Youth policy in Malta

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Report by an international panel of experts appointed by the Council of Europe

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Malta has been an island of hospitality to the team. This should, ideally, have contributed to the quality of the report – but this is not for us to judge.
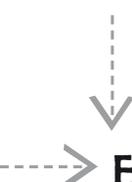
Executive summary

introduction

This international review of Maltese youth policy was undertaken by a panel of experts on the basis of the following sources of information:

- the National Report prepared by the Maltese national review team;
- the presentation of additional documents by individuals, agencies and organisations;
- a study visit by the international team that included meetings with young people, government representatives (including the Minister of Youth), public service practitioners, staff from relevant non-governmental organisations and the executive of the National Youth Council;
- literature and website searches undertaken by the rapporteur and other members of the international review team.

It should be mentioned that a fruitful discussion on the International Report took place at a public hearing in Valetta on 4 October 2003. It is to be hoped that such constructive public debate will continue to take place.

The timing of this international review was auspicious in that it was shortly preceded by the publication of the Council of Europe's report on youth policy indicators (Council of Europe (2003a)). This document, in conjunction with a synthesis report on seven of the previous international reviews (Williamson, 2002), proved enormously helpful to the rapporteur in particular. Whilst it could not be claimed that the international team evaluated Maltese youth policy in strict accordance with the principles contained in these Council of Europe publications, we were certainly deeply influenced by some of the more dominant concepts contained therein.

The international review team wish to record the fact that the Maltese public authorities co-operated fully with the review. Moreover, during our visit in May 2003 we were received by everyone with great hospitality and warmth. The discussions in which we participated were characterised by a spirit of friendly candour. It was, indeed, a privilege to work in such conditions.

Social context

In many respects Malta is a traditional Roman Catholic society in which faith, family and community constitute the main points of reference for the overwhelming majority of the population. It is a warm and cohesive society that certainly appears to care deeply for its young people. The family, for example, is a vital national

resource and a socially protective factor. Unlike many other European countries, young people's delayed transition to independent living is not perceived as a major problem in Malta. Most young people are content to remain living at home until their late twenties, and parents appear happy to accommodate them.

Despite the undoubtedly supportive nature of local parish life, there is a downside that cannot be ignored. There are two main areas in which young people in Malta seem to be disadvantaged: in terms of establishing their own autonomy and, in the more closely observed neighbourhoods, at least, asserting individual difference. Establishing youth autonomy in a society still characterised by deeply paternalistic reflexes is no simple matter. Even in those cases where the public authorities make genuine efforts to extend participation rights, many young people seem uncomfortable with going against the grain of cultural traditions and opt, instead, to defer to traditional authority. The assertion of difference in an apparently monocultural society, meanwhile, is also problematic for some young people. Close communities are usually wonderfully nurturing places in which to grow up, but they can also sometimes be stiflingly judgemental. Some examples are duly cited within this report.

Although cultural traditions weigh heavily on the lives of some young people, it is important not to present Malta as a static or backward society. A cursory glance at the archipelago's history confirms the cliché that "change is the only constant". Whilst Malta retains an attachment to core Catholic values, it is important not to dismiss the church as a monolithic institution. There are many currents of opinion within the church along with many different Catholic identities in wider society. Moreover, there are detraditionalising influences operating within Malta. The rising levels of female participation in the labour market, for example, are challenging traditional gender roles. There are also, of course, powerful forces from without: in the age of globalisation, no country is an island – not even Malta. With its accession to the European Union, the country is entering an interesting new chapter in its history. Knowing the potential of Malta, however, there is no reason why the country should confine its international role to only one continent.

Youth policy: organisation, structures and delivery systems

At present Malta has the benefit of a dedicated minister of youth. In addition to having responsibility for youth affairs, the ministry also covers sports, arts and heritage. It should be noted, however, that operational responsibilities have been delegated to quasi-autonomous agencies in the case of sports (Malta Sports Council), arts (Arts Council) and heritage (Heritage Malta). Currently three members of staff service the youth department within the ministry. It is worth mentioning, though, that the possibility of creating a quasi-autonomous national youth agency is being considered. It is evident that the reorganisation of the ministry is still in its early stages. Nevertheless, serious efforts are being made to develop a strategic approach by ensuring that all policies affecting young people are monitored and youth-proofed by the ministry. The National Youth Council is the main body consulted in respect of policy formulation – although inevitably, perhaps, there are differing perceptions concerning the efficacy and mutual respect of this consultative arrangement.

The small size of the country obviously creates the possibility of close consultative contact with young people. There are, though, also constraints. These include the problem of the minister being supported by a small civil service. This can make

continuous policy development difficult. Consequently it is sometimes necessary to outsource functions or commission discrete pieces of work from outside bodies and external consultants.

Youth policy is, of course, delivered across a number of government ministries and departments. The report structures its analysis around key policy domains: learning; access to the labour market; health, welfare and social protection; accommodation, and criminal justice.

Learning

Although bold initiatives are being introduced to modernise the curriculum and democratise schools, it will probably take some time before the culture of Maltese education is transformed. The legacy of a traditional, didactic and examination-focused system appears to have an enduring influence on much classroom practice. Nevertheless, there are grounds for cautious optimism. The attitudes of many younger teachers are supportive of the reforms being introduced. Nevertheless, the education system continues to be structured around social divisions. At the institutional level of the school there are splits that run along a number of intersecting fault lines: state and church; public sector and private sector; the early separation of the academically gifted from the seemingly less able, and there is also gender segregation. Education systems are, of course, products of their societies. To what extent, though, is the education system in Malta merely engaged in the routine reproduction of those social relations found in wider society? The international review team does not possess the intellectual or moral authority to recommend a wholesale change to the education system, but it can ask whether young people are being treated fairly and equitably.

Access to the labour market

The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) occupies a key position in assisting young people into the labour market. In most respects it is a role that it performs well. Participation rates by young people in the various schemes operated by the ETC are very impressive. Imaginative and determined efforts are also being made to reach young people on the margins. The quality of horizontal networking across this difficult terrain is very good. The ETC engages successfully with a wide range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). There is also a clear commitment to engage with employers' organisations and trade unions in developing a strategic approach to employment and training.

Despite the above-mentioned good work, it has to be acknowledged that there is something of a mismatch between the demands of the economy and the labour supply available to employers. It is important to recognise, however, that the ETC cannot address this issue alone. The process of reform and re-positioning in which the education system is currently involved has already been noted. It is important, though, that priority be given to aligning complementary services. The need to work towards a joined-up approach is pressing.

Health, welfare and social protection

Health care in Malta would appear to be of a high standard. Core services are universally available and free at the point of delivery. Meanwhile, serious efforts are being made to engage the widest possible range of young people in preventive health services. The work of the Health Promotion Department is particularly note-

worthy. It is seeking to reach young people in imaginative ways and deal with such issues as sexual health in a non-judgemental spirit.

As mentioned previously, the family is a vital national resource protecting children and young people from social exclusion. However, given that young people are particularly vulnerable to poverty, questions must be asked about what happens to those who either actively choose to live independently or are compelled to do so by circumstances.

The proposed position of commissioner for children is most welcome. Young people need an advocate who will actually listen to them. A council of children, on which young people could serve, would be an ideal forum within which participation rights could be exercised. It is to be hoped that the public authorities will grasp this opportunity.

Accommodation

Whilst the traditional, closely-knit Maltese family is far from being under threat, there are nevertheless subtle changes occurring in terms of structure, roles and attitudes. One such trend is the emergence of some young single people who are seeking independence. Their position is difficult and needs to be addressed. The provision for certain vulnerable groups of young people should also be reviewed as a matter of high priority. The international review team would wish to make the point that it was impressed by the commitment and sensitivity of the staff we met at the housing authorities. However, the absence of a discrete youth strategy in this policy domain is a concern.

Criminal justice

The apparent absence of an integrated data system in this field is a major worry. Evidence-based policy and practice – including sentencing practice – cannot be developed in the absence of sound information. Court outcomes, the impact of sentences and recidivism rates are simply not known. It is difficult to see how a rational criminal justice system can be developed in the absence of good quality and readily retrievable information. It also makes it far more difficult to monitor the system for biases and mechanisms of discrimination that might be operating against certain social groups.

On the basis of the information available, the international review team has made a number of recommendations in such areas as pre-court diversion, restricting the use of custody, and expanding community-based sentences.

Recommendations and challenges for the future

The recommendations of the international review team are summarised below:

Learning, training and access to the labour market

- The progress of democratic initiatives within schools must be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis. The training of teachers must also take full account of recent changes in educational philosophy.

- The position of the Maltese language within the education system must be reviewed. Whilst the aim of full bilingualism (Maltese and English) should be upheld, it is important that young people are not disadvantaged by being

compelled to sit examinations in certain subjects through the medium of English at too early a stage in their school careers.

- The aims of the education system and the Employment Training Corporation need to be more closely aligned in order to meet the needs of young people and the economy.

- A strategy should be devised to increase the level of employee participation in further education and training, especially with those young people who have weak educational profiles.

- The mission of the Employment Training Corporation should be communicated more effectively to both staff and service users.

Health and social protection

- Given the vulnerability of young people to poverty and social exclusion, a comprehensive package of support measures should be designed in the domains of social security, housing and health. Targeted polices and services should also be developed in respect of those at acute risk.

- The proposed establishment of a commissioner for children is welcomed and supported. It is important, however, that the commissioner's office be adequately resourced. Children and young people also need to be represented on the council of children.

- A discrete youth strategy should be developed in the field of housing. An integrated service for young people should include access to advice, mediation, crisis accommodation and properly supported move on housing units. Special provision also needs to be made for the vulnerable 15- to 17-year-old age group.

Criminal justice

- The criminal justice system should establish an integrated data system. This will assist the development of evidence-based practice by sentencers and those tasked with managing young offenders in both custodial and community settings.

- A "children first" philosophy should be adopted in respect of young people under the age of 18.

- Custody should be the sentence of last resort in respect of young people.

- As far as possible young people should be diverted from the formal criminal justice system. Extending the use of cautions should be considered alongside the introduction of restorative justice measures.

- Consideration should be given to raising the age of criminal responsibility.

- In order to strengthen the credibility of community-based sentences, the probation service should be properly resourced.

Equity and diversity

- The acceptance and affirmation of diversity must be made explicit in all policy documents covering the youth field. This includes references to gender, disability, sexuality, faith and ethnicity. Monitoring systems should be put in place in order to detect any institutional biases that may be operating against certain social groups.

- There is a need to identify those institutional blockages that are impeding the progress of young people with disabilities in such areas as education, training, employment and housing. It is important to develop a strategy that not only

widens access to services, but also acknowledges the right of such young people to exercise their autonomy.

Research, evaluation and policy implementation

- In order to develop evidence-based policy and practice it is essential that robust data collection and evaluation systems be put in place.
- Clear lines of communication should be established between researchers, policy makers, educators/trainers and practitioners.
- Digestible guidance should be given to managers, practitioners and front-line staff with responsibilities regarding young people. Publications in the main policy streams affecting young people could include "key messages from research for policy makers" and "good practice guidelines for front-line workers".
- Young people should be meaningfully engaged in the policy development process. At the very least reference groups or focus groups should be established in such areas as housing, education and employment.
- Local government needs to be nurtured and developed. Young people should be encouraged to play a key role in such developments.

Malta and international relations

- Malta is well-placed to act as a bridge between North Africa and Europe. More could be made of its potential role as a mediator between the Islamic, Christian and secular worlds.
- Attention should be given to maximising participation in existing packages of opportunity.
- The international team did not explore in sufficient depth the nature of those transfers in human and social capital that take place between Malta and its emigrant communities in such places as Australia, Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. These important international connections should be revitalised and constructed into imaginative opportunity schemes.

Key youth policy actors: the national youth agency and the National Youth Council

- Provided clear lines of accountability are established, the international review team supports the establishment of a national youth agency.
- The creation of a national youth agency implies a corresponding strengthening of the National Youth Council. The National Youth Council does not currently possess the material resources to function autonomously and effectively. The issue of autonomy is vitally important and closely related to the resources at its disposal. Irrespective of the political party in power, a fixed percentage of the budget should be allocated to the National Youth Council.
- National youth council members' one-year tenure of office must be extended to at least two years.
- The National Youth Council should conduct a critical review of its democratic practices. It must find ways of connecting with the grassroots and making the executive more socially representative. It should also explore ways of transcending the destructive political sectarianism that has apparently characterised its history to date.
- It is necessary to establish a coherent statutory framework that will not only clarify the citizenship rights of young people, but also the roles, responsibilities,

duties and rights of public authorities, the National Youth Council, the national youth agency and the NGOs working in the field.

- Maltese youth policy should strive to be opportunity-focused in orientation, particularly in such areas as employment, health and housing.

The youth work profession

- A professionally accredited youth worker training scheme should be developed. This could be achieved in co-operation with European partners.
- Greater efforts need to be made in the area of non-formal learning. Youth work is clearly central to a non-formal education strategy and must be resourced accordingly.

Council of Europe: international reviews of youth policy

In future, international review teams should be given greater assistance with social and cultural orientation prior to visiting the country being reviewed. This could take the form of key social scientific and cultural texts being distributed to team members along with guidance on further reading and useful website addresses.

More detailed guidance on the above recommendations can be found within the main body of the report.

Conclusion

There are some very exciting developments in Maltese youth policy. The proposed establishment of a national youth agency is just one such idea currently being mooted. Policy aspirations must, however, be supported in practical, material terms if they are to be meaningful. In recent times, seemingly, inadequate funding has blunted the effectiveness of the National Youth Council. There has apparently also been a decline in government support for youth organisations. It is fully appreciated that resources are finite and governments must juggle competing priorities. Nevertheless, adequate resourcing and the effective management of delivery systems are critical if policy aims are to be translated into tangible opportunity packages for young people. The international team has every confidence that the Maltese public authorities will review the situation closely.

1. Introduction

1.1. Terms of reference

Following the recommendation of ministers at their informal meeting in Luxembourg in 1995, the Council of Europe youth sector developed a new approach concerning youth policy development. Central to this strategy was the implementation of a programme of international reviews of national youth policies. This process was established to fulfil three distinct objectives:

• to advise on national youth policy;

• to identify components of youth policy that might inform a general, European approach to youth policy across Europe;

• to contribute to a learning process about the development and implementation of youth policy.

In the intervening period the Council of Europe has organised nine such reviews, produced a synthesis report on seven of them (Williamson, 2002), and published a report on policy indicators (Council of Europe, 2003). At the same time, the European Union is opening its new policy following the publication of the white paper on youth to the accession countries; a process that includes Malta. Taken together, these three key elements foreshadow the introduction of European standards on youth policy development. Such standards are of descriptive value, intended to help establish reliable data and facilitate meaningful comparisons between countries. Nevertheless, they are not intended to prepare the way for a standardised youth policy. Given the diversity of social and cultural contexts that exist within Europe, such a project would be both undesirable and unachievable.

