

Institute of Tourism Studies  
In affiliation with The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management

Continuing Professional Development in the Tourism and  
Hospitality Industry among Women in Malta:  
Opportunities, Motivations, Expectations, and COVID-19 Pandemic Effects

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Submitted to:  
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In partial fulfilment for the requirements of the Degree of  
Master of Business Administration

## ***DECLARATION***

I, *Mary Rose Briffa*, declare that this is an original piece of work, produced entirely by myself, 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.



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Student's signature

## ***ABSTRACT***

Continuing Professional Development refers to the procedure by which a person takes control of her/his own development and learning (Megginson & Whitaker, 2007), engaging in an on-going process of action and reflection. It is an exciting and empowering process, which can motivate individuals to accomplish their ambitions. Furthermore, Continuing Professional Development reminds us that the onus for development lies with the individual rather than the employers/managers in the organisation (Megginson, & Whitaker, 2007). This research project aims to analyse the process of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the tourism and hospitality industry among women in Malta. Additionally, the purpose of this research is to focus on the existing opportunities for Continuing Professional Development in Malta, women's motivations and expectations, and the overall COVID-19 Pandemic effect on the sector. The main hypothesis statement is to assess whether a significant difference exists in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance between women and men. Despite the importance of the topic and the various research that exists on the subject, secondary research specifically on women within the Maltese context is lacking. An explanatory mixed approach has been adopted for this research study, starting with a quantitative online questionnaire, followed by qualitative focus groups to explain in further detail what was elicited through the online questionnaires. A non-probability sampling procedure was applied for the online questionnaire, resulting in 51% (N=53) female participants and 49%. (N=51) male participants, totalling 104 valid responses. The fifty women participants for the focus groups were selected from amongst the questionnaire participants, using the first four largest groups (according to the course followed). Twenty-one showed their interest in participating. Ultimately, nineteen women participated in the three focus groups. The data for the online questionnaire was collected through Google Forms and analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.0.0). The focus groups were conducted through Microsoft Teams and the content elicited was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by means of an online software called Delve. The Independent Samples T-Test confirmed that the null hypothesis for each question cannot be rejected, and therefore, the main null hypothesis was confirmed. The findings from the focus groups indicate that women have overall positive views about

Continuing Professional Development however, they express preference for online lifelong learning as they can achieve a better work-life balance. Furthermore, participants feel that they are more empowered after receiving training and that progression can never be gender equal as they believe that the Maltese society is patriarchal. This study will supplement the existing body of knowledge on lifelong learning and work-life balance by investigating specific issues for women in Malta, as well as the effect of COVID-19 on Continuing Professional Development. It will also provide three viable solutions that can be practically employed in the tourism and hospitality industry in Malta. The researcher will also identify areas that can be expanded upon with further studies, such as the effect of the patriarchal society on gender equality in career progression.

**Key Words:** Continuing Professional Development, Continuing Vocational Education & Training, COVID-19, Expectations, Motivation, Work-life Balance, Stress, Progression, Gender Equality

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## *Introduction*

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is training (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [Cedefop], 2014), which begins after leaving initial education (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020) or after starting work (Cedefop, 2014) to skill, upskill and reskill (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2021), and pursue professional development (UNESCO, 2021). However, a gap was identified in the literature review regarding women and work-life balance issues, specifically, women working in the Tourism and Hospitality industry in Malta. The researcher aimed to identify what has been achieved to date in terms of providing lifelong learning opportunities and the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on motivation and expectations of women in Malta. This chapter will first introduce the background and context, then the research problem, aims, objectives and questions. The significance of the research will be clarified and finally, an outline of the research study will be presented.

## *Research Background*

CPD enables learning to become an initiative-taking process, rather than reactive. It is a holistic professional commitment with the aim of improving employees' personal skills and proficiency throughout their careers. CPD can be facilitated through different means, such as workshops, events and conferences, online learning programs, and best practice methods, focusing on individual improvement and successful professional development (CPD, 2022). Over recent years, CVET has progressively become prominent in European policy (Cedefop, 2015) varying drastically from just two decades ago, when the industry's current challenges were not even contemplated (Cedefop, 2015). The importance that VET is given by Europe's policy makers has been accentuated when in November 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration initiated the launch of the European strategy for enhanced cooperation in VET, called the 'Copenhagen Process', reaffirmed at Maastricht in 2004, Helsinki in 2006, Bordeaux in 2008, Bruges in 2010 and the Riga Conclusions in 2015 (EC, 2020). Lifelong

learning is vital to increase motivation, aid equity, and increase possibilities for disadvantaged groups' participation in society (Cedefop, 2014). In fact, its aims are to expand employees' knowledge, skills, competencies, and professional knowledge (Bahçelerli, 2018). Training is essential as it affects the competitiveness of the tourism offer and enables innovation through the development of new products and services (Bahçelerli, 2018).

### *Global and European Survey Results*

#### *Survey Results regarding Europeans' Perceptions of CVET*

A Cedefop survey conducted with the aim of studying Europeans' perceptions about CVET in 2020 amongst EU Member states, Iceland and Norway, generated findings that portrayed an optimistic notion of lifelong learning and CVET. Adult learning and CVET provision are perceived as being beneficial to the individuals throughout all participating countries. They are also considered important for the economy and society, as well as for career progression, increased income, and the reduction of unemployment (Cedefop, 2020).

#### *Findings from a Global Survey of Enterprises*

The main survey findings conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and nine global partners amongst 114 countries establish that the COVID-19 pandemic has heavily impacted operations, resulting in completely or partially suspended operations, with almost 90% introducing online measures. The impact was increasingly felt by micro, small and medium enterprises, rather than larger ones (ILO, 2021). One of the policy's recommendations mentions funding for skilling, upskilling and reskilling as well as enhancing access equity for disadvantaged groups, especially women, who were the hardest hit by the pandemic, with employment losses owing to COVID-19 pandemic being 5% higher for women than for men (ILO, 2021).

#### *Work-life Issues for Women Who Are Presently in Training and Employed in the Hospitality Industry*

In 2015, almost 60% of those employed in tourism activities in Europe were females, whereas in Malta, the situation was reversed, with the percentage of women employed in core tourism being that of 41%. In 2016, almost 60% of adults between the age of 25-64 in the EU, stated an involvement in any informal training, with most countries,

reporting a higher share of women participating than men (Eurostat, 2020). This phenomenon repeats itself in Malta where, the female participation rate for adult learning in 2018 was approximately 12%, whilst the male participation rate was approximately 10%. In 2019, both male and female participation rates in adult learning registered an increase of 1%. Thus, in Malta, both rates (male and female) were higher than the European average rates (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020).

When examining the challenges and benefits which students experienced whilst simultaneously studying and working in a study conducted in the USA amongst thirty-one hospitality educational programmes, a decrease in academic performance and an increase in stress were identified as the main challenges. The main benefits discerned were the gaining of experience and hands-on skills (Schoffstall, 2013). Another survey conducted in Spain amongst unemployed and active workers alike, concluded the positive effect of a CVET programme in its research findings; most participants (80%) were ready to enrol in further education and more than half of the participants (almost 60%) perceived deeper empowerment after the course (Mara, Cascón-Pereira, & Brunet Icart, 2022).

### *Research Problem*

CPD is critically important for employees' improvement of personal skills and competences throughout their careers (CPD, 2022). The researcher identified three studies that investigated CPD and its effect on employees along with their expectations and motivations (Cedefop, 2020; ILO, 2021; Eurostat, 2020), however, these studies focused on the European and/or global situation. Hence, studies are missing when it comes to CPD and Malta. Additionally, studies on the situation also lack from a female gender perspective and the COVID-19 impact. As a result, the existing secondary research is insufficient and inadequate to focus on the situation in Malta with regards to women, their CPD in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry, the opportunities, motivations, expectations, and the COVID-19 pandemic effects.

## *Research Aims, Objectives, Hypothesis*

### *Research Aims*

Given the scarcity of research regarding CPD in Malta and the effect on motivations and expectations thereon, the study will seek to identify what has been done to date by the policy makers and the industry to provide lifelong learning opportunities in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry in Malta; the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on motivation and expectations of women in Malta; and the impact on career progression.

### *Research Objectives*

The first research objective was the attempt to determine whether any differences exist in motivations and expectations between the male and female genders in Malta. After determining the similarities or differences, the second research objective was to examine the motivations and expectations of women in Malta in further depth.

### *Hypothesis Statement*

The null hypothesis of this research was: ‘There is no significant difference in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance between women and men.’

### *Research Significance*

This research study will contribute to the existing knowledge on lifelong learning and work-life balance issues for women in Malta. It will help in addressing the shortage of research in this field, especially when it comes to Malta. It will also provide practical solutions that can be employed in practice and help the Tourism and Hospitality industry in Malta, which has already been experiencing a skills gap that has been accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research study will also identify areas that need further discussion such as the effect of the patriarchal society and gender equality in career progression.

## *Research Outline*

### *Chapter One: Introduction*

This chapter delineates the study purpose and focus, explaining the research outline. It includes a brief explanation of the research background comprising summaries of the main secondary research studies. It also provides a reason as to why the research area was selected. Furthermore, the first chapter entails an explanation of the research aims, objectives and hypothesis, and concludes by outlining the research study structure.

### *Chapter Two: Literature Review*

The second chapter represents a literature review that analyses existing models and theoretical frameworks within the research area. This chapter includes definitions of the main terms used, such as CPD and CVET and explains the search strategy for the secondary data. Other authors' opinions, regarding the research area in general and the research problem have been presented by the researcher in a logical manner. Finally, the existing research will be analysed to identify contributions from these findings to the Tourism and Hospitality industry in Malta.

### *Chapter Three: Methodology*

The third chapter addresses the methodology by explaining: the research approach adopted; the explanation of the research design executed; and the research philosophy used. It continues to explain: the sampling methods of the study; the collection methods chosen; and their implementation, with a detailed explanation of how the analysis was performed by the researcher using research software (IBM SPSS) for the online questionnaire along with the transcribing tools (Microsoft Teams) used for the recording of the focus groups' discussions. The explanation of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was also presented. The chapter continues with the justifications of the methodology used and concludes with the discussions of the ethical considerations taken during the research study.

## *Chapter Four: Research Findings*

The fourth chapter starts with the explanation of the sample characteristics. It contains a presentation of the demographic data collected through the online questionnaires, which have been presented through various bar charts and pie charts. The research findings continue with the presentation of the descriptive statistics concluded from the Likert scale questions, using histograms, descriptive statistics' summary, and normality plots. The data was collated and presented by the researcher, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.0.0). Inferential Statistics were performed to prove/disprove the hypothesis. Results indicated that the null hypothesis for each question cannot be rejected, and therefore, the main null hypothesis was confirmed.

The qualitative findings derived from the focus groups were presented through a thematic Analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) aided using an online free software called Delve<sup>1</sup>. Six main themes were identified by the researcher from the thematic analysis research findings. This chapter concludes with a summary of findings to introduce chapter five, where the research discussion will take place.

## *Chapter Five: Research Discussions*

The fifth chapter constitutes the research discussions. The discussion chapter retains an invaluable role in the achievement of the research aim and objectives. In continuation to the previous chapter, this chapter starts with the summary of the research findings. Following the same sequence of Chapter Four, this chapter starts off with the primary data findings from the online questionnaire and continues with the findings from the focus groups. The findings have been compared to the literature review on the subject, and an in-depth discussion has been presented on each research finding. The discussion first tackles the Likert scale questions of the online questionnaire and follows with the six themes identified in the focus groups' findings.

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<sup>1</sup> Delve - Qualitative Analysis Made Easy- Analyze transcripts from in depth interviews and focus groups together with your team. - <https://delvetool.com/>

## *Chapter Six: Conclusion*

The sixth chapter concludes the research work and encapsulates the level of achievement of the research aims and objectives. It continues by selecting and presenting three suggestions that industry stakeholders can implement in practice to contribute to the tourism and hospitality sector. The final chapter also acknowledges the limitations arising from gaps in the literature review, the sampling method used, and the changing global situation. In conclusion, Chapter Six, provides recommendations for future studies to address the research limitations and to build upon the findings.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This research concentrates on CPD in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. This chapter was organised in four main sections/themes, as follows:

- various definitions of CVET and in-depth details of a survey regarding the perceptions on CVET;
- human resources skilling, reskilling, and upskilling, along with the European and Maltese policies related to tourism, green and digital strategies;
- the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital and green transition within human resources skilling, reskilling, and upskilling;
- work-life balance issues for women who are presently in training and employed in the hospitality industry.

### *Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET)*

Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) is an education and/or training offer (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [Cedefop], 2014), which starts after leaving initial education (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020) or after starting work (Cedefop, 2014) with the purpose of further developing the individual's vocational, professional, or personal abilities. It takes place within the industry, a specific organisation or in a company context (CEDEFOP, 2009) to acquire new skills required for a new occupation or to reskill (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2021) by using the latest technologies and tools across different training institutions (European Commission [EC], 2020). CVET or CPD relates to the learning happening over the course of a lifetime (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020) and it includes specialised, vocational, formal, or non-formal training (Cedefop, 2014). Undertaken by adults (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020), CVET needs to adjust to the digital shift over the working life period and engage in flexible and inclusive pathways that may include switching from one country to another whilst completing a CVET qualification. This will aid the match up of demand and supply in the labour market (EC, 2020). In fact, labour mobility is one of the first European Community's objectives and is a condition for labour availability, sustainable wages, competitiveness and growth (Cedefop, 2015a).



CVET has progressively become prominent in European policy over recent years (Cedefop, 2015) varying drastically from just two decades ago when these challenges were not contemplated by the industry (Cedefop, 2015). CVET should be linked to the initial Vocational Education Teaching (VET) by offering career guidance throughout life (EC, 2020). In November 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration introduced the European strategy for improved cooperation in VET described as the ‘Copenhagen Process’. It was reaffirmed, at Maastricht in 2004, Helsinki in 2006, Bordeaux in 2008, Bruges in 2010 and the Riga Conclusions in 2015 (EC, 2020). In 2015, the Cedefop's report concluded that the ‘Copenhagen Process’ and the ‘Bruges Communiqué’ have had a positive impact on all national VET policies and strategies in all the participating countries (Bagale, 2015). CVET is indispensable for human capital management in the tourism industry, in order to offer a better service (Cedefop, 2015b), benefit development and preserve human resources in a society which needs innovative solutions, economic development, and social unity. Moreover, the cultivation of human resources can aid and guard people (Bohlinger, 2004) whilst mitigating increasing unemployment. (Bagale, 2015). Lifelong learning is vital to increase motivation, production, employment opportunities, competitiveness, and innovative solutions. It aids overall equity and the disadvantaged groups’ participation in the labour market and in society (Cedefop, 2014). Lifelong learning’s aims include the expansion of the employees’ knowledge, skills and competencies and professional knowledge (Bahçelerli, 2018). In this regard, training is vital as it affects the tourism’s offer competitiveness also due to the fact that having trained tourism personnel enables innovation through the advancement of new services and products (Bahçelerli, 2018). To reach the target of a European society and economy that is digital and green, high-quality human capital, along with a well-trained labour force whose skills are continuously updated by training institutions, are needed. As a result, well-coordinated, accessible CVET systems are essential to develop such a high quality workforce (Note, 2020). A lifelong learning culture needs that work-based/on the job learning is part of a CVET strategy (EC, 2020). Work-based learning is important as it can function as a motivator and increase participation and effectiveness of CVET policy (Cedefop, 2015a). In Malta, adult learning and training participation rates have increased from 16.5% to 19.1% between 2014 and 2019 but unfortunately, Malta still has the 2nd highest percentage of adults in Europe with lower secondary education and therefore,

support to improve the skills of low-skilled adults is still imperative (Social & Plus, 2021).

It is crucial that lecturing staff be competent in order for them to ensure that the necessary knowledge, competencies, and skills are being conveyed to the vocational learners (Cedefop, 2017). Therefore, to strengthen the professional capital of its lecturing staff, the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) partnered with Haaga Helia University, Finland in a process developed at ITS and modelled on the Cedefop (2015)'s European guidelines (Cedefop, 2017), to validate ITS lecturing staff's informal and formal learning and recognise prior learning (RPL). High-quality and inclusive CPD offered to lecturers, trainers and mentors, acts as a multiplier and mediator to a lifelong learning culture (EC, 2020).

### *Survey Results Regarding Europeans' Perceptions of CVET*

A first opinion survey conducted by Cedefop, attested that, overall individuals often perceive CVET and adult learning as less attractive than general education. However, whilst the study provided insight into the comparison between CVET and general education, the researchers came to few conclusions about the image which people have of CVET. In addition, understanding these perceptions is critical as CVET is an essential aspect of lifelong learning (Cedefop, 2020). Having better insights about people's perceptions can help to recognise the strengths and weaknesses in countries' CVET systems and further assist in forming new strategies to expand CVET and adult learning as well increase their involvement (Cedefop, 2020).

In 2020, Cedefop conducted another survey amongst the EU Member states, Iceland and Norway, to study Europeans' perceptions of CVET. Findings established an optimistic image of lifelong learning and CVET. The main reasons chosen by participants for their involvement in adult learning were personal development (66%) and job skills improvement (64%). Correspondingly, 96 percent of the participants agreed that it is particularly important to continue to learn throughout life and 84 percent believe that adult learning and CVET will become essential to enable them to progress in their careers. Moreover, 93 percent of the Maltese respondents are convinced of CVET's importance for career progression and 89 percent agree that governments should prioritise investment in learning for adults (Cedefop, 2020). Throughout all the Member States, the provision of adult learning and CVET, is

perceived by participants as being highly beneficial for individuals, the economy and society and imperative for career progression. CVET is considered as a route for an increased income, finding a new job more hastily and the reduction of unemployment (Cedefop, 2020). About 84% of all the participants believe that organised work-related activities are essential to develop job skills. Maltese respondents are the most convinced of all these benefits. Amongst all countries interviewed, only 61% of Maltese respondents believe that both CVET and school or university education are of the same importance.

