INSTITUTE OF TOURISM STUDIES

Institute of Tourism Studies Malta

Strategic Plan

From Consolidation to
Mediterranean Excellence

2026 2030

Institute for Tourism Studies

Malta’s Centre of Excellence for Tourism, Hospitality and Culinary Education

Approved by the ITS Board of Governors

March 2026

Foreword from the Board of Governors

The Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) has proudly served Malta's tourism economy for thirty-eight years. Our graduates are found at every level of Malta's hospitality and tourism industry, and our practical, industry-rooted model of education has shaped the professional standards of an entire sector. We enter the 2026–2030 strategic cycle with a clear sense of purpose, a strong foundation to build upon, and an ambitious vision for what ITS can become.

This Strategic Plan represents a step-change in ITS's development. It sets out a forward-looking programme of investment, modernisation, and growth thereby strengthening what works, evolving what needs to change, and seizing the significant opportunities that Malta's position in the global tourism and education landscape now presents. The Strategy is deliberately sequenced: building quality and operational excellence first, then activating carefully chosen growth opportunities in parallel.

The 'Consolidation-Plus' framework at the heart of this Strategy reflects our conviction that institutional strengthening and strategic growth must proceed together. We are committed to raising quality standards, modernising our infrastructure, deepening our industry relationships, and growing ITS's international profile by building on the transformative momentum generated by the Skills Pass Programme and the opportunities created by Malta Vision 2050.

We commend this Strategy to our staff, our students, our industry partners, and the people of Malta. ITS is a cornerstone of Malta's tourism economy and a nationally significant educational institution. This Board is committed to the investment, leadership, and sustained effort required to deliver on the ambitions set out in the pages that follow.

ITS Board of Governors I March 2026

1. Executive Summary

The Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) enters the 2026–2030 strategic cycle from a position of earned strength and genuine opportunity. Anchored in thirty-eight years of specialist tourism and hospitality education, the Institute is well-placed to build on its established foundations, address areas for improvement with purpose and discipline, and seize an exceptional range of strategic opportunities. This Strategic Plan charts a clear, evidence-based course from institutional strengthening through capability building, strategic expansion, and ultimately, optimisation and scale.

Strategic Context

Three intersecting macro-forces shape this strategy's context:

- Malta Vision 2050 (launched 27 February 2026) targets 4.5 million annual visitors by 2035 and a €3.8 billion GDP economy. Tourism is central to the national roadmap, and ITS, as Malta's sole specialist tourism education institution, is well-positioned to be a key contributor to delivering this ambition.
- Global higher education transformation driven by AI, rapid international student mobility growth (from 7.5 million in 2025 to a projected 9 million by 2030), and intensifying competition. Malta's English-speaking EU status post-Brexit forms a valuable part of a broader differentiated offer for prospective international students.
- Shifting global travel patterns, including disruption to Middle East aviation hubs since early 2026, are creating emerging opportunities for western Mediterranean destinations including Malta. ITS will monitor developments carefully and build on its position as a safe, EU-accredited, English-speaking destination, while ensuring any response is grounded in confirmed trends rather than early projections.

Institutional Strengths and Development Priorities

Extensive analytical work, encompassing the Self-Assessment Report 2025, External Quality Assurance reviews 2021–2024, and the THE-ICE Accreditation Review 2025, affirms ITS's considerable strengths while identifying clear areas where focused investment will drive significant improvement:

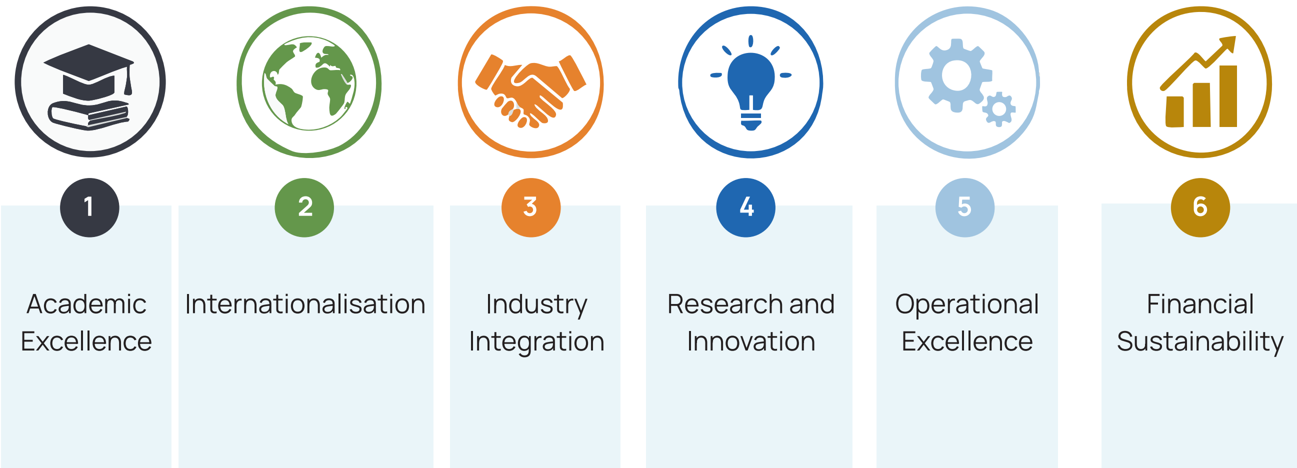
Established Strengths	Investment Priorities
Exceptional strategic delivery (99% task completion, 2020–2025)	Advancing quality assurance systems to full MFHEA compliance
Deep industry integration: operational training restaurants, formal partnerships	Infrastructure modernisation and campus development
Successful transnational education: Shanghai & Zhengzhou satellite campus	Building research capacity and formal research infrastructure
Innovative Skills Pass Programme: now generating institutional surplus revenue	Integrating and upgrading information management systems
Motivated, experienced senior leadership team	Strengthening curriculum-industry alignment
Malta's EU English-language positioning: a valued part of a broader differentiated offer	Diversifying income streams to complement Government support