The process involved in conducting an international review can be summarised in the following terms. In order to facilitate an international review procedure for the Council of Europe, the authorities in the youth field of the inviting country are asked to produce a national youth report. Ideally, this report will cover the same domains as the international review. It should also include relevant contextual information and analysis on the particular social conditions in which young people in that country live. The Secretariat of the Council of Europe, during a preparatory mission, designs the programme for the review team's visit in consultation with the country's authorities. It also appoints an international review team of five members comprising one member of the Intergovernmental Youth Committee (CDEJ), one member from the NGO community (Advisory Council) and three experts/researchers (one of whom works as a rapporteur general). The international review team visits the country twice (in Malta it was considered acceptable to visit only once) and then submits a report to the national authorities and the statu-

tory bodies of the youth field in the Council of Europe. A recent innovation, practised for the first time in the case of Lithuania in 2002, is a presentation of the international review to a national public of social actors in the youth field in the capital during a one-day hearing. Finally, the process is closed with a presentation of the report to an international public. In the case of Malta this will be in Budapest on 5 November 2003 at a meeting of the Joint Council on Youth Questions. Ideally, the report should be reviewed two years after its completion at national and international level. The purpose of such a review is to audit the progress of the recommendations contained in the original report and re-open discussion on salient issues in light of experience. The review might also make concrete proposals in respect of both national policy and the work programme of the Council of Europe.

1.2. The developing European framework of youth policy

Whilst it is not our intention to present a detailed summary of the Council of Europe's recent report on youth policy indicators (Council of Europe: 2003a), we considered it helpful to highlight some of the salient ideas contained in this document. Whilst we could not claim that the international team evaluated Maltese youth policy in strict accordance with the principles contained in this Council of Europe publication, the review was certainly deeply influenced by its more dominant concepts. Accordingly, this section of the report quotes extensively from the youth policy indicators document.

A substantial body of international policy statements and declarations on youth policy have emerged over recent years: the final texts of the Council of Europe's Conferences of European Ministers Responsible for Youth; the United Nations First Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth held in Lisbon in 1998; the reference to youth contained in the Declaration of the European Council in Laeken in 2001; and the publication of the white paper of the European Commission, "A new impetus for European youth" (European Commission, 2002). The 6th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth (Council of Europe, 2003b), for example, agreed that – despite the wide diversity of social and economic conditions of the various member states – there should be a common commitment to the citizenship rights of young people. This included,

> "… access to fundamental rights, to education, the labour market, health care, culture, technological innovations and the possibility to enjoy decent living conditions as a prerequisite for their active participation in society."

(Council of Europe, 2003a: 3)

These important policy commitments are inevitably, perhaps, rather broad. Ultimately, though, they require further development. It is in that spirit that the youth indicators paper poses a series of interrelated questions:

• "Are young people, in Europe and worldwide, carrying a distinctly new set of values, attitudes and lifestyles? What social changes could predictably come about as a result of young people's activity? What are the implications for the social and political institutions, as we know them?

• Are youth trends global, and how do they translate locally in western, as well as in the transition countries in Europe, in conflict areas and in the developing world?

- How do social structures and institutions favour and/or obstruct young people's influence? What strategies could help young people have more influence on social development; individually, as well as collectively?

- What are the indicators allowing to measure young people's influence on social change? How does young people's action or inaction alter the landscape of knowledge, work, leisure, community and power? (See report of the youth actor of social change symposium, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, 12-16 December 2001, p. 7)

- What are the indicators to assess governance in the youth field? What is a youth policy, what does it aim at and how can its impact be highlighted in terms of accountability, effectiveness and coherence?"

(Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 3)

The report notes that youth ministers have identified a number of trends affecting the lives of young people across Europe:

"1. The experience, for young people of longer and more complex transitions to adult life (examples: extended full-time education and training and longer stay in parental home).

2. High youth unemployment and over-representation of young people in marginal and precarious employment.

3. High economic reliance on families and social network and support systems.

4. Increasing inequalities of educational opportunity.

5. Insecurity, increasing violence suffered by youth and committed by them, fears of globalisation and the destruction of the environment; in some cases fear of armed conflict, incalculable health risks."

(Council of Europe, 2003a, pp. 4-5)

The governing ideas of youth policy have clustered around concepts of learning, inclusion/social cohesion, citizenship/participation, and safety/health/well-being (Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 4). Arising out of these ideas, the report argues that youth policy should have the following objectives:

"a. To invest purposefully in young people in a coherent and mutually reinforcing way, wherever possible through an opportunity focused rather than problem oriented approach.

b. To involve young people both in the strategic formulation of youth policies and in eliciting their views about the operational effectiveness of policy implementation.

c. To create the conditions for learning, opportunity and experience which ensure and enable young people to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to play a full part in both the labour market and in civil society.

d. To establish systems for robust data collections both to demonstrate the effectiveness of youth policies and to reveal the extent to which policy gaps exist in relating to effective service delivery to young people from certain social groups, in certain areas or in certain conditions.

e. To display a commitment to reducing such policy gaps where they demonstrably exist."

(Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 4)

The notion that young people are not merely the passive recipients of policy is something that has been recognised by European ministers with responsibility for youth. According to the report, this perspective is crystallised in the ideas expressed below,

"1. Creativity and innovation and a tendency to understand oneself as a cultural producer, both individually and within reference groups.

2. A high level of ethical standards when judging institutions both nationally and at European level indicating deep democratic convictions.

3. Active participation in community affairs, at local level and within networks and action groups.

4. Open and positive attitudes to a heterogeneous Europe, standing up for cultural, ethnic and social diversity, even if intolerant social and xenophobic attitudes of some cannot be ignored (summary of final declaration)."

(Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 5)

In recognition of the interactive relationship between policy designers and young people as active agents, the youth policy product is conceptualised in terms of packages of opportunity and experience. These packages are listed in the report as follows:

"1. Learning: (lifelong, formal and non-formal) education and training, recognition of non-formally acquired skills and competencies.

2. Access to new technologies.

3. Specialist personal advice and support, career guidance.

4. Information.

5. Access to health services and social protection.

6. Access to housing.

7. Access to paid work.

8. Mobility.

9. Justice and youth rights (for example to assistance).

10. Opportunities to participation and active citizenship.

11. Recreational, cultural and social.

12. Sports and outdoor activities.

13. Away from home, youth exchange and international experiences.

14. Safe and secure environment".

(Council of Europe, 2003a, pp. 6-7)

Such packages of opportunity and experience are typically delivered by ministries across the policy domains of education and training, employment and youth employment, health and well-being, housing, social protection, family policy and child protection, leisure and cultural policy (sports, arts and volunteering), and youth justice (Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 7). Common to all domains are the cross-cutting themes of information, participation and active citizenship, and power (Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 7). The issue of power, it should be noted, needs to be covered at two levels. The first concerns the legal status of young people in its application to participation.

"Can young people claim certain youth policy opportunity packages for them-selves? On measures imposed on them – can they veto them?"

(Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 7)

The second level at which power should be considered concerns the extent to which declared policy aspirations are supported in practical, material terms. It relates to,

"… the budgets put at the disposal of special youth policy measures: when are they are enlarged, when are they cut back? Does this mainly refer to local policies, does it intervene into ministerial domains? Are these movements co-ordinated or separate? What is the hard core of youth policy items in budget terms – what cannot be touched and how can youth budgets be defended in legal terms?"

(Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 7)

The implication is quite clear. Adequate resourcing and the effective management of delivery systems are critical if policy aims are to be translated into tangible opportunity packages. Failure to address crucial questions of practical application will inevitably lead to policy gaps and shortfalls in service provision.

"The reasons for this policy gap may be resource constraints, inappropriate structures, an absence of a suitably skilled workforce, a poorly designed policy, unrealistic objectives, or an absence of a sufficiently broad range of measures. This list is not exhaustive, but different reasons for the policy gap may overlap. Moreover this gap may affect different sub-groups of young people to a different degree; hence there may be disproportionately negative consequences for groups such as rural young people, minorities, those who leave school prematurely, or young women. The resultant policy challenge will be, how to improve the package of opportunity and experience to ensure that access to it is created for such disproportionately disadvantaged groups of young people."

(Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 9)

The report reminds us, moreover, that youth policy is value-based and therefore concerned with such essential principles as human rights, equality of opportunity, the affirmation of multiculturalism and the heterogeneity of all national popula-tions; and access and inclusion (Council of Europe, 2003a, p. 7). The centrality of values to youth policy and practice should alert researchers to the importance of qualitative evaluation in this area of work. The evaluation of youth policy requires a research strategy that deploys both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sources of information and the review process

The Council of Europe duly appointed the international review team. The group was chaired by a member of the European Steering Committee for Intergovernmental Co-operation in the Youth Field (CDEJ). Other members of the group included three youth researchers (one of whom was the rapporteur), a representative from the youth NGO community – the co-management structure of the Council of Europe (Advisory Council) – and two members of the Council of Europe's Secretariat. A slightly more detailed account of the various members' backgrounds and interests is provided below. However, it is worth noting that different members of the team – in accordance with their different areas of interest and expertise – took a lead role at different points in the process. In the last analysis, of course, a collective view had to be formed. This was achieved through face-to-face debates in group meetings and virtual debates via email correspondence.

The process commenced with the receipt of the National Report prior to the group's visit to Malta. On an individual basis all members of the group subjected the document to close scrutiny. This was followed by a series of group discussions that took place during the course of our visit to Malta. The initial discussions centred on the quality and comprehensiveness of the report. Our meetings also identified omissions, points for clarification and issues where more information was required. It is important to make the point that whilst the National Report served the purpose of being an invaluable reference point, it was not the only source of information. Other documents – including books, reports and briefings – were provided by agencies, organisations and individuals. At the outset the group was very clear that it was not reviewing the National Report; it was reviewing youth policy in Malta.

The visit to Malta took place in May. Our visit comprised a demanding itinerary (see Appendix 1) of formal meetings with the national review team (authors of the National Report), government ministries (at which governing politicians and civil servants were present), agencies and NGOs (including the National Youth Council). The review team was particularly pleased to have the opportunity of meeting the Minister of Youth, the Honourable Jesmond Mugliett. There were also valuable informal meetings with practitioners and young people at sites of youth work practice. At these meetings the review team had the opportunity of asking questions and generally engaging in dialogue. Crucially, these visits helped the team members gain a feel for what was happening at ground level.

At the end of the visit the team met in order to form a provisional critical overview of Malta's youth policy. The discussion also included some of the recommendations

that the review team might wish to make in respect of key areas of policy. Following the team's departure from Malta, group members have continued the debate via email correspondence. This has taken the form of an exchange of papers and notes. Midway through this process the rapporteur circulated a progress report and consultation document to the team. Some 6 000 words in length, it sought to consolidate the team's position on a series of questions.

In the quest for additional data, it should be mentioned that the rapporteur has undertaken a literature search and visited a number of relevant websites. Moreover, in the process of compiling the report, he has been in email contact with a number of Maltese colleagues based in the agencies visited. They kindly answered queries, clarified certain misunderstandings and pointed him in the direction of other useful sources of information. Their assistance has been particularly appreciated.

On 15 July the rapporteur circulated a draft report to all members of the international review team. The members duly provided critical comments, suggested amendments and, in some cases, provided additional text. Although the rapporteur necessarily took editorial decisions about what should be included in the final draft of the report, a consensual view on the main issues did emerge. Ultimately, a sense of collective ownership of the final document was achieved. Whilst the International Report is the product of a rather complex collective process, the rapporteur must take full responsibility for what is finally printed on the page. Any inaccuracies or shortcomings in this report should be attributed solely to him.

2.2. The international review team

The review team thought it might be helpful to provide brief profiles highlighting individual backgrounds and interests. The report on youth policy in Finland contained the piquant observation that the benefit of an international review for the country under consideration is that it can help to render "the familiar strange" (Council of Europe, 1999: 101). One member of the Secretariat had visited Malta previously in order to establish the parameters of the review and negotiate an itinerary for the international team's visit. Another member of the team had also visited Malta briefly, but did not have the opportunity to engage meaningfully with the local society and culture. A major disadvantage, therefore, was that it took most of us a little time to gain a sense of orientation. In fact the team might have been prepared more fully had some additional social scientific and cultural texts been provided in advance of the visit. This is a learning point that the Council of Europe may wish to consider for future international reviews. Nevertheless, the advantage of our profound ignorance was that the team brought fresh eyes to this unfamiliar terrain. The naïve question of the stranger in a strange land can sometimes yield the most revealing answers. However, the team also hopefully brought some experience and expertise to the task, as well, no doubt, as a few items of cultural baggage. It is in the interests of good social science that we therefore reveal something of our backgrounds and interests. What follows are not fully developed person cultural biographies (McCracken, 1988). Hopefully, though, these accounts give an impression of the different understandings we may have brought to this policy review.

Adriana Ciorbaru (Chair, CDEJ)

Adriana Ciorbaru works in the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Youth. She is the representative of Romania on the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and a member of the CDEJ Bureau. The experience derived from her

active involvement in the preparation of Romania's national review of youth policy in 1999-2000 has been invaluable to the international review team.

Charles Berg (researcher)

Charles Berg is from Luxembourg, a country similar to Malta in terms of size, but in contrast to the Maltese archipelago, entirely landlocked. He teaches educational science and qualitative research methods at the Institut Superieur d'Etudes et de Recherches Pedadogiques, Walferdange (the national teacher training centre in Luxembourg). Currently his research work focuses on two subjects: literacy and youth. He also co-directs the Kannertheateralier, a student and teacher drama group that performs children's theatre. He is a co-founder and chairman of the Centre d'etudes sur la situation des jeunes en Europe (CeSiJe), his country's most important youth research structure.

Jonathan Evans (researcher and rapporteur)

Jonathan Evans is from the United Kingdom and works as a lecturer in the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences (a constituent institution in the federal University of Wales). His research interests lie principally in the field of youth justice and public care. Before moving into higher education he worked as a community development worker, social worker and probation officer. For a period of three years he also served on the national executive of the National Association of Probation Officers. As a Welsh-speaker living in a multicultural city, he is also interested in the rights of linguistic and cultural minorities.

Michael Ingledow (Council of Europe)

Michael Ingledow is a member of the Council of Europe's Secretariat.

Jean-Charles Lagree (researcher)

Jean-Charles Lagree is research fellow in sociology for the French state research organisation, the National Centre for Scientific Research. He is also currently General Secretary of the European Sociological Association. He has previously taken part in a similar exercise, reviewing youth policy in Lithuania. His research interests are: collective identity, Europeanisation, globalisation and international migration.