All other Member States are less convinced that both are as important (Cedefop, 2020). With regards to accessibility of CVET, 72% of all participants are in agreement that many opportunities exist in their country, with 61% believing that appropriate work-related training activities are available and 66% affirming that information is easy to find. More than half of the participants concede that time off from work, flexible working hours, financial incentives, certification of learning and training recognition, childcare support and other caring responsibilities would inspire more adults to participate in work-related training and learning. The highest level of agreement was registered in Malta, where respondents claimed that participating in work-related learning and training would be more impactful if support was offered with childcare and other caring responsibilities, as well as training recognition (Cedefop, 2020). Overall, a positive image was noted from all participating countries; although CVET does not retain the same status as tertiary education, it is still highly valued and linked with practical benefits (Cedefop, 2015), vital for the participants' work and personal development, with two thirds agreeing that it should be a priority for the government's investment (Cedefop, 2020).

### *Skilling, Upskilling and Reskilling*

#### *European and Maltese Policies and Strategies*

Skilled labour in the tourism industry is vital. A study about accountable tourism determined that training can be an answer to implementing responsible tourism (Farmaki et al., 2014). The service quality provided is crucial for the tourism product; therefore, the primary emphasis of human resources should be on staff upskilling in order to create an enhanced tourism offer. With the diversification of the Maltese

industry, hospitality careers have become less attractive when compared to the other options (Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection [MTCP], 2015,) with front-line hospitality duties being considered by employees as short-term jobs. On the other hand, third country nationals are willing to accept any kind of work; hence, managers are opting for short term solutions and employing front-liners through recruitment agencies instead of investing in skilled employees (Peplow, 2021). A paper that seeks to explore issues of education and training of personnel in the hospitality and tourism sectors in Croatia concluded that fewer people are enrolling in the tourism educational institutions and thus, the education system needs to adapt to the current tourism trends as intervention is essential since tourism contributes significantly to the countries' GDP (Perman & Mikinac, 2014). This is also the case in Malta, where tourism continues to be a fundamental contributor to the GDP with a 27% share (Grant Thornton, 2020).

VET is achieving a new impetus with the updated European Skills Agenda. The Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on VET is helping to accentuate the individuals' rights to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning. These rights are stated in the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EC, 2020). The European Skills Agenda<sup>i</sup> (EC, 2020) was designed with the aim of assisting European citizens and businesses in developing new, finer skills and strengthening sustainable competitiveness, as inscribed in the European Green Deal (EC, 2021) which is expected to have an impact on the employment market and the required skills (Social & Plus, 2021). In the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning the Maltese government reiterated its commitment to encourage adults by supplementing their studies and assisting them in striking a balance between learning and work (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020). Based on what was learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the goals of the European Skills Agenda is to build the required resilience to respond to crises (EC, 2021). The European Skills Agenda attempts to ensure social fairness by providing access to education, such as through life-long learning, to everyone and everywhere in the European Union. It includes twelve actions, one of which is dedicated to vocational education, training and action (EC, 2021). This action calls for a proposal for a Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (EC, 2018) which has been set through the Council Recommendation dated 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021 (Council, 2020) and the Osnabrück declaration whereby the European Ministers in charge of VET

agreed on a set of actions to complement the strategy and objective of the Council Recommendation. Taking into consideration the updated European Skills Agenda, as well as the Council Recommendation, the council has identified four focus areas. One of the areas is concerned with the lifelong learning culture and its relevance to CVET and digitalisation, with the goal of establishing a new lifelong learning culture through the promotion of VET as an attractive job and life pathway by offering adaptable, flexible, inclusive and high-quality training opportunities (EC, 2020). In 2015, the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) conducted a survey in Malta with regards to the customer experience when interacting with tourism employees. Results revealed positive feedback from all sectors linked to service areas in the tourism industry (MTCP, 2020).

In Malta, pressure to skill the hospitality industry personnel with competencies has been long felt by the industry and stakeholders (Times of Malta, 2018). The National Tourism Policy 2015-2020<sup>ii</sup> mentions the importance of human resources' skilling and the recognition of prior learning through the experience acquired in previous employment (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2020). The Ministry for Tourism in collaboration with the Institute of Tourism Studies and the MTA launched two programmes to improve the hospitality sector. The programmes are called the Proficiency Acknowledgement in Tourism Hospitality (P.A.T.H.) and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (Scicluna, 2021). These will aid employees when applying to enhance their studies, hence leading to more qualified and duly recognised employees employed in the tourism sector (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2020). The Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) introduced a Master's degree in Heritage Interpretation with the intention of offering knowledge, skills, and competencies in heritage interpretation to those who already work within the culture and heritage tourism industry, and those who desire to work in the guiding industry (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2020). The ITS, has thus increased its portfolio of studies and is now offering a Bachelor's degree in Hospitality Management, a Bachelor's degree in Culinary Arts and a Master's degree in Business Administration in International Hospitality Management in partnership with Haaga-Helia University, Finland, Paul Bocuse Institute in France, and Emirates Academy (EAHM) (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2020).

Following the Malta Tourism Policy 2015-2020, the Government of Malta initiated a process of consultation with the public and relevant stakeholders to finalise the new

ten-year Malta Tourism Strategy.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the progress and many positive results achieved, the delivery of quality service continues to be an issue (Government of Malta, 2021). A recent dissertation<sup>3</sup> by Spiteri (2020) was mentioned by the Malta Chamber of Commerce, in their National Workforce Strategy wherein tourism was singled out as one of the sectors that employs a high concentration of unskilled third country nationals, exerting pressure on locals' salaries. This practice creates consequences, amongst which is the lack of adequate training, resulting in an unfavourable damage to the reputation of Malta's tourism industry (The Malta Chamber, 2021). The National Workforce Strategy is made up of key principles that are fundamental for tourism development in Malta. One of these is the planning for adequate human resources through the proper educational and career development channels (Government of Malta, 2021). Addressing the human resources dimension and the supply chain requirements is one of the thirteen identified strategic challenges (MTA, 2021). Further issues that need to be resolved include the hospitality skills gap, along with the relationship between industry and human resources. (Government of Malta, 2021). In relation to this, the ITS Strategic Plan 2021 -2025 determined missing skills in the Maltese tourism industry; namely, digitalisation, creative sustainability, heritage, and accessible tourism amongst others. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that many professions in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry lack soft skills (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2021); Scicluna (2021) identified those missing in the Maltese Tourism industry as character traits, personal attributes and communication skills amongst others, but particularly, service delivery (Government of Malta, 2021). Whilst staff language and communication skills may have achieved the lowest scores due to the high influx of foreign nationals to make do for the high demand of labour (Scicluna, 2021), it is essential to encourage more people to study and train, with the goal of pursuing a career in the tourism industry. In this regard, ITS will continue to offer programmes aimed at upskilling the present industry workforce, particularly in the Maltese context, where hospitality graduates in the tourism industry remains low (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2021).

Amongst the key international principles influencing the Maltese Tourism Strategy are the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>3</sup> (MTA, 2021). Sustainable

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<sup>2</sup> Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 [file:///C:/Users/brifm046/Downloads/maltatourismstrategy\\_2030\\_v7.pdf](file:///C:/Users/brifm046/Downloads/maltatourismstrategy_2030_v7.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Goals <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

development goal four resolves to ensure inclusive and unbiased quality education, promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. One of the targets for education is that by 2030, equal access to affordable, quality vocational and tertiary education is provided for all men and women. Another target for 2030 is the substantial increase of youths and adults who have attained relevant technical/vocational skills required for decent employment and entrepreneurship (United Nations, 2021).

Another key influence for the proposed Maltese Tourism Strategy is the European Green Deal<sup>4</sup> (MTA, 2021), which strategy reaffirms the Commission's commitment to tackle climate change. Considering that implementing the UNs 2030 agenda and integrating them at the heart of the EU's policymaking and action plans, is an integral part of the European Union's strategy, the primary aim of the latter is the mainstreaming of sustainability in all European Union policies, including, the education policy. For instance, upskilling and re-skilling are required to gain the green transition benefits. The proposed European Social Fund+ will play a vital role in assisting the European workforce in acquiring the necessary skills (EC, 2019) and also in Malta, where the programme continues to represent the main funding arm for human resource investment (Social & Plus, 2021). Furthermore, the skills agenda will be updated to improve employability in the green economy (EC, 2019). The ESF+ programmes at the local level aim to foster green and digital transitions in line with the EU's ambitions under the Green Deal and the European Digital Strategy (Social & Plus, 2021). Finally, the European Green Deal will improve citizens and future generations' wellbeing and health by providing transitional skills training and future-proof jobs (EC, 2019).

Another crucial factor influencing the Maltese Tourism Strategy is the EU Digital Strategy<sup>5</sup> (MTA, 2021), which aim is to make the transformation beneficial for its citizens and concurrently, achieve the targets set in the Green Strategy for a carbon zero Europe by 2050 (EC, 2021). One of the Digital strategy's actions is related to digital skills in order to address the gap in the said field (EC, 2021), which has also been confirmed as lacking for the tourism workforce in Malta in the ITS Strategy for 2021-2025 (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2021). The collaborative, digital workforce abilities have become critical (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021) as there is an extended

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<sup>4</sup> European Green Deal - [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

<sup>5</sup> Europe Digital Strategy - [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age\\_en#:~:text=Digital%20technology%20is%20changing%20people's,this%20Europe's%20%E2%80%9CDigital%20Decade%E2%80%9D.](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age_en#:~:text=Digital%20technology%20is%20changing%20people's,this%20Europe's%20%E2%80%9CDigital%20Decade%E2%80%9D.)

use of online and mobile platforms, along with a prevalent shift in how individuals book their trips by using mobile and tablet booking devices throughout all stages of a travel experience . In fact, tourism providers are adapting their marketing strategies to maximise their visibility and retain a competitive advantage (eSkills Malta Foundation, 2019). The National Workforce Strategy, published in August 2021 by The Malta Chamber of Commerce, states that digital upskilling should be given the uttermost attention. This comes as a result of the excellent technology advances experienced worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic which have altered the way people connect and work (The Malta Chamber, 2021).

Improving digital skills is becoming a key requirement across various job roles. The proposed ESF+ Programme will be able to support training for a digital and green transition whilst vocational and tertiary education will be assisted to adapt to the development of carbon friendly technologies to facilitate and sustain the economy in various sectors such as, tourism (Social & Plus, 2021). According to Cedefop, digital skills amounted to 23% of the total skills demanded (The Malta Chamber, 2021). Employees are presently keener to learn new digital skills, thus, businesses need highly advanced expertise that promotes creativity, adapts to the environment and makes employees more aware of self-development (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021).

### *The COVID-19 Pandemic, Digitalisation, and Climate Change*

Climate change and digitalisation have been a major impact on our society and will remain so (EC, 2020) however, the most pivotal factor that has surely created a seismic revolution in the future of the higher education industry was the COVID-19 pandemic (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2021). COVID-19 has seriously disrupted general education, including CVET across all Europe (EC, 2020) specifically, the skilling, reskilling and upskilling of employees, interns and apprentices in all types of enterprises and organisations around the world (ILO,2021). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) mentioned the effect that the pandemic has had on at-risk categories like youths, women and workers and small island states (Azzopardi, 2022). The pandemic has accentuated the digital skills gap that already existed and accelerated the digital transition (EC, 2018). Although its long-term consequences are presently uncertain, the COVID-19 effect on business life is not expected be short-lived (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic materialised in digitalisation



processes advancements, enabling organisations to offer their employees access to work from home (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021). As a consequence, flexible responses from VET systems, appropriately governed, need to be in place to respond to the digital and green changes and the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (EC, 2020).

At the moment, Europe is experiencing a twin digital and green transition which are reshaping the way Europeans live, interact and work (EC, 2018). As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that online learning can play a complimentary role to support learning (EC, 2020), member states were quick to move towards online solutions (EC, 2020) with a structural shift in the methods of delivery (Institute for Tourism Studies, 2021). However, the VET situation was different wherein practical training, such as on the job training and apprenticeships have come to a halt in most sectors (EC, 2020).

Like the rest of the world, Malta was harshly hit due to the international impact on the tourism sector (The Malta Chamber, 2021). During these extraordinary times, the Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection (MTCP) in collaboration with the MTA, launched a €5 million investment, with the aim of assisting tourism. Malta was at the forefront to boldly devote this proportion of investment in human resources, preparing the sector for after COVID-19 by providing the highest-level of online training with the objective of training thousands of affected tourism workers (Government of Malta, 2020). This investment had the ultimate goal of skilling, upskilling, and reskilling during this lull period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, so that the industry could benefit from the service of more professional and qualified tourism employees and thus provide a better experience to its clients. One of the primary aims of the online programme was to provide opportunities for upskilling or reskilling amongst tourism employees who were facing unemployment or turmoil at their workplace (MHRA, 2020). In this setting, human resources professionals retain a critical role to facilitate and support, as it is important not only to reskill or up-skill the workforce, but also to be flexible (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021). Various entities, including the University of Malta (UoM), the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), international bodies and several international universities and training centres offered courses under this scheme. Moreover, participants were not charged as the whole initiative was financed by the government of Malta (Government of Malta, 2020). During this tumultuous period for the Maltese tourism industry, the MTCP and the

MTA seized the opportunity and seriously invested in the Maltese tourism workforce. From the beginning, the scheme attracted about 8,000 persons who participated in more than 1,000 different courses (MTA, 2020). In a study conducted at ITS targeting mature students, it was concluded that COVID-19 has had its positive effects; individuals were able to listen to lectures at a more convenient time, focus more on their studies, gain a sponsorship and apply for relevant courses more efficiently since these were held online. Had these courses been onsite, students claimed that they would never have been able to follow the courses (Mifsud & Camilleri, 2022).

The sustaining of tourism employee training schemes introduced during the COVID-19 period is important to expand on the opportunities that were offered. Government and stakeholders involved must ensure that a tourism career is perceived as attractive for new entrants in the employment scenario and tackle the issue of foreign labour as a substitute to domestic shortfalls. The situation can be ameliorated by providing quality service training which imparts pride in working in the hospitality industry as well as improving salaries and wages, and career progression opportunities (Government of Malta, 2021).

The exodus of local and foreign workers and skilled personnel from the hospitality industry to other economic activities that were considered safer was one of the most negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism workforce (Government of Malta, 2021). Many countries have agreed upon fiscal packages in response to the crisis (ILO, 2021) as support was needed to train or retrain newcomers (MTA, 2021). In order to mitigate this phenomenon (Malta Enterprise, 2020) or the 'new reality' (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021), the Government also introduced wage supplement schemes to assist the hospitality and tourism industry which was the hardest hit by the COVID-19 Pandemic (Malta Enterprise, 2020). In this regard, countries need long-term policy measures, so that workers are more adaptable and resilient to the varying world of work and future emergencies (ILO, 2021). The threat of skilled personnel moving from tourism to other viable industries is real (MTA, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic also affected employees with amplified levels of anxiety and stress whilst working remotely since the absence of real contact and communication may have led to unmotivated and disoriented employees (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021). On the other hand, although the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Maltese workforce significantly, Malta has been facing labour supply gaps in certain industries for a long

time, twinned with skills shortage. As a result, understaffing may lead to a low level of service, in turn affecting reputation (The Malta Chamber, 2021).

CVET is being distinguished as the most appropriate response strategy for the post-COVID-19 recovery, digital innovations and sustainability issues (EC, 2020). As demand for skills, jobs, and qualification profiles change and new professions emerge in the wake of green and digital skills, individuals need more support to update and upskill (EC, 2020). It is critical to digitally upskill the future generation in order to ensure their employability, as well as to equip industries with skilled human resources not only for highly specialised roles, but also for current low-level jobs which are being digitally transformed (The Malta Chamber, 2021). Technology and digital innovations are changing employment models, leading to the automation of certain tasks and the creation of new skills and roles needed, thus also implying the requirement of a certain type of digital skills knowledge for nearly all jobs (eSkills Malta Foundation, 2019). Subsequently, CVET should strive to entrench skills for sustainability in their practices. The EC has been active in promoting training initiatives in digital skills for the European workforce and its consumers, with the specific resolve of modernising European Union education. Therefore, most of the initiatives are being aimed at harnessing digital technologies for learning and the recognition and validation of skills sets with the goal of anticipating the skills needed across the European Union (eSkills Malta Foundation, 2019). The link between digitalisation and sustainability is pivotal to this objective (EC, 2020); in fact, the European Union needs a paradigm skills shift, to ensure a twin transition and recovery from the COVID-19 impact. Using this interpretation, lifelong learning is crucial for long term and sustainable growth, in particular with small and medium sized enterprises (EC, 2018). A recent global survey which interviewed 6000 young people aged between 16-25 (Gen Z), shows that 82% of respondents are optimistic about finding work and 85% are self-confident about their technological ability and believe trends, such as automation of work, will have a positive influence on their working experience.

Contrastingly, most respondents criticised their experience with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (The Malta Chamber, 2021). Having the right green skills is crucial for a smooth transition to a low-carbon economy, whilst also improving current skills and providing new green skills to meet future industry demands (Social & Plus, 2021).

### *Global Survey of Enterprises of Employees, Apprentices & Internal Findings*

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) together with nine other development partners launched a global online survey in 114 countries to scrutinise the COVID-19 impact on employee, intern, or trainee, and apprentice training and development (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). It focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on training and development, the good practices implemented by the various organisations to mitigate the same impact and finally, the policy recommendations for the post COVID-19 era (ILO, 2021).