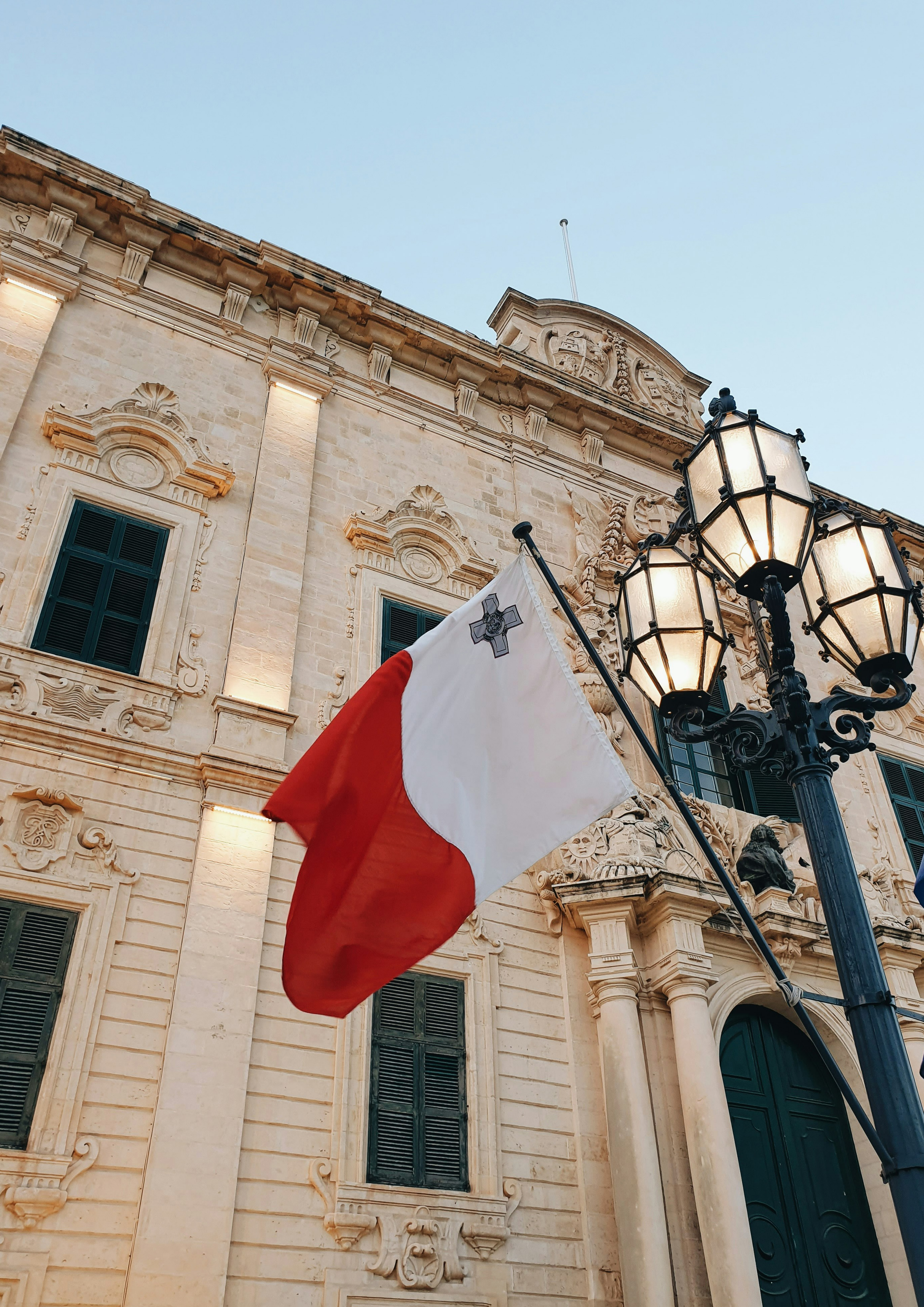
The Consolidation-Plus Framework

This Strategy adopts a sequenced 'Consolidation-Plus' approach, progressively activating strategic programmes across four phases:

Phase	Period	Focus
Phase 1 – Baseline Consolidation	2026	Quality assurance advancement, infrastructure investment, digital foundations
Phase 2 – Capability Building	2026–2027	Skills Pass 2.0, curriculum modernisation, international recruitment
Phase 3 – Strategic Expansion	2027–2028	University pathway, transnational education, innovation incubation
Phase 4 – Optimisation and Scale	2028–2030	Full integration, university status pathway, scale

The Strategy is organised around six strategic objectives:





2. Strategic Context

2.1 Global Trends in Tourism and Hospitality Education

The global tourism education sector is undergoing structural transformation. The EdTech market is projected to reach $404 billion by 2025, growing at 16% annually, with AI in education expected to grow more than fivefold by 2030. Leading institutions are integrating VR, AR, AI-powered personalisation, and immersive simulations as standard pedagogical tools.

The international competitive landscape spans a range of tiers and price points: from Swiss specialist institutions (EHL, Les Roches, Glion) at the premium end, to UK and Australian research universities (Surrey, Oxford Brookes, Griffith), and Asian institutions combining smart tourism and AI integration at competitive price points. Each occupies a distinct market position. Climate policy integration is now a structural curriculum requirement, with sustainability embedded across all programmes rather than offered as an elective.

At the European level, the EU's Tourism Sustainability Strategy and Pact for Skills reinforce the imperative for structured, sector-wide investment in workforce upskilling. This is a mandate ITS is well-placed to lead domestically.

2.2 International Student Mobility

International student mobility has more than tripled in two decades, from 2.1 million in 2000 to 7.5 million in 2025, with projections to reach 9 million by 2030. Asia, particularly India, China, Vietnam, and Indonesia, and Africa, led by Nigeria and Kenya, are the fastest-growing source regions.

Malta's August 2025 policy reforms, permitting 20 hours of work per week for non-EU students and a six-month post-study work entitlement, meaningfully strengthen Malta's competitive position as a study destination, complementing its EU-accredited, English-medium offer with Schengen mobility rights.