Peter Lauritzen (Council of Europe)

Peter Lauritzen is a German national who has been working in the youth field of the Council of Europe since it first became operational in 1972. In the intervening period he has been in charge of education and training, research and – more recently – youth policy reports. He has directed the Council of Europe's youth campaign against racism and was the first director of the European Youth Centre in Budapest. He currently runs the co-operation programme with the European Union and co-ordinates education, training, research and youth policy.

Alexandros Liakopoulos (Advisory Council – ETUC)

Alexandros Liakopoulos is a young Greek trade unionist who has been involved in many youth movements and organisations over the last decade. His involvement spans local, national and international levels; it includes participation in the pupil, university student, trade union, political youth and social forum movements. At an international level he has served in a representative capacity on the ETUC youth

section, Young European Socialists (ECOSY), International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY), European Youth Forum, Advisory Council and the Programming Committee of the European Youth Foundation. As Alexandros Liakopoulos has himself observed, this experience has helped him develop,

> "a certain expertise in understanding cultures and international trends of the youth movement in parallel with youth institutional initiatives and policies, in promoting the interests of the organisations and/or institutional bodies I am representing, in addressing the central questions of youth interest and promoting the empowerment of youth ... in society."

Alexandros Liakopoulos' academic background (a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy, and a Masters degree in European Politics) has helped him to develop an international perspective, particularly in relation to the process of European unification. He is currently undertaking doctoral research on the relationship between the processes of globalisation and regional integration. His analysis includes coverage of the institutional, political, social, cultural and economic dimensions of the subject.

It is, however, his everyday contact with young people that has ensured he maintains a close interest in the issues most affecting them: employment, education and training, social inclusion, discrimination and prejudice, and social justice. It is against this background that he considers it vitally important to promote youth participation and representation in all the key political processes. The institutional empowerment of youth and the importance of the European dimension are central to his political philosophy and practice.

3. The national context

3.1. The social and cultural context: youth and civil society

It is not the task of the review team to produce a report that contains a definitive sociological account of Maltese society. For the group to even attempt such a project would be a huge impertinence. Nevertheless, some acknowledgement of the social and cultural context within which youth policy is formulated and delivered is necessary. In attempting to outline the contours of this context, however, it is recognised that the analysis will inevitably be incomplete and open to dispute. In our defence, however, it should be pointed out that even highly capable native social scientists have struggled to assemble a complete picture of contemporary Maltese society. In terms of the availability of hard data and rigorous theoretical analyses, lacunae apparently still exist.

> "With reference to social stratification, for instance, we have, as yet, no empirical study of the class structure of Maltese society, or of the loci of power and of how influence is wielded. We know next to nothing about social mobility or lack of it, and very little empirical work has been done in terms of analysis of the state. Few have dared to systematically address the hegemony of the Catholic Church in Malta, the distribution of wealth among various groups, or the principles of cultural inclusion which are exercised locally."

(Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994, p. 7)

The Maltese islands are, of course, small (about the equivalent land mass of the Isle of Wight that lies off the south coast of England) and, especially in the south, densely populated (a total population of approximately 375 000 to 400 000 residents). At risk of essentialising the national identity, the archipelago's uniquely complex and turbulent history has left some distinguishing marks on contemporary Maltese society. Despite its often-enforced engagement with a wider world of potentially unfriendly neighbours and colonial powers, to some extent Malta remains its own unique reference point. Despite being located in a "geo-politically sensitive theatre" (Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994, p. 10) – experiencing, as it has done, successive waves of domination by the Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Spanish, French and, latterly, the British – the Maltese people have managed to accommodate outside influences and retain a strong sense of national identity. The survival of the Maltese language and culture in the face of such assaults on its identity is, indeed, a minor miracle.

Sultana and Baldacchino (1994) identify three decisive influences on contemporary Malta: the British tradition, the church of Rome and, what they term, "the realm of Lilliput" (p. 14). British interest in Malta was essentially strategic and it "… successfully groomed a fortress culture which is a prerequisite for a secure fortress economy" (p. 10). It has been suggested that, on the whole, the British model of imperialism tended not to disrupt local culture and customs unless it was absolutely necessary to its national interest. As such, the British did not seek to obliterate the local language or culture and certainly had the good sense to avoid serious disputes with the Roman Catholic Church. That said, the British did bequeath the marketable asset of fluency in the English language and left a still discernible imprint on institutions of education, administration, justice and government. The patrician, colonial governor-style of – ostensibly – benevolent top-down administration, probably knitted quite well with established local traditions of paternalistic authority:

"[The] colonial legacy spills over into a variety of contemporary behaviour patterns. These include western-inspired conspicuous consumption, a welcoming society orientation which is amenable to a vibrant tourist economy as well as an educational, legal and general institutional set-up which draws heavy inspiration from the hallowed canons of metropolitan practice."

(Sultana and Baldachino, 1994, p. 11)

The "modelling disposition" (Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994, p. 11) of the Maltese people would seem to still be evident in a management style that favours centralised and vertical lines of command.

The Roman Catholic Church remains at the very centre of Maltese life. As an institution it is present to administer the rites of passage in this life and preside over the final journey into the next. Abela (1994, p. 2001) also provides evidence of a society that continues to subscribe to core Roman Catholic values – even when it isn't attending mass on a regular basis. Maltese society's sense of cohesion derives in large part from these long and very strong religious traditions. It is arguably the adhesive that has helped to bond families with their neighbourhoods. Both church and family are vital national resources that provide young people with support, security and a feeling of solidarity with their neighbours. By the same token, these same institutions also have the capacity to enclose, confine and restrict. During the course of our visit the review team wondered whether Malta was a monolithic society rather than a cohesive society. The search for a space that was not already occupied by church or family preoccupied us on our visit. To what extent could a civil society exist outside state, family and church? Were the interstices between these different sectors of society sufficiently sizeable to permit the growth of a critical culture that was free from the regulatory surveillance of social authorities? Was Malta, in reality, as socially conformist as it sometimes appeared? Apart from the ritualised set-piece sparring of the political parties, were there deeper, subterranean conflicts at work in society? These were the questions to which we returned on numerous occasions in our discussions.

As central as the Roman Catholic Church is to Maltese life, it is important not to fall into the trap of assuming that it is a monolithic institution. Although the Church continues to draw the bottom line on certain moral issues (abortion and divorce are not permitted in Malta; and this position will not be affected by accession to the European Union), there are nevertheless different groupings and tendencies within

local Catholicism – just as there are in the wider Roman Catholic Church. Some sub-scribe to social radicalism and liberal theology, whilst others are more conservative in their beliefs. Abela (2001, pp. 101-121) has written insightfully about the co-exis-tence of traditional or conventional practising Catholics with the newly emerging – and sometimes significantly secularised – Catholic identities of today. To the for-eign eye this indigenous diversity is not immediately apparent. On closer inspec-tion, however, it is most certainly present.

The third influence on the Maltese social identity is Lilliputian. The authors, of course, are referring to the size of this unique, "ex-colonial microstate" (Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994, p. 14). Unlike many other small countries, of course, it is insular in the strictly geographical sense of the term. The combined characteristic of smallness and insularity make for a particularly intense social experience. The enforced intimacy of Maltese social life makes it a place where individuals are highly observed. There is, of course, a very positive dimension to this experience. It means that people are more likely to notice those in need of help and assistance. There is, though, a downside and this can particularly affect young people who are trying to spread their wings as well as those who are in some way different in this warm, overwhelmingly monocultural society. Simply subscribing to values or devi-ating from customary behaviours can attract uninvited attention. One young woman we met at Zghazagh Azzjoni Kattolika (ZAK) gave us an insight into the con-straints that can be placed on young people's behaviour by neighbourhood gossip. Another young man in the same meeting said that he wouldn't attend certain types of party because the news would be relayed back to his parents via the communal grapevine. We heard similar stories in Gozo. Whilst such close social networks are not necessarily always malicious – indeed they are mostly well-intentioned and socially protective – they still have the capacity to smother individuality and a sense of adventure. Sultana and Baldacchino express this same point in very strong terms.

> "Social mobility and intimacy are not exclusively benign conditions, con-firming attributes of a small is beautiful stereotype. Microstate life could make one feel very hemmed in. It could feel like growing up in a straight jacket of community surveillance, given the dense psycho-social atmosphere."

(Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994, p. 17)

One of the paradoxes of this small and intimate total society, however, is that the social distance between the top and the grassroots seems to be the same – in rel-ative terms – as one might find in larger, more complex and pluralistic societies. One of the perennial complaints the review team heard concerned the elite allegedly being out of touch with the ordinary people. Initially some of us marvelled that it was possible to be out of touch with anyone in Malta, but there did appear to be some truth in this assertion.

The international review team wondered whether there might not be a fourth influ-ence on Maltese society: patterns of migration. In its discussions, the team was interested not only in past and present patterns of migration. We were also inter-ested in future prospects. How do Maltese people envisage their relationship with their prospective European partners?

After political independence was granted in 1964, there followed large-scale emi-gration from the islands to Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United

States of America. The process of "… dismantling… the fortress service economy" (Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994, p. 10) was probably not completed until the end of the 1970s. This painful period of economic reorientation surely accounts in part for the large Maltese exodus. The effects of that emigration are still being felt today (see the population pyramid table reproduced on page 46 of the National Report, 2003). One of the issues in which we were interested was the relationship between the indigenous population and the Maltese diaspora. What is the nature of the social and cultural transfers that currently take place between the native Maltese and these émigré communities?

Recent statistics suggest that the number of Maltese emigrants has declined sharply since 1995 (National Statistics Office, 2003e: website accessed in August 2003). This is partly because greater restrictions have been placed on immigration in such countries as the United Kingdom. Thus, in the first quarter of 2003, the total number of people emigrating to the United Kingdom was eight. Malta's accession to the European Union may well change this trend. Whilst many of the people we met in Malta doubted the likelihood of a mass exodus or brain drain from Malta to European Union member states, it seems entirely probable that the number of young people leaving the islands will increase. Some young people may leave to further their education or careers. Others may simply wish to broaden their social and cultural experience of other societies. Many of these young people may not settle permanently outside Malta, but some will. Those who do return, however, will probably be changed by their experience. This, in turn, is likely to have some ripple effect upon wider society on these islands. Currently, the majority of returning migrants would appear to be people who have been studying abroad (National Statistics Office, 2003e: website accessed August 2003). During the course of the team's visit to Malta we met such people. Shifts in attitudes and outlooks had certainly occurred in most cases we encountered. An increase in the volume of returning exiles will, almost inevitably, have some wider impact on local society.

This human traffic will, of course, flow both ways. Malta, like other member states, must also be prepared for the arrival of foreign people who enter the country as citizens rather than tourists. This prospect will undoubtedly bring both benefits and challenges.

Accession to the European Union will also probably intensify anxieties about illegal immigration. This is, indeed, already a pressing item on the domestic political agenda. In the past year there have been approximately 1 600 boat people processed by the authorities (National Statistics office, 2003e: website accessed August 2003). This is not, of course, simply a policing matter. There are humanitarian and social issues with which education, health and welfare agencies must grapple. Whilst some references to this situation were made during the course of our visit, we found it difficult to gauge Maltese society's reaction to the arrival of such immigrants. The issue of asylum-seeking is one that excites heated debate and considerable prejudice in many European Union countries. In some cases it can also create a hostile environment for established visible minorities. As a team we wondered how legitimately settled minorities (Muslims, Jews and foreign workers with work permits) fared in contemporary Maltese society. As we did not have the opportunity of meeting representatives from such communities, it is difficult for us to comment on this matter. In the circumstances we can only raise the question.

Whilst Malta is still, in many respects, a profoundly traditional society, it is also subject to many powerful de-traditionalising influences. In this era of electronic media and economic globalisation, no state is an island. Malta's not so distant accession to the European Union is confirmation of this fact. The Maltese islands have for many years, of course, hosted foreign tourists. The annual influx of those with other lifestyles, cultures and outlooks is bound to have an effect. On the one hand, as Giddens (1994: XXVIII) observes, it can provoke a variety of opposition and resistance. Given Malta's history, a little resistance to invasion is perfectly understandable and not to be deplored. A tendency by some, though, to construct all social problems as imported evils (drugs, Aids, promiscuity and pornography) is to read only one side of the balance sheet. Many Maltese people – quite possibly the majority – adopt, adapt or accommodate foreign cultural imports. This is particularly true of Maltese youth. Young Maltese people do not only enjoy themselves in the bars and dance halls of Paceville. The National Report's intriguing section on culture (2003, p. 112-127) draws attention to the new, exciting ways in which young people are refashioning foreign cultural imports and claiming them as their own. The variety and vibrancy of the youth cultures in these small islands is truly remarkable and surely worthy of celebration and even investment. There is evidence here that some young people are using their free-time creatively – albeit in ways that attract disapproval from mainstream Maltese society. Admittedly, it is probably only a minority of young people who actively seek the more empowering forms of self-expression. Nevertheless, their lack of deference to authority is not necessarily an unhealthy development. In the midst of this scene, the emerging visibility of Malta's gay community is evidence of this generation's growing confidence in asserting difference (National Report, 2003, p. 116; Malta Gay Rights Movement, 2003 – website accessed August 2003). This is not to suggest, however, that the assertion of difference in Maltese society is an easy option for young people. Appendix 5 reproduces a late submission made to the international review team by the Malta Gay Rights Movement.

The points of comparison being made here are, of course, self-referential. Young people in Malta today are being compared with those of yesterday. In comparison with many other European countries, Malta's young people are somewhat staid and conventional. On a number of occasions the review team was struck by how deferential young people were in the presence of authority figures. In a modern democratic society mutual respect between citizens is healthy; deference, on the other hand can stifle initiative and creativity – essential qualities for the modern world.

Young people's involvement in traditional voluntary organisations (political parties, religious associations and church bodies) has declined, but membership has increased markedly in other organisations like trade unions, sports, health and third world development groups. Significantly, moreover, Maltese youth is engaged in higher rates of unpaid work in voluntary organisations compared to their European counterparts (Abela, 2001, pp. 1-78). These levels of social commitment are very impressive.

A close analysis of membership, finance and participation rates in youth organisations reveals an interesting picture (National Statistics Office, 2003f: website visited August 2003) in which there are causes for celebration and concern. The survey includes children, young people and older adults. Thus, whilst membership increased by 16.3% between 2000 and 2001 (from 67 084 to 78 001), this was

concentrated mainly in the younger age groups. In percentage terms the age profile of the membership can be represented in the following terms:

5-10: 28.4%

11-15: 25.07%

16-20: 12.21%

21-24: 11.91%

25-29: 12.41%

30+: 10%

Meanwhile, youth organisation membership as a percentage of the total population (of the various age cohorts) can be broken down as follows:

5-10: 72.23%

11-15: 70.31%

16-20: 33.05%

21-24: 39.63%

25-29: 35.27%

Although males dominate the membership of these youth organisations (70.27%), the gender distribution is more equitable in the age groups 16-20 (50.9% males and 49.1% females) and 21-24 (50.71% males and 49.29% females).