The main findings of the survey have ascertained that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the operations of survey participants with about 80% completely, or partially, suspending operations, and almost 90% introducing online measures, with the impact being greater on micro, small and medium enterprises than on larger ones. The pandemic also affected training with 90% of employees, 86% of apprentices and 83% of trainees not receiving skilling, upskilling, or reskilling training (ILO, 2021). Online training increased tremendously due to the lockdown measures being introduced. Thus, infrastructure issues such as inadequate connectivity, lack of accessibility, digital illiteracy, lack of adapted training, and difficulty of delivering practical sessions online were some of the main issues encountered by the training providers and learners (ILO, 2021). Approximately 65% adopted measures to continue upskilling and reskilling their employees. These included the use of video-conferencing tools and online virtual learning environments, adjusting the apprenticeships' training period, and resuming on the job training whilst taking health precautionary measures against the pandemic (ILO, 2021). About 75% positively responded that they intended to adopt innovative methods to improve skilling and reskilling by increasing investment in digital platforms, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), introducing blended learning and staff capacity building to assist them in delivering online training (ILO, 2021). In contrast, over half of the participants surveyed stated that there will be a reduction in staff training investments due to the financial problems forced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the policy recommendations, there is mention of funding for skilling, upskilling and reskilling as well as improving the access equity for disadvantaged groups, especially women, who were the hardest hit by the pandemic. Employment losses due to COVID-19 pandemic were 5% higher for women than for

men, therefore the response and recovery plan must address the widening gender disparities (ILO, 2021).

### *Women Work-Life Issues when in Training and Employed in the Hospitality Industry*

According to Eurostat (2015), almost 60% employed in tourism activities in Europe were females. This was not the case in Malta wherein the percentage of women employed in core tourism activities was 41%, with a share of 21% being young people (Eurostat, 2020). In 2016, almost 60% of adults between the age of 25-64 in the EU stated involvement in any informal training, with most countries reporting a higher share of women participating than men (Eurostat, 2020). Correspondingly, the female participation rate for adult learning in 2018 was approximately 12%, whilst male participation rate was approximately 10%. In Malta, female participation rate for adult learning in 2019 was 13.4% and males participation rate was 10.7%, with both rates higher than the European average rates (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020). Whilst females outperform males in terms of educational accomplishments, the representation in the employment market is not equal (Social & Plus, 2021). Work-life struggles have become one of the key obstacles to women's organisational commitments (Liu et al., 2021). In fact, over the past two decades, work-life issues have always been a crucial area when tackling labour policies. Achieving work-life balance is thought to increase people's life fulfilment (Noda, 2020). In a study conducted amongst sixty hotel employees in Poland, it was concluded that Generation Y tends to place more emphasis on their own lives and less on their work (Grobelna & Tokarz-Kocik, 2016). The possibility of working flexible hours and balancing work-life ambitions are crucial influencers for employees' motivation (Schneider & Treisch, 2019). From the research conducted by Debattista, Geronimi and Pace (2022) targeting all students at the Institute of Tourism Studies, it was concluded that part-time students perceive more benefits in online learning than full-time students. Also, a general preference for online learning was exhibited more by women, than men. When participants were asked whether they were satisfied with the way ITS provided online learning opportunities, a total of 86.11% said that they were either satisfied or very satisfied (Debattista, Geronimi, and Pace, 2022). The primary barriers that hinder females from taking part in CPD are family issues, time constraints, lack of support,

cost and work constraints, and lack of career guidance (Chuang, 2015). In this regard, women face more barriers than men when partaking in CPD, due to the perceived stereotypical role of main guardian within the family, thus creating a gender role disparity in the work place and a gender pay gap (Chuang, 2015). In a study by Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (1974), three main deterrents were identified: namely, the situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers which all influence women's participation in adult education.

Examples include feeling too old, a lack of time, prohibitive costs, job responsibilities and childcare needs, all of which are likely the result of personal factors. Institutional barriers are inadvertently generated, such as through lack of information or guidance (Chuang, 2015). Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) supplied another barrier to the original, previously recognised three; the informational barriers, which landed challenges in accessing comprehensible information about educational opportunities, thus influencing the decision to participate. A fifth challenge identified by O'Mahony and Sillitoe (2001), was the financial barriers that may also dishearten employees from continuing their training through the opportunities offered. The choice to participate in CPD also depends on the individual and other socio-economic grounds (Boeren, 2017). Despite the fact that these deterrents may be common for all adults, women face more difficulties in accessing CPD than men (Davies & Preston, 2002). A research study conducted in the UK concluded that the primary barrier that prevents women from progressing in the hospitality industry are the long hours and therefore, stated that more must be done in order to make the hospitality industry more humanised (Doherty, 2004). Policy modifications were effected with the intention to generate gender equality, however, although improvement was registered, women still struggle to secure managerial positions (Davidson, 2012). During the last three decades, there have been considerable changes and a surge in opportunities for women, resulting in an increase in female involvement in recent years. The rise of women in top managerial positions within the hospitality sector has elevated their status (Fav, 2015). Higher education levels results into more committed women and therefore, more women with higher education levels need to be employed in order to maintain higher commitment levels and lower turnover rates (Liu et al., 2021). Biz (2016) concluded that the barriers for women employees in hospitality management are slowly disappearing; however, job progression still remains a major hurdle. In fact, a study conducted by Malta's

National Statistics Office (NSO) concluded that the food and beverage sector employ 4,736 full-timers and 6,861 part-timers, attesting a clear difference in gender distribution. Based on this, for every two men in full-time employment, there is one woman, whilst the gap for part time work is much lower wherein for every five men, there are four women (MTCP, 2020).

A dissimilarity still exists between different genders' perceptions when seeking work-life balance. Both genders accede towards a preference for reduced hours of work. Nevertheless, the rationale is different; predominantly, men prefer shorter hours to gain more time for their themselves, whilst women choose shorter hours to procure more time for their family. Most employed men prefer their partner to work on a part-time basis. In comparison, females, would also prefer a part-time job more than their male counterparts, particularly when thinking of their children's upbringing (Thorntwaite, 2002).

In a study conducted in a Scottish University to examine patterns of part-time workers who were also studying, it was determined that almost two in every three participants had been working part-time for the same employer for a year and two months prior (Barron & Anastasiadou, 2009). . Furthermore, female students were more likely to be employed than men (Barron & Anastasiadou, 2009). In a study in thirty-one hospitality educational programmes across the USA examining the challenges and benefits which students experienced whilst simultaneously studying and working, Schoffstall (2013) ascertained that a decrease in academic performance and an increase in stress were identified as the main challenges. On the other hand, the gaining of experience and hands-on skills were the main benefits identified (Schoffstall, 2013). Moreover, research findings from a survey conducted in Spain accentuated the positive influence of a CVET programme conducted amongst unemployed and active workers alike; most participants (80.4%) were ready to enrol in further education and more than half of the participants (59.43%) perceived more intense empowerment after the course (Mara, Cascón-Pereira, & Brunet Icart, 2022).

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### *Research Approach*

A mixed method research approach was adopted, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2017). This was used in conjunction with the overall goal of attaining a study with greater overall validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) which would not have been made as feasible by exclusively using either one of the approaches (Creswell, 2017). This is also known as triangulation and helps in offsetting the weaknesses of each approach (Dawson, 2002). A post-positivist perspective was practised for the research; this represents the thinking after positivism, therefore, the challenging of the truth and the recognition that researchers cannot be sure about their claims of knowledge when studying human behaviour and actions (Phillip & Burbules, 2000). In post-positivism, the emphasis is placed on falsifying a hypothesis instead of verifying it. In this respect, results are forecasted, a theory is examined and a relationship between variables or a cause-and-effect association are discovered (Kawulich, 2001).

### *Research Design*

An explanatory sequential mixed method was used. The study began with a quantitative approach, through an online questionnaire; after which, data were collected and analysed. Subsequently, results were disclosed in further detail by means of qualitative research through the use of focus groups. This method is considered explanatory as the initial quantitative results are then further explained through qualitative means (Creswell, 2017). The quantitative results aided the researcher in selecting the participants for the qualitative phase and also in forming the questions asked during the second phase (Creswell, 2017).



## *Research Methods*

### *Quantitative Research - Online Questionnaire*

A survey, or an online questionnaire, was administered to collect quantitative data on opinions, attitudes, and trends by analysing a sample of the population (Babbie, 1990). One of the most common uses of questionnaires is social research, which quantifies experiences and characteristics of different social groups (McCombes, 2020). A non-probability sample technique was used to select the individuals taking part in the questionnaire and a non-random criterion was applied, therefore, not everyone had a chance of participating (McCombes, 2020). The survey remained open until hundred eligible responses were collected.

To participate in the online questionnaire participants had to be employed and pursuing or have recently completed training via self-sought or work-organised means during 2020-2021. The primary intention was to disseminate the survey amongst part-time students attending the the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS). However, whilst the survey commenced and replies started coming in, it was observed that the sample would be insufficient. In consequence, the online questionnaire was also disseminated amongst the employees of the ITS, the Ministry for Tourism and Consumer Protection (MTCP), the Malta Tourism Authority, and the Mediterranean Conference Centre. It was also sent to University of Malta, and Airmalta, however, unfortunately, it was not disseminated. The questions in the survey were closed-ended questions. Hence, the respondents had several prearranged answers to choose from as follows:

- binary answers such as a yes or no;
- a Likert scale with a fixed response ranging from universally agree to highly disagree;
- multiple-choice answers, with one of the choices being ‘other.’ In this case, respondents could elaborate if their answer was not in the prepared answers.

The online questionnaire was drafted using Microsoft Forms application, which is a free online tool for creating online questionnaires. The objective of the online survey was to study work-life balance issues, along with satisfaction and expectations for men and women in Malta during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The questionnaire gathered data on the perception of the interviewees with regards to opportunities of lifelong learning in the past and in the present, during the unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic. It focused on the problems encountered and how expectations of career progression were affected whilst managing studies, work, and family life, particularly during these unparalleled times. The pandemic phenomenon has been very recently experienced, thus its effect on human resources has yet to be academically researched or identified.

#### Main Hypothesis ·

Ho: There is no significant difference in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance between women and men.

Ha: There is a significant difference in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance between women and men.

The online questionnaire commenced on the 20th October 2021 and ended on 9th February 2022, lasting sixteen weeks. It was closed when the pre-set target of 100 valid responses was reached and eventually also superceded. The amount of responses received totalled 116.

#### *Qualitative Research - Focus Groups*

Following the online questionnaire, three focus groups made up of female participants were organised and facilitated by the researcher. The sample was chosen from participants who had responded to the online questionnaire; they needed to be of a female gender, working and at the same time pursuing studies and/or recently finished their studies. Participants were identified from female students following their studies at ITS, specifically, the MBA in International Hospitality Management and the Master of Arts in Heritage Interpretation, as well as women employees at the MTCP. These groups were selected as they were the most dominant respondent groups in the online questionnaire administered in the first phase of this study. An invite was sent to forty women from these three cohorts and interest was shown from twenty-one women. These were then split into three groups, ensuring that each focus group's participants had diverse characteristics such as age and interest in different areas of study. Once formed, a second email with a recruitment letter was sent to those who expressed

interest to confirm their involvement, with nineteen confirming and participating. The focus groups were held:

- once in person in an office in Naxxar, to facilitate Gozitans and people who live in the North;
- twice in hybrid mode at the Ministry for Tourism in Valletta.

The focus groups explored the issues women encountered whilst managing studies, work and family life at the same time, at various levels in the hospitality industry. It also evaluated how women's expectations were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited recent data is available regarding the opportunities available and the expectations and motivations of the female gender. Also lacking is valid research on how females cope differently when compared to males, when working, studying, and managing family life, especially in Malta.

The focus groups were held on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of April and on 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2022. Two focus groups had six participants whilst the final one had seven. The focus groups were of the single focus group type, which is the most common, wherein one moderator asks questions and discusses a topic with a small group of respondents (Nyumba et al., 2018).

The same set of questions were used in each of the three focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2002). When no more added information was derived and the 'saturation point' reached, research was declared closed (Dawson, 2002). All participants were given a small token of appreciation.

### *Analysing Data Methods*

#### *Online Questionnaire Analysis*

Before data analyses were started, the gathered data needed to be prepared and examined for reliability and validity (McCombes, 2020). Therefore, it was cleared from inputs which were not eligible to participate, or had not answered correctly, ensuring a reduction in bias and error (Dawson, 2002). The amount of responses eliminated were twelve, whilst the total number of valid replies were 104. Finally, data analyses were done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.0.0) software.

### *The Three Focus Groups Analysis*

Data from the three focus groups were analysed by using a transcribing tool, a popular tool when analysing focus groups, whereas speech was converted into text. The method used, which is relatively common, is called ‘intelligent verbatim transcription’, wherein everything is first written down, followed by the elimination of irrelevant words, for example words like, eh, uhm, em. The appropriate software was used for more accurate results (Steeferk, 2020), using the available transcribing tool on Microsoft Teams<sup>6</sup>.

For the focus groups, Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used. This allows the flexibility to understand and sort data into broad themes (Caulfield, 2020). The first step involved the familiarisation with the transcribed data. This entailed reading the text and taking notes to become further acquainted with it. Secondly, data was coded by using phrases and code labels to describe the content. Thirdly, themes were devised, such as stress/anxiety, expectations, adaptations, motivation, equality and empowerment. The next step comprised the reviewing of the themes and ensuring their accuracy. Following the selection of the themes, these needed to be defined, thus precisely formulating what each theme meant. The final step was writing up the analysis (Caulfield, 2020). The Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was aided using the online software called, Delve.<sup>iii</sup>

### *Secondary Research – Literature Review*

The secondary data for this research was a literature review compiled from academic journals, books, research on the particular topics, as well as European and Maltese policies. This served as a reinforcement to the primary research formerly conducted. Secondary data was quantitative and/or qualitative and was convenient to put the primary research into perspective (Scribbr, 2020). The primary data collected, was compared to the literature to enable the authentication of the required conclusions with regards to the research outcomes. This research approach was considered the most suitable because of cost effectiveness and time limitations (Scribbr, 2020).

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<sup>6</sup> Teams - <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/topic/what-is-microsoft-teams-3de4d369-0167-8def-b93b-0eb5286d7a29>

## *Methodology Evaluation and Justification*

During the literature review, a gap was uncovered in women and work-life balance issues, in particular, women working in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry in Malta. Therefore, the focal point of the primary research was to focus on work-life issues for women whilst studying and working in the tourism industry. Primary research was used to obtain answers for specific questions by retaining control over the sampling method and measurement tools applied. A non-probability sampling method was adopted as it is cheaper and easier to access (Bhandari, 2020). Furthermore, a mixed method approach was implemented, integrating the two approaches of qualitative and quantitative techniques and thus, combining the strengths of both (Mixed methods, 2020). Reasons for choosing an explanatory mixed method approach included the facts that a small sample was analysed, and therefore, method was more flexible, and the sample could be adjusted as the information was being collected (Scribbr, 2020). For the quantitative research used in the natural and social sciences (Bhandari, 2020), an online questionnaire was used, as it is a common method due to its low cost and easy formulation (McCombes S. 2020). For the qualitative research, mostly used in the humanities and social sciences, such as sociology and education (Bhandari, 2020) where attitudes, behaviours, and experiences can be explored (Dawson, 2002), three focus groups were conducted. The reason for selecting focus groups was primarily their efficacy, when combined with other methods (Kawulich, 2001). In this regard, it was possible to clarify in further detail what was found in the online questionnaires. Moreover, considering that the study was conducted in attempt to mitigate the gap identified in the secondary research, only women were chosen to participate. In this respect, retrieved information from focus groups tends to be more in-depth, even though fewer people can participate (Dawson, 2002).

## *Ethical Issues*

Where research concerns living things, one must ensure no negative consequences or harm (Favaretto et al., (2020), hence, crucial guidelines were followed when conducting this research. Approval was sought from the ITS Academic Research and Publications Board and obtained, prior to starting the research. (Appendix D). The researcher needed to: protect participants; develop trust; guard against any misconduct; and cope with any

emerging problems (Isreal & Hay, 2006). Major ethical issues arise when: stipulating the research problem; recognising a purpose statement; drafting research questions; and whilst gathering, analysing, and drafting up data results (Creswell, 2017). As a result, when identifying the research problem, precautions were taken to ensure that the problem identified would be beneficial and meaningful for the individuals being studied, apart from the researcher (Punch, 2005). When the purpose statement and the questions were developed, the objective of the survey was conveyed to the participants of the online questionnaire and focus groups (Sarantakos, 2005). Additionally, it was ensured that the purpose conveyed was congruent with what the researcher had in mind (Creswell, 2017). Several ethical issues arise also during data collection. It is critical not to put those who are participating at risk (Creswell, 2017). Hence, informed consent was developed by the researcher for participants to sign before they engaged in both the quantitative and qualitative research. The form contained identification of the researcher, sponsor, research purpose, and benefits of participating. It also included a confidentiality guarantee, an assurance that one can withdraw from participating at any time and contact details of the persons involved if any further clarifications are required (Sarantakos, 2005). A sincere time estimate for both was given. Finally, participants were informed that the focus groups would be recorded but if and when they wished to stop recording, they could alert the coordinator immediately (Nyumba, et al., 2018). Throughout data analysis and interpretation, the anonymity of the participants was always maintained. In fact, during both the online questionnaire and focus groups analyses, names were dissociated from the responses during the coding and recording stages. In the focus groups participants' names were not used and instead, they were henceforward referred to as participant one, participant two, etc. (Creswell, 2017). The surname of the Institute of Tourism Studies' Masters level coordinator was applied in the transcripts. She was even mentioned by several participants during the focus groups, praising her dedication and continuous support whenever they had encountered issues. Naturally, this person was informed of the researcher's intention to utilise her name and it was confirmed that it was acceptable for her. She agreed, stating that the researcher must do what best suits the dissertation. After interpretation, data will be kept for a reasonable period, as recommended by Sieber (1998), who asserts 5-10 years, and subsequently destroyed (Creswell, 2017). Other ethical issues that were considered were those that occur during the writing and dissemination of the research. The researcher ensured that when writing, there was no bias against persons based on

gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnic groups, disability, or age (Creswell, 2017). The APA (2001) guidelines were followed wherein the language presented was unbiased; labels were not used and participants were acknowledged (Creswell, 2017).

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

### *Introduction*

The aim of this research was to analyse what has been achieved to date in terms of providing opportunities regarding lifelong learning in the field of Tourism and Hospitality. It focused on the participants' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the problems encountered, as well as the effect of career progression whilst managing studies, work, and family life. The literature review indicated that limited recent data is available regarding the opportunities available to the female gender, as well as their motivation and expectations. Furthermore, it was also concluded that research on the way females cope differently to males in the working environment is lacking, hence, this study has also delved into studying and managing family life, especially in Malta. The main objective behind the online questionnaire was to analyse whether there are significant differences between males and females in the satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance between working and studying. The aim of the focus groups was to analyse the motivation and expectations of women in further detail.