2.3 Malta Vision 2050 and National Policy Alignment

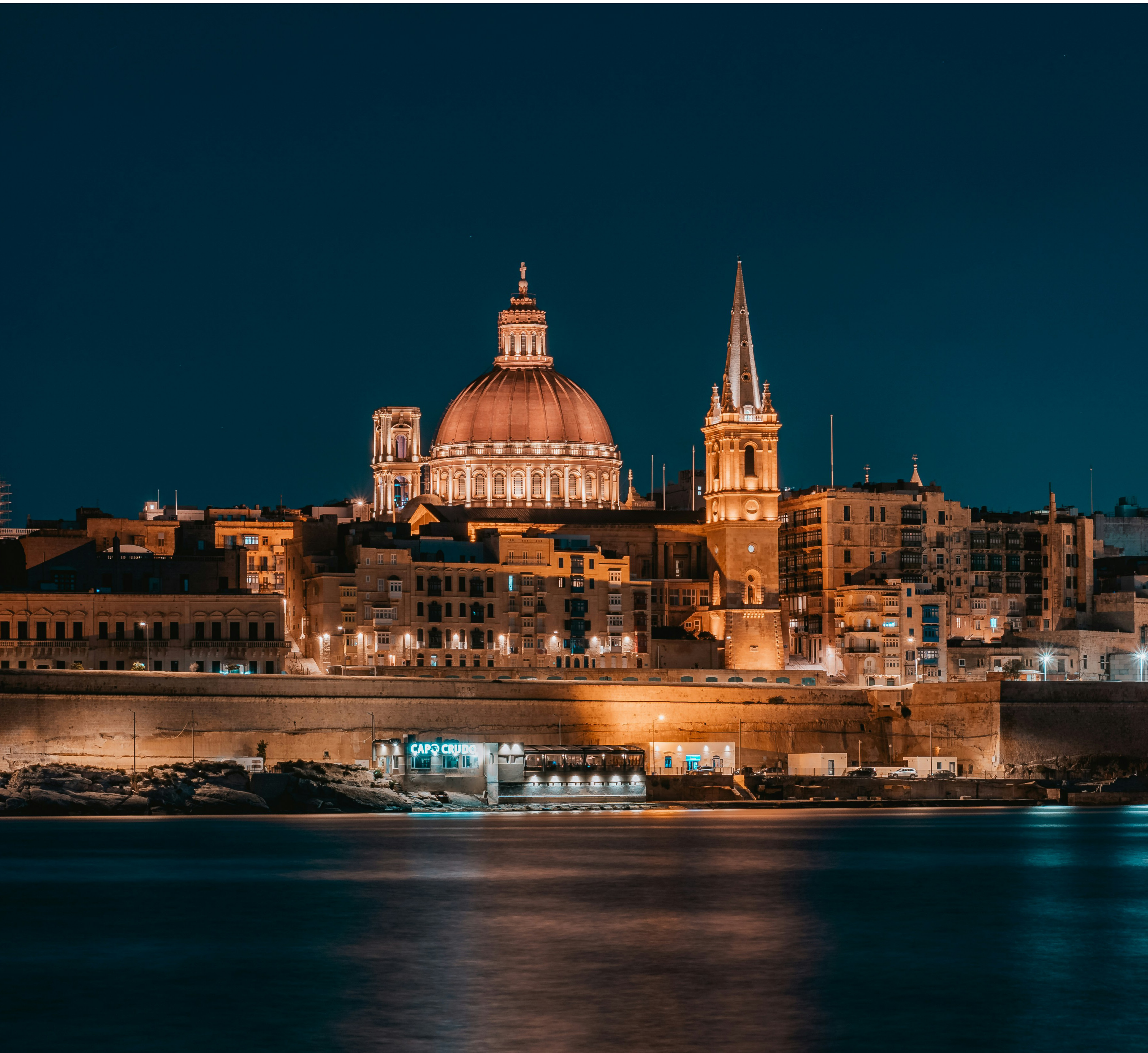
Malta Vision 2050: ITS as a Key National Partner

Malta Vision 2050, launched on 27 February 2026, targets 4.5 million annual visitors by 2035 and a €3.8 billion GDP. Its four pillars consisting of: sustainable economic growth, accessible citizen-centred services, national resilience with modern education, and smart land and sea use, provide a strong strategic framework for ITS's contribution to national priorities. Of particular strategic significance is the Vision's commitment to value-based tourism thereby moving from volume toward higher-quality, higher-spending visitors. A skilled, knowledgeable, and professional workforce is fundamental to this ambition. Investment in ITS is investment in the quality of Malta's tourism product and the long-term sustainability of its most important economic sector.

malta
shine here

2.4 Shifting Global Travel Patterns

Disruption to major Middle East aviation hubs since early 2026 has created emerging substitution travel demand for western Mediterranean destinations including Malta. International operators are reporting increased bookings for the region. ITS will develop its Mediterranean positioning on strong structural foundations, built on Malta's established qualities as a safe, English-speaking, EU-accredited island destination, and will ensure any recruitment or commercial responses are grounded in verified demand rather than early projections.



3. Institutional Position and Strategic Diagnosis

3.1 Overview of ITS

The Institute for Tourism Studies was established in 1987 as Malta's sole specialist tourism and hospitality education institution. Operating under Government aegis, ITS delivers programmes spanning MQF Levels 3 through 7 across tourism management, hospitality, culinary arts, events management, diving safety management, and cultural heritage.

ITS is the exclusive provider of licensed tourist guiding programmes in Malta and operates the nationally mandated Skills Pass Programme. With its Luqa campus, Gozo facilities, and Shanghai and Zhengzhou satellite campuses, ITS serves approximately 832 students annually and maintains partnerships across Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific.

3.2 Quality and Development Review Findings

Three recent quality and accreditation reviews including the Self-Assessment Report 2025, External Quality Assurance reviews 2021–2024, and THE-ICE Accreditation Review 2025, consistently affirm ITS's strengths as a high-quality, industry-embedded institution. They also identify a clear set of development priorities where structured investment and improvement will leverage ITS's full potential.

Dimension	Established Strengths	Development Priorities
Governance & Leadership	Engaged Board; strong industry relationships; energised executive	Formalising strategic advisory mechanisms; clarifying governance roles
Quality Assurance	Formal QA framework; PDCA adoption; active IQAC	Advancing MFHEA standards compliance; strengthening evidence management
Academic Standards	Practice-oriented curricula; strong placement focus	Extending external examiner coverage; enhancing learning outcome mapping
Research & Innovation	Emerging applied research activity	Building dedicated research infrastructure, budget, and leadership
Information Management	Published ethics and GDPR policies	Integrating information systems; strengthening business continuity planning
Finance	Skills Pass Programme generating institutional surplus	Diversifying income streams; strengthening financial governance frameworks

3.3 Strategic Position Summary

STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT
99% strategic task completion rate (2020–2025 plan)	Quality assurance systems requiring structured advancement
Deep industry integration and operational training restaurants	Campus facilities requiring investment and modernisation
Successful Shanghai & Zhengzhou transnational education campus	Research capacity at an early stage of development
Skills Pass Programme generating institutional surplus revenue	Information systems requiring integration and modernisation
EU English-language destination: valuable as part of a broader offer	Curriculum continuously evolving to reflect industry developments

OPPORTUNITIES	CONSIDERATIONS
Malta Vision 2050 national workforce and tourism mandate	Maintaining competitive differentiation as the sector evolves
Skills Pass 2.0: significant revenue and impact opportunity	Managing growth alongside continued quality improvement
International student mobility growth and post-Brexit positioning	Building income diversification alongside continued Government partnership
Mediterranean positioning and shifting global travel patterns	Smart City campus development timeline and planning progression
EU funding: Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Interreg MED	Sustaining digital transformation pace across the institution

4. Strategic Direction

VISION

To be a leading institution that provides excellence and innovation in tourism and hospitality education, driving transformation in the sector through high-quality teaching, research, and industry collaboration.