As expected, perhaps, religious organisations form the largest group in the sphere of youth work with a share of 21.5%. This is followed by organisations dedicated to educational activities (18.9%) and social activities (16.6%). Approximately 260 organisations are staffed by 43 full-time and 111 part-time personnel. It will be appreciated, therefore, that most youth organisations rely very heavily upon volunteers. During the period in question there was a small drop of 1.5% in voluntary participation. It should be noted that 50.1% of volunteers are female.

The most worrying aspect of the survey concerns the financial conditions in which they operate. The period under scrutiny witnessed a decline in expenditure from 0.73 million Maltese lira (MTL) to MTL 0.62 million. This represents a decrease of 14.8%. There has been a corresponding decline in the income of youth organisations: the decrease from MTL 0.84 million to MTL 0.56 million represents a drop of 32.6%. It should also be noted that government subsidies to youth organisations were reduced from MTL 254 768 in 1999 to MTL 205 172 in 2000. This was followed by a sharp fall to MTL 82 838 in 2001. As a percentage distribution of income, government subsidies fell from 36.12 % in 1999 to 14.9% in 2001.

It should be appreciated that the details of the most recent budget are not available to the review team at the time of compiling this report. It is quite possible, therefore, that the downward trends in expenditure, income and government subsidies reported here are now in the process of being reversed. It is to be hoped that this is the case.

One of the questions that the review team posed was whether young people in Malta were being prepared for citizenship both in their own country and the wider world. Those we met in Gozo made the point that life on the Maltese islands imposes very immediate practical constraints and obstacles on mobility. A Gozitan, for example, cannot cross borders with the same ease as a young person from Luxembourg. Nevertheless, given these natural constraints placed on young people's mobility, Maltese youth appear to travel more extensively than one would

have perhaps first assumed. The review team was very impressed with the Kerygma Movement's efforts to combine youth mobility with social concern, peace and interfaith dialogue. The development work undertaken by the movement's young people in Albania, for example, is particularly noteworthy.

Like the British, the Maltese have been described as "ambivalent Europeans" (Mitchell, 2002). This is not necessarily a criticism, however. The ability to look both ways is a positive attribute. As Father Charles Fenech of the Kerygma Movement noted, Malta is well placed – geographically at least – to act as a bridge between North Africa and Europe. The country could, perhaps, make more of its potential role as a cultural mediator between the Islamic, Christian and secular worlds. Malta's position in the world – paradoxically both marginal and central – means that it has the potential to relate not only to Europe, but also well beyond.

3.2. Youth policy, organisation, structure and service delivery

In 1990 a parliamentary secretariat for youth affairs was created within the Ministry of Education. Two years later this secretariat was transformed into a Ministry of Youth and Arts. After a series of consultative meetings with youth organisations, a National Youth Council was established in the same year. It was also in 1992 that the University of Malta agreed to a request from the ministry to establish an Institute of Youth Studies. In 1993 a youth policy report was drafted and subsequent changes have been made as the result of regular reviews. The National Report (2003) explains the background against which an international review of youth policy was requested.

> "It was clear by now that, six years after the publication of the first policy document, and following the establishment of a number of relevant structures, the time has come for more concrete action to be taken. Malta's representation on the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ), on the Youth Research Network, and on the Youth Policy Indicators Experts' Team of the Council of Europe led to an application for an international review by a team of experts from this same Council. Malta's application was accepted and the Honourable J. Mugliett, Parliamentary Secretary for Youth and Sport within the Ministry of Education set up a review team in order to prepare a National Report on youth in Malta."

At present Malta has the benefit of a dedicated Minister of Youth. In addition to having responsibility for youth, the ministry also covers sports, arts and heritage. It should be noted, however, that operational responsibilities have been delegated to quasi-autonomous agencies in the case of sports (Malta Sports Council) and arts and heritage (Arts Council and Heritage Malta, respectively). Currently three members of staff service the youth department within the ministry. It is worth mentioning, however, that the possibility of creating a quasi-autonomous national youth agency is being considered. It is evident that the reorganisation of the ministry is still in its early stages. Nevertheless, serious efforts are being made to develop a strategic approach by ensuring that all policies affecting young people are monitored and youth-proofed by the Ministry. The National Youth Council is the main body consulted in respect of policy formation – although inevitably, perhaps, there are differing perceptions concerning the efficacy and mutual respect of this consultative arrangement.

Youth policy is delivered through various government ministries and departments. The ministry's role in funding NGOs is another important mechanism for translating policies into ground level practice. The main channels of communication and information used by the ministry are via youth workers, the website, NGOs and – as previously stated – the National Youth Council.

The small size of the country obviously creates the possibility of close consultation with young people. There are, however, also constraints. These include the problem of the minister being supported by a small civil service. This can make continuous policy development difficult. Consequently it is sometimes necessary to commission or outsource discrete pieces of work from outside bodies or consultants. The National Report (2003) is an example of this type of process.

The National Report is divided into six sections: an introduction, the national youth policy document (covering those aged between 14 and 30), education (by Mario Azzopardi); health (by Gabriella Calleja); employment (by Dr Anthony Azzopardi), culture (Albert Bell), housing (Audrey Ann Ellul), and justice (by Sandra Scicluna). Extensive reference is made to the National Report (2003) as a source of information and commentary in Chapter 4 of this international review report.
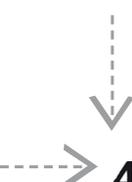
4. Issues and themes

4.1. issues and cross-cutting themes

This chapter deals with the salient issues and themes of youth policy. The learning section concentrates mainly on the domains of education and youth work. Access to the labour market focuses mainly on the areas of employment, education and specialist advice on careers. The work of the Employment Training Corporation is also appraised here. Section 4.4 on health, welfare and social protection explores the health and well-being agenda, the role of the health service and, in particular, the work of the health promotion department. The exploration of welfare and social protection includes consideration of such areas as social work, social security and specialist services to vulnerable or at risk populations. Section 4.5 on accommodation focuses on both social housing services and the role of the family. Finally, section 4.6, on criminal justice, takes a critical look at how that system appears to deal with young people who break the law. Issues of culture, citizenship and mobility have already been discussed in Chapter 3.1. These issues do, however, re-emerge in different sections of this chapter.

The above issues are also explored in relation to a number of cross-cutting themes. Although these themes are inextricably linked, they are organised under the following headings: participation, equity, diversity and special provision, autonomy, social cohesion and social exclusion, and governance, power and information.

4.2. Learning

Introduction

In most conventional accounts of youth transition, the route from full-time education to the labour market is often perceived as the most critical. A successful economic transition, it is argued, forms the basis for the ultimate attainment of domestic independence, household and/or family formation. In senior policy circles, therefore, it is understandable that a crucial aim of the education system should be vocational preparation. Education, however, embraces a broader mission than merely aligning the education system with the needs of the economy. In fact such an alignment is no simple task, because healthy economies are dynamic and in a state of constant flux and change. Young people, therefore, need to be equipped with something rather more than sets of occupationally-defined competences. They need the skills, competences and attitudes required to adapt to rapidly changing economic and social conditions. The acquisition of such navigation skills should now be regarded as an essential element of a good education.

Employability, according to Williamson (2002, p. 50), should be one of the three main aims of education; the other two aims being personal development and preparation for active citizenship. These educational aims are, of course, all linked. The soft skills of creative problem-solving, rational decision-making and effective communication are relevant to personal life, citizenship and employment, or, as Williamson expresses it, "life-management, participation and the workplace." (Williamson, 2002, p. 50)

In light of the above preliminary comments, this section of the report considers three areas: formal education, non-formal education, and vocational education. Formal education can be summarised succinctly as "the structured education system that runs from primary school to university, and includes specialised programmes for technical and professional training" (Brander et al, 2002, p. 21). Non-formal education, meanwhile, "refers to any planned programme of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competencies, outside the formal educational curriculum" (Brander et al, 2002, p. 21). Formal and non-formal education should not, however, be regarded as mutually exclusive areas of pedagogical activity. Whilst youth work is traditionally, and quite correctly, identified as the principal site for non-formal education, schools are also places where personal and social development can be facilitated. The power of the hidden curriculum that underpins school regimes – for good or bad – is, indeed, already well appreciated in Maltese society (Mifsud, 1994). Schools, for example, can organise and structure the social experience of their students in ways that can successfully transmit core soft skills and democratic values. Vocational education, whilst commonly considered to fall within the sphere of technically specialised formal education, should also include an important dimension of non-formal education. This is not only true in human resource-type vocations like youth work, social work, tourism and personnel management, but also in mainstream areas of the economy like information technology, electronics and manufacturing. The importance of team-working and inter-disciplinary project management in industry requires the development of well-honed group-work skills. The days when employees were stuck in their occupational ghettos have passed. The overarching aim of education must therefore be to produce self-starting individuals who are competent, confident, communicative and well prepared for a world of ever-changing challenges.

Formal education

There is clear empirical evidence in many countries that a good school attendance record and the possession of formal academic qualifications are strong protective factors against the risk of social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Lee and Murie, 1999; Coles, 2000; Williamson, 2002). It is, therefore, perfectly legitimate for governments to pursue polices that reduce school exclusions or truancies and increase the overall level of formal educational qualifications. Longer periods spent in formal education should, *ipso facto*, improve employment prospects for young people. However, it should also be acknowledged that governments have a political interest in persuading young people to extend their time in formal education or training: high levels of youth unemployment afflict many European countries. There are basically three main policies designed to promote young people's extended presence in the formal education system: direct support to educational institutions, direct financial assistance to young people, and/or direct financial assistance to the families that support young people (Middleton, 2002).

A detailed outline of the formal education system is not presented here. A few of the key features of the secondary school system will, however, be highlighted in order to convey a sense of the structural context within which education is delivered to young people. The Maltese education system, in common with many other European countries, is divided into three tiers: primary, secondary and tertiary/higher. Education is compulsory for those aged from 5 to 16. It is worth mentioning, however, that in recent years the pre-school sector (ages 3 to 5) has been expanded and, though not compulsory, is universally available. In our visit to the Ministry of Education on 6 May 2003 the review team was informed that the take-up rate was approximately 95%; a very healthy participation rate that, incidentally, releases many parents (especially women) to engage in employment, training or further education should they so choose. This measure is potentially a very important protective factor in terms of reducing the risk of social exclusion. The quality of pre-school education is, moreover, enhanced and supported by a "fully operational" pre-school education centre.

Compulsory education is provided across three sectors: state, church (Roman Catholic) and independent/private. The Director General of Education commented upon some aspects of the relationship between the three sectors in the following terms:

"The non-state sector of Maltese schools (the greater bulk of which are church schools but which also includes an appreciable proportion that are referred to as independent schools, that is not being run by either the state or the church) happens to cater for about one third of the student cohort. The other two thirds are catered for by state schools. At secondary education level, there is an entry qualifying examination, at 11+, which determines whether the child is admitted to a junior lyceum (which is academically oriented and comparable to the levels reached by the non-state schools) or is admitted to a general secondary school (also referred to as an area secondary school). It so happens that the number of students qualifying for entry into the junior lyceums and the number of students admitted in the general secondaries happen to be roughly equal. Thus it can be said that the non-state sector, the junior lyceum (state) sector and the general secondary sector (state) roughly cater for one third of the students each. The first two sectors cater for high academic achievement (two thirds of the cohort) whilst the third sector has to cater for less academically inclined students."

(Mizzi, 2003)

There is, however, a close relationship between the state and the private sector. Apparently, the state contributes to the funding of most independent schools. The majority of these schools are managed by the Roman Catholic Church (National Report, 2003, p. 18). The relationship between the state and church schools is described in the following terms:

"The Catholic Church in Malta has traditionally played an important part in education, providing educational institutions of a high standard. Such a tradition has left a significant legacy. Church schools, now heavily subsidised by the state to the amount of MTL 11 million annually, still offer free education, asking only for annual contributions from parents. Entrance to church schools is by public examination and, since parents subscribe overwhelmingly to the option, places are then frequently allotted by a lottery system."

(National Report, 2003, p. 17)

issues and themes

More recently Maltese society has witnessed a new departure in the use of public money for private education. The "…establishment of non-profit making foundations that undertake the setting-up of fee-paying educational institutions" (National Report, 2003, p. 17) is currently attracting MTL 500 000 per annum from the government. One of the aims of this initiative, as we understand it, is also to widen access to high quality education.

The boundary between private and church education is seemingly not entirely clear-cut. As has already been mentioned, the church runs the majority of private schools. It should also be noted that some people allege that the voluntary parental contribution to a Catholic Church school education has, over time, become almost obligatory (National Report, 2003, p. 43). The review team was left with an incomplete picture of the independent education sector. It would appear, however, that private provision covers a wide range in terms of quality, regime and ethos. It should not, therefore, be assumed that all private schools in Malta are prestigious and provide an easy route into a social elite.

> "The issue of Maltese private schools is rather a complex one since not all private schools have the same standing. Darmanin (1989) and Sultana (1991b) note that private schools cannot, as a matter of fact, be clustered in one group since there are evident differences in the clientele different private schools attract. History and old students' occupations generally dictate which private schools are at the top."

> (Mifsud, 1994, p. 324)

At this juncture it seems appropriate to pause and consider the structure within state secondary education. Lower education within the state sector is provided at junior lycea, area secondary schools and boys'/girls' schools. The old trade schools, only a few years ago a prominent feature of Maltese education, are being phased out. Entry to a junior lyceum is by means of a national qualifying examination. These schools are designed to deliver a higher level of academic education than the area secondary schools. Students who fail the examination are admitted to area secondary schools. The boys' schools and girls' schools cater for low achieving pupils. Lower secondary education covers the 11- to 16-year age cohort and provides a general education. At the end of lower secondary education, pupils sit the secondary education certificate examination, an entry qualification that accesses most upper secondary courses. At upper secondary education level there are two streams: one for general education, the other for vocational and technical education. The junior college provides the general education, while the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) delivers vocational education. MCAST currently provides vocational courses from Level 1 to Level 4. This, in essence, is the structure of secondary education in Malta.

At this point it is appropriate to take a wider perspective and consider briefly the historical legacies of Maltese education. The Director General of Education, Mr Charles Mizzi, has commented, "education in Malta has, for years, been the centre of political controversy…" (Ministry of Education, 2000: Ministry of Education website accessed July 2003). It was, therefore, with more than a little trepidation that a review team of foreigners entered this hotly contested arena. However, our task was made comparatively easy by the candour that characterised the contributions of those we met during the course of our visit, not least from the Director General of Education himself. Moreover, the National Report makes some

strikingly robust criticisms of the Maltese education system. Below is a selection of quotations from the education section of the report.