Of the 116 participants in the online questionnaire (Appendix A), twelve (10%) were excluded as they did not meet the study criteria of being in full time employment and studying at the same time. Subsequently, forty women were chosen from the questionnaire respondents to participate in three focus groups. Twenty-one women expressed initial interest, but eventually only nineteen women participated in the focus groups. Refer to Appendix B for the focus group questions.

The research findings are presented into two sections:

1. The quantitative research findings derived from the online questionnaire which will be presented through: demographic data and graphs of the sample; descriptive statistics of the Likert scale questions, including histograms, measures of central tendency such as the mean, mode and median and measures of variability such as the standard deviation, the skewness and kurtosis; and inferential statistics to compare the two groups through T-tests and the confirmation or the disproving of the null hypothesis.
2. The qualitative research findings derived from the focus groups will be presented through Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006).



## Demographic Data – Online Questionnaire

### Gender

Figure 1 illustrates that there were 51% (N=53) female participants and 49% (N=51) male participants.

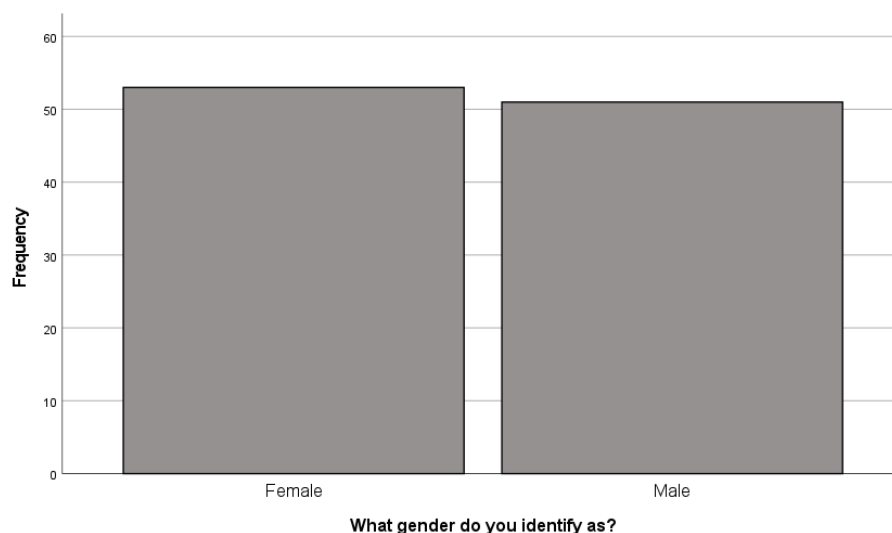


Figure 1 – Gender

### Nationality

Figure 2 shows that 91% (N=95) of the participants were Maltese, 8% (N=8) European and 1% (N=1) non-European. All non-Maltese participants were female.

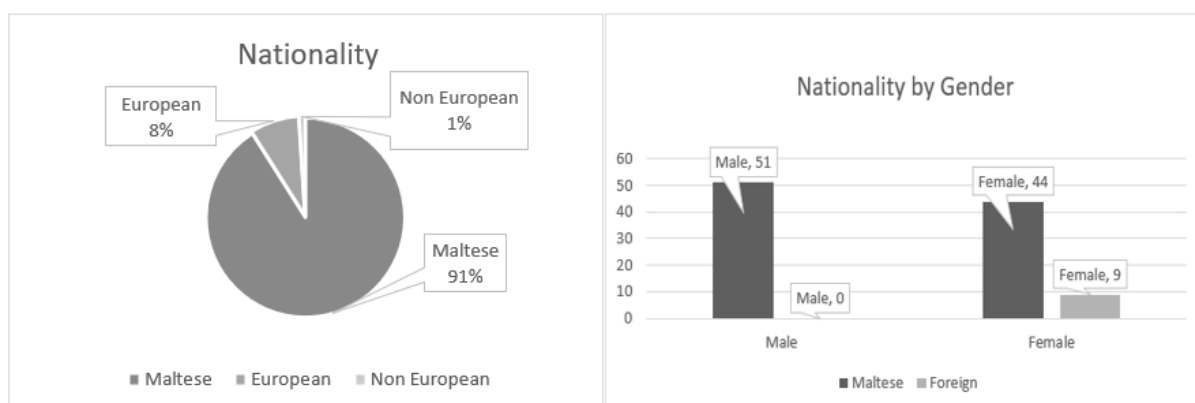


Figure 2 - Nationality, Nationality by Gender

## Level of Education

Figure 3 affirms that most of the respondents, 79% (N=81), possess a tertiary level of education. Another 18% (N=19) have post-secondary level of education, whilst 4% (N=4) have secondary level of education.

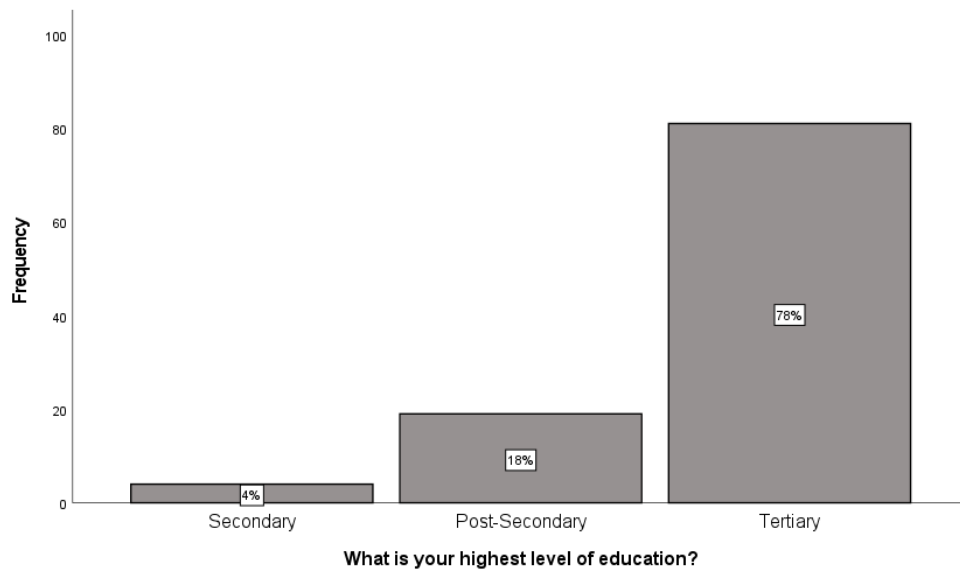


Figure 3 - Level of Education

## Employment Status

Figure 4 illustrates that 94% (N=98) are employed, whilst only 6% (N=6) are self-employed.



Figure 4 - Employment Status

## Employment Sector

Figure 5 indicates that 77% (N=80) are employed within the tourism industry whilst 23% (N=24) are employed in other sectors which are not related to tourism and hospitality.



Figure 5 - Employment Sector

## Level of Training

Figure 6 proves that 52% (N=54) were following training at Master level, 13% (N=14) at Degree level, another 13% (N=14) at Diploma level and 21% (N=22) at Certificate level.

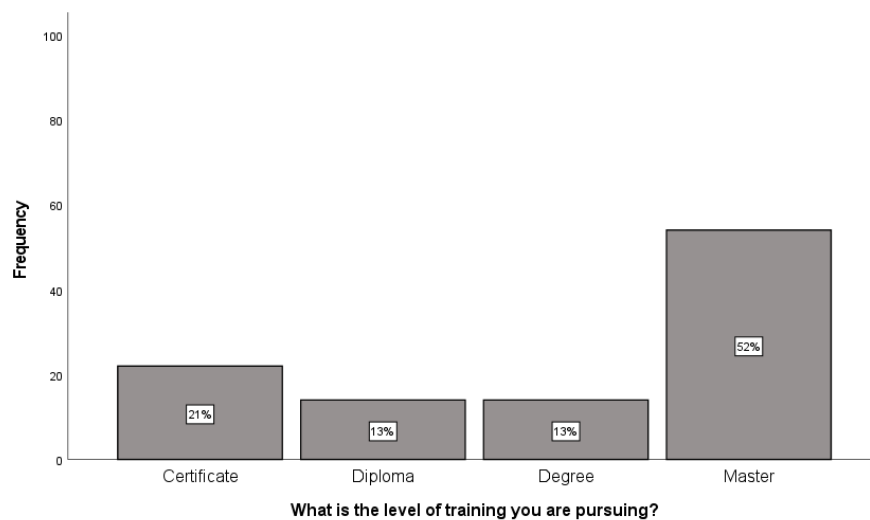


Figure 6 - Training Level

## Descriptive Statistics

### 1. Lifelong Learning Opportunities before the COVID-19 Pandemic.

From the histogram it can be concluded that 69% (N=71) agreed that opportunities of online learning already existed. Only 10% (N=11) disagreed and 21% (N=22) remained neutral. From the distribution curve it can be verified that there is a negatively skewed distribution (-0.906) and a normal/medium kurtosis (0.957) (Figure 7). The descriptive statistics show that the median and mode are the same, whilst the mean is almost the same, indicating a fairly symmetrical distribution. The standard deviation is 0.86, thus revealing that the majority of responses are close to the mean. A normality check was performed and the normal probability plot shows a fairly normal distribution (Figure 8).

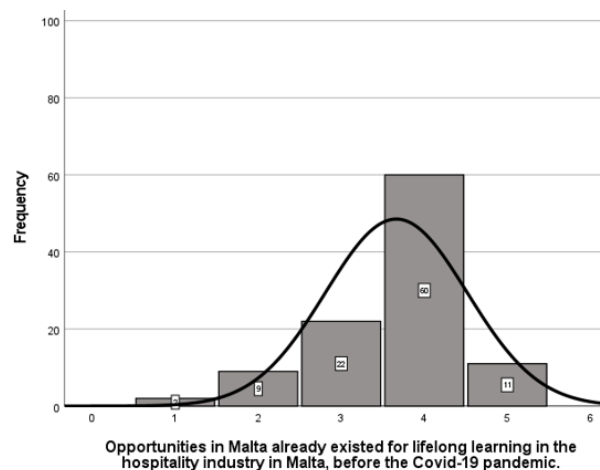


Figure 7 - Question 1: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		3.66
Median		4.00
Mode		4
Std. Deviation		.855
Skewness		-.906
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		.957
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

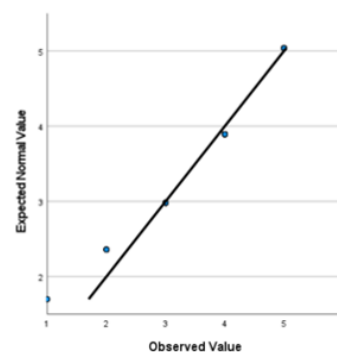


Figure 8 - Question 1: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

## 2. Unemployment due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

From the histogram below it can be understood that 75% (N=78) disagreed with this statement. Only 12% (N=12) specified that they became unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst 13% (N=14) remained neutral. The distribution is positively skewed (1.363) with a medium curve (Figure 9). The median and mode are the same and the mean is slightly higher, thus confirming an almost normal distribution. The standard deviation (1.25) indicates that responses are near to the mean. These results have been substantiated with the probability plot (Figure 10).

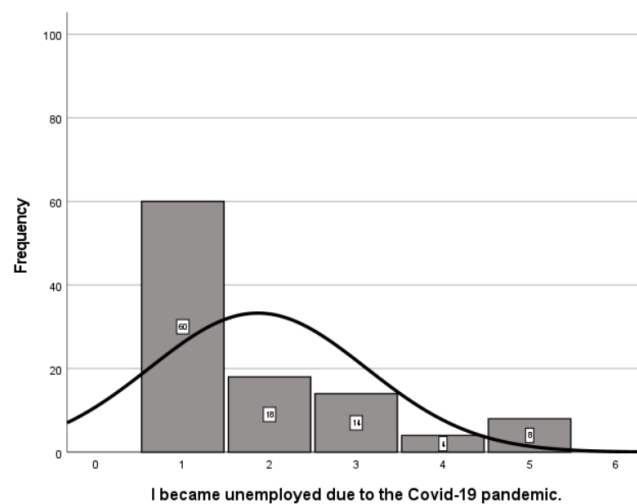


Figure 9 - Question 2: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		1.87
Median		1.00
Mode		1
Std. Deviation		1.247
Skewness		1.363
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		.796
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

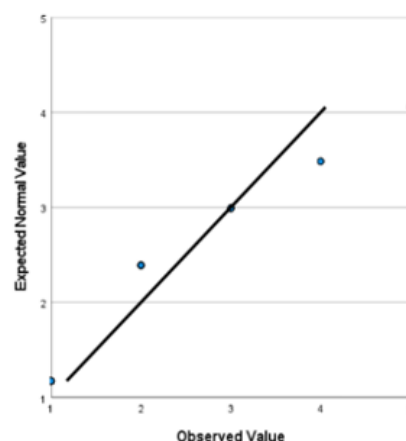


Figure 10 - Question 2: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

### 3. Effects of the COVID-19 on Career Progression

The histogram shows that 49% (N=51) disagreed that COVID-19 affected their career progression, 20% (N=21) were neutral and 31% (N=32) agreed. The distribution is positively skewed (0.262). The histogram shows that responses are almost equally distributed, showing a flat kurtosis and a normally distributed bell curve (Figure 11). As predicted from the statistics and the histogram, the probability plot elucidates a normal distribution (Figure 12).

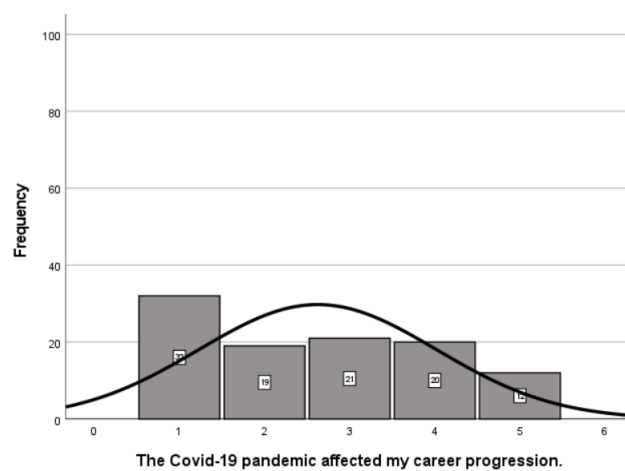


Figure 11 - Question 3: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		2.63
Median		3.00
Mode		1
Std. Deviation		1.395
Skewness		.262
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		-1.241
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

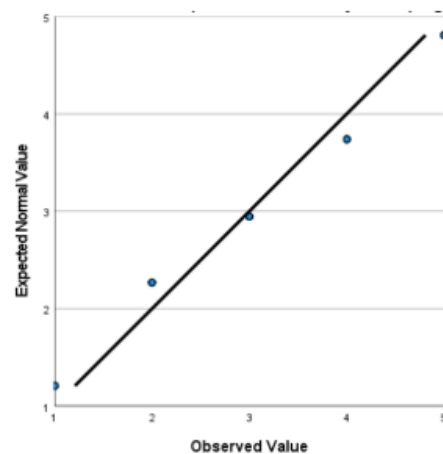


Figure 12 - Question 3: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

#### 4. Increase of Online Learning Opportunities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Most responses, 86% (N=89), acceded that online learning opportunities increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 4% (N=4) disagreed and the remaining 10% (N=11) were neutral. The distribution line shows a negative skew (-1.21) and a fair peak in the curve (Figure 13). The mean, median and mode are almost the same, with a standard deviation of 0.81 indicating a symmetrical distribution. This was confirmed by the probability plot which has attested a normal distribution (Figure 14).

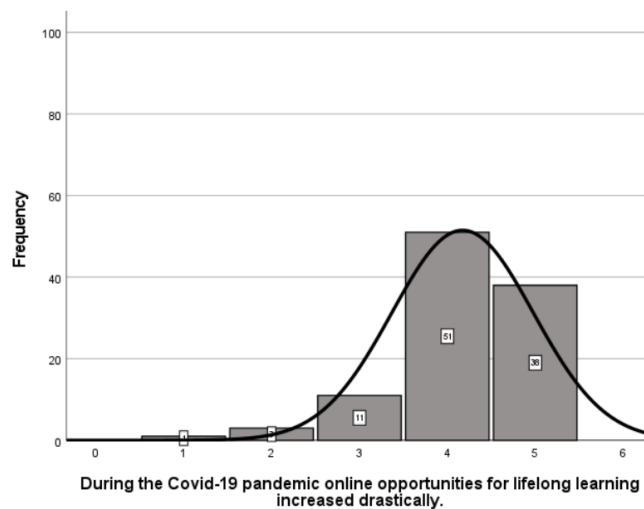


Figure 13 - Question 4: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		4.17
Median		4.00
Mode		4
Std. Deviation		.806
Skewness		-1.121
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		1.960
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

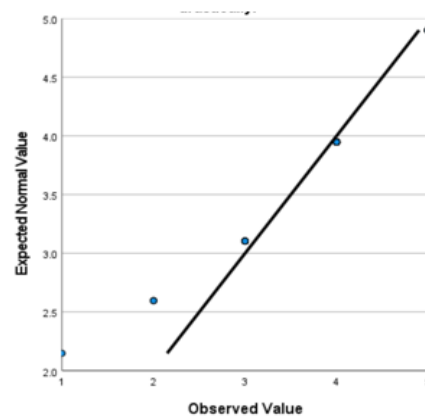


Figure 14 - Question 4: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

## 5. Problems Encountered whilst Studying, Working, and Managing Family Life

In this context, 72% (N=75) admitted that they encountered problems during their studies. Only 8% (N=8) stated that they had no issues, whilst 20% (N=21) remained neutral. The distribution indicates negatively skewed results (-0.8) (Figure 15). The mean, median and mode are almost the same, with standard deviation of 0.96, indicating a symmetrical distribution substantiated by the probability plot which shows a normal distribution (Figure 16).