MISSION

To shape excellence and innovation in tourism and hospitality through teaching, learning, quality research, expert advice, and the realisation of innovative business concepts.

4.1 Core Values

Value	Commitment
Excellence	We hold ourselves to the highest standards in education, governance, and professional conduct.
Integrity	We act with honesty, transparency, and accountability in all we do.
Innovation	We embrace change, pursue new ideas, and apply technology and creativity to solve real challenges.
Industry Relevance	We ensure our education reflects and anticipates the evolving needs of the tourism industry.
Sustainability	We embed environmental, social, and governance principles in our programmes and operations.
Inclusion	We celebrate diversity and create an environment where every student and staff member can thrive.
Partnership	We build deep, mutual, and lasting relationships with industry, government, and academic partners.

4.2 Strategic Ambition — By 2030, ITS Will Be:

Fully MFHEA-compliant and on a credible pathway to university status

Internationally recognised, with international students comprising 35% of enrolment from at least fifteen source countries

Malta's preeminent national institution for tourism workforce development

A recognised research-active institution contributing to national tourism policy and industry knowledg

Financially sustainable, with a growing and diversified income base complementing continued Government partnership

4.3 Six Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective	Description
Academic Excellence	Achieve full MFHEA compliance and build world-class teaching quality across all programmes
Internationalisation	Grow international enrolment to 35% from 15+ source countries by 2030
Industry Integration	Deepen curriculum co-design, work-based learning, and employer partnerships
Research and Innovation	Build research capacity as the foundation for university status
Operational Excellence	Advance quality assurance, digital systems, and governance infrastructure
Financial Sustainability	Grow and diversify revenue in complement to Government support

5. Strategic Positioning and Value Proposition

5.1 Unique Value Proposition

The ITS Advantage

EU credential I English medium I Post-Brexit structural advantage Mediterranean location with unmatched hospitality ecosystem and cultural heritage Competitively positioned fees relative to Swiss and UK specialist competitors Work rights: 20 hours/week + 6-month post-study entitlement (August 2025 reforms) Deep industry integration: real training restaurants, structured placements, Skills Pass Self-accrediting institution with clear MQF Level 3–7 progression pathways Boutique learning environment with personalised support (80% retention rate, above sector norm) Gateway to Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and EU research and mobility networks

5.2 Competitive Positioning

ITS occupies a distinct and defensible market position: the Mediterranean boutique specialist, combining EU credentials with authentic industry experience and a distinctive island destination. This positioning serves a genuine market segment that is neither the ultra-premium Swiss specialist tier nor the large-scale UK and Australian mass market thereby offering students a high-quality, personally supported, industry-immersive education in a unique Mediterranean setting.

ITS will position itself as the Mediterranean's leading higher education institution for tourism, hospitality management, and the culinary arts; boutique in character, rigorous in quality, and globally connected in reach. This positioning is built on two mutually reinforcing pillars:

1. Building the ITS Training School as a Mediterranean Centre for Executive Education and Innovation

2. Developing a professionalised International Student Recruitment Infrastructure

6. Phase 1
Baseline Consolidation (2026)

Phase 1 focuses on the foundational investment priorities that will underpin all subsequent growth. Four interconnected programmes form the core of this phase:

1	2	3	4
Quality Assurance Advancement Programme	Infrastructure Investment Programme	Financial Sustainability and Governance Strengthening	Digital Foundation Programme

The Skills Pass 2.0 rollout proceeds in parallel given its significant near-term impact and the importance of sustaining the Programme's momentum.

6.1 Quality Assurance Advancement Programme

ITS has a formal quality assurance framework in place and a committed Internal Quality Assurance Committee. This Strategy invests significantly in advancing the maturity and coverage of these systems, targeting full compliance with all MFHEA standards and strengthening the evidence base that supports ITS's academic credibility and accreditation standing.

Key areas of investment include: strengthening the QA Division with dedicated Quality Assurance Managers; improving assessment governance and external examiner coverage; building a systematic evidence management system; and developing a formal published QA policy framework. The THE-ICE Accreditation Review 2025 affirmed ITS's strong industry alignment and practice-based provision while identifying these areas for structured development.

QA Priority	2026 Action	Target
MFHEA Standards Advancement	Appoint dedicated QA Managers for Levels 2–4 and 5–7	7+ of 11 standards met by end-2026
Assessment Governance	External examiner policy; module learning outcome mapping register	≥50% programme coverage by end-2026
Business Continuity	Approve and test Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan	Plan validated Q3 2026
Evidence Management	Digital IQAC action tracker and central evidence repository	90% QA action closure rate
Research Leadership	Appoint Senior Research Lead	In post by Q4 2026
Financial Governance	Commission first external financial audit	Contracted by Q4 2026

6.2 Infrastructure Investment Programme

ITS operates from its Luqa campus, which has delivered excellent educational outcomes for many years and which now requires planned investment to bring facilities in line with modern hospitality education standards. This Strategy adopts a three-tier, sequenced infrastructure investment approach that allows improvement to begin immediately while longer-term transformation plans are developed:

Tier	Purpose	Estimated Investment	Timeline
Immediate Enhancement	Safety compliance, critical systems, essential equipment upgrades	€5,000,000	0–18 months
Medium-Term Development	Improved learning environments; modular upgrades; accreditation-standard facilities	€10,000,000	18–48 months
Long-Term Transformation	Purpose-built Smart City campus (subject to Government approval)	€90,000,000	5+ years
Contingency & Programme Management	Project management, design, planning, contingency	€5,600,000	Phased
TOTAL		~€120,600,000	

ITS will submit a formal investment request of €15 million to the Ministry of Finance to support the Immediate Enhancement (€5M including programme management) and Medium-Term Development (€10M) tiers. The Smart City campus, with an estimated cost of €90 million, will be supported by a Government capital commitment alongside blended finance: strategic private partnership, EU structural funding, concessional financing, and industry investment. ITS will develop a comprehensive business case to support all funding applications.

