5 (and if needed 6)</p> <p>– After week 3, we look more into daily details, different situations and practicing everything that has been learned. Furthermore, from week 3 onwards there is a chance to learn all memberships and rooms by heart as there is no longer too much new information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practicing, checking in and checking out</li> <li>- Practicing the daily tasks</li> <li>- Practicing compensation and helping to solve guest complaints</li> </ul>	<p>All files shared so far</p>	<p>As adults learn best when practicing, once all the basic material has been covered, the new employee can start practicing, practice must always be done with supervision and feedback, as well as the chance to ask questions</p>
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<p>After week 5/6</p>	<p>From week 5/6 and based on the new employee’s abilities and progress, more advanced things can be thought, like refunds and allocation – this needs to entirely be based on how the learning is going. Remember that everyone learns differently, has a different level and has a different learning curve. Keep supporting the new employee and ensure that all questions are answered in order to create confidence and better understanding of the daily tasks</p>
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**Checklist****Trainee****Trainer**

What can you find at the desk – getting familiar with what is where and what is everything called

Getting to know the back office and what is where

Seeing the rooms and where are all the facilities – Rooms, outlets and opening hours

The pits

- Arrivals
- the 3 different pits
- Pit check

Meeting rooms

Departures

- Departure calls
- Check outs

Check outs

Rate your stay

Getting familiar with the emails

- the daily emails we get
- the shared email box
- BEO and IKE

Arrivals

- Allocation of any not allocated rooms
- Putting alerts
- Time of arrival

Credit limit and no post

Pull outs

Check ins

- Queue
- Updating the information

- Courtesy calls

Room moved

- OOS
- Room move report

Reds and yellows

Handling credit cards securely

Making keys

POS machine

- Sale
- Pre-aut
- Pre-aut completion
- Refunds
- Incrementing pre-auts
- Reprinting a receipt

Memberships

Taxis

- Making a booking
- Taxi tokens

Concierge and porters

Luggage

- Where we put the luggage of the arrivals and of the departures and how it is marked

Phones

Room types

OOS

Billing

- Adjusting the bill and rebates
- Moving transactions
- Paid outs, Beauty studio, laundry

Profile notes and colours

Upselling

**Merlin trainings** – These trainings you can do after you get your credentials will be able to find them in MyLearning, after you do them, you need to send the certificates to ■■■ – see how to find them explained after the table

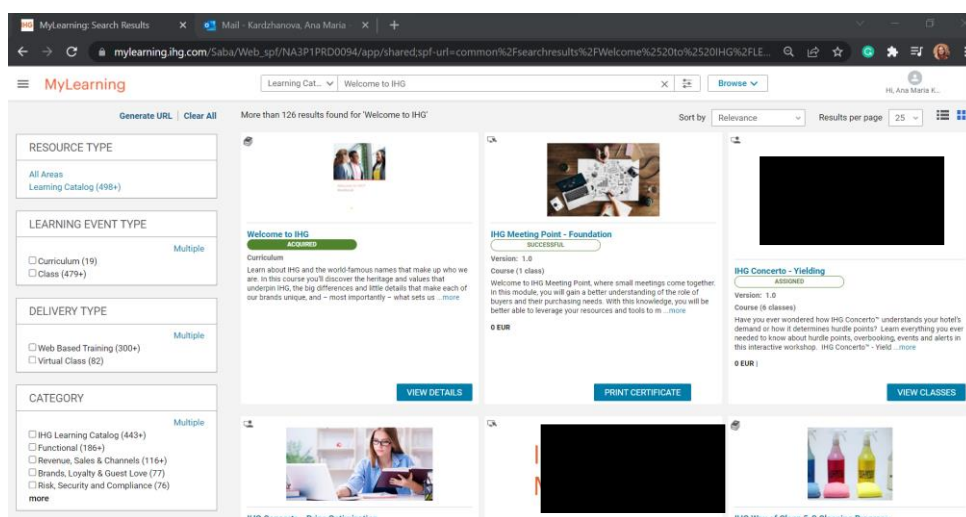
Welcome to ■■■	
Loyalty at ■■■	
■■■ Hotels and resorts brand orientation	
Problem handling	
True hospitality service skills	
Introduction to information security	
Handling credit cards securely	
Responsible procurement	
Preventing human trafficking	
■■■ general fire training	
■■■ way of clean for non-housekeeping colleagues	
Code of conduct	
Code of conduct – Anti-bribery	
Code of conduct – competing fairly	
Guest arrival report	
Getting to know ■■■ concerto	
■■■ concerto homepage overview	