> "Malta has had a severely rigid schooling system for many centuries and the reactive character of education is still very much in evidence."
>
> (2003, p. 21)

> "Malta has sustained relative intellectual paralysis for centuries, owing to a vertical system of education that did not recognise the potential of young people as individuals."
>
> (2003, p. 21)

> "There is enough historical and empirical evidence to suggest that the Maltese educational system failed to acknowledge the process of personal growth and became too restrictive to appreciate the essentially unpredictable nature of creative activities."
>
> (2003, p. 36)

> "There exists an anti-imagination prejudice in Maltese educational institutions."
>
> (2003, p. 36)

The traditional culture of educational institutions in Malta was repeatedly portrayed to us in terms of being narrow, overly didactic and examination-focused. This was certainly a view echoed by many of the young people we met on our visits to youth clubs and non-governmental organisations. The dispiriting tradition of Victorian instructionalism, no doubt one of the less helpful legacies of British colonialism, has seemingly survived well beyond the nineteenth century. The following quotation taken from a sociological analysis of education in the last decade of the twentieth century evokes an ethos reminiscent of Thomas Gradrind's school in Charles Dickens' *Hard times* (1976), first published in 1854. The "strict compartmentalisation of knowledge",

> " compounded with a pedagogy that is solely concerned with the transmission of 'knowledge', decontextualises learning, making it completely alien to students' reality …. The situation is made worse by virtue of the fact that teachers are given the status of sole experts in the class and students are treated as empty vessels that need to be filled. This means that valuable knowledge is held almost exclusively by the teacher".
>
> (Chircop, 1994, p. 393)

The above passage resembles closely Dickens' depiction of mid-nineteenth century English education. The opening chapter of the novel, for example, likens the pupils of Gradgrind's pupils, to

> "little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim".
>
> (Dickens, 1976, p. 48)

The systemic neglect of creative pursuits and personal development are sharply condemned in the National Report (2003, p. 36). According to one estimate it amounts only to "the allotment of less than 6% of the timetable in mainstream schools to creative projects". (National Report, 2003, p. 36). It has been widely acknowledged within Maltese society that such an education system does not prepare its young people well for either the demands of a modern economy or the responsibilities of active citizenship – particularly European citizenship.

It would certainly appear that, for some time now, there has been widespread recognition of the need to reform the education system. According to the National Report, the Education Act of 1988 (Act XXIV) aimed to usher in "a system of educational institutions that is made accessible to all Maltese citizens for the full development of the whole personality, including the ability of every person to work." (National Report, 2003, p.18). Moreover, such a rounded education should "enable citizens to form their own independent judgement and develop their creative skills, so as to be able to avail themselves of opportunities to qualify in trades, skills, artisanal, technical, or commercial activities, as well as in professions that absorb them fruitfully within the community." (National Report, 2003, p.18). More recently, the Ministry of Education has launched a national minimum curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2000: Ministry of Education website accessed July 2003). The new curriculum is remarkable because it emerged from extensive consultation with most of the key constituencies involved in education. The extent to which young people themselves (the consumers and/or participants) were consulted, however, remains unclear. Nevertheless, given the controversy that has surrounded Maltese education in the past, the significance of this new educational initiative should not be underestimated. At the time the Director General of Education highlighted the importance of the new consensus.

> "The new national minimum curriculum (NMC) is the breaking of a new dawn in the field of Maltese education. The document is truly national because it is applicable to all state, church and independent schools alike. The document is also national because of the broad-based support that it has received from the major stakeholders in the educational fields during the process of formulation and final approval. Support and approval has also been forthcoming from both sides of the House of Representatives."

(Ministry of Education, 2000: Ministry of Education website accessed July 2003)

The new curriculum is founded upon 15 principles of educational philosophy. These are listed as: quality education for all, respect for diversity, stimulation of analytical, critical and creative thinking, education relevant for life, stable learning environment, nurturing commitment, holistic education, an inclusive education, a more formative assessment, the strengthening of bilingualism in schools, gender equality, vocation and competence, the importance of learning environments, increasing participation in curriculum development, and decentralisation and identity. There is insufficient space within a report of this nature to unpack all of these founding principles. It is, however, worth drawing attention to the rationale underpinning some of these educational concepts.

Under principle 2 (respect for diversity) it is acknowledged that many students have hitherto felt "marginalized by the system" and, as a result, "end up socially excluded and without the necessary means to live fully and effectively in society." (Ministry of Education, 2000: Ministry of Education website accessed July 2003). It

is against the background of this analysis that students' different paths of development and learning styles are recognised. The pedagogical implications for teachers are clear and seemingly accepted by the ministry. Disappointingly, though, the opportunity to validate social and cultural diversity – albeit in the context of a comparatively homogenous society – is missed.

Principle 3 (stimulation of analytical, critical and creative thinking skills) addresses the radical shift in teaching practice that is required. In what could be taken as a direct challenge to Gradrindery in all its forms, the document reminds the reader "students are not empty receptacles to be filled." (Ministry of Education, 2000: Ministry of Education website accessed July 2003). A healthy education, therefore comprises:

> " – a pedagogy based on questioning and not a pedagogy based on answers; questions that lead to further questions rather than answers;
>
> – learning by doing, which involves the creation by students of concrete and relevant objects, a process that involves looking at the problem.
>
> The curriculum encourages a process of continuous search. Teachers should help students not only to establish the link between people, things, events, processes and ideas, but to continuously change or elaborate their structure of knowledge."
>
> (Ministry of Education, 2000: Ministry of Education website accessed July 2003)

Principle 10 (the strengthening of bilingualism in schools) is an important reassertion of the status of the Maltese language whilst Principle 11's welcome statement on gender equality reflects some changes in the social relations between young men and women in wider society. Principle 15 (decentralisation and identity) is linked to the ministry's commitment to a process of democratisation within a hitherto heavily centralised education system. Whilst devolving power to schools should hasten the sense of ownership at a local level, it is important that principles of equity are also observed. The benefits of decentralisation may be very great, but there is also a corresponding danger of simply confirming or institutionalising existing inequalities between geographical areas and social groups. As with all such measures, it is a question of balancing equally legitimate principles.

As a statement of principles, the review team found much to applaud within the "creating the future" document (Ministry of Education, 2000: Ministry of Education website accessed July 2003). Past deficiencies are acknowledged with commendable candour. The strength of shared commitment evidenced in future plans, meanwhile, is truly impressive. However, as the National Report comments,

> "Listing concepts is not enough and nor are good intentions a guarantee for effective development and transformation."
>
> (National Report, 2003, p. 44)

In the last analysis, the success of the new national minimum curriculum can only be evaluated properly in the coming years. It is much too soon to make any authoritative judgement at this stage. Nevertheless, it is important that the evaluation undertaken is ongoing, transparent and discussed openly in the public domain. The review team finds no reason why this should not happen.

Vocational education and employment training issues are dealt with in other parts of this chapter. In so doing we do not, of course, imply that vocational training is a completely discrete area of educational endeavour. As emphasised previously, vocational education is not simply about initiation into a prescribed set of technical competences. It also involves acquiring an ability to problem-solve, mine individual creative potential, engage in critical analysis, and deploy soft interpersonal skills in the workplace.

Higher education has been an influential presence on the archipelago since 1592. The University of Malta has undergone radical restructuring and a massive expansion in student numbers since the late 1980s. At the present time there are approximately 8 000 students registered on various full- and part-time degree and diploma courses. Some 2 000 students graduate each year. Traditional areas of study like law and education have been supplemented by engineering, information technology, computer science and commerce. (National Report, 2003, pp. 15-16). The National Report (2003, p. 37) also draws attention to the collaboration involved between the University of Malta, Institute of Tourism Studies and the Ministry of Tourism in developing and delivering a tourism first-degree programme. Whilst in no way compromising the independence of this academic institution, the university is clearly being responsive to the future needs of the Maltese economy.

Non-formal education

There are signs that non-formal education is being recognised within the Ministry of Education. Recent developments in the delivery of an adult education literacy and numeracy project aimed at hard to reach populations are a case in point:

> "Initially the project will be based on non-formal learning. This has traditionally been regarded by some quarters as being of little value to the learner or to society. However, it has now been accepted that learning which may be considered to have few practical educational outcomes can have incredibly positive results, as a sense of curiosity will be developed which in turn will induce motivation. Through non-formal learning, adult learners will have the possibility of developing their motivation. Through non-formal learning, adult learners will have the possibility of developing their potential, realise their worth and feel empowered to improve their position. Learning which may be considered to have few practical educational outcomes can be the first step to more formal learning, as learners will realise that learning can further empower them and bring about change."

(Department of Information, 2003b: website accessed July 2003)

Such initiatives and practices do, however, need to be applied more widely. The question of whether the learning that takes place outside formal settings can be properly valued and accredited needs to be addressed at some stage.

Youth work is, of course, the location within which non-formal education can take place very successfully. Youth clubs and youth organisations are the forums where young people can acquire key interpersonal skills – like team-building, assertiveness and negotiation – and learn crucial lessons about active participation and citizenship. The review team was greatly impressed with the youth organisations visited. The commitment of mostly unpaid volunteers was especially noteworthy. Whilst there were some memorable exceptions, we also encountered many young people who appeared to be rather too deferential in the presence of authority

figures. This is not a criticism of the youth workers or the volunteers. Indeed, a volunteer we met in Gozo made the observation that young people were not sufficiently rebellious. Historically across most of Europe successive generations of young people have made vital contributions to the process of social renewal. Their energy and creativity may sometimes prove uncomfortable – and occasionally acutely painful – to those in positions of authority. Nevertheless, youth's contestation of received ideas, traditions and social norms is central to the life of a dynamic society. This does not necessarily mean the abandonment of the past, of course – though in some cases radical departures from historical precedent are made. In a dynamic society, though, traditions should not be transmitted uncritically from one generation to the next. If young people are reduced to being the passive recipients of tradition, then that tradition itself is at risk of extinction. A living tradition involves each generation making an active contribution to that heritage. When young people are passive, the dangers of social ossification and long-term decline become almost palpable. Transforming cultures of deference take time and, in many cases, training. Four main themes emerged in various guises in our meetings with youth clubs and youth organisations:

1. The need for more resources was identified. A common demand, we well recognise, but one worthy of close inspection. Money was required for more equipment, maintenance and a myriad other purposes. Crucially, it was felt that increased funding would facilitate the creation of more full- and part-time youth work posts.

2. The need for clearer communication of information to the grassroots. It was pointed out that not every club or organisation enjoyed the benefit of Internet access.

3. Easier access to relevant training was cited as being an essential pre-requisite for improved services to young people. The point was made that volunteers as well as paid staff needed good quality training at an appropriate level.

4. Youth work should be established as a properly recognised profession.

Resources are, of course, finite. It is fully appreciated by the review team that governments must juggle priorities. Nevertheless, it is our view that investment in youth work would be money particularly well spent in Malta. The Ministry of Education has taken serious and well-measured steps in the direction of democratisation. The creation of democratic structures in schools and neighbourhoods is welcome. That said, these new structures are unlikely to be extensively used unless corresponding efforts are made to change the culture on the ground. Young people, and quite possibly their parents, must acquire the habits of participation and full engagement. This is a long-term project in which youth work has a leading role to play.

Vocational education

There appears to be a clear strategy to re-position the education system in such a way as to produce young people who are employable in the projected growth areas of the Maltese economy. With the country's accession to the European Union now assured, Maltese youth must also be prepared to take up wider opportunities beyond the shores of their islands. The aim to produce young people who are proficient in both native Maltese and English is an important part of that economic strategy.

Curriculum reform and a reconfiguration of educational institutions – as opposed to a wholesale restructuring – lie at the heart of Malta's plan to make the rising generation sufficiently knowledgeable, skilled and flexible to meet the demands of new economic realities. Some of these changes have already been mentioned. Others will be explored in more depth in the section on employment and labour market access. At this point, however, it is worth highlighting the importance of a few recent initiatives. In 2000, around 20% of the age cohort was in higher education. However, there was concern, that "… the number (and sometimes the quality) of students in the post-16 vocational sector seemed less encouraging" (National Report, 2003, p. 30). It was against this background that the Ministry of Education launched a strategy with three main objectives to be achieved by 2007:

"1. to introduce technology education at all levels in pre-16 education;

2. to create a new college to take responsibility for much of the post-16 vocational education carried out in Malta, and

3. to set up the Malta vocational qualification, responsible for setting standards and accrediting institutions."

(National Report, 2003, p. 30)

It would seem that the above strategy is well on course. In 2000 the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) was established.

"The vocational college …pledges specialised on-going training, re-training and the upgrading of Malta's current skills-base. Stimulated by the concept of life-long learning the college offers to ensure access to everyone at first level, in feasible areas of study, independently of any formal academic qualifications. Striving to provide schemes for the accreditation of prior learning so as to encourage female returnees and second-chancers to come forward, MCAST offers a wide selection of course."

(National Report, 2003, p. 31)

The work of the Employment Training Corporation (ETC) will be considered later in this chapter.

Participation

As far as participation in education is concerned, attention has been drawn to the problem of illiteracy and dropout rates (National Report, 2003, p. 25). Whilst rates are low when compared to many other European countries, there is understandable concern generated by this issue. The subsequent position of such young people in the labour market is inevitably precarious. The establishment of the Foundation for educational services in 2001 was a response to this problem. Specialised courses are now being run with young people outside normal school hours – often in partnership with other agencies. Such initiatives are important if these young people are to be re-engaged.

The process of democratisation and decentralisation in education has already been referred to in this chapter. Efforts to involve parents, teachers and pupils (albeit only for those aged over 16) in locally established structures are to be welcomed; particularly worthy of note are the establishment of school councils and participation officers. The real challenge, of course, is to create a culture in which the key stakeholders in education actively use these structures. The use of advisory focus

groups by the ministry should also be mentioned. The extent to which they are representative of the main constituencies of interest – including the young people themselves – is unclear. Nevertheless, it is interesting that some of the policy proposals emerging from the focus groups are actually very challenging (National Report, 2003, p. 23-24).

Equity, diversity and special provision

One of the apparent contradictions of this cohesive society is that its education system is structured around social divisions. At the institutional level of the school there are splits that run along a number of intersecting fault lines: state and church; public sector and private sector; the early separation of the academically gifted from the seemingly less able; and, of course, there is gender segregation. How are such divisions of the young justified? Whilst it is possible to assess positively this state of affairs and celebrate the rich diversity of Maltese education, it is nevertheless important to ask some uncomfortable questions. Education systems are, of course, products of their societies. To what extent, though, is the education system in Malta merely engaged in the routine reproduction of those social relations found in wider society? A contemporary sociological analysis of the social class composition of Maltese schools was not available to the review team. Nevertheless, on the basis of academic work conducted in the 1990s, it would seem that the old trade schools were largely working class in character. Trade schools are being phased out of existence, but what else has actually changed? To what extent can the existing education system in Malta be said to offer young people both intellectual and social mobility? To what extent does the present system waste young talent? To what extent does parity of status and esteem exist between the different types of school? These are profoundly crucial questions for Malta. The review team does not possess the intellectual or moral authority to recommend a wholesale change to the education system. We cannot, for example, recommend switching to a system of comprehensive education. We can, however, ask whether young people are being treated equitably and fairly. Historically, the Maltese education system seems to have produced both winners and losers in almost equally significant numbers. This also seems to be borne out by some young people's experiences of education (Azzopardi, 2000, pp. 57-59). The challenge for the future is to ensure that all young people derive positive experiences, skills and attitudes from their exposure to the formal education system. This should include those who are not going to necessarily be the main beneficiaries of the knowledge-based economy.