6.3 Digital Foundation Programme

ITS currently operates a number of separate information systems that do not yet communicate seamlessly with each other, creating duplication of effort and limiting data-driven decision making. The Digital Foundation Programme will progressively integrate and modernise these systems over three years, at an estimated total investment of approximately €800,000. This investment will significantly improve efficiency, quality management, and the student and staff experience.

Phase	Focus	Timeline	Budget
Phase 0 – Diagnostic	Operating model and critical process identification	0–2 months	€10,000
Phase 1 – Quick Wins	Student records automation; e-invoicing; timetabling engine	3–12 months	€75,000–125,000
Phase 2 – Integration	QA evidence system; CRM; HR appraisal module	12–24 months	€150,000–200,000
Phase 3 – Strategic	Assessment moderation; research administration; facilities management	18–36 months	€200,000–350,000
Contingency	Training, data migration, system integration	Phased	€100,000–150,000

7. Phase 2
Capability Building (2026–2027)

Phase 2 builds on the strengthened foundations of Phase 1 to develop the institutional capabilities that will enable sustainable growth. Four major capability programmes run in this phase.

7.1 Skills Pass Programme 2.0 — Strategic Enhancement

The Skills Pass Programme has grown into a major Asset for ITS. The Programme certifies workers seeking employment in Malta's tourism sector through AI-powered training, AI-proctored examinations, and blockchain-authenticated certification, and has made a material positive contribution to ITS's financial position.

Skills Pass 2.0 will extend the Programme's reach significantly, creating a substantial opportunity to grow ITS's impact, its internationally transferable platform, and its revenue base. ITS will pursue this opportunity with focus and ambition.

Strategic Objective	Description
Governance & Operational Excellence	Dedicated Skills Pass organisational structure with clear accountability and a performance-driven operating model
Accreditation & Quality Assurance	Align modules with MQF levels; secure international recognition; embed rigorous QA systems
Technology & Scalability	Automate identity verification, proctoring, reporting, and certification; ensure cloud scalability
Internationalisation	Structured market-entry strategy; partnerships with visa application centres, governments, and corporates
Commercialisation & Revenue	Tiered pricing model; licensing framework; B2B/B2G commercial pathways
Brand & Candidate Experience	Strong brand presence; multilingual candidate support; seamless end-to-end experience

7.2 Curriculum Modernisation and Digital Pedagogy

ITS is committed to ensuring its curriculum remains at the forefront of industry requirements and pedagogical best practice. Stakeholder feedback and review findings point to a clear opportunity to deepen the alignment between academic content and contemporary industry practice, and this Strategy invests significantly in doing so. The programme delivers modernisation across four components:

- Full Curriculum Mapping and Redesign: a systematic, institution-wide review mapping all learning outcomes and assessments, streamlining content, and ensuring strong vertical progression and horizontal integration across all programmes within 12 months.
- Industry-Led Curriculum Co-Design: formal Industry Advisory Boards (IABs) for each academic cluster, comprising senior industry leaders, HR directors, alumni in leadership roles, and international partners. IABs validate curriculum annually, identify emerging skills, and co-design modules and assessments.
- Assessment Modernisation: a shift toward authentic, practical, industry-relevant assessment, including practical demonstrations, live operational settings as assessment vehicles, digital portfolios, and industry-evaluated workplace performance.
- Digital Learning Enhancement: transform the Virtual Learning Environment into a dynamic, interactive learning ecosystem with embedded analytics, interactive tools, and a structured digital pedagogy programme for all academic staff.

7.3 Mediterranean Positioning and International Recruitment

Growing ITS's international profile and student base is both a strategic priority and a financial imperative. Malta's domestic tertiary market supports a limited student population, and the explosion in international student mobility represents a significant opportunity for institutions with ITS's distinctive offer. This programme builds on two strategic pillars:

1

ITS Training School as Mediterranean Executive Education Centre

The Training School will evolve into a flagship international centre for executive and corporate education, serving tourism, hospitality, and culinary professionals across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Core offerings include: executive certificates in hospitality leadership, digital tourism, ESG and sustainability, culinary innovation, and destination management; an Innovation and Experimentation Hub; and the Annual Mediterranean Tourism Futures Summit.

2

Professionalised International Student Recruitment

Core components include: a dedicated International Recruitment Team; agent networks across six priority source markets (Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia); AI-supported lead management and CRM with multilingual digital presence and virtual campus tours; and regional partnerships with feeder institutions, vocational colleges, and hospitality organisations.

7.4 National Centre of Excellence for Work-Based Learning

ITS has a longstanding tradition of industry-embedded education and has the opportunity to build on this to become Malta's national centre of excellence for Work-Based Learning (WBL). The Skills Pass 2.0 reform and Malta's strong demand for tourism workforce development create a significant platform for ITS to lead the national WBL agenda. A Three-Pillar WBL model will be established:

Pillar	Description
Apprenticeships	Dual-pathway learning combining employment and study, drawing on successful models in Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. Industry partners sponsor students from Year 1, providing structured, paid work experience and long-term employment pathways.
Structured Work Placements	A quality-focused placement system with a tiered employer accreditation framework (Platinum/Gold/Silver), structured engagement with employers at placement inception, midpoint, and completion, and dedicated Placement Quality Officers to support both students and employers.
Work-Based Assessment & Recognition of Prior Learning	Using the Skills Pass methodology, ITS assesses experienced workers across hospitality and tourism disciplines. Recognition of Prior Learning pathways for MQF Levels 2–5 enable experienced workers to demonstrate and formalise their competence through practical assessment and portfolio evidence.

PHASE 3 I 2027–2028
Strategic Expansion: Building for the Future

8. Phase 3 Strategic Expansion (2027–2028)

Phase 3 activates three major strategic expansion programmes, all building on the strengthened institutional foundations of Phases 1 and 2. Each is conditional on satisfactory progress against Phase 1 and Phase 2 milestones.

8.1 Laying the Foundations for University Status

The 2026–2030 Strategy does not seek university status within this period. Instead, it builds the full institutional architecture including research capacity, academic qualifications, governance systems, and programme depth. These are all required to make a future application credible and successful. This is a 5–7 year development programme, and it must begin now to achieve the ambition.