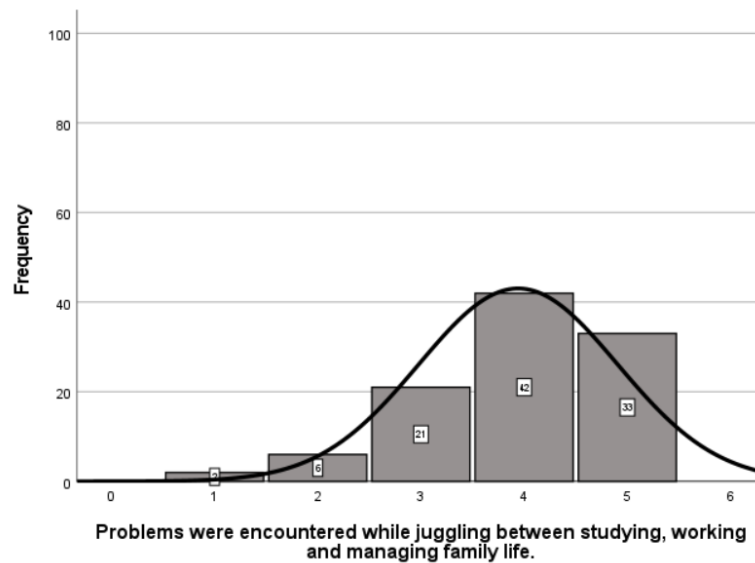


Figure 15 - Question 5: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		3.94
Median		4.00
Mode		4
Std. Deviation		.964
Skewness		-.812
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		.409
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

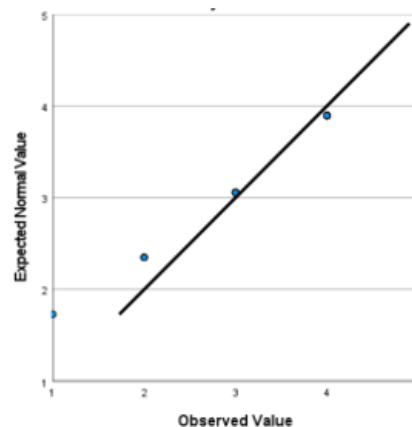


Figure 16 - Question 5: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot



## 6. Training Institutions Assistance

The histogram shows that 64% (N=67) declared that the Institute they were studying with was extremely helpful. Only 6% (N=6) disagreed whilst 30% (N=31) preferred to remain neutral. The distribution line shows a slightly negative skewed line (-0.67) (Figure 17). The mean, median and mode are almost the same indicating a symmetrical distribution. The standard deviation is lower than one (SD=0.92) denoting that most responses are near to the mean. All this is confirmed by the probability plot which has shown a normal distribution (Figure 18).

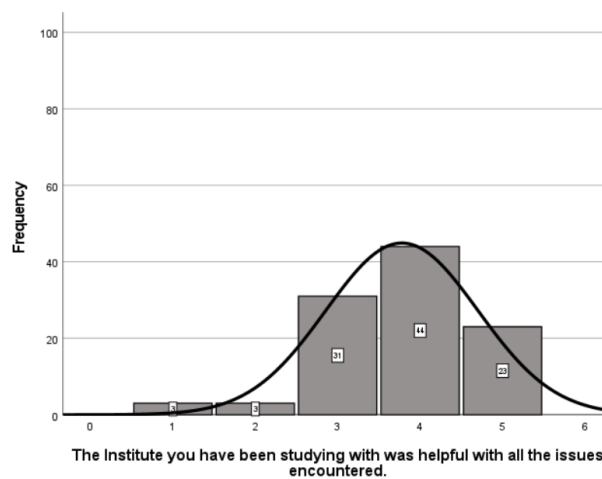


Figure 17 - Question 6: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		3.78
Median		4.00
Mode		4
Std. Deviation		.924
Skewness		-.672
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		.747
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

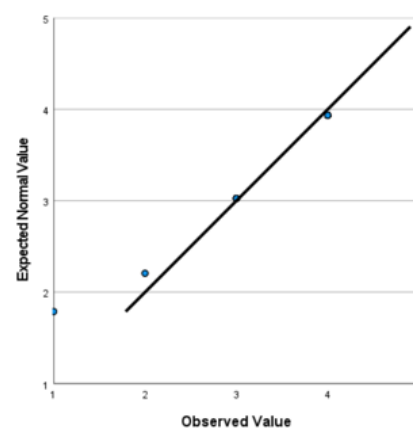


Figure 18 - Question 6: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

## 7. Online Lessons Provided were Ideal to Juggle Better Work-life Responsibilities

The histogram displays 73% (N=76) affirming that the online lessons were an ideal way to balance work and personal obligations. Only 3% (N=3) disagreed, whilst 24% (N=25) remained neutral. The distribution curve is slightly to the right, thus indicating negative skewness (-0.771) (Figure 19). The mean, median and mode are almost the same and the standard deviation is lower than 1 (SD=0.86), all indicating a symmetrical distribution. The peak (kurtosis) is relatively high (1.16). The probability plot confirmed this analysis, confirming a normal distribution (Figure 20).

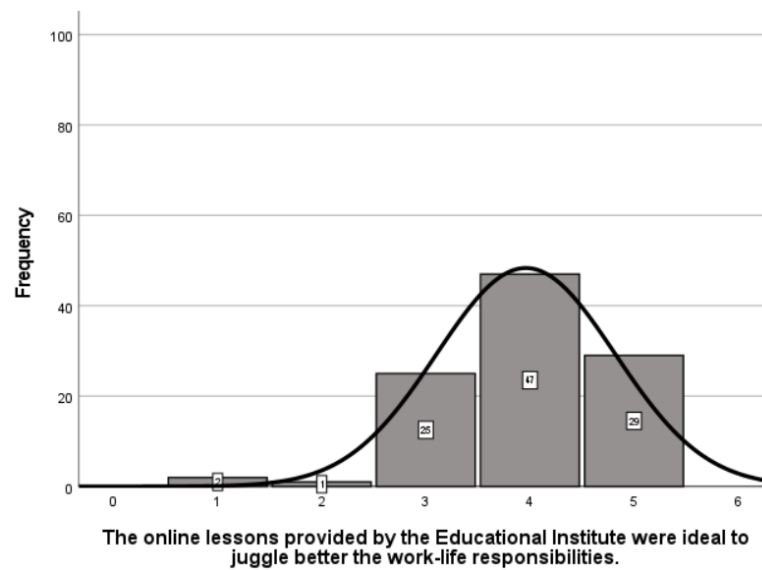


Figure 19 - Question 7: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		3.96
Median		4.00
Mode		4
Std. Deviation		.858
Skewness		-.771
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		1.157
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

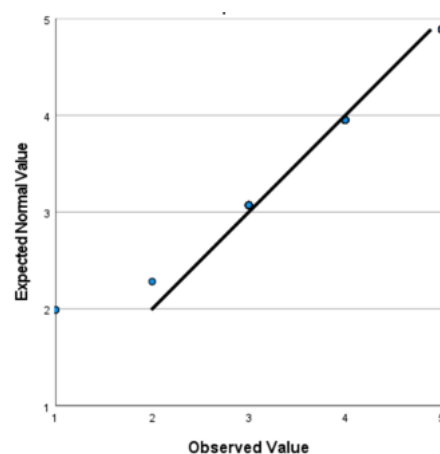


Figure 20 - Question 7: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

## 8. The Effect on Completion of Studies with the Gradual Revival of Tourism and the Increase in Tourism Numbers.

From the histogram below, 27% (N=28) agreed that they were affected, 35% (N=36) remained neutral, whilst 38% (N=40) disagreed and stated they were not affected. The flat curve shows a normal distribution with a slightly positive skewness of 0.14 (Figure 21) The mean, median and mode (M= 2.84, SD = 1.167) are almost the same indicating a symmetrical distribution confirmed by the probability plot which shows a normal distribution (Figure 22).

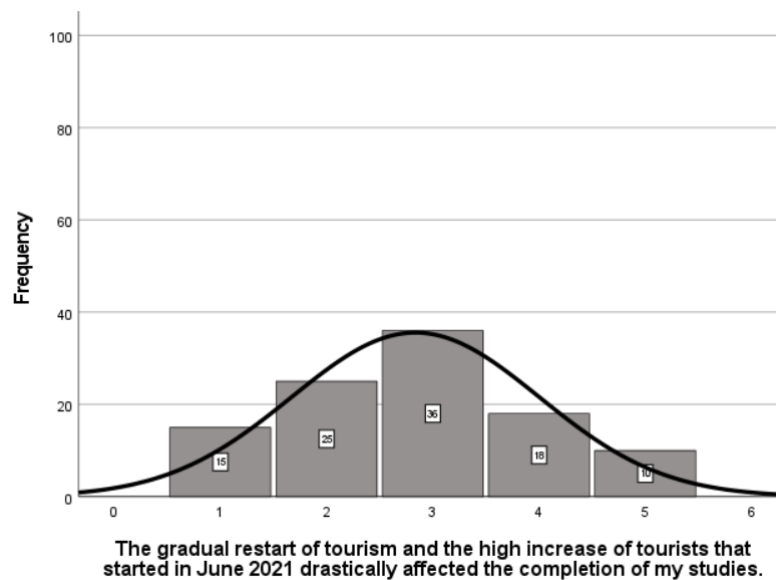


Figure 21 - Question 8: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		2.84
Median		3.00
Mode		3
Std. Deviation		1.167
Skewness		.138
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		-.674
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

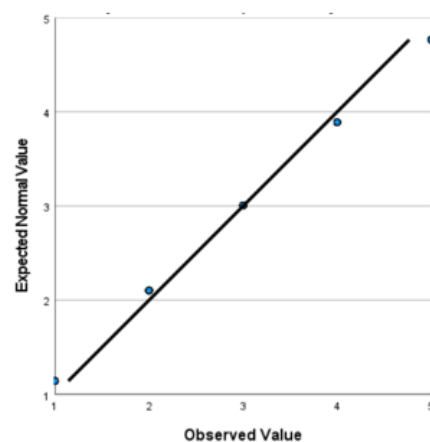


Figure 22 - Question 8: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

## 9. Expectations of Participants for after the COVID-19 Pandemic

Optimistically, 64% (N= 67) retain positive expectations for after the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who preferred to remain neutral amounted to 27% (N=28), whilst 9% (N=9) do not have positive expectances for after the COVID-19 pandemic. The distribution curve tends to the right showing negative skewness and a medium curve (Figure 23). The mean, (M=3.72), median and mode are almost the same indicating a symmetrical distribution with a standard deviation lower than one (SD= 0.88), thus denoting that the majority of responses are near to the mean. The probability plot shows a normal distribution (Figure 24).

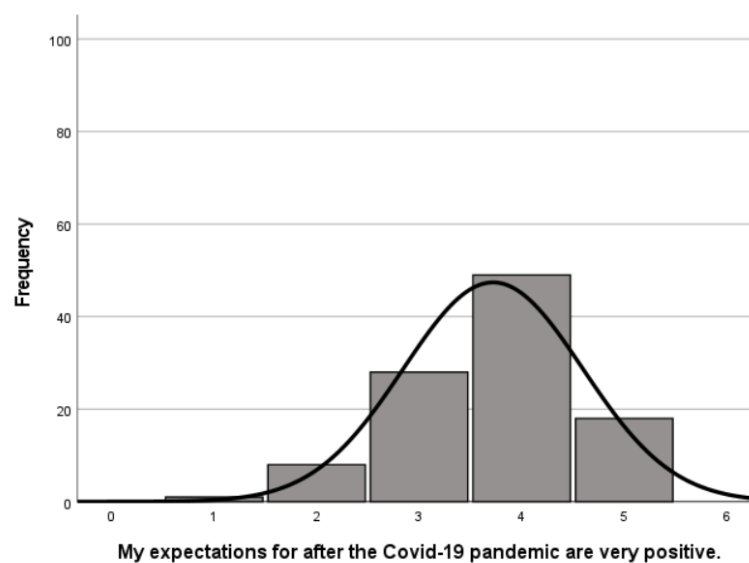


Figure 23 - Question 9: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		3.72
Median		4.00
Mode		4
Std. Deviation		.875
Skewness		-.483
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		.085
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

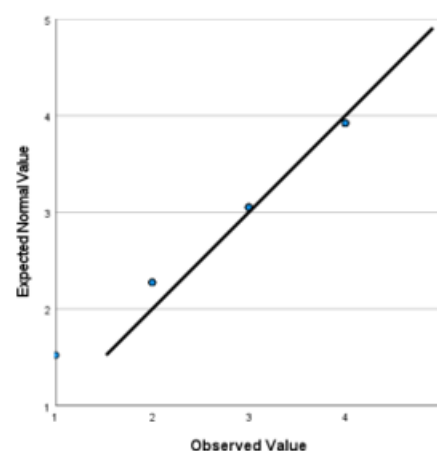


Figure 24 - Question 9: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

## 10. Opportunities for Career Progression for after the COVID-19 Pandemic

In this regard, 56% (N=59) are optimistic about the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and believe that opportunities for progression will increase. Only 5% (N=5) disagree with this statement and 38% (N=40) preferred to remain neutral. The curve shows a normal/medium curve distribution (Figure 25) The mean (M=3.67) and median are almost the same and the mode is common for two responses, as the number of persons who responded neutral and the number of respondents who agreed is the same (38%), with a standard deviation lower than one (SD=0.90). The probability plot shows a normal distribution (Figure 26).

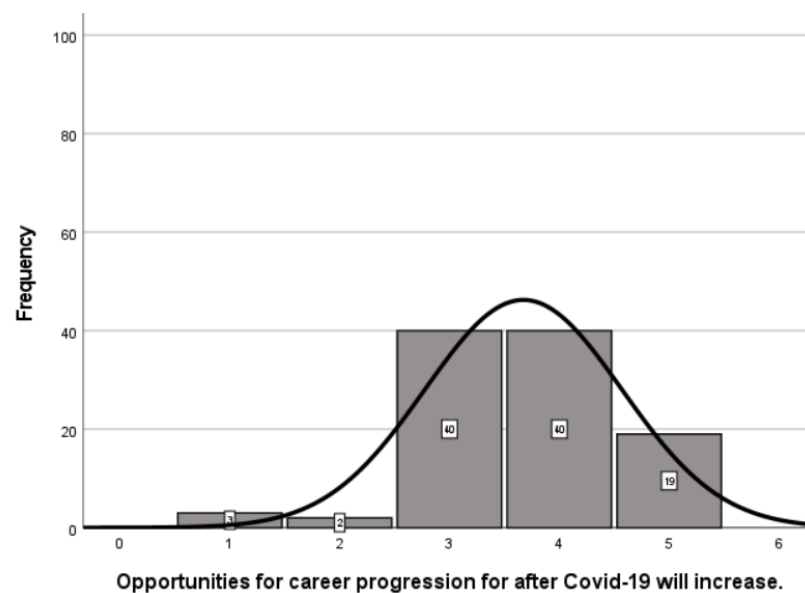


Figure 25 - Question 10: Histogram

N	Valid	104
	Missing	0
Mean		3.67
Median		4.00
Mode		3 <sup>a</sup>
Std. Deviation		.897
Skewness		-.454
Std. Error of Skewness		.237
Kurtosis		.668
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.469

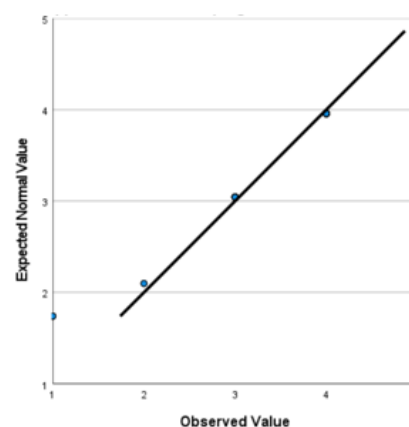


Figure 26 - Question 10: Descriptive Statistics, Normality Plot

## *Inferential Statistics*

An Independent Sample T-Test was performed for each Likert question to determine whether any differences existed between the two-sample means (females and males). For each of the ten questions, the T-value was always smaller than the critical value. The critical value was calculated and resulted in a  $t(102) = 1.66$ ;  $p > 0.05$  and the confidence interval always crossing 0 (Refer to Figure 27). Results delineated that the null hypothesis for each question cannot be rejected.

Therefore, the main Null Hypothesis has not been rejected:

Ho: With 95% confidence, the researcher ascertained that there is no statistically significant difference between the sample mean of women and men in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance.