Notwithstanding the above comments, the team would wish to affirm the positive strategy being adopted in respect of gender equality. The elimination of gender stereotyping in subject selection will eventually broaden routes of access into the labour market. Initially we were concerned to read in the National Report, "… technology education is now being offered not only in trade schools, but also in all state schools catering for boys" (p. 30). Further enquiries revealed that currently technology education is available in all boys schools and it is offered as an option to girls. In practice this apparently means that girls wishing to take technology can do so, but are compelled by the existing patterns of provision to attend a school where this option is offered. This may well require them to attend a school outside of their catchment area. In reality this is, no doubt, a major disincentive for girls wishing to take technology. It is envisaged that all girls schools will eventually offer the subject. In this intervening period, however, these girls are being disadvantaged.

One of the questions that interested some members of the review team was that of language. Maltese and English are the official state languages. The aim of creating a fully bilingual population is certainly desirable in economic and cultural terms. Whilst the team would in no way wish to jeopardise this national aim, we wondered whether some young people might not be disadvantaged by having to sit certain subjects through the medium of English at too early a stage in their academic careers (mathematics, for example). Whilst we received no empirical evidence on this subject, it seems probable that young people from families where knowledge of English is limited will be disadvantaged when taking examinations through the medium of English. In Gozo, for example, we were told that young people were less exposed to use of the English language. Social class may also be a factor in linguistic proficiency. There is, in fact some evidence, to support such an assessment of the situation. (Chircop, 1994, pp. 391-392). More research is, no doubt, required on this subject. Nevertheless, given that Maltese is an official language it seems slightly perverse to deny young people a choice in respect of the language in which they sit an examination. In Wales, for example, children exercise this choice freely without sacrificing the ultimate aim of complete proficiency in two languages. Some consideration may, therefore, be given to the issue of linguistic choice and the status accorded to Maltese in the various domains of educational practice.

On first appearances Malta seems to be a reasonably homogenous society in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion. Nevertheless, minorities do exist within Maltese society. Unfortunately, the review team did not have the opportunity to meet any members of the minority communities. In the circumstances it is therefore difficult to comment authoritatively on the way in which the society deals with such groups as minority ethnic communities, asylum seekers, and gays and lesbians. The values of Roman Catholicism, of course, are woven into the very fabric of the curriculum. Whilst it is appreciated that those who do not subscribe to Roman Catholicism are not required to receive religious instruction in the dominant belief system, we did wonder whether the identities of other faith communities received positive affirmation in schools. By the same token, we also wondered whether the Catholic majority has the opportunity to receive a democratic human rights education. Such an approach fosters both a spirit of critical self-inquiry and a healthy respect for the values of others.

An inclusive approach to those young people with disabilities is being developed. As far as is feasible, a strategy of mainstreaming is adopted. At a practical resource level the aim is to deploy additional special needs classroom assistants (National Report, 2003, p. 20).

Young people in higher education are comparatively well supported by the state. All post-secondary school students receive a regular stipend and grant as well as benefiting from the smart card system – a scheme enabling them to purchase books and course materials (National Report, 2003, pp. 18-19). This system of support is both comprehensive and inclusive in scope. What was not entirely clear to the review team, however, related to those young people who wish to access the crucial two years of post-compulsory education that precedes university entrance. Is the support available to younger people and families from poorer backgrounds adequate?

Autonomy, social cohesion and social exclusion

Despite many of the encouraging developments in democratic reform within schools, young people continue to remain in a position of relative powerlessness. Whilst school is a young person's domain, it is not a habitat over which they have a

great deal of control. Youth clubs and youth NGOs therefore remain important spaces where young people can be themselves. The expansion and resourcing of such spaces is vitally important. It will also provide an empowering alternative ethos to expensive – and essentially consumerist – commercial entertainment.

Governance, power and information

The democratic credentials of those wishing to reform the education system are doubtless authentic. The impression remained, however, that grassroots empowerment looked rather like a top-down directive. Whilst this style of management may still be part of the problem, there are nevertheless palpable obstacles facing those in positions of power who genuinely desire grassroots change. The teaching profession is reputedly conservative and defensive of its working practices. The National Report (2003, pp. 21-22) alludes to this problem. This is a training issue for those with responsibility for educating teachers. There is, though, a deeper-seated cultural problem of deference by young people to authority figures. This too is a training issue for those who work with young people in the less structured environment of the youth club.

Access to information is a critical factor in equalising power relations. The government's commitment to rolling out new technology to schools is very impressive. The launch of the school websites (Ministry of Education, 2003: Ministry of Education website accessed July 2003) in June this year was accompanied by 31 000 primary and secondary school students being given e-mail accounts. The computer – student ratio now stands at 1 to 7 in primary schools and 1 to 14 in secondary schools. (Department of Information, 2003a). Extending this programme to youth organisations in a second wave would enhance this strategy.

4.3. Access to the labour market

The new emphasis placed on young people's education and training is not unique to Malta. It is a well-evidenced trend across Europe. One obvious consequence of young people spending longer periods in education is that their entry to the labour market is delayed. However, the relationship between the employability of young people and the supply of appropriate jobs can often prove problematic. In small countries such as Malta, moreover, labour market conditions can change quite rapidly.

> "Trends and changes in the labour market are prominent factors which have a direct and highly influential effect upon the adaptability and effectiveness of employment policies. Both long-term and short-term plans for improving employability and employment prospects are subject to constant disruption. Within the context of a small country like Malta, the continuous assessment of trends and changes becomes more urgent since there are pockets of issues which tend to change in number and size frequently."

(National Report, 2003, pp. 75-76)

Among these pockets of issues would be tourism, which is subject not only to seasonal fluctuations but also particularly vulnerable to the state of international relations. The impact of September 11 2001 on tourism was felt keenly through the period 2001 to 2002 (National Report, 2003, p. 76).

During periods when the job supply is low there is a very real danger of policy displacement occurring whereby many young people secure positions for which they are over-qualified. As Williamson observes,

"This over-credentialism or qualification inflation...has the effect of leaving those without qualifications further on the margins, compounding their social exclusion and thereby producing a different challenge for youth policy."

(Williamson, 2002, pp. 50)

What, in other words, happens to those other young people who would otherwise be driving taxis, waiting on tables or working in an unskilled capacity at factories and building sites?

Most European countries attempt to assist the transition from full-time education to work by implementing a mixture of supply- and demand-side policies. Supply-side polices ordinarily involve vocationally-orientated training programmes. The decline in the manufacturing industry and the increasing influence of economic globalisation has meant that many companies are now reluctant to finance training costs. As a result, vocational training has become a prominent feature of public policy in recent years. In most cases a carrot and stick approach is adopted with service users: social assistance for jobseekers will thus depend upon participation in such training programmes. Workfare in Norway and New Deal in the United Kingdom would be examples of this type of approach. Such policies have, however, been criticised for seeking to shift the responsibility of a work-poor economic environment to the unemployed themselves.

Demand-side polices, on the other hand, involve increasing labour market demand for young people. Such measures can be summarised as follows:

"1. the provision of subsidies to employers who take on young unemployed people or who provide a first job (Greece, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom);

2. providing specially created jobs for young people in the public sector (Germany, Norway);

3. making it generally easier and cheaper for employers to hire workers (Germany, United Kingdom);

4. removing minimum wage restrictions or having a lower minimum wage for young people."

(Middleton, 2002, p. 60)

On the latter point, it is worth noting that the current minimum wage is set at MTL 53.13 for a 40-hour week and applies to all those above the age of 18. Workers aged 16 receive MTL 51.13 and those aged 17 MTL 52.13. Workers in receipt of the minimum wage do not pay income tax. Whilst our enquiries with representatives of the trade union movement suggested this level of income would not support those workers supporting a young family, there is nevertheless broad support for the current mechanisms for determining the minimum wage. The system has been in place for some 30 years, has curtailed the use of cheap labour and allows annual increases of between MTL 1.25 and MTL 2.00. It was pointed out to us, moreover, that in many cases trade unions and employers are able to negotiate wages for young people well above the minimum wage.

Malta has come some considerable distance since the fortress service economy (Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994, p. 10) was dismantled following the departure of the British. Malta's economic strategy is based on the development of financial services, information technology, high quality manufacturing goods and, of course, tourism. It is estimated that tourism represents 24.3% of the gross national product

and over 25% of exports of goods and services. 27% of full-time employment, approximately 41 000 jobs, is directly related to the tourist industry (National Report, 2003, p. 37). The position of young people within this sector is very important. The tourist industry in Malta is in the process of upgrading from its traditional position as a package holiday resort. In addition to prestigious marina and waterfront developments, the country is now developing in such areas as culture, national heritage, educational courses and conferences. However, as the recent decline in cruise passengers visiting the islands suggests (National Statistics Office, 2003a: website accessed August 2003), Malta cannot quite yet afford to abandon its traditional tourist market. A twin-track approach is likely to be adopted during this critical period of transition.

The unemployment rate is comparatively low at around 5%. Young people's economic activity is concentrated in such areas as the wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing, and hotels and restaurants. The table below is taken from the National Report (2003, p. 89).

 The main occupations chosen are listed as follows:

Main occupations

June 2002			Percentage of total employed (15 to 24)		15 to 24 age group	No. of employed (15 to 24) per occupation
	M	F	M	F		
Plant and machine operators	3 420	4 049	18%	21%	39%	18 869
Clerks	1 947	3 397	10.8%	18.9%	29.7%	17 918
Service workers & shop and sales workers	2 474	3 003	12.4%	15%	27.4%	19 992
Professionals	1 207	1 251	8.9%	9.3%	18.2%	13 507
Technicians and associate professionals	1 925	1 554	9.5%	7.6%	17.1%	20 290
Elementary occupations	1 926	1 094	8.7%	4.9%	13.6%	22 128
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	391	-	11.5%	-	11.5%	2 554
Armed forces	65	-	4.7%	-	4.7%	1 385
Legislators and senior officers	153	424	1.2%	3.5%	4.7%	12 158

The position of young people, however, is extremely vulnerable. Whilst young people under 25 years of age appear to benefit more than adults when the economy is buoyant, they experience disproportionately higher levels of unemployment when jobs are in short supply (National Report, 2003, p. 87). That said, young people tend to be unemployed for shorter periods of time than older people. Registered unemployment at the end of September 2002 stood at 7520 (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 7). The Employment Training Corporation's (ETC) annual report for the period 2001to 2002 estimated that around 31% of the total unemployed population are under 25. More recent estimates put the figure at approximately 50% of the total unemployed population (National Report, 2003, p. 87). These statistics do, however, need to be interpreted carefully. As the National Report points out,

"... there is a number of individuals who may be classified as invisible. This number includes those under the school-leaving age and so cannot be registered as unemployed, and those who, although of school-leaving age, do not register at all although they may be engaged in some form of employment with the family or in what Finn ...called the twilight economy, that is under-age labour."

(National Report, 2003, p. 86)

Another trend that should also be mentioned is the growth in part-time work, especially by women. This does not impact the unemployment statistics, but it is important to guard against the assumption that those who do not appear in the figures are all in full-time employment. Part-time workers in the 15 to 24 age group comprise approximately 20% of the total for part-time workers (National Report, 2003, p. 91).

The main agency tasked with assisting the transition from full-time education to employment is the quasi-autonomous ETC. The review team wishes to emphasise the point that it was greatly impressed with the ETC. Based on figures for April 2003, the ETC has a caseload of 1 544 clients; 69% male and 31% female (ETC presentation, 9 May 2003), managed by three employment advisors. One concern, perhaps, is that the advisor-client ratio might make it difficult to give sufficient time to those jobseekers who require higher levels of guidance. The sheer weight of numbers might make it extremely problematic for employment advisors to move beyond a mechanistic, case management approach to their work with young clients. This is not a criticism of the highly committed staff at the ETC, but merely an observation based on the statistics presented to the review team (ETC presentation, 9 May 2003). Typically, the aims of an interview conducted by an ETC staff member are threefold:

- to guide jobseekers in finding the right employment according to their skills, qualities and qualifications;
- refer them to courses to increase their employability;
- encourage them to participate in relevant ETC schemes.

    (ETC Presentation, 9 May 2003)

The range of training schemes available for young people in Malta compares very favourably with what is provided in other European countries. The European Union's employment guidelines have, to a large extent, been applied.

The National Report claims:

> "Structures within the organisation, networking, strategic planning, and research and development, among others, are in place."
>
> (National Report, 2003, p. 108)

On the basis of the evidence presented, the review team would concur with this assessment. The ETC schemes for which young people are eligible will be summarised briefly here. Firstly, it should be mentioned that the ETC undertakes a programme of school to work transition talks with form 5 students (aged 15 to 16). Between October 2002 and April 2003, 50 schools were visited (ETC presentation, 9 May 2003).

The basic employment passport (BEP)

> "… provides basic employment skills to young school leavers who are coming out of the present educational system with little or no skills or qualifications and do not intend to continue with further training and education"
>
> (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 9)

BEP comprises a 12-week programme that covers such areas as applied literacy and numeracy, basic IT skills, technology education; and social skills. Trainees, of whom there were 308 in 2001 to 2002 (175 males and 133 females), receive an allowance of MTL 10 per week.

The job start youth initiative targets labour market newcomers aged between 16 and 24. It aims to integrate them into the labour market in the shortest possible period and tries to achieve this via job searches, job plans, job clubs and core skills programmes. Typically, a young person meets an advisor once every four weeks when s/he discusses available options and identifies possible obstacles to labour market entry. In those cases where employment cannot be secured, the young person is referred for training. If the young person remains unemployed s/he is referred to the job experience scheme (see below). Between October 2001 and September 2002, 278 young people were introduced to the job plan. A further 186 were duly referred to the job experience scheme (ETC Presentation, 9 May 2003).

The job experience scheme (JES) offers in-house training and work experience for those aged over 16. Young people are attached to a company or organisation for a maximum of 13 weeks (24-hour week). The ETC pays clients an allowance to cover transport costs and employers are not required to pay a wage to trainees. In the year 2001 to 2002, a total of 304 young people participated on JES, 71 of whom found a job after completing the scheme (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 9).