Pillar	Description	2027–2028 Milestones
Research & Innovation Ecosystem	Research Office; strengthened Academic Research and Publications Board; Tourism Workforce Observatory; Grant Acquisition; Publication Strategy	Research Office operational; first Horizon Europe applications submitted; Observatory annual report published
PhD-Qualified Academic Staff	Fully funded PhD scholarships for ITS lecturers; international doctoral partnerships; academic career framework; research workload allocation	First cohort of 3–5 PhD scholarship holders enrolled; research workload model agreed; career framework published
Doctoral Programme Development	PhD in Tourism, Hospitality and Experience Innovation — co-supervised with international partners; rigorous research methods; publication requirement	Programme design completed; MFHEA pre-consultation commenced; first cohort target 2030

8.2 Transnational Education: Three-Pillar Strategy

ITS has demonstrated its TNE capability through the successful Shanghai satellite campus and the Kobe University partnership. Phase 3 builds on this to develop a structured, quality-assured approach to exporting ITS's expertise internationally:

1. Curriculum, Certification and Audit Unit (CCAU): An independent unit responsible for curriculum governance, programme validation, assessment verification, accreditation compliance, and certification integrity. Its independence from academic delivery functions ensures robust quality assurance across all ITS programmes and partnerships.

2. Co-Branded Academic Initiatives: Building on existing partnerships (Kobe, Haaga-Helia, Mediterranean Gastronomy Educational Partnership), expanding co-branded programmes through a formal Co-Branding Governance Framework. Priority regions: Asia-Pacific, Africa, and the Mediterranean.

3. Overseas Satellite Campuses: Building on the Shanghai & Zhengzhou proof of concept, with phased and evidence-based expansion, then exploring new campus opportunities in high-potential markets, followed by franchise and validated programme arrangements.

8.3 Specialist Tourism Business Incubation Centre (STBIC)

The STBIC is a sector-specific innovation and enterprise hub that integrates ITS's academic knowledge, applied research, student and graduate talent, and deep industry networks to support entrepreneurship and innovation specifically within the tourism, hospitality, and culinary sectors. It is deliberately designed to complement, not duplicate, the broad-based business support functions of Malta Enterprise and similar agencies, offering tourism-sector expertise and curriculum-linked incubation that general support providers do not offer.

STBIC Function	Description
Tourism Innovation Accelerator	Structured 12-week programme: business model development; digital marketing; sustainability integration; financial planning; market validation; pitch preparation
SME Support and Advisory	Supporting Malta's tourism businesses with digital transformation, sustainability certification, workforce upskilling, and experience optimisation
Research and Applied Innovation	Applied research projects; industry-commissioned studies; Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ innovation consortia; student capstone projects with commercial potential
Sustainability and Climate Innovation	Regenerative tourism; carbon accounting tools; green hospitality solutions; circular economy models; climate-resilient destination planning
Talent Development	Students gain real-world innovation experience, entrepreneurship pathways, mentorship from industry leaders, and opportunities to develop commercial ideas

9. Phase 4 Optimisation and Scale (2028–2030)

Phase 4 integrates and optimises all active strategic programmes, scales the most successful initiatives, and positions ITS to make a credible application for university status by the end of the strategic period.

9.1 University Status Application Pathway

By 2028, ITS will assess its progress against the preconditions for university status under Maltese law. If research milestones have been met, including a minimum of 8–10 PhD-qualified staff, active research centres, a functioning Research Ethics Board, an emerging publication record, and a fully operational Research Office, ITS will engage formally with MFHEA regarding the university status application pathway.

The PhD in Tourism, Hospitality and Experience Innovation is targeted for first cohort admission in 2030, conditional on preconditions being satisfied. The university status application itself is planned aspirationally for 2030–2031.

9.2 Malta's Premium Tourism Workforce Programme

By 2028–2030, ITS will launch a flagship national programme aligned with Vision 2050's 4.5 million visitor target and the associated demand for a skilled, professional hospitality workforce. This programme will bring together Skills Pass 2.0 certification, micro-credentials in specialist areas, Recognition of Prior Learning pathways for experienced workers, and targeted executive education for tourism managers and policymakers.

Delivered as a national public-private partnership with industry stakeholders and major tourism employers, this programme will establish ITS as Malta's central institution for tourism workforce development.

9.3 Smart City Campus and Digital Activation

If the Smart City campus is approved and progresses within the strategic period, Phase 4 will manage the transition to the new campus, ensuring all modular and portable investments from Phase 2 are successfully incorporated and the full capabilities of the new campus are activated, including AI-enhanced personalised learning pathways, VR/AR integration across all programmes, and modern teaching kitchens, wellness facilities, and research laboratories.

ITS will continue to invest in and optimise the Luqa campus throughout this period and will maintain constructive engagement with Government on the Smart City development timeline.

9.4 Phase 4 Key Milestones

Milestone	Target Date
MFHEA full compliance (11 of 11 standards)	End-2028
International student ratio reaches 35%	End-2030
Diversified income comprising 30%+ of total revenue	End-2030
Research Office fully operational with measurable output	End-2028
PhD programme framework approved by MFHEA	End-2028
First PhD cohort admitted	2030
University status application submitted	2030–2031 (aspirational)
Annual Skills Pass revenues exceed €2.5M	End-2028
5+ active co-branding partnerships with international institutions	End-2028
ITS recognised as national tourism workforce observatory and policy partner	End-2030

10. Balanced Scorecard and Key Performance Indicators

The Balanced Scorecard translates the six strategic objectives into measurable indicators across four perspectives, providing the measurement architecture for quarterly Board reporting throughout 2026–2030.