Statements		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
Opportunities in Malta already existed for lifelong learning in the hospitality industry in Malta, before the Covid-19 pandemic.	Equal variances assumed	14.949	0.000	-0.955	102	0.171	0.342	-0.160	0.168	-0.493	0.172
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.965	83.072	0.169	0.337	-0.160	0.166	-0.490	0.170
I became unemployed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.	Equal variances assumed	2.173	0.143	1.124	102	0.132	0.264	0.275	0.244	-0.210	0.759
	Equal variances not assumed			1.129	97.750	0.131	0.262	0.275	0.243	-0.208	0.757
The Covid-19 pandemic affected my career progression.	Equal variances assumed	0.839	0.362	-0.298	102	0.383	0.767	-0.082	0.275	-0.627	0.463
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.298	101.751	0.383	0.766	-0.082	0.274	-0.626	0.462
During the Covid-19 pandemic online opportunities for lifelong learning increased drastically.	Equal variances assumed	1.676	0.198	-1.764	102	0.040	0.081	-0.276	0.156	-0.586	0.034
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.758	98.188	0.041	0.082	-0.276	0.157	-0.587	0.035
Problems were encountered while juggling between studying, working and managing family life.	Equal variances assumed	0.932	0.337	-0.394	102	0.347	0.695	-0.075	0.190	-0.451	0.302
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.395	100.397	0.347	0.694	-0.075	0.189	-0.450	0.301
The Institute you have been studying with was helpful with all the issues encountered.	Equal variances assumed	7.684	0.007	0.364	102	0.358	0.717	0.066	0.182	-0.295	0.427
	Equal variances not assumed			0.361	84.390	0.360	0.719	0.066	0.183	-0.299	0.431
The online lessons provided by the Educational Institute were ideal to juggle better the work-life responsibilities.	Equal variances assumed	0.827	0.365	1.386	102	0.084	0.169	0.232	0.168	-0.100	0.565
	Equal variances not assumed			1.381	95.600	0.085	0.171	0.232	0.168	-0.102	0.566
The gradual restart of tourism and the high increase of tourists that started in June 2021 drastically affected the completion of my studies.	Equal variances assumed	0.006	0.940	-0.391	102	0.348	0.696	-0.090	0.230	-0.546	0.366
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.391	101.763	0.348	0.697	-0.090	0.230	-0.546	0.366
My expectations for after the Covid-19 pandemic are very positive.	Equal variances assumed	0.303	0.583	0.621	102	0.268	0.536	0.107	0.172	-0.235	0.448
	Equal variances not assumed			0.620	100.785	0.268	0.537	0.107	0.172	-0.235	0.449
Opportunities for career progression for after Covid-19 will increase.	Equal variances assumed	3.165	0.078	1.390	102	0.084	0.168	0.243	0.175	-0.104	0.591
	Equal variances not assumed			1.383	93.548	0.085	0.170	0.243	0.176	-0.106	0.593

Table 1 - Independent Sample T-Test Results

## *Focus Groups Thematic Analysis*

### Introduction

The focus groups' objective was to delve into further detail on what was concluded from the online questionnaire. Questions from the online questionnaire were selected and elaborated on, to obtain further information from the focus groups. The questions were open-ended and six recurring themes were extracted. A sample of the focus group transcripts (Focus Group 1, Question 1) can be found in Appendix C. The themes identified are Stress/Anxiety; Expectations; Equality; Adaptations; Motivations and Empowerment.

### Stress/Anxiety

When asked to elaborate on the problems encountered during their studies (where CPD was done during working hours), the focus group respondents mentioned various issues that emanated stress and anxiety in them. Interruptions were cited by six participants of the focus groups, with the main example being from young children. Another person reported interruptions from colleagues at work and another participant disclosed interruptions from elderly family members at home.

Personally, the downside of online learning is the distractions that you get when you have young kids and thus, not being able to participate during the discussions. I was able to follow, but then I couldn't contribute.

Lack of socialising was observed by three participants when asked about the disadvantages of online learning, however, it was still confirmed that it is the best solution for working women when studying.

I did miss the human element. Unfortunately, I did not even get to know all my colleagues. That was, I think, the weakest link. Today, we are practically almost done with our thesis, and I still don't know some of them. I like to socialise, obviously because at that point, it was the only socialisation I was getting.

No delineation between work, study, and family life was inferred by two participants in one of the focus groups.

And as XXXX said, there was no proper delineation between one element of my life and the other. It was all mixed up. And so yes, it affected my focus and it definitely affected my emotional well-being, yes.

A guilt feeling was insinuated by four participants; two stated that they felt discomfited for spending less time with their family and children, and two others described the guilt they felt for not participating and collaborating as much during workgroups and discussions due to other family issues or young children requiring their attention at the same time.

I had this feeling of guilt. Now, I do not know whether I would have had it, had it not been online. Whether we know about the COVID scenario, or not, I would probably still have had this feeling of being torn between the needs of my family and my own personal needs.

The lack and a definite lower supply of staff in the Tourism Industry due to the re-opening of tourism, since they had either left Malta due to COVID-19 or found more secure jobs, was mentioned by three participants. The remaining staff had more work on their plates but were still required to meet assignment deadlines and attend lectures as it was mandatory during the initial lockdown.

We had three times a week, and we thought COVID-19 was over, so we started living again. But then companies within the tourism industries could not find tourist guides because they were scared to work in the industry. They did not want to mix with people. Some were pregnant, others with babies, and others had found other jobs, especially the younger ones. So we had a lot of work with fewer workers and still needed to continue studying.

When asked to identify any issues encountered with the Institute the focus group members were studying with, substantially, the replies were incredibly positive, and the setbacks encountered were minimal. Noteworthy mentioning were the hindrances encountered with the University of Malta. More than one student mentioned the mismanagement of the UoM when switching to online teaching due to COVID-19.

The only issues I had with my university came up during my last semester when we shifted to online classes. I did feel like there was a lack of care towards the students; our mental health and everything. And it was just so hectic, there was really no room for error. That being our last year, it was an especially important part of our life as we were going to get the degree. So that was the only issue I encountered, which I can't fully blame on them. But yes, that's how I feel about it; like they didn't really care as they should have.



All the above lead to the conclusion that it was extremely hard to manage work, studying and family life; consequently, people were more anxious and stressed.

On a positive note, various focus group participants mentioned that they had no issues with their Institute and that their Institutes/Universities were immensely helpful. A particular matter discussed was the assistance experienced from their Institute when facing psychological issues.

ITS has been extremely helpful. I mean, from personal experience, especially with Doctor Thornhill, she was there for me when I got stuck a bit, following up on me. When we finished, by the end of January, I believe it was during our Human Resources module, I said let's continue. For me, the worst struck was being Russian and having relatives in Ukraine it was very emotional for me. This military action, but even the information was like I'm seeing one thing here on the TV and hearing another thing from my relatives. So, it was getting a bit difficult, you know, and it was hard for me to concentrate on the thesis, you know. So, I approached Doctor Thornhill and she was caring, understanding, and helpful.

## Expectations

When directed to their expectations for after the COVID-19 pandemic the responses were mixed with many highlighting their worries about the war in Ukraine and consequently, the increase in prices and the gap created in hospitality skills due to COVID-19.

And so, in general, I'm obviously concerned, probably like everyone else, about the geopolitical situation in Europe and the war in Ukraine, of course. And its effects on us.

The negative side is that it has disrupted entire industries like the tourism industry, especially with the Labour force statistics stating the skills that we've lost. People have gone on to more secure industries and they will not be coming back because they're afraid that this crisis will be repeated. So, the tourism industry must work really hard to attract these trusted people again.

Simultaneously, respondents were also optimistic about the development of remote working after COVID-19, the revival of tourism, and the feeling that everything would return back to 'normal'.

The most positive [aspect] is that a lot of companies are switching to hybrid or fully teleworking. For me, that is the most positive thing, and I think it's very helpful for females

because we are the default parents, no matter what. It has changed the travel scenario. People want to achieve their bucket lists. They don't want to wait anymore because they have a chance to go ahead and do it. It's not like you travel when you retire or for your 50th or your 40th. It's the next holiday must be great. People are searching for nature. They are searching for more road trips and family holidays. So that's very good.

But I can see that people feel the need to be normal again and I have that feeling too. As soon as masks were off, I was so happy not to wear them again.

## Equality

When prompted about what may be done to ensure gender equality in career advancement, many suggested various measures that can be implemented such as: educating everyone involved, providing childcare centres in the workplace, creating mentoring programmes for women, and assuring less discriminating interviews, amongst others. In particular, one participant cited, 'Childcare facilities at the place of work, offering flexible working hours, education and ... some form of mentoring within the organisations.'

Another major step forward would be childcare centres at the places of work like in other European countries. That way, mothers are not looked down upon for having to leave because they have a child to pick up. I think this would help. When I went back from maternity leave, XXX was six months. I mean, he spent a full day at the nursery, from 9 am till 6 pm, and at 5:30pm, no matter what, I just had to drive from Saint Julians like a maniac on the coast road. I used to leave him till 6 pm, I cannot imagine until 10 pm.

Many participants concurred that Malta still retains a patriarchal society and that ultimately, it seems that males and females can never truly be equal when it comes to progression.

But I still feel that if we conform to the traditional way more, where the woman takes care of the family, it is more difficult. I agree with the other participants who mentioned the patriarchal element and how a woman thinks twice before accepting an opportunity for promotion.

I think it's even more difficult because when it comes to career progression for a man, it's easier to decide; basically, "okay, so maybe I will be spending more time at work..." and that's it. A woman would have to think beyond that point; "Okay, so I'll be spending more time at work, which means less time at home and less time with the kids." It will never be on the same playing field.

Furthermore, there were also two first-hand experiences put forth by participants, wherein they had to sacrifice their careers due to family obligations or because it was the best thing to do, rather than because it was imposed.

Once, I turned down a promotion because I knew I would be coming back from maternity leave and I would not be able to dedicate and give my 100%, at work and at home. Once you have children, it becomes difficult. Maybe it was a mistake. Before having my son, I used to do about 50-60 hours, which is fine in hospitality; the extra pay and overtime were fine. But after [becoming a mother] I had to reduce that to 40 hours a week and stop there. Today, when I think about it, I say I would have done it differently. I would have accepted the job and if it didn't work out, I would have changed it. So, for me, it is another lesson learnt.

From my personal experience, I find that my responsibilities for my young children are what holds me back the most. And not because it is imposed upon me. It is a decision that my husband and I have taken together; his career comes before mine because financially, it makes more sense. So, basically, we decided that I would be the one sacrificing more. Since my daughter was around two years old, I had the feeling that I wanted to be present in her life. I was not forced to. My husband never told me to stop my job or whatever. But I felt that once I had kids, I wanted to be present in their lives. And so that came at the expense of my career at that stage.

## Adaptations

When asked to elaborate on the problems encountered during their studies the focus group one respondent stated that she had to adapt to online learning despite her lack of technological knowledge. Two participants mentioned the stress of returning to study after an exceptionally long period of not studying and adapting to the new reality.

A couple of months after we started, Covid hit. I had many difficulties as I don't know anything about technology. I had a computer; it was full of my grandchildren's photos and games. That's the only thing I knew how to do with computers; download games, empty my mobile camera, and look at the photos.

One participant emphasised, 'going back to studying after 30 years... the first time I didn't know what hit me.'

XXXX mentioned how she had been out of school for 30 years. For me it was longer than that! I've been a tourist guide for the last 37 years. So, it's quite a long time.

Five respondents accentuated the benefit of having a reliable support system in order to be able to juggle work, study, and life issues, and that it was a necessary adaptation to function well.

If it wasn't for my relatives and the support I've found, especially until my daughter starts nursery just next week, it would not have been possible to change jobs and study at the same time.

## Motivation

When asked about the challenges encountered whilst studying, although many participants declared that it was extremely hard, four of them stated that this was their choice, and from these responses it could be concluded that the focus group participants were highly motivated and willing to make sacrifices to succeed.

I agree with what XXXX was saying, that it was our choice. Sometimes, when you have an opportunity and you literally cannot miss that opportunity, you must take it and make the sacrifices.

When asked about the major benefits of online learning for part time women students, and why they think women find more benefits in online learning than males, ten out of eighteen participants mentioned that women can be multitaskers and thus the major benefit for online learning for them was that while following lectures, they could be doing other things.

I agree that females are better multitaskers. It's much easier to do it online. So that means that if I have an hour lecture, during that hour I can cook, I can change a nappy and probably even play a game with my daughter while listening and trying to understand.

## Empowerment

When asked about equality in career progression, two respondents made an important comment about empowerment:

I think we must start from when the kids are still young and ingrain in them [the idea] that girls have the same potential as boys, so it's ingrained in them from a very young age that they are equal. So, we must give them the tools to empower girls as much as we empower boys and not discriminate against girls.

You must ensure that if anything happens to you, at least you've a career and a particularly excellent job to land on. Because otherwise, you will not be able to assist the family in any of their needs. So, you won't have to depend on anyone.

Despite many references to the hard struggles, they faced during their studies, one focus group member mentioned how much more empowered she feels.

I feel I got empowered with more skills and knowledge. Without this knowledge, I wouldn't be the person that I am today. I can say that I have really changed, and I feel more confident as a person at work.

A concluding remark from one of the members of the focus group with regards to empowerment and independence is worth mentioning:

To end this on a positive note, I wanted to conclude that we have been discussing difficulties and challenges so far, but I also want to mention how what we do rubs off positively on our children, especially our daughters and that they feel empowered. This will show them that it is possible. It is difficult, but it is possible and what you really want to do, you can achieve. It's hard work but I think we're giving a positive image. My mom is in her seventies and when I was young, when I was growing up, I remember she always instilled in me this idea of continuous learning. "Do not ever rely on men," she used to say. "You must be independent yourself," because she herself was not allowed to do it. When she arrived at the stage of marrying my father, her father at the time had told her, "Look, you either continue studying or you get married." And then she got married, she got pregnant. And, you know, she just stopped. And she always told me, "Don't make my same mistake, just, work hard."

## Summary of Findings

From the quantitative research findings, it can be inferred that there is no difference between females and males with regards to their opinions on CPD in Malta, the institutions they studied with, their personal and career progression expectations for after COVID-19, or their views with regards to online learning. Also, both men and women had favourable opinions.

When the researcher further analysed these conclusions through three focus groups comprised of women, it was discovered that women have incredibly positive attitudes towards online learning and its advantages. When asked what can be done to ensure equal progression for women and men, the analysis reveals that women participants

think that it can never be equal mainly owing to a patriarchal society. From the focus groups' findings, it was also denoted that participants felt more empowered after their studies and believe that empowering our children, especially girls, is the key to a more equal society and future independent women.

## Chapter Five: Research Discussion

### *Introduction*

The aim of this research study was to analyse what has been achieved to date in terms of providing opportunities in CVET lifelong learning in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. During the online questionnaire, the study focused on uncovering any differences in expectations and satisfaction for work-life balance between males and females. The Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was: There is no significant difference in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance between women and men.

From the online questionnaire findings, several salient issues were identified. These were further examined qualitatively through focus groups targeting female participants only, in order to attempt further investigation about female motivation and how females cope in different ways than males whilst working, studying, and managing family life.

### *Summary of Key Findings*

The ten Likert scale items in the online questionnaire were related to awareness about CPD opportunities, the effect of COVID-19 on learning, online opportunities, and employment. Questions on work-life balance issues and expectations for after COVID-19 were also included in the online questionnaire. The questionnaire was directed to both males and females, working and studying part-time. It was established by the researcher that there is no statistical difference between the genders. Thus, the data implied that the general null hypothesis must be confirmed; there is no significant difference in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance between females and males.

The focus groups targeted only female part-time students. Thematic analysis was used to identify the main themes mentioned during the focus groups. The themes identified were: Stress/Anxiety; Expectations; Equality; Adaptations; Motivations and Empowerment.

## *Interpretation of Results*

The discussion will proceed in the same sequence as it did in Chapter Four: Research Findings.

The quantitative research findings derived from the online questionnaire and the qualitative research findings derived from the focus groups will be discussed.

### *Online Questionnaire Discussion*

The discussion will proceed in the same manner as the findings, by presenting the Likert scale statements and categorising them into distinctive areas as follows: Awareness; COVID-19 Effect; Work-life Balance; and Expectations.

#### *Awareness*

##### *Lifelong Learning Opportunities before the COVID-19 pandemic*

When the statement ‘Opportunities in Malta for Lifelong Learning in the hospitality industry in Malta already existed before the COVID-19 pandemic’ was presented in the questionnaire, 69% (N=71) agreed. The results indicate an elevated level of positive awareness about lifelong opportunities in Malta, (M=3.66, SD= 0.86). The data supports the survey conducted by Cedefop amongst Member States (MS), wherein 72% of all MS’ participants agreed that adult learning and CVET opportunities exist in their country, with Maltese participants having the highest percentage of agreement (90%); 66% totally agreeing and 14% tending to agree (Cedefop, 2020). (Refer to Table 2).

#### *COVID-19 Effect*

##### *Unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic*

When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, ‘I became unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic,’ only 12% (N=12) of the respondents verified the statement, therefore connoting a low negative impact of COVID-19 on employment (M= 1.87, SD= 1.25). This data opposed what was found in the literature review, wherein an ILO survey concluded that the prolonged lockdown and closure of workplaces in almost all countries caused considerable global employment disruptions, with 345 million jobs lost (ILO, 2020). On the other hand, the research findings are supported by the literature review available for the situation in Malta. Debattista,



Geronimi & Pace, (2022), claim that when analysing the figures from their research related to unemployment effect, many tourism/hospitality workers in Malta had their salaries guaranteed by the government's wage supplement, which was introduced in Malta to assist the industries which were affected by the pandemic, especially the hospitality and tourism industry which was the hardest hit (Malta Enterprise, 2020). (Refer to Table 2).

#### Effect of COVID-19 on career progression

When the statement 'The COVID-19 pandemic affected my career progression' was proposed, 31% (N=32) agreed with it. This indicates a minimal impact on career progression due to the COVID-19 pandemic (M=2.63, SD=1.40). The Cedefop survey concluded that the provision of CVET is essential for career progression, brings benefits to the society, economy, and industry (Cedefop, 2020) whilst instilling pride in working in the hospitality industry and improving salaries and wages (Government of Malta, 2021). (Refer to Table 2).

#### Increase of online learning opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic

When respondents were presented with the statement, 'During the COVID-19 pandemic, online opportunities for lifelong learning increased drastically', 86% (N=89) agreed. This demonstrates a significant positive impact due to the increase of online life learning opportunities (M = 4.07, SD= 0.81). This data finding is supported by the ILO survey which concluded that the use of online tools and video conferencing to deliver staff training during the COVID-19 pandemic increased by 6% and 10% respectively (ILO, 2021). (Refer to Table 2).

#### The effect on completion of studies with the gradual revival of Tourism and the increase in tourism numbers

To the statement, 'The gradual revival of tourism and the high increase of tourists that started in June 2021, drastically affected the completion of my studies,' only 27% (N=28) agreed. This data suggests that the revival of tourism during one's studies has had a moderate effect on the participants (M = 2.87, SD = 1.17). This contradicts the percentage mentioned below (72%) who accorded that they had encountered problems whilst managing studies, work, and family life. In consequence, it was decided to

further analyse this issue during the focus groups. (Refer to Focus Group Discussions and Table 2).