Properly regulated apprenticeships are offered through the technician apprenticeship schemes (TAS) and the extended skills training schemes (ESTS). Those commencing apprenticeships in the said schemes numbered 357 and 348 respectively in 2001 to 2002 (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 8). Short-term apprenticeships – or traineeships – were also offered to 135 young people in the same period (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 8). Interestingly, these traineeships have been used more recently "to satisfy the immediate human resources' needs of employers" (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 8). The local skills shortfall in the construction industry, for example, has led to companies increasing requests for the use of foreign labour. The ETC has responded to this situation by entering into a close agreement with the Federation of Building Contractors (FOBC).

"Through the traineeship, the corporation gave trainees the opportunity of a working week made up of work and training, a weekly pay of MTL 70 for a whole year (MTL 35 offered by the contractor and the remaining MTL 35 offered by the corporation), as well as improving their prospects of finding a permanent job. ETC and FOBC also agreed that for every work permit issued to a foreigner to work in this trade, contractors were bound to employ a Maltese trainee."

(Employment Training Corporation, 2002, pp. 8-9)

The bridging the gap scheme targets those groups that are particularly vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion. Such groups include disabled people and those stigmatised by histories of offending and/or substance misuse. Between October 2001 and September 2002, 30 (out of a total of 53 participants) took part in the scheme; between October 2002 and March 2003 it was 17 out of a total of 26 (ETC presentation, 9 May 2003). Close working relationships have been established with Mid-dlam-ghad-dawl, Caritas, Agenzija sedqa, the Substance Abuse therapeutic unit (SATU), OASI and APPOGG. Links are also being forged with the authorities that oversee Corradino correctional facilities (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 13) with a view to organising training courses for inmates. A full evaluation of these services was not available to the review team, but it is worth noting that, as part of the partnership agreement with Caritas, 101 ex-substance abusers have been trained, with 24 finding permanent employment on completion of the programme (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 13).

The youth outreach programme is another example of the ETC's commitment to reaching vulnerable and excluded groups of young people with the collaboration of socially committed agencies and NGOs. The initial experience gained from working with APPOGG in Cottonera has since been applied to new initiatives in Cospicua, Zabbar, Zetjun and Zurrieq. Young people have been successfully engaged in this outreach approach. They are involved in job club-type sessions (two hour sessions, twice a week) in six-weekly cycles. During these sessions they learn how to conduct job searches, write letters and improve telephone skills. Between October 2001 and September 2002, 89 clients participated in these schemes and 22 were duly placed. The figures for the half-year October 2002 to March 2003 show that 64 clients participated and 13 were placed (ETC presentation, 9/5/03).

Finally, the ETC offers a range of shorter, skills-based training programmes in which these are refined and upgraded. Additionally, the website has been developed and made more user-friendly. A 'freephone service' for users has also been launched.

One area that the ETC may wish to explore is that of youth enterprise. As self-employment in Malta is increasing (National Report, 2003, pp. 90-91), it may be an opportune time to cultivate the entrepreneurial skills of the rising generation. However, as Williamson points out, it is also important to provide, "robust support for business planning, financial start-up and ongoing business advice" (Williamson, 2002, p. 51). The ETC cannot meet such needs alone.

The availability of further education and training for those already in employment is a vitally important feature of any economic strategy. The need for ongoing professional development, re-skilling and re-training is well recognised. A recent survey of workers' participation in training and further education (National Statistics Office, 2003c: website accessed in August 2003) found that only 6.1% of the employed labour force took up such opportunities (5.9% of employed males and 6.5% of employed females). There would therefore appear to be a pressing need to

increase participation rates. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the majority of those involved in further education and training are aged under 40. That said, exhorting older workers to embrace the philosophy of lifelong learning might be necessary. Two findings in the survey are particularly striking. Firstly, "employees in the public sector are almost twice as likely to participate in training courses than their counterparts in the private sector" (National Statistics Office, 2003c: website visited August 2003). Secondly, it is those with a background in higher education who are most likely to take advantage of further education and training opportunities. Whilst it is to be expected that graduates and professionals should prioritise their own professional development, it is a cause for concern that those who most need further education and training are actually those least likely to participate. Once again, the point should be made that the responsibility for addressing this problem does not rest solely with the ETC. Nevertheless, the corporation is well placed to offer leadership in this area.

The ETC is committed to evaluating the effectiveness of its operations. Indeed, the main section on employment in the National Report is based on research commissioned by the ETC. The corporation should, therefore, be commended for developing a critical culture. Moreover, the findings from such research can obviously be used as the basis for improving service delivery. Although the research project being conducted by Dr Azzopardi is incomplete, a few themes appear to be emerging clearly from the data. One complaint levelled at the ETC is that service users are often sent dated information regarding vacancies, or else this information is not sufficiently tailored to individuals' specific needs (National Report, 2003, p. 102). Another concern is that the aims of the ETC do not appear to be fully understood by young service users. Whilst job-finding is understandably a priority for young people, the training functions are seemingly not always properly appreciated. According to the research, young people's perceptions of the training agency can be summarised in the following terms:

> "The responses given by the clients … showed that their perception of the functions of the employment agency is solely a utilitarian one: the corporation is there to find employment. Training and personal development do not form part of the picture."

> (National Report, 2003, p. 109)

This perception would appear to be the result of a failure to project the wider mission of the corporation. The need to increase the level of meaningful participation by young people in the process of job-seeking, personal development and training is clear. The issue of participation and ownership could, however, extend to staff within the corporation.

> "A worrying and contradictory element emerges from the qualitative approach taken for the collection of data from persons working for the corporation and from a sample of its clients. The revelations made by the respondents in the section of the report devoted to their views and perceptions do not seem to tally with the written and stated claims of the corporation as printed in its reports. For example, the setting up of a research and development programme did not feature at all in the interviews held with administrative staff. Nor did the question of collaboration with social partners – save for a minor mention by one individual. What, on the other hand, emerged in an explicit manner, is the lack of participation of each one of the interviewees in the deci-

sion-making process and in the establishment of criteria for the introduction of training programmes."

(National Report, 2003, p. 108)

Despite the clear evidence that the ETC has an impressive success rate, it would seem that there is still something of a mismatch between the demands of the economy and the labour supply available to employers:

"The range of training courses offered, whether short or of long duration, do not seem to be providing the labour market with persons fit for its requirements. According to the employment barometer (autumn to winter, 2003, ETC), '56% of the surveyed employers face shortages caused by the absence of the necessary qualifications' and '58% of such employers blame the lack of skilled human resources for their shortages'."

(National Report, 2003, p. 109)

However, it is important to recognise that the ETC cannot address this issue alone. The process of reform and re-positioning in which the education system is currently involved has already been noted. It is important, though, that priority be given to aligning complementary services. As the National Report notes with concern:

"The ETC and the education division do not as yet appear to be moving towards a point of convergence; they as yet are more seen to be moving in a parallel track to the detriment of a sound labour market-education tandem."

(National Report, 2003, p. 91)

The need to work towards a joined-up approach to service provision is pressing.

Participation

Participation rates by young people in the various schemes operated by the ETC are very impressive. Imaginative and determined efforts are also being made to reach young people on the margins. The quality of horizontal networking across this difficult terrain is good. The ETC engages successfully with a wide range of NGOs. There is also a clear commitment to engage with employers' organisations and trade unions in developing a strategic approach to employment- and training related-matters. The establishment of the labour market policy committee is one example of a willingness to work in partnership. The extent to which trade unions are involved in approving schemes, monitoring workplace conditions and reviewing the quality of training placements was not clear to our team, though. Ensuring that young people are not exploited or sold poor quality training is, of course, a responsibility shared by all partners.

There are questions about the extent to which young people are actively engaged in the process of navigating their own training and employment paths. The perception that the ETC is merely a job-finding agency would suggest there is more work needing to be done in respect of communicating the corporation's mission. There are also some issues about the extent to which all ETC staff own the aims of the agency.

In our meeting with ETC staff, the issue of labour mobility was mentioned. It would seem that there is a cultural factor influencing the extent to which jobseekers are prepared to travel to work. For those familiar with the commuting times and

distances in other parts of Europe, it is slightly disconcerting to learn that some job-seekers' expectations of what constitutes a reasonable travel-to-work distance can sometimes be comparatively limited. Perhaps altering the culturally conditioned perceptions of distance will take a little time. In the meantime, however, it is important that young people have access to good, affordable public transport.

Equity, diversity and special provision

The ETC appears to be very committed to gender equality (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, pp. 11 and 27). Meanwhile, provision for those with specific needs is mediated through the bridging the gap scheme (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, pp. 11-13). In the area of disability, for example, the ETC works closely with such organisations as the Eden Foundation, the Richmond Foundation and the Arka Foundation. We understand that research on disabled service users' perceptions on existing provision is currently being undertaken (Employment Training Corporation, 2002, p. 12). The results of this research will hopefully inform policy development and practice. It is also worth mentioning that a strategy for ETC operations in Gozo was launched in 2002 (ETC, 2002; Ministry for Gozo: website accessed July 2003). The effectiveness of that strategy will obviously need to be evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis.

Autonomy, social cohesion and social exclusion

The ETC's commitment to social inclusion is well evidenced by the bridging the gap scheme. Serious efforts have been made to engage those groups vulnerable to social exclusion – including those with offending behaviour and substance misuse profiles.

Malta is a cohesive society built on the foundations of family and faith. Paradoxically, however, in some cases the strong attachments to family and neighbourhood might constitute a cultural obstacle to young people going further afield in search of work. Whilst we would not wish to over-problematise this cultural trait, the ETC staff did identify such attitudes as a barrier to labour mobility in some cases. Having said that, other obstacles (young people's housing situation, for example) also need to be addressed.

One of the issues mentioned to the team was that of the unofficial, twilight economy. Although young people might derive some short-term benefits from such work – including a degree of autonomy from the formal economy and the state – they are actually at risk of being severely disadvantaged. They are, for example, placed in a vulnerable position regarding health and safety, wage exploitation, lack of training and the absence of proper career structures. Some of these young people, it is implied, can also be exploited within family businesses – a situation that paradoxically exhibits unwelcome features of social cohesion and social exclusion. Of course, some of these young people will be underage. The problem of child labour has already been identified (Sultana, 1994), but the full extent of this abuse is inevitably difficult to quantify. This may well be an issue that needs to be addressed if/when the children's commissioner is appointed.

Governance, power and information

As has already been mentioned, there would appear to be some problems regarding the communication of clear, accurate and appropriate information by the ETC to young service users. The communication of the agency's wider mission is still an issue that needs to be addressed.

The problem of youth unemployment is a sensitive political issue in most European countries. Inevitably, perhaps, the agenda is dictated by political concerns. It is important, however, that young people be properly consulted and engaged in the design of such polices and services. The fact that the ETC has developed a critical research culture within the organisation – in which the views of users are sought – bodes well for the future, however.

4.4. Health, welfare and social protection

The Maltese health system is organised on an integrated and national basis. It is financed through general taxation and core services are free at the point of delivery. Other services – in such areas as dentistry, pharmacy and optometry – are only available free to low income members of the community who hold pink cards (National Report, 2003, p. 47). Whilst the public sector provides universal health care, the influence of the private sector is growing. Private health care now accounts for 12% of acute hospital beds and 18% of beds in elderly people's nursing homes (National Report, 2003, p. 47). Taking an overall view the National Report concludes:

"The present health service in Malta can be considered as being essentially hospital-based, with a weak supporting primary care structure."

(National Report, 2003, p. 49)

It is important to recognise, however, the social dimension of health. The impact of environmental factors on health cannot be under-estimated. The distribution of wealth/resources along with housing conditions, family well-being, the quality of neighbourhood and standard of the workplace environment, are all immensely influential factors. When health is considered in a holistic way it implies that responsibility is also distributed across a range of government departments and social institutions. The National Report draws particular attention to the responsibilities of the Ministry for Social Policy, the National Commission for Persons with Disability, the National Commission for Mental Health, the Commission for the Promotion of Occupational Health and Safety, Sedqa (working in the field of substance misuse), APPOGG (the main provider of social work and welfare services) and Sapport (working in the area of disability).

It has been argued that the health inequalities that exist in childhood tend to disappear during adolescence, but reappear in later years (West, 1997; 1999). Whilst young people are, therefore, generally quite healthy when compared with other sections of the population, youth is a crucial time in the life course because lifestyle choices made at this stage are likely to have a critical impact on health in subsequent years. As the National Report states:

"Pre-determining choices are made not only in childhood, but, to a greater extent than is usually appreciated, in the age range from 15 to 24."

(National Report, 2003, p. 66)

In light of this analysis, the lifestyle choices that young people make in such areas as exercise, nutrition, alcohol consumption, drug use and sexual behaviour assume greater importance. The role of health promotion departments in influencing such choices is particularly crucial. In the case of its engagement with young

people, such departments must also avoid the impression of preaching. There is always the risk of falling into the trap of being problem-focused rather than opportunity-focused. Sexual health, for example, is not simply about issuing cautionary messages regarding Aids, chlamydia and gonorrhoea; it should also be concerned with pleasure and fulfilment. Moreover, sexual health initiatives need to go beyond simply dispensing condoms. They should equip young people with skills to negotiate the power imbalances that are inherent in many early sexual relationships. It is important, for example, that young people have the confidence to be assertive with prospective sexual partners who are misusing power and exerting undue pressure.

It is difficult to assemble a clear picture of the health and behaviours of young people in Malta. When it becomes available, the age-specific data contained in the first national health interview survey (HIS) will be useful. There are, however, some interesting findings contained in the general population survey (HIS website: accessed July 2003) as well as some age- specific research available in the study on the health behaviour of school-aged children (Massa, 2002). In the general population there is a tendency to adopt a rather sedentary lifestyle: 86% of interviewees in the HIS had not engaged in any significant physical activity (like jogging or cycling) in the week before the interviews were conducted. Notwithstanding the challenges of the Mediterranean climate, there are clear implications for the new sports council. Sporting activity should not be seen as the preserve of the athletic elite. It needs to be democratised and extended to those who usually think of themselves as spectators rather than participants. The pleasures of physical exercise and sport can be made more attractive to young people through the active promotion of schemes that offer free or concessionary rates of access to sports centres and other recreational facilities.