10.1 Financial Perspective

KPI	Baseline (2026)	Target 2027	Target 2030
Revenue from commercial sources	€650K	€1.5M	€3.5M
Government funding as % of total income	92%	<85%	<70%
Net asset position	Improving	Positive	Surplus >€1M
Skills Pass Programme revenue	Established & growing	€1.5M	€2.5M+
Corporate training revenue	<€100K	€500K	€1.5M
EU and research grants secured	Building	€200K	€800K+
Liquidity days	<30	≥60 days	≥90 days

10.2 Student and Stakeholder Perspective

KPI	Baseline (2026)	Target 2027	Target 2030
Overall student satisfaction	>70%	>75%	>80%
Graduate employment within 6 months	>70%	>75%	>85%
International student ratio	~15%	>20%	>35%
Student retention rate	80%	>82%	>85%
Employer satisfaction with graduates	>65%	>70%	>80%
Number of active industry MOUs	<10	15	25
Skills Pass candidates certified (annual)	+20%	+50%	+200%

10.3 Internal Process Perspective

KPI	Baseline (2026)	Target 2027	Target 2030
MFHEA quality standards compliance (of 11)	Advancing	7+ of 11	11 of 11
Programmes with current industry review	<50%	60%	100%
Information systems integrated	0 of 6	3 of 6	All 6
Administrative processes digitised	<30%	60%	95%
Research publications (peer-reviewed)	0	1–3	15+
Internship placements rated Good or above	<40%	60%	85%
External examiner coverage of programmes	<30%	50%	100%

10.4 Learning and Growth Perspective

KPI	Baseline (2026)	Target 2027	Target 2030
Staff receiving CPD and digital upskilling	<50%	80%	100%
Faculty with digital pedagogy certification	<20%	50%	90%
Staff satisfaction score	>60%	>65%	>75%
PhD-qualified academic staff (number added)	+3	+3	+10
Innovation initiatives piloted per year	None	3	8+

11. Governance and Implementation Structure

11.1 Strategy Governance Framework

ITS's proven Strategy and Change Office model, which delivered 99% task completion on the 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, will be retained and strengthened. The Board of Governors retains ultimate strategic oversight, approving annual plans, reviewing Balanced Scorecard performance quarterly, and ensuring alignment with national policy including Malta Vision 2050.

11.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Role / Body	Responsibilities
Board of Governors	Ultimate strategic oversight; Annual Strategic Plan approval; quarterly BSC review; financial oversight; stakeholder accountability
CEO	Strategy execution leadership; Senior Management performance; external stakeholder relations; Ministry engagement
Strategy and Change Office	Strategy monitoring and reporting; task assignment and tracking; performance dashboard management; initiative coordination
Quality Assurance Unit	MFHEA compliance; internal verification systems; QA policy; audit readiness; accreditation management
DCEO/COO Corporate Services Unit	Administration, Human Resource Management, Marketing, Technology, Stores
Academic Dean / COO Academia	Academic excellence; curriculum quality; faculty development; research framework; IAB programme
CFO / Finance Unit	Financial sustainability; revenue diversification; capital management; Smart City financial planning; external audit
International Relations Unit	International student recruitment; CCAU partnership oversight; TNE operations; EU funding
Research Office Unit	Research strategy; grant acquisition; Scientific Committee secretariat; publications; Tourism Workforce Observatory
Skills Pass Programme	Skills Pass 2.0 growth; commercialisation; accreditation; international expansion
WBL Directorate	Apprenticeships; placements; RPL; employer accreditation; WBL quality assurance

11.3 Monitoring and Reporting Cadence

Cadence	Content	Audience
Monthly	IQAC action updates; cashflow and capex report; PMO operational dashboard	Executive Leadership Team
Quarterly	Balanced Scorecard report; strategic initiative progress; financial dashboard; risk register update	Board of Governors; Ministry of Tourism
Annually	Annual Strategic Plan; full BSC performance review; external strategy assessment; public progress report	Board; Ministry; Stakeholders; Public
2028 — Interim Full Review	Independent external strategic review; full BSC assessment; strategy recalibration for 2028–2030	Board; Senior Management; Ministry

12. Risk Management

12.1 Strategic Risk Register

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Delayed advancement of MFHEA quality standards compliance	Medium	High	Dedicated QA resourcing; monthly compliance reporting to Board; independent readiness review by Q3 2026
Slower-than-planned income diversification	Low–Medium	High	Skills Pass 2.0 as near-term revenue priority; monthly financial monitoring; Board-level escalation triggers
Smart City campus timeline uncertainty	Medium	High	Develop parallel campus development scenarios; continue Luqa investment regardless; ring-fence portable assets
Broader geopolitical developments affecting travel patterns	Low–Medium	Medium	Monitor international developments; contingency planning for student communications; diversify source markets
Staff workload and wellbeing	Low	High	Implement sustainable workload model in 2026; annual wellbeing survey and action plan; competitive employment conditions
Government funding environment	Low–Medium	High	Grow diversified income to 30%+ of revenue by 2030; develop financial reserves; maintain strong Government relationships
Competitive landscape evolution	Medium	Medium	Accelerate curriculum modernisation; quarterly IAB engagement as market intelligence mechanism
Research capacity development pace	Medium	High	Begin research investment in 2026; workload model reform in 2027 collective agreement
Skills Pass revenue variability	Low–Medium	Medium	Maintain ring-fenced reserves; diversify platform revenue; sustain domestic mandate as stable base
Technology implementation pace	Low–Medium	Medium	Phased delivery approach; seed funding from Skills Pass; strong vendor agreements

12.2 Risk Monitoring

The Strategy and Change Office will maintain a dynamic risk register reviewed quarterly. High and critical risks will be escalated to Board level at each quarterly review. An annual scenario planning exercise will stress-test the strategy against a range of alternative external environments, ensuring ITS remains well-positioned to respond to change.

13. Financial Framework

13.1 Summary Investment Plan

Programme / Area	Investment Required	Phase	Primary Funding Source
Quality Assurance Advancement (staffing, systems, audit)	€200K–350K	Phase 1	Government appropriation; internal reallocation
Immediate Infrastructure Enhancement	€5,000,000	Phase 1	Ministry of Finance capital investment (€5M request incl. programme management)
Digital Foundation — Phase 1	€125K–210K	Phase 1–2	Skills Pass Programme revenue; IT capital budget
Digital Transformation — Full Programme	~€800,000 total	Phase 1–3	Skills Pass Programme revenue; EU digitalisation grants
Medium-Term Infrastructure Development	€10,000,000	Phase 2	Ministry of Finance (€10M investment request)
Smart City Campus	€90,000,000+	Phase 3–4	Government capital commitment (€30M) + private partner + EU structural funds; residual ~€65M through blended finance
International Recruitment Infrastructure	€500K–800K	Phase 2	International student fee revenues; EU funding
Research Office and Infrastructure	€400K–600K per annum	Phase 2–3	EU grants (Horizon Europe, Erasmus+); Government research budget
STBIC (physical + virtual)	€800K–€1.2M	Phase 3	EU innovation funds; corporate sponsorship; Skills Pass Programme revenue
Programme Management & Contingency	€6,600,000	All phases	Government; blended finance

13.2 Government Investment Partnership Request

ITS is seeking a strategic investment of €15 million from the Ministry of Finance to support the Immediate Infrastructure Enhancement (€5M including programme management) and Medium-Term Infrastructure Development (€10M) tiers. This investment is central to maintaining and advancing the quality of ITS's educational environment and protecting the value of any future Smart City investment.