## How to find the trainings

1. Go to [redacted] and log in with your Merlin account
2. There you can search the trainings in the search bar

Also, you can click on My learning and check how you are doing – what you have completed, the trainings in progress and if you have signed up for another

3. **Finding the training** - When you search several options should come up – select the relevant one and then do it 😊



4. **Starting the training** – press register or launch (be careful to select English as the language and that you don't choose a training that has to be paid)
5. **Sending the certificate** – after you complete the training, you need to send Ana the training, so it can be marked as done
  - Go to the completed training – click on Print certificate – save it and send it to Ana

You can also do the training called [redacted] (ID: 00050703) to help you get more used to My Learning

## **Appendix E: National Occupational Standards (NOS) for receptionist**

### National Occupational Standards

**Sector:** Front Office

**Occupation:** Receptionist / Guest Service Agent/ Guest Care Host

**MQF Level:** Level 3

**Units:**

- FO301: Health and Safety requirements at the workplace
- FO302: Guest relations and customer service
- FO303: Checking in and checking out guests
- FO304: Work Ethics
- FO305: Cashier Duties



### **FO301: Health and Safety requirements at the workplace**

This unit lists the knowledge and skills needed by a person holding this position to carry out work in compliance with health and safety requirements. Upon completion of the unit, the persons carrying out this work will possess the necessary knowledge and skills to follow health and safety procedures which ensure that their actions do not create health and safety risks to self or others.

#### **Performance Criteria**

The candidate must have the necessary knowledge and skills to:

1. Carry out safe working practices according to the workplace health and safety regulations
2. Follow company and department safety and security policies and procedures to ensure a clean, safe, and secure environment.
3. Follow property specific procedures for handling emergency situations (e.g., evacuations, medical emergencies, natural disasters).

#### **Required Knowledge**

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 must know and explain:

1. The roles and responsibilities of themselves and others under the Health and Safety legislation.
2. The individual legal responsibilities as per Health and Safety legislation.
3. Health concerns associated with the workplace and safe practices when carrying out work.
4. Potential hazards at the place of work (such as electricity, slippery surfaces, contaminants, irritants, fire, heights, and improper use of tools and equipment)
5. The importance of being alert to the presence of hazards at the place of work.
6. The precautions to be taken to abide by health and safety regulations.
7. The health and safety risks associated with their role regarding tools, materials and equipment.
8. The procedures for dealing with potential hazardous material at the place of work.
9. Unsafe work procedures or conditions and report them to management and/or security/safety personnel.
10. The first aid facilities that exist within work area.
11. Emergency procedures at the workplace in case of a fire, bomb threat, etc.
12. Contact details of responsible persons to whom to report health and safety matters.

#### **Required Skills**

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 should be able to:

1. Comply with duties and obligations defined in the Health and Safety legislation.
2. Work according to Health and Safety regulations and other relevant regulations that apply on the job.
3. Identify which health and safety procedures are applicable and relevant to their particular working environment

4. Adhere to work processes as per legitimate instructions.
5. Control health and safety hazards within own capability and job responsibility.
6. Maintain awareness of undesirable persons on property premises.
7. Report work related accidents, or other injuries immediately upon occurrence to manager/supervisor.
8. Comply with warning signs displayed at the workplace and set up safety signs when necessary.
9. Protect work areas from damage and perform work functions without damaging work areas.
10. Deal with hazards, risks and hazardous material according to workplace regulations.
11. Refer to superior when help is needed and falls out of own responsibility.
12. Follow emergency procedures in the workplace.
13. Recognize emergency situations and report immediately to superiors.
14. Contact relevant authorities in case of emergency.