### *Work-life Balance*

#### Problems encountered whilst studying, working, and managing family life

When the statement ‘Problems were encountered whilst managing studies, work and family life’ was presented, 72% (N=75) stated that they are in agreement. This data suggests a substantial negative impact on work-life balance (M= 3.94, SD= 0.96). This was also corroborated by a study conducted in the USA investigating the benefits and challenges experienced whilst working and studying, wherein stress was identified as a major challenge (Schoffstall, 2013). When inferential statistics were affected, no statistical difference between males and females was registered, and both genders remarked that it was hard to manage studies, work, and family life. Conversely, Chuang (2015) states that women face more barriers than men when partaking in CPD. This contradiction was noted, and a follow-up question was posed during the focus groups to elicit further information about the predicaments encountered. (Refer to Focus Groups Discussion and Table 2).

#### Training Institutions Assistance

To the statement, ‘The Institute you have studying been with was helpful with all the issues encountered,’ 64% (N=67) agreed. The findings convey a positive impact (M=3.78, SD = 0.92) and this is supported by a study conducted by ITS lecturers amongst mature students, wherein respondents felt noticeably supported in most aspects of their course (Mifsud & Camilleri, 2022). Furthermore, it was noted that a staggering 30% (N=31) preferred to remain neutral, therefore it was decided to conduct additional research during the focus groups. In fact, participants were then asked to elaborate on any problems encountered with their Institute. (Refer to Focus Groups Discussion and Table 2).

#### Online lessons provided were ideal to better manage work-life responsibilities

To the statement that ‘The online lessons provided by the educational institute were ideal for better balancing work-life responsibilities,’ 73% (N=76) were in agreement. This finding suggests the invaluable impact of online learning in assisting with the achievement of a work-life balance (M= 3.96, SD= 0.86). This was supported by

secondary research; in a study conducted at ITS students were asked a similar question, ‘Are you satisfied with how ITS provides online learning opportunities through its services like the VLE, Office 365, MS Teams etc.?’ and 86.11% said that they were either very satisfied or satisfied (Debattista, Geronimi, and Pace, 2022). Correspondingly, another study conducted by ITS lecturing staff targeting mature students confirms the prominent positive impact of online learning, with respondents reporting that they were able to apply for the course since it was online and claiming that it would not have been possible to follow the course if it had been onsite (Mifsud & Camilleri, 2022). Debattista, Geronimi and Pace (2022) concluded that predominantly, women (part-time or full-time students) expressed a more substantial preference for online learning, than men. This occurrence was further investigated during the focus groups where participants were asked about the major benefits for part-time women students. (Refer to Focus Groups Discussion and Table 2).

### *Expectations*

#### Expectations of participants for after the COVID-19 pandemic

When presented with the statement, ‘My expectations for after COVID-19 pandemic are positive,’ 64% (N=67) agreed. These results suggest that students who completed the questionnaire had moderate to strong positive expectations (M=3.72, SD=0.88). (Refer to Table 2).

#### Opportunities for career progression for after the COVID-19 pandemic

To the statement, ‘Opportunities for career progression will increase after COVID-19,’ 56% (n=59) agreed. These results suggest moderately optimistic expectations for career progression from the students participating in the online questionnaire (M=3.67, SD=0.90). Meanwhile, in the secondary research conducted through the Cedefop survey, it was concluded that almost all respondents (96%) assent that CPD is particularly important and that CVET and adults learning will become essential to enable people to progress in their careers (Cedefop, 2020). When the online questionnaire was initially delivered, (between November 2021 – February 2022,) the global situation was very different from what was being experienced in February, with the start of the war in Ukraine. Hence, it was decided to ask these two questions again during the focus groups (held in April-May 2022) and go into further detail to discern whether expectations had changed. (Refer to Focus Groups Discussion and Table 2).

Statements	Mea n	St. Dev.
<b>Awareness</b>		
<i>Lifelong Learning Opportunities before the COVID-19 pandemic</i>	3.66	0.86
<b>Covid-19 Effect</b>		
<i>Unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic</i>	1.87	1.25
<i>Effect of COVID-19 on career progression</i>	2.63	1.40
<i>Increase of online learning opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic</i>	4.07	0.81
<i>The effect on completion of studies with the gradual revival of Tourism and the increase in tourism numbers</i>	2.87	1.17
<b>Work-Life Balance</b>		
<i>Problems encountered whilst studying, working, and managing family life</i>	3.94	0.96
<i>Training Institutions Assistance</i>	3.78	0.92
<i>Online lessons provided were ideal to better manage work-life responsibilities</i>	3.96	0.86
<b>Expectations</b>		
<i>Expectations of participants for after the COVID-19 pandemic</i>	3.72	0.88
<i>Opportunities for career progression for after the COVID-19 pandemic</i>	3.67	0.90

Table 2 - Mean and Standard Deviation Table

### *Focus Groups Discussion*

The focus group questions were derived from the online questionnaire responses. Hence, the questions posed in the focus group discussion attempted to clarify some queries raised by the online questionnaire findings. This discussion will proceed in the same order as the Research Findings.

#### **Stress/Anxiety**

Stress and anxiety were recurring themes which were mentioned by all focus group participants, especially when asked to elaborate on problems encountered whilst studying. The theme Stress/Anxiety is comprised of several sub-themes: interruptions

during lectures, mostly by children, which was extremely stressful at times as it also limited participants' ability to actively participate during lectures; lack of socialising, (although it was emphasised that the benefits of online learning outweighed the disadvantages of a lack of socialisation); lack of demarcation between work, studies and family life due to the partial lockdowns experienced; the feeling of guilt, generated by spending less time with close family; lack of staff in the tourism industry, which also implied more stress for those who remained in the industry whilst also handling studies and family life, as well as mismanagement from a particular institute when learning switched online. All the aforementioned issues that resulted in stress have been corroborated from the secondary research conducted on the subject. The COVID-19 Pandemic amplified the level of stress whilst working and studying remotely at the same time, as a lack of real human contact and face-to-face communication may have led to stressed employees (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021). Comparably, Schoffstall (2013) identified an increase in stress levels as one of the challenges of studying and working simultaneously. Finally, some of the barriers highlighted by Chuang (2015) as preventing females from taking part in CPD are family issues, time constraints, a lack of support, cost and work constraints and a lack of career guidance, all of which lead to work-life struggles, which is one of the key obstacles for women (Liu et al., 2021).

### Expectations

The primary optimistic expectations mentioned were in connection to: the future opportunities in remote working; the tourism revival in Malta; and the feeling that everything will return back to normal. In contrast, the negative aspects identified were the war in Ukraine, inflation, and the skills gap in the tourism industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of positive expectations with regards to remote working opportunities have been attested with the secondary research done on the subject, confirming that the excellent advances in technology experienced worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic have altered the way people connect and work (The Malta Chamber, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic materialised in advancements in the digitalisation processes, allowing organisations to provide their employees with remote access to work (Zhi, Ismail, & Nasuredin, 2021). The negative considerations with regards to the skills gap in the tourism industry has also been corroborated with the secondary research. Firstly, The Malta Chamber (2021) revealed that Malta has long been experiencing supply

issues in certain industries, combined with skills shortage, and that this is an urgent issue that must be attended to as understaffing may lead to a low service level which may in turn, affect reputation. Additionally, it can be asserted that the same technological advancements also retain their negative repercussions, as observed in a European Commission report stating that: ‘COVID-19 has accentuated the digital skills gap that already existed and accelerated the digital transition,’ (EC, 2018). .

### Equality

The sub-themes that emerged when inquired about can be done to ensure gender equality in career progression were: education for all involved, from young children at schools to management/employers; childcare facilities in the workplace; female mentoring programmes; and less gender discriminating interviews. There was also reference to individual experiences wherein participants had to sacrifice their career because of family commitments. An overall arching comment was that Malta retains a dominant patriarchal society and that this mentality is difficult to change, with a few participants commenting that career progression can never be equal.

The aforementioned issues also featured in the secondary research. For instance, the suggestion to include childcare facilities to support working parents transpired, with the highest level of agreement being in Malta, wherein respondents claimed that participation in work-related learning and training would be more viable if support through childcare was provided (Cedefop, 2020). The mentoring programmes suggested by the participants also emerged in a European Commission report wherein high quality CPD offered to lecturers, trainers and mentors, was perceived to act as a multiplier and mediator to a lifelong learning culture (EC, 2020). Moreover, the focus group finding that females can never be equal to males with respect to career progression is corroborated by Chuang (2015), wherein the author states that women face more barriers than men due to the apparent stereotypical role as the main carer within the family, thus generating a gender role disparity in the workplace and in pay. Finally, the issue of sacrifice also surfaced in the research with Thornthwaite (2002) stating that females prefer a part-time job more than their male counterparts when taking into consideration their children’s upbringing.

## Adaptations

When asked to expand on the problems encountered whilst studying, participants described adjustments that they had to make due to their circumstances. They enunciated the lack of technological knowledge, and therefore, how they had to adapt and learn to use new IT software in a remarkably brief time assisted by the Institute staff; returning to studying after an exceptionally long time, which appeared to cause particular distress to two participants; and finally, the advantage of having a reliable support system at home.

The literature seems to validate the aforementioned themes. With regards to technological knowledge, a study done by Camilleri & Mifsud (2022) concluded that since students moved to online learning, difficulties related to technology were experienced, however, these were resolved through the support of the ITS' IT staff and lecturers. Similarly, the finding of returning to studying after a long time was corroborated by a study conducted by Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (1974) which identified three main deterrents, one of which being the situational/personal factors, such as feeling too old. With regards to the finding pertaining to the importance of a strong support system, the Cedefop survey affirmed the significance of friends and family as the principal means of support to be able to participate in adult learning and CVET (Cedefop, 2020).

## Motivations

When asked to elaborate on the problems encountered during their studies, although the majority of the participants consented that it was awfully hard for them, they all clarified that they were willing to make sacrifices such as lack of time with family, multitasking between family and work responsibilities and managing to study at the same time, and having less leisure time, in order to achieve what was ultimately their choice.

This perseverance to succeed in women was also one of the identified elements in the literature review. In 2016, Eurostat (2020) reported a higher share of European women participating in CPD than men. In conjunction, the female participation rate for adult learning in 2018 was 2% higher than for males, with Malta registering a female participation rate of 13.4% in 2019, compared to 10.7% for males, thus constituting both rates being higher than the European average rates (Ministry for Education and

Employment, 2020). Another question was posed about the major benefits of online learning for part-time women students. During the focus groups participants were informed that through a study conducted at ITS by Debattista, Geronimi & Pace (2022), it was concluded that females perceive more benefits in e-learning than males. Many of the participants concurred with the aforementioned study as women were seen as better multitaskers and as a result, it proves easier to do two things at the same time whilst following online training. The participants' motivation was almost tangible, felt through their utterances; they were willing and inclined to reach the targets they set for themselves.

### Empowerment

The empowerment theme arose during the focus groups on a few occasions. When prompted about career progression for women, one participant mentioned that although it was challenging, following the learning experience, she felt empowered with new skills and knowledge, as well as confident in her workplace. The same participant also remarked on the effectiveness of empowering girls as much as boys, to instil in them the belief that they are as able to succeed as males, and thus, to have more equal progression. As a concluding remark, another participant observed that even though it was extremely challenging, she felt that she served as an example to her children, especially her daughter, to persevere in the achievement of their/her goals, demonstrating that although at times something may appear difficult to achieve, it is never impossible. In relation to this, a study with the focus of exploring the effect of empowerment through CVET courses for unemployed and active workers in Spain, showed that almost 60% of the participants perceived high empowerment (Mara, Cascón-Pereira & Brunet Icart, 2022).



## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter provides the main findings derived from the research, in relation to the research aims, objectives and hypothesis posed. It will identify actions from the research findings that may serve as contribution to practitioners within the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. It will also recognise the limitations of the research and conclude with a proposal of recommendations for future research, derived from the insights gained through the study.

The primary research's intention was to analyse what has been achieved to date in connection with providing opportunities regarding lifelong learning in the field of Tourism and Hospitality. It focused on the individuals' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the problems encountered, along with the effect of career progression whilst managing studies, work, and family life. This part of the analysis was pursued via secondary research through the literature available.

The aim of the main hypothesis was to investigate whether any differences exist between males and females in satisfaction and expectations for work-life balance. This was firstly attempted through the online questionnaire wherein questions focused on specific areas that were found to be lacking in the literature review. Results denoted that there is no statistical difference between males and females and therefore, the null hypothesis was confirmed.

Once the null hypothesis was confirmed by the online questionnaire, three focus groups were conducted in order to analyse the motivations and expectations of women in further detail. Participants were asked open-ended questions to further elaborate on: the problems encountered whilst working and studying; progression issues for females; expectations for after the COVID-19 pandemic; and the benefits of online learning. The focus groups attempted to bridge the literature gap established earlier about how females cope differently to males in the working environment whilst studying and managing family life. The research findings affirm that women's expectations and motivations are affected by stress management; equality issues that affect equal progression; other adjustments required by women; and the feeling of empowerment emanating from CPD.

## *Research Study Contributions in Practice*

Based on the research findings, especially from the literature review and focus group discussions, three specific actions have been identified. The Tourism and Hospitality practitioners are thus able to implement specific measures to improve situations in the workplace and make career progression more equally accessible.

### *Childcare Support*

One of the primary issues to encourage more adults to participate in work-related learning and training proposed in a Cedefop survey, was childcare support; with the highest level of agreement registered between Maltese participants (Cedefop, 2020). During the focus groups, the interruptions experienced from the students (generally by their children) were mentioned several times as being one of the main reasons for finding it hard to manage studies and family life. Another issue itemised during the focus groups was the lack of childcare facilities close to or within workplaces in Malta. Although childcare facilities already exist and are freely accessible to all (Government of Malta, 2020), childcare facilities in the workplace are lacking. With the introduction of this amenity, parents would not need to leave earlier to pick up their kids, since as participants have pointed out, those that always need to leave prematurely, eventually tend to be regarded less favourably for promotion and/or progression. Furthermore, onsite childcare is beneficial when employees have atypical/long hours of work as is the case for the hospitality industry.

In Malta, the tourism and hospitality businesses are made up of micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Out of 4,820 employers in the Accommodation & Food Services, 4,399 are micro, 416 are SMEs and only five are large (Jobsplus, 2022). The viability of childcare nurseries in the place of work is sometimes linked to economies of scale, however, this should not be the case. The benefits outweigh the cost, with reduction in absenteeism, lower turnover as it impacts the loyalty and commitment of the employees (ILO, 2022), reduction of stressed and anxious employees and an increase in the parent/guardian's full attention on their assigned duties (Lobell, 2020).

### *Women Mentoring Programmes*

During the focus groups, participants were asked about their expectations for career progression after the COVID-19 pandemic and also to elaborate on what can be done to ensure that career progression is equally accessible for both genders. One of the suggestions put forward was mentoring programmes for women employees, particularly in the workplace.

COVID-19 has had a greater negative impact on working women than men, with employment losses being 5% higher for women than for men (ILO, 2021). The policy recommendations emphasised the usefulness of funding for skilling, upskilling and reskilling and enhancing the equity of access for both genders (ILO, 2021). An implemented mentoring programme in America resulted in a quarter of the participating employees receiving an increased salary grade compared to only 5% of the employees who did not take part in the mentoring programme (Kramer, 2021). In order to be effective, mentoring programmes must have in place: the programme's goals definition, the right selection of participants, a good match of mentees and mentors, and most importantly, provision of training for the mentors (Indeed, 2022). The introduction of mentoring programmes by the Maltese Tourism and Hospitality practitioners would benefit all involved, that is, the mentor, mentee and the company employing them (Reeves, 2021).

### *Supporting Lifelong Learners*

Lifelong learning is essential for sustainability and long-term growth in particular with small and medium sized enterprises (EC, 2018), which incorporates the majority of the tourism industry in Malta (Jobsplus, 2022). During the focus groups, participants admitted one source of the stress experienced during their studies was the lack of knowledge of digital skills and the return to study after a long time. Participants confirmed that they had to adapt rapidly and because at times, this felt too daunting, they were on the verge of resigning more than once. Pertaining to this, they admitted that in the absence of the support received from their family and friends, they might have renounced their studies. Moreover, they also alluded to the support they received from the Institute, such as lecturers, administrators, and ITS technical people.

In a study conducted by Camilleri & Mifsud (2022), suggestions were made for a preparatory course on: academical writing skills, study skills, IT skills such as the use of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), Teams, presentation skills, and other IT software knowledge required depending on the course being followed. Meanwhile, during the focus groups, when asked about the issues they encountered with their learning Institutes, students remarked on the lack of formal feedback from certain lecturers. The study by Camilleri & Mifsud (2022) also corroborates this finding.

Therefore, it is being suggested that when tourism and hospitality training providers implement CPD training, preparatory courses are held so that students can acquire basic knowledge and skills before embarking on a study programme. Furthermore, effective communication skills during the course are imperative, particularly, valuable feedback, which is essential for students to improve their performance (Orrell, 2006).

These measures would foster a holistic, supportive environment, wherein part-time, lifelong learning students are assisted in being well-equipped with the necessary tools to learn, prior to, during and even following their studies. This would also help in mitigating stress levels wherever possible, considering this may be a cause for an increase in dropouts (Pascoe, Hetrick & Parker, 2020).

### *Limitations*

### *Literature Review Gap*

The extensive literature review revealed gaps of information in specific areas. The main gaps in research were found with regards to women and work-life balance issues, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation, and sustainability for human resources working in the Tourism and Hospitality industry in Malta. Whilst the gap related to women and work-life balance issues was addressed by the primary research, other gaps in the research remained, especially related to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on women hospitality employees working in Malta.

### *Sampling Method*

For the research study, a non-probability sampling method was used, thus imposing a particular selection process on the members of the population who have a chance of

participating in the study. Therefore, criteria for participants to be selected is non-random. This method results in a lower level of generalisation of the research findings when compared to random sampling. As a result, sample group members were selected based on the accessibility of the researcher to the Educational Institute and entities where the surveys and focus groups were administered, with an increased risk of the sample being biased (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

### *Global Situation*

The global situation changed abruptly during the research study and consequently, this may have limited the accuracy of the results. Considering the timeframe when the questions about the expectations for after the COVID-19 pandemic were asked in the online questionnaire between November 2021 and February 2022, the situation varied drastically with the commencement of the Russia – Ukraine conflict in February 2022. In an attempt to further elucidate the online questionnaire findings, the questions related to these expectations were asked again during the focus groups held between April – May 2022. Furthermore, participants were posed open-ended questions to elaborate on their own expectations. Although findings are more realistic, as at that point participants were more mindful of the incumbent conflict, and new worries relating to insecurity and inflation had emerged, the war was still in its initial phases. In this respect, research findings may be limited.