The health behaviour of school age children study highlights some areas for concern. Vegetable consumption amongst Malta's adolescents is very low: only 19.2% of boys and 22.5% of girls eat fresh vegetables on a daily basis (Massa, 2002, pp. 2-3). Sweet consumption, on the other hand, was found to be the highest in this World Health Organization study: 59.3% of boys and 55.3% of girls ate sweets on a daily basis (Massa, 2002, p. 3). Unsurprisingly, the body mass index (BMI) statistics indicate that many young people are overweight: 30.7% of this population being above the 85th percentile and 16.9% above the 95th percentile (Massa, 2002, p. 4). The issue of alcohol consumption is less clear. On the face of it, the percentage of school-age children who consume alcohol is comparatively high: 36.3% of boys and 33.3% of girls drink spirits on a weekly basis whilst 31.5% of boys and 16.4% of girls drink wine on a weekly basis (Massa, 2002, p. 6). What is not clear, however, is the pattern of drinking. The drinking habits of Mediterranean countries are very different from that of northern European countries like England. In the general population Maltese people do not appear to have a drink problem. The mortality rate from chronic liver disease and cirrhosis is comparatively low (National Report, 2003, p. 59). The extent to which the young people in this study were engaged in harmful binge drinking requires closer inspection before a state of moral crisis is declared in Malta. Nevertheless, a number of people the team met during our visit drew attention to the growing problem of illegal sales of alcohol to minors. If licensing laws are not being properly enforced then this is obviously a cause for concern. Another area for concern cited in the National Report is the rising level of smoking amongst young people, particularly girls and young women (National Report, 2003, p. 58). The risks associated with some patterns of illegal

drug misuse, especially among young men (National Report, 2003, p. 59), are mentioned, but put into perspective.

> "Experimental substance misuse is common in early adolescence but only a minority will develop addictive patterns of use."
>
> (National Report, 2003; 59)

The main problems for such users are, then, most likely to arise directly from contact with the criminal justice system.

Very little research data are available on the sexual behaviour of young people. The incidence of HIV, Aids and sexually transmitted diseases is, though, comparatively low in comparison with the rest of Europe. The rate of teenage pregnancies is, moreover, low and stable (National Report, 2003, p. 60).

The Health Promotion Department is tasked with influencing young people's lifestyle choices and behaviours. The HIS (2003: website accessed July 2003) reveals that the most common sources of information about health are the media, general practitioners, health centre professionals, family, friends and health promotion campaigns. It is therefore important that the Health Promotion Department use the media effectively and educates/trains those people most likely to have contact with youth (teachers, youth workers, parents, and etc.). On the basis of our meeting with the Health Promotion Department and additional information presented to us, we conclude that some excellent work is being undertaken. Certainly there are some impressive professional health promotion campaigns being conducted through the mass media. The philosophy of the staff members we met also seemed well attuned to the sensibilities of its young service users. It was therefore no surprise to learn that there were plans to establish a dedicated adolescent team. In a country where abortion is illegal and where dominant cultural attitudes towards homosexuality tend towards the judgemental, it is vital that young people trust healthcare professionals. The availability of a confidential freephone advice service is an important part of the department's strategy. Some of the people whom the department wishes to engage are, nevertheless, difficult to reach. The team was therefore very impressed to learn of an initiative in peer-led education where health promotion programmes were both written and delivered by young people. Outreach work has also been undertaken in areas where young people congregate in large numbers, mainly in places of entertainment. The use of second and third year medical students in this role is particularly imaginative. Wherever possible, it is important for evaluation to be undertaken of such initiatives. Evaluation in the field of health promotion is notoriously difficult, but it is important to publish results and findings in order to spread best practice.

Mental health has recently been recognised as an important youth issue. Whilst "only a rough picture can be drawn of the mental health situation of young people in Malta" (National Report, 2003, p. 64), it is clearly important that a multi-disciplinary approach be developed. Crucially, young people need to know where they can access help without being stigmatised or labelled. Research suggests that certain "underprivileged population groups" (National Report, 2003, p. 64) may need to be targeted by policy makers and practitioners. However, any mental health strategy needs to be universal in scope. It should aim to create a positive mental health environment in all those institutions and spaces that young people occupy. The very high level of pressure experienced by children at school (85% of girls and 70% of boys) is disturbingly high (Massa, 2002, p. 5). It is imperative that a mental

health strategy aimed at young people address the need to build a safe social environment in which a positive emotional/mental health ethos prevails.

Many organisations and agencies are, of course, also engaged in the field of health and social protection. Some have already been mentioned. The team's meeting with staff at Caritas should, however, be highlighted. We were greatly impressed by the high level of professionalism and dedication exhibited by staff delivering services to those with substance misuse problems. The continuum of services provided by Caritas includes community-based projects informed by harm reduction strategies and residential therapeutic communities requiring total abstinence. The proposed adolescent day programme for young people aged 13 to 16 is another interesting initiative being mooted.

The effectiveness of alcohol and drug rehabilitation services is extremely difficult to evidence. It was therefore gratifying to receive a methodologically sound impact assessment of the new hope project (Swain, 2000). Whilst the limitations of the research study are candidly acknowledged (Swain, 2000, p. 55), there is clear evidence presented of successful, cost-effective work.

Whilst the above-mentioned project is undoubtedly very successful, it is important to recognise the fact that not all young people with alcohol and drug problems will necessarily feel comfortable with the services provided by Caritas. The underlying philosophy, or perhaps the emphasis on spiritual values, will not resonate with all young people. It is important, therefore, that there is proper diversity of provision to meet different needs. As we were reminded on a number of occasions, even in a cohesive society, one size does not fit all.

Whilst it is legitimate for policy makers and practitioners to influence young people's choices and behaviour, it is equally important to shape the social context within which such seemingly individual decisions are taken. The context within which young people choose to smoke is an obvious example. Ms Maria Ellull, the Principal Scientific Officer in the Health Promotion Department, argued that health education needed to be complemented by other measures. These included:

- protection from environmental tobacco smoke for non-smokers in workplaces and public places;
- bans on advertising, sponsorship, marketing and vending machines;
- increase in the legal age for the sale of tobacco products;
- improved labelling and health warnings on tobacco products which should also contain graphic depictions of the harm attributed to using the product;
- increase in the funding for anti-tobacco efforts from duty paid in cigarette sales;
- free access to smoking cessation aids for smokers seeking to quit addiction;
- updating the existing Tobacco (Smoking Control) Act of 1986.

   (National Report, 2003, p. 63)

As previously mentioned, in the field of alcohol consumption the law regarding sales to minors should be properly enforced. Alternatives to centres of commercial entertainment also need to be developed in order for young people to have a real choice about how to spend their leisure time.

Having reintroduced the importance of wider social and environmental factors on health, it seems appropriate to consider briefly some welfare and social protection themes. It is difficult to comment authoritatively on this area, as the team did not have an opportunity to visit, for example, social services projects. Nevertheless, it

would appear from our meeting with the Ministry of Social Policy that there are serious efforts being made to develop an integrated approach to the social problems affecting young people.

Malta has a comparatively comprehensive system of social security (see National Statistics Office, 2003b for a helpful summary of benefits available to the country's citizens: website accessed August 2003). The Social Security Act 1987 (Cap 318 of the Revised Laws of Malta) provides a systematic framework for the administration of social security benefits. The statute replaced the Old Age Pensions Act 1948, the National Assistance Act 1956 and the National Insurance Act 1956. There is insufficient space in a report of this nature to offer either an account or a critique of the Maltese social security system. A few points are, however, worthy of comment. Three benefits are particularly worthy of note in respect of young people. The marriage grant is a benefit that certainly provides a welcome measure of assistance for some young people making the domestic transition from dependency to independent living. It is,

> "a one-time payment payable upon marriage to persons ordinarily resident in Malta. To be eligible a person must be employed, self-employed or self-occupied for at least six months at any time prior to his marriage".

> (National Statistics Office, 2003b: website accessed August 2003)

A social security benefit that reinforces the institution of marriage so explicitly could be criticised for being discriminatory in that it excludes those young people who seek to establish independence outside matrimony. Young people may wish to choose to co-habit (including those in same-sex relationships), dwell in households based on friendship networks or simply live alone. Establishing an equitable social security system in circumstances of social diversity is a challenge facing all European countries. Malta should not, therefore, be singled out for criticism in this regard. Nevertheless, this is a challenge that must be faced. Ultimately, perhaps the most equitable way of approaching questions of social entitlement is through the route of individual citizenship rights. This is, of course, a matter requiring further debate in wider forums.

The second social security benefit on which we would wish to pass comment is child allowance. This is

> "payable to locally residing female citizens of Malta who have care of children under 16 years, and where the household income does not exceed a stipulated amount".

> (National Statistics Office, 2003b: website accessed August 2003)

The universal distribution of such a benefit is arguably one of the most effective means of combating child and family poverty (Brown, 1988; Child Poverty Action Group, 2003: website accessed August, 2003). In the poverty life-cycle the arrival of children in any family marks a period of reduced income and increased expenditure. It is therefore with some concern and – given Malta's commitment to family life – surprise we noted that this benefit is means-tested. The debate about whether specific benefits should be universal or targeted is one that is familiar to governments across Europe and beyond. The pressures placed on the social security system by an ageing population are certainly not unique to Malta. Apparently, though, considerable savings in government expenditure on non-contributory

benefits have been achieved through the introduction of means-testing for this child benefit (National Statistics Office, 2003b: website accessed August 2003). In view of the government's commitment to eradicating child poverty, searching questions must be asked about the real level of savings actually being made. Are the bureaucratic costs of administering a means-tested system taken into account in calculating the level of savings? What impact does the withdrawal of child allowance from ineligible claimants have upon children and families? Are the savings made redistributed to those most in need? These are legitimate questions to which we should seek answers.

Finally, the orphan's supplementary allowance is, "…a further weekly allowance paid to a guardian of a child or children aged between 16 and 21 who are not following any gainful occupation, the gross of earnings of which exceeds the national income wage" (National Statistics Office, 2003b: website accessed August 2003). This is a benefit targeted at a potentially very vulnerable group. Perhaps, though, this type of allowance could also be made available to support those with backgrounds in the public care system.

Pockets of poverty and disadvantage would certainly appear to exist in Malta. Following the methodology established by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2000) a Maltese at risk of poverty line has been set at 60% of the national equivalised income median (calculated at MTL 2 036 in 2000 to 2001). Based on the household budgetary survey (National Statistics Office, 2003d: website accessed August 2003) conducted between March 2000 and 2001, around 14.9% of the population fell below the "at risk of poverty" line. Moreover, the wealthiest fifth of the population received an income that was 4.5 times greater than the poorest fifth of the population. Clusters of poverty are located in particular geographical areas, especially the southern Harbour (20.7 %), south-eastern (15.9%) and northern Harbour (15.2%) districts. Gozo and Comino, meanwhile, stand at 13.5%. Certain social groups are also at greater risk of poverty: those in receipt of social security benefits, lone parents, the less well educated, and, of course, young people. 35.7 % of those below the "at risk of poverty" line are aged between 0 and 19 years, and 20.6 % are aged between 20 and 39 years. Given the vulnerability of children and young people to poverty, it therefore makes sense to organise the social security benefits system accordingly.

The National Statistics Office and Ministry of Social Policy have formed the poverty line project to work on the application of "a poverty line which reflects the basic requirements of a person to adequately live in Malta" (Galea–Seychell, 2003a: website accessed July 2003), or what might be described as a citizen's wage. Whilst it is crucial to refine the instruments used to effect adequate social transfers via the social security system, it is widely appreciated that the concept of social exclusion embraces dimensions not covered by conventional measures of poverty. Barnes summarises the key elements that comprise social exclusion:

"1. social exclusion is multi-dimensional – not about income alone but a wide range of indicators of living standards;

2. social exclusion is dynamic – analysing social exclusion means understanding a process and identifying the factors which can trigger entry or exit;

3. social exclusion has a neighbourhood dimension – deprivation is caused not only by lack of personal resources but also by insufficient or unsatisfactory community facilities, such as run-down schools, remotely-sited shops, poor public transport networks and so on;

4. social exclusion is relational – the notion of poverty is primarily focused upon distributional issues, the lack of resources at the disposal of any individual or a household. In contrast, social exclusion focuses more on relational issues: in other words, inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power;

5. social exclusion implies a major discontinuity in relationships with the rest of society."

(Barnes, 2002, p. 5)

He adds:

"The notion of social exclusion has the potential not just to highlight differences in resources between individuals and groups of individuals, but also to explore the issue of autonomy and dependency."

(Barnes, 2002, p. 5)

In Malta the relationship between dependency, autonomy and social exclusion is an interesting one. The concept of youth autonomy appears to be underdeveloped in Malta. However, the price paid for dependency on the family seems to be one willingly accepted by most young people. In exchange they receive security, stability and protection. As in Spain (Council of Europe, 2000), the family is a national resource and key protective factor against social exclusion.

Nevertheless, there are some young people who, for a variety of reasons, do not enjoy the natural social protection afforded by the family. APPOGG plays an important role in supporting those in positions of vulnerability. Whilst the agency delivers a range of services to all sections of the community, there is a heavy emphasis placed on children and young people in need. Social work services are provided in child protection and public care. The public care system in Malta seems to experience many of the same challenges as similar systems in other countries: an insufficient number of foster placements, the difficulty of placing teenage children – especially adolescent boys who exhibit challenging behaviour, and, of course, the problem of poor educational and social outcomes for looked-after children. One gap in provision requiring attention actually relates to care leavers. Their support needs do not evaporate at the age of 18 – indeed in many respects their needs multiply at this stage in their lives. Whilst APPOGG offers a traditional casework/social work approach to children and families, it also uses community development strategies in at least some disadvantaged communities. The pioneering Cottonera Community Resource Centre, for example, has brought together core complementary services (employment, housing, social work, etc.) in a one-stop shop. This joined up approach is a practical response to the interlinked causes of social exclusion and appears to be a very encouraging development (Galea-Seychell, 2003b: website accessed July 2003).

One of the most exciting proposals is found in the Commissioner for Children Bill 2003 (Malta Parliament website: accessed July 2003). If enacted, as seems likely, it will facilitate the appointment of an independent commissioner who will protect the rights and interests of children. There are four points the team would wish to make in respect of this post. Firstly, it is important that the commissioner's office be properly resourced in terms of administrative, policy, legal and research support. The brief of the commissioner is extremely wide and s/he will need access to a wide range of advice. Secondly, section 10b states, "that the best interests of children

and the family are paramount". It should be acknowledged that the interests of the child and the family are sometimes in conflict. In such circumstances, the child's interests are obviously paramount. Thirdly, 10d states "…children and their families are to be provided with opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them and in defining, planning and evaluating services to children." This is a sound principle that should be applied to the process of selecting a commissioner. It should also extend to children being properly represented on the council for children (section 12). It should be pointed out that children in Wales were involved in the appointment of the present Welsh commissioner and are currently represented on an advisory board. Finally, consideration might be given to extending the commissioner's powers to cover all areas of youth policy and practice. The aforementioned example of care leavers provides just one powerful reason why the commissioner's powers should be extended beyond the age of 18. Young people need a strong advocate to advance the arguments for responsive, joined up services in housing, education, training and employment.

Participation

There are serious efforts being made to engage the widest possible range of young people in preventive health services. The work of the Health Promotion Department is particularly noteworthy. It seems to be reaching young people in imaginative ways.

The proposed commissioner of children is an exciting development, but it will be disappointing if the opportunity of engaging children and young people is missed.

Equity, diversity and special provision

The importance of the equality agenda appears to be fully appreciated in this field. As in other