**FO302: Guest relations and customer service**

This unit lists the knowledge and skills needed by a person holding this position to carry out work related to guest relations. Upon completion of the unit, the persons carrying out this work will possess the necessary knowledge and skills to answer, record, and process all guest calls, requests, questions, or concerns; follow up to ensure each has been met to guests' satisfaction. In addition, the person carrying out this work will operate the telephone switchboard station, supply guests with directions and information and arrange transportation for guests/visitors.

**Performance Criteria**

The candidate must have the necessary knowledge and skills to:

1. Acknowledge and welcome guests in a friendly and professional manner.
2. Explain the different room and hotel facilities, give their location and provide instructions on using these facilities.
3. Record, act and follow-up all guest requests, questions, concerns or complaints.
4. Provide guests with directions and information on the different transport types available and places of interest.

**Required Knowledge**

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 must know and explain:

1. The company in place policies to address specific guest requests e.g. a room change.
2. The company's/department's standard operating procedures.
3. The accessibility of the hotel and what services are available for persons with physical or sensory disabilities.
4. How to operate the telephone switch board and answer telephone calls in a correct manner.
5. The different room and hotel facilities and their location.
6. The guest internet access, television system, entertainment system, telephone system and any other in-room technology and/or service.
7. Places of interest - give directions and suggest different means to visit them.
8. The different methods of transport available to the guest.
9. What type of action to take following a guest telephone call. This could be a simply query on the opening times of the hotel restaurant to something much more urgent such as a medical emergency.
10. How to accept and record a new room reservation including last-minute bookings.

**Required Skills**

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 should be able to:

1. Greet and acknowledge guests in a friendly and professional manner. Use eye contact and refer to the guest by surname or title.
2. Wherever possible anticipate guests' service needs and take the necessary action.
3. Listen attentively to any questions or concerns by the guest, respond positively and take any required action.

4. Assist or offer assistance to individuals with disabilities.
5. Be alert for opportunities to improve the profitability of the company e.g. potential sales opportunities
6. Assist other employees to ensure a prompt guest service.
7. Operate telephone switchboard station.
8. Answer calls in a polite, professional and friendly manner.
9. Answer calls within a reasonable time as per company policy.
10. Answer, take note and act on all guest calls, requests, questions, concerns or complaints.
11. Follow up with guests to ensure their requests or problems have been addressed to their satisfaction.
12. Receive, record, and communicate messages accurately.
13. Contact the appropriate individual or department, as necessary to resolve a guest request or problem.
14. Ensure that any outstanding requests or problems from the previous day / shift, or as recorded in the departmental logbook, receive priority and are resolved.
15. Supply guests with information and directions regarding property amenities, services, and hours of operation, local places/areas of interest and current activities.
16. Explain room features/facilities (e.g. mini-bar, TV, etc.).
17. Book transport (e.g., taxi) for guests on request.
18. Accept and record new room reservations.
19. Evaluate the general cleanliness of the customer area and take corrective action where necessary.

### FO303: Checking in and checking out guests

This unit lists the knowledge and skills needed by a person holding this position to carry out work in an ethical and professional manner. This unit covers work ethics related to relations with customers and colleagues.

#### Performance Criteria

The candidate must have the necessary knowledge and skills to:

1. Ensure that guests are checked in according to company policy
2. Explain hotel procedures, opening hours of hotel facilities and location of guest room.
3. Carry out a guest checkout according to company policy.

#### Required Knowledge

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 must know and explain:

1. Procedures for guest check in including walk-ins, pre-booked and groups, amongst others.
2. Procedures for room allocation covering room changes, upgrades, etc.
3. Procedures for guest check-out from billing, to feedback, to ensuring housekeeping is aware that the room was vacated.
4. The procedures to operate property management system (PMS) appropriately.