### *Recommendations*

#### *Addressing Research Limitations*

##### *Literature Review Gap*

This limitation may come as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic being a recent phenomenon and Malta holding such a small geographical location, therefore studies related to Malta would be limited. Future studies on the subject must still be published therefore, the recommendation is for future research on the same subject using a different geographical location. Findings on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality employees may not be identical to those for Malta, however, they are still comparable as COVID-19 affected the entire world, not only Malta.

### *Sampling Method and Geo-political Situation*

The use of the non-probability sampling method is the most commonly used by researchers due to cost and time limitations (Bhandari, 2020) when conducting quantitative research. The study had the requirement of mixed research imposed; therefore, quantitative research was imperative. A future recommendation would be to conduct a qualitative analysis wherein research findings are related to words, feelings, and emotions (Dudovskiy, 2022) rather than data. Hence, more in-depth focus groups are recommended in a year's time from the original research. In-depth interviews are also suggested with policymakers and tourism and hospitality practitioners. Finally, it is important to allow a relevant time gap before replicating the study, so that the economical/political situation is more stable following the current turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war between Ukraine and Russia.

### *Building Upon Findings*

A pivotal element in the research study findings was the sad conviction, by at least five of the female participants in the focus groups, that Malta retains a patriarchal society, and that despite attempts by policymakers to make things better, career progression will never be equal. On the other hand, positive elements were also noted. The focus group participants exhibited a prominent level of motivation to progress in their careers. They also declared that after their training they feel more empowered and perceive themselves to be setting an even better example to their children.

Future qualitative research, using various techniques available, such as one-to-one interviews, observations and focus groups, in continuation to this study is being recommended. The present study was related to CPD and women in Malta, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the opportunities, motivations, and expectations of the female gender. The recommended study should continue to focus on CPD and women in Malta, but research in further detail the effect of the patriarchal society on equal progression.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A – Online Questionnaire

**Disclaimer: To participate in this survey participants need to be in employment, pursuing or just completed recently (during 2020-2021) training via self-sought or work organised means.**

Dear Participant,

My name is Mary Rose Briffa, and I am currently a student at the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) reading for an MBA in International Hospitality Management and conducting a dissertation study entitled '***Continuous Professional Development in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry among Women in Malta: Opportunities, Motivations, and Expectations and effects of the Covid19 Pandemic.***

The aim of this research study is to analyse what has been achieved to date in order to provide opportunities regarding lifelong learning. It will focus on what is being presently done, in these unprecedented times of the Covid19 pandemic. It will focus on the problems encountered and how expectations of career progression were affected while juggling time between studying, working and managing family life, particularly during these unparalleled times. The pandemic phenomenon has been very recently experienced, thus its effect on human resources has not been yet academically researched or identified. This research will be supervised by Dr Katya De Giovanni who can be reached on [katya.degiovanni@gmail.com](mailto:katya.degiovanni@gmail.com). Furthermore, should you have any questions, you may also address them to me on [maryrose.briffa001@its.edu.mt](mailto:maryrose.briffa001@its.edu.mt)

Kindly note that this questionnaire is anonymous, and you are in no way required to reveal your identity. Please also note that once you submit the questionnaire for analysis it will not be possible to retrieve it or to amend any responses. Kindly also note that should you decide to answer this questionnaire, you are automatically consenting for your responses to be used in the analysis.

1. What gender do you identify as?

\*

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

2. What is your Nationality? \*

3. What is your highest level of education? \*

- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Post - Secondary
- ☐ Tertiary
- ☐ PhD

4. What is your employment status? \*

- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Full time student
- ☐ Unemployed

5. If you answered employed or self-employed to the **question 4**, are you also currently or just recently completed studying on part time basis? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ N/A



6. If you answered unemployed to **question 4**, are you currently studying on part time basis? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ N/A

7. If you answered retired to **question 4**, are you currently studying on part time basis? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ N/A

8. If you are currently working, are you working in the Tourism & Hospitality Industry? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. If you answered yes, to **question 8** what is your job role in the organisation?

10. If you answered no, to **question 8** in what sector are you currently working?

11. Kindly indicate the course name you are following/followed. **Pursuing or just completed recently (during 2020-2021).** \*

- ☐ Master in Business Administration in International Hospitality Management
- ☐ Master of Arts in Heritage Interpretation
- ☐ Bachelor of Science in Diving Safety Management
- ☐ Higher National Diploma in Tourist Guiding (Part-Time)
- ☐ Other

12. If you answered **other** in question 11 please specify name of course.

## Section 2

13. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Opportunities in Malta already existed for lifelong learning in the hospitality industry in Malta, before the Covid-19 pandemic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I became unemployed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The Covid-19 pandemic affected my career progression.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
During the Covid-19 pandemic online opportunities for lifelong learning increased drastically.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Problems were encountered while juggling between studying, working and managing family life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The Institute you have been studying with was helpful with all the issues encountered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The online lessons provided by the Educational Institute were ideal to juggle better the work-life responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The gradual restart of tourism and the high increase of tourists that started in June 2021 drastically affected the completion of my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My expectations for after the Covid-19 pandemic are very positive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. \*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Opportunities for career progression for after Covid-19 will increase.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.

## Appendix B – Focus Group Questions

Focus Group
<p>Dear Participant,</p> <p>My name is Mary Rose Briffa, and I am currently a student at the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) reading an MBA in International Hospitality Management and conducting a dissertation study entitled 'Continuing Professional Development in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry among Women in Malta: Opportunities, Motivations, and Expectations and effects of the Covid19 Pandemic.</p> <p>The aim of this research study is to analyse what has been achieved to date in order to provide opportunities regarding lifelong learning. It will focus on what is being presently done, in these unprecedented times of the Covid19 pandemic. It will focus on the problems encountered and how expectations of career progression were affected while juggling time between studying, working and managing family life, particularly during these unparalleled times. The pandemic phenomenon has been very recently experienced, thus its effect on human resources has not been yet academically researched or identified. It will also analyse all these issues from a gender perspective. Limited recent data seems to be available regarding the opportunities available and the expectations and motivations of the female gender. Also lacking is research on how females cope differently to males when working, studying and managing family life especially in Malta. The pandemic phenomenon has been very recently experienced, thus its effect on human resources has not been yet academically researched or identified.</p> <p>This research will be supervised by Dr Katya De Giovanni who can be reached on <a href="mailto:katya.degiovanni@gmail.com">katya.degiovanni@gmail.com</a>. Furthermore, should you have any questions, you may also address them to me on <a href="mailto:maryrose.briffa001@its.edu.mt">maryrose.briffa001@its.edu.mt</a>.</p> <p>This focus group should take about 60 to 90 minutes. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. Thank you for your time! Your participation is greatly appreciated.</p>

**Questions:**

Conclusion from the online questionnaire: 72% agree or strongly agree that problems were encountered while juggling between studying, working and managing family life.

Question 1: Can you please elaborate about the problems encountered during your studies?

---

Conclusion from the online questionnaire: 64% agree or strongly agree that expectations for after the Covid-19 pandemic are very positive?

Question 2: Can you kindly give your views on this conclusion?

---

Conclusion from the online questionnaire: 57% agree or strongly agree that the opportunities for career progression for after Covid-19 will increase.

Question 3: What do you think can be done so that career progression for women is in the same level as it is for men?

---

Conclusion from the online questionnaire: When asked if the Institute you have been studying with was helpful with all the issues encountered, 30% preferred to remain neutral in their answer.

Question 4: From your end could you mention any problems that you encountered with your Institute?

---

Conclusion from the online questionnaire: 73% are in agreement that the online lessons provided by the Educational Institute were ideal to juggle better the work-life responsibilities. Conclusion from the literature review: From another online study conducted by ITS academics amongst all ITS students it was concluded that the part time students see more benefits in e-learning than full time students. Also, females in general see more benefits in e-learning than males (Debattista et. al 2022)

Question 5: What do you think are the major benefits of online learning for women part time students?

## Appendix C – Focus Group Sample Transcripts

### Focus Group 1 Question 1

Participant 1

It was a little bit hard juggling a full-time job. I moved countries during the thesis and during the master's started a new job also. So yeah, it was a bit hard to juggle everything together, but this was my choice to do so, you know, I don't regret it or I don't blame anyone. You know, it was my choice to do. But yes, it was. It was very hard. I don't have children, so it's different maybe for people who have children for women who have children.

'my choice' Found it hard to juggle between work life study | 'It was very hard'

Participant 2

It's been still very hard to juggle everything, but we're almost there now. So, since I'm with a small child of three years old, it was amazingly hard. I basically didn't manage to listen to any of the subjects while I was only listening to the recordings. Because I need to tend to the family when I come from work, I cannot sit for three hours listening to something. So it was really hard. But as she said, I mean we choose this way. So this is it, especially for me because I'm working in F&B, so I don't work from 9 am to 5 pm. And they remember the situation when they did block modules in July in August. I mean, how are we going to listen to it all day? It was around 15 August. There's the big holiday. And even September the next year. Yes, and you need to prepare 8 hours there minimum. We could never choose the time. At least we used to know the time it was going to be and make our own arrangements. So basically I had the luck that I was not busy while winter at work. It was an office job. So, I managed to do my assignments at work.

'my choice' Found it hard to juggle between work life study | 'It was very hard' small children stress management | family problems

Participant 3

Well, that's some of the problems I have encountered during my studies were mainly time and stress management issues. Well, I do not have any children, but I still have other personal commitments, and juggling between studying, working and family life is not that easy for everyone. And I also ended up studying later at night during the winter, during the weekend and also leaving little time for leisure activities, and studying becomes a number one priority.

Found it hard to juggle between work life study | 'it was very hard'

#### Participant 4

And since I work from home and I was doing a course related to work. The interruptions at home, but there were few. But we had the chance to choose the times convenient for us. Therefore, it wasn't so, so hard.

interruptions

Online learning Views positive/negative

#### Participant 5

The major problem is not enough time. Time management. Mainly the lack of time and trying to juggle everything in one go. Basically, that's the major issue. Another issue is when you're following a course which is, let's say, outside of the office hours, it makes it much more difficult because, usually the norm is that outside of the office hours is dedicated to family, to your personal life. So basically, whenever you've got a course which is outside of the office hours, you have even to juggle even more because of the lack of time that you have for your private life, somehow you have to make up for it. Apart from that, there is a lack of energy after a day at work. It's tiring to try to focus on something else, to study it's even more difficult. And with small kids, it's a bigger problem. It's a nightmare. Trying to explain what Mommy is doing, not with them.

interruptions

Online learning Views positive/negative

small children

#### Participant 6

As such, I am not married and do not have children and I think that a woman who works full time and studies part-time, and has children, is more difficult than it is for me who does not have people depending on me. Having said that now that I am living on my own and I can compare to when I used to live with my family and study simultaneously, I still find it more difficult as at home there was always my mum that I could depend upon.

The issues encountered are related to time management and less time for leisure as when you have some free time you dedicate it to studying or doing assignments.

Online learning Views positive/negative





**Undergraduate and Post-Graduate  
Research Ethics Application Form**

**For research proposals submitted in  
Academic Year 2020-2021**

**Version November 2020**

Please open this form in Adobe Acrobat Reader

### Information for applicants

Students submitting a proposal to the Academic Research and Publications Board for approval need to submit a proposal for ethical clearance. The following checklist must be submitted to the ARPB with the necessary documentation on [arpb@its.edu.mt](mailto:arpb@its.edu.mt) within eight (8) weeks of the approval of the research proposal. The ARPB will seek to process the application within four (4) weeks excluding the recesses and national/ public holidays as per ITS Academic Calendar.

Please make sure to tick **ALL** the items. Incomplete forms will not be accepted.

		YES	NOT NEEDED
1a.	Recruitment letter/ information sheet for subjects, in English	✓	
1b.	Recruitment letter/ information sheet for subjects, in Maltese	✓	
2a.	Consent form, in English, signed by supervisor, and including your contact details	✓	
2b.	Consent form, in Maltese, signed by supervisor and including your contact details	✓	
3a.	In the case of children or other vulnerable groups, consent forms for parents/ guardians, in English		✓
3b.	In the case of children or other vulnerable groups, consent forms for parents/ guardians, in Maltese		✓
4a.	Tests, questionnaires, interview or focus group questions, etc in English	✓	
4b.	Tests, questionnaires, interview or focus group questions, etc in Maltese		✓
5a.	Other institutional approval for access to subjects: Health Division, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Department of Public Health, Curia...		✓
5d.	Other institutional approval for access of data: Registrar, Data Protection Officer Health Division/ Hospital, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Department of Public Health...		✓
5c.	Approval from Person Directly responsible for subjects: Medical Consultants, Nursing Officers, Head of School	✓	

For ARPB Use Only:

Received by ARPB	18/06/2021
Discussed by ARPB Research Ethics Committee on	22/06/2021
Approved by ARPB Research Ethics Committee on	23/06/2021

### Request for Approval of Human Subjects Research

Please type. Handwritten forms will not be accepted.

<b>FROM: (name, address for correspondence)</b> Mary Rose Briffa Waris, 5 Triq I-Ghamuq, Fgura <b>MOBILE NO.</b> 79,705,928 <b>EMAIL:</b> maryrose.briffa001@its.edu.mt <b>COURSE AND YEAR:</b> MBA in International Hospitality and Tourism	<b>DISSERTATION/THESIS TITLE:</b> Continuous Professional Development in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry among Women in Malta: Opportunities, Motivations, and Expectations and how these have been affected by the Covid19 Pandemic.
<b>DURATION OF RESEARCH:</b> From: 07/2021 To: 12/2021	<b>TUTOR'S NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS:</b> Dr Katya De Giovanni katya.degiovanni@um.edu.mt

<p>1. Please give a brief summary of the research methodology and why it includes human subjects. The research will be investigated through a mixed method approach to research social, behavioural and health science in which research is gathered through quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two approaches and combining the strengths of both data collated. (Mixed methods, 2020) It is also known as triangulation and will help in counteracting the weaknesses in both methods (Dawson, 2002) My study includes human subjects as I will be conducting an online questionnaire and three focus groups.</p>
<p>2. Give details of procedures that relate to subjects' participation: (a) How are subjects recruited? What inducement is offered? (<i>Append copy of letter or advertisement or poster, if any.</i>)</p> <p>Subjects will be reached through an online quantitative questionnaire sent to all postgraduate students studying part time at ITS. (Annex 4a)</p> <p>Focus groups with female participants will be selected from the respondents of the online questionnaire. (Annex 4a)</p> <p>(b) Salient characteristics of subjects – number who will participate, age range, sex, institutional affiliation, other special criteria:</p> <p>One (1) Online questionnaire, to be sent to 54 students - Sex: Males/Females; Age: over 24: Part time students following post graduate studies at ITS, namely the MBA in International Hospitality and Tourism and the Masters in Heritage Interpretation. (Annex 4a)</p> <p>Three (3) Focus groups with 6 participants for each focus group; Sex: Females; Age over 24: Part time students following post graduate studies at ITS, namely the MBA in International Hospitality and Tourism and Masters in Heritage Interpretation. (Annex 4a)</p>
<p>(c) Describe how permission has been obtained from cooperating institution(s) – company, school, hospital, non-profit organisation, and other relevant organization (<i>append letters</i>).</p>

A formal request was sent to ARPB, ITS on the 25th of May 2021, to get institutional approval.  
Received approval from ARPB on the 26th of May 2021 (Annex 5c)

(d) What do subjects do, or what is done to them, or what information is gathered? (*Append copies of instructions or tests or questionnaires*) How many times will observations, test, etc., be conducted? How long will their participation take?

Online questionnaire: It will be a one time procedure, taking about 15 minutes and it will be done online.

Focus groups: There will be three focus groups, taking about 60 to 90 minutes.

Online Questionnaire and Focus Group questions attached.

(e) Which of the following data categories are collected? Please tick where appropriate.

Data that reveals:

Race and ethnic origin	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political opinions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious and philosophical beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade union memberships	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sex life	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biological information	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

3. How do you explain the research to subjects and obtain their informed consent to participate? (*If in writing, append a copy of consent form.*) If subjects are minors, mentally infirm, or otherwise not legally competent to consent to participation, how is their assent obtained and from whom is proxy consent obtained? How is it made clear to subjects that they can quit the study at any time?

It is made clear to subjects that they can quit the study at any time in the consent form and recruitment letter. (Annex 1a and 1b + 2a and 2b)

4. Do subjects risk *any* harm – physical/ psychological/ legal/ social – by participating in the research? Are the risks necessary? What safeguards do you take to minimize the risks?

No

5. Are subjects deliberately deceived in *any* way? If so, what is the nature of the deception? Is it likely to be significant to subjects? Is there any other way to conduct the research that would not involve deception, and, if so, why have you not chosen that alternative? What explanation for the deception do you give to subjects following their participation?

No

6. How will participation in this research benefit subjects? If subjects will be 'debriefed' or receive information about the research project following its conclusion, how do you ensure the educational value of the process? (*Include copies of any debriefing or educational materials*)

The expected outcomes of the study are the gathering of information: on Continuous Professional Development in Tourism among women; opportunities, motivations, and expectations of women and how these have been affected by the Covid19 Pandemic. This information will aid policy makers when formulating future Tourism Policies and thus subjects will benefit if policies are more in line with their 'gender' needs and expectations.

**To be completed by the ARPB Research Ethics Committee**

We have examined the above proposal and advise



**Acceptance**



**Refusal**



**Conditional Acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Name/s and Surname/s of ARPB Research Ethics Committee Representative/s:  
Approval of Research Ethics Application

Signature/s  
:

Prof Glen Farrugia  
Chair  
Research Ethics Committee

Date: 23/06/2021