ITS will prepare a comprehensive investment case supported by: an independent technical assessment of the Luqa campus; independent cost validation by a qualified quantity surveyor; a detailed business case; a 10-year financial model; and a procurement and delivery plan. All Ministry investment will be managed through dedicated capital accounts, released against verified milestones, and subject to regular independent review.

13.3 Financial Sustainability Trajectory

ITS's financial position has strengthened materially as a result of the Skills Pass Programme, which has generated significant revenue and moved the Institute into a surplus position. This positive trajectory will be sustained and built upon through three parallel strategies:

1. Growing and diversifying revenue through Skills Pass 2.0, international student recruitment, and corporate and executive education
2. Improving efficiency and effectiveness through digital transformation and organisational development
3. Investing in the institution through Smart City development and the Government infrastructure partnership

The 2027 Balanced Scorecard review will serve as an important milestone for assessing financial sustainability progress.

14. Conclusion and Initial Priorities

The Institute for Tourism Studies enters this strategic cycle from a position of established strength and real momentum. The Skills Pass Programme has transformed ITS's financial position and demonstrated the institution's capacity for innovation at scale. The 2020–2025 Strategic Plan was delivered with exceptional discipline. And the external environment, Malta Vision 2050, growing international student demand, and shifting Mediterranean travel patterns, presents a compelling set of opportunities that a reformed, ambitious ITS is well-placed to seize.

This Strategy is built on a clear, sequenced logic. Phase 1 investments in quality advancement, infrastructure, and digital systems create the platform for everything that follows. Phase 2 builds the capabilities in curriculum, recruitment, industry partnership, and workforce development that will drive growth. Phase 3 activates strategic expansion into higher education research, transnational education, and innovation. And Phase 4 brings it all together, positioning ITS for university status and long-term sustainability.

Malta Vision 2050 gives ITS a powerful national mandate. As the nation's sole specialist tourism education institution, ITS is central to Malta's ambition to become a high-quality, sustainable, premium tourism destination. The quality of the visitor experience is ultimately shaped by the people who deliver it and ITS is the institution that develops those people.

The choices made by ITS's leadership, Board, staff, and Government partners will shape the institution — and Malta's tourism sector for the decade ahead. This Strategy is ITS's commitment to making those choices well.

14.1 Initial Priority Actions

Priority Actions
1. Strengthen the Quality Assurance Division — appoint QA Managers for Levels 2–4 and 5–7
2. Commission an independent MFHEA readiness review
3. Advance Smart City campus decision, with parallel Luqa investment proceeding regardless of timeline
4. Launch equipment and facilities upgrade programme at Luqa campus
5. Submit €15M infrastructure investment request to the Ministry of Finance
6. Initiate integrated information system procurement (Digital Foundation Programme)
7. Formalise MOUs with industry stakeholders including curriculum co-design mandate
8. Launch Skills Pass 2.0 growth strategy with commercial partnership programme
9. Activate international student recruitment infrastructure and campaigns
10. Complete organisational development programme, clarifying academic and operational leadership
11. Establish Balanced Scorecard reporting dashboard and schedule first quarterly Board review
12. Constitute the Academic Research and Publications Board and develop the Research Strategy

Appendix: Analytical Foundation

A. Foundational Reports Underpinning this Strategy

This Strategic Plan is underpinned by four foundational analytical reports:

- External Analysis Report — macro-environmental forces, global mobility trends, competitor benchmarking across Swiss, UK, Australian, and Asian higher education institutions
- Situation Analysis Report (SAR 2025) — governance, financial structure, operational systems, QA position, and infrastructure assessment
- Stakeholder Analysis Report — structured consultation with staff, students, industry partners, regulators, and government
- Strategic Options Analysis Report — evaluation of eight alternative strategic pathways, resulting in adoption of the Consolidation-Plus framework

In addition, this document integrates evidence from the ITS Self-Assessment Report 2025, External Quality Assurance review action plans 2021–2024, and the THE-ICE Accreditation Review 2025.

B. Strategic Options Evaluated

Option	Description	Decision
Option 1 — Consolidation	Invest in quality, infrastructure, and financial sustainability	Adopted — Phase 1 primary focus
Option 2 — Stakeholder Engagement	Deepen industry partnerships and curriculum co-design	Adopted — Phase 2
Option 3 — University Pathway	Build research capacity and academic credentials	Adopted — Phase 3, conditional on milestones
Option 4 — Educational Expansion	Expand into general higher education beyond specialist remit	Not adopted — outside ITS's specialist mandate
Option 5 — TNE Expansion	Scale transnational education beyond Shanghai	Adopted — Phase 3
Option 6 — Workforce Development	Become national WBL centre of excellence	Adopted — Phase 2
Option 7 — Innovation Hub	Establish STBIC for tourism entrepreneurship	Adopted — Phase 3
Option 8 — Digitalisation	Transform digital infrastructure and pedagogy	Adopted — Phase 1–2

C. Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
ARPB	Academic Research and Publications Board — ITS's internal research governance body
BCP/DRP	Business Continuity Plan / Disaster Recovery Plan
BSC	Balanced Scorecard — strategic performance management framework
CCAU	Curriculum, Certification and Audit Unit — proposed independent quality governance unit
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COO	Chief Operations Officer
DCEO	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
EQA	External Quality Assurance — MFHEA's periodic institutional review process
IAB	Industry Advisory Board — formal employer and alumni curriculum governance body
IQAC	Internal Quality Assurance Committee — ITS's internal QA governance body
MFHEA	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority — national quality and regulatory authority
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework — national qualifications classification system (Levels 1–8)
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning — assessment pathway for experienced workers
SAR	Self-Assessment Report — ITS's annual institutional quality review document
Skills Pass	ITS's nationally mandated programme certifying workers for Malta's tourism and hospitality sector
STBIC	Specialist Tourism Business Incubation Centre
THE-ICE	Tourism, Hospitality, and Events industry accreditation body
TNE	Transnational Education — delivery of ITS-accredited programmes outside Malta
WBL	Work-Based Learning — structured learning through employment and workplace experience

— End of Strategic Plan 2026–2030 —

Institute for Tourism Studies | Approved by the ITS Board of Governors | March 2026