#### Required Skills

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 should be able to:

1. Check-in guests by confirming reservation, verifying guest identity and collect any relevant taxes (eg: eco-tax).
2. Operate the property management system (PMS) in an appropriate and efficient manner.
3. Secure valid form of payment for rooms (unless pre-paid) and set up accurate accounts for each guest as per company policy.
4. Assign room according to company policy and prepare room key/welcome pack for guest. When using electronic keys activate accordingly.
5. Inform housekeeping when there are guests waiting for an available room.
6. Coordinate with housekeeping to track readiness of rooms for check-in.
7. When possible allocate rooms according to guests' preferences and accommodate requests for room changes.
8. Propose a room upgrade if the customer wants a room that is different to the original reservation
9. Keep track of changes in room status for housekeeping.
10. Inform guests of any new messages, mail, etc.
11. Perform guest check-outs according to company policy.
12. Where applicable present the bill with relevant charges to the guest and resolve any disputed charges prior to departure.
13. On check-out retrieve the room key/s and where possible request comments on guest's stay.
14. Thank guests and provide a warm farewell.

15. Clear departures in the computer system to indicate that rooms are no longer occupied.
16. Evaluate requests for late check-outs and approve subject to room availability and occupancy levels.
17. File guest registration form according to company policy.

**FO304: Work Ethics**

This unit lists the knowledge and skills needed by a person holding this position to carry out work in an ethical and professional manner. This unit covers work ethics related to relations with customers and colleagues.

**Performance Criteria**

The candidate must have the necessary knowledge and skills to:

1. Maintain a professional and courteous attitude with customers.
2. Maintain a harmonious team work environment with colleagues.
3. Respect work obligations.
4. Deal with difficult or unexpected situations in a professional manner.

**Required Knowledge**

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 must know and explain:

1. The meaning and implications of a customer centric business.
2. The importance of maintaining a team mind-set among colleagues.
3. The rules and regulations of the workplace.
4. Own duties, functions and responsibilities.
5. The duties and functions of subordinates.
6. Basic emotional management.

**Required Skills**

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 should be able to:

1. Value the customer by adopting a professional and courteous attitude and by showing a proactive approach
2. Address clients/customers in a professional manner
3. Ensure customer satisfaction whilst supervising and conducting service tasks
4. Effectively deal with customer complaints to maintain high satisfaction levels among clientele and seek superior's assistance when help is needed and falls out of own responsibility.
5. Create and maintain a positive mind-set among employees
6. Ensure tasks are carried out effectively and efficiently according to the workplace standards and procedures
7. Attend work on a timely and presentable manner wearing clean and appropriate clothing according to the workplace requirements
8. Speak to co-workers using clear, appropriate and professional language.
9. Support all co-workers and treat them with dignity and respect.
10. Respect and follow supervisors' and superiors' instructions
11. Guide and instruct subordinates in a positive, professional and polite manner
12. Actively listen to and consider the concerns of other employees, responding appropriately and effectively.

### FO305: Cashier Duties

This unit lists the knowledge and skills needed by a person holding this position to carry out work related to the cashier duties at the hotel front desk. Upon completion of the unit, the persons carrying out this work will possess the necessary knowledge and skills to process payments, manage a cash float and use an electronic point of sale.

#### Performance Criteria

The candidate must have the necessary knowledge and skills to:

1. Manage a cash float and use an electronic point of sale.
2. Process payments, foreign exchange and other transactions.

#### Required Knowledge

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 must know and explain:

1. The different methods of payment.
2. How to operate an EPOS (Electronic Point of Sale) system and the hotel front desk software (PMS), where applicable.
3. The different types of receipts.
4. How to use a cash float and perform an end-of-shift reconciliation.
5. Any processes on how to handle payment problems and how to refer them (including manual operations).

#### Required Skills

The Receptionist at MQF level 3 should be able to:

1. Process all payment types as per company policy (e.g. cash, cheques, debit cards, etc)
2. Accurately handle cash
3. Issue receipts, refunds and change to customer.
4. Count cash float at the beginning of the shift to ensure that amount is correct and there is adequate change.
5. Count cash float at the end of the shift to ensure the amount is correct.
6. Prepare end of shift reports on the financial transactions that were carried out during the shift.
7. Print contingency lists to have a record of all guests in case of an emergency.
8. Prepare credit card authorization report and check for discrepancies.
9. Perform foreign exchange transactions in line with company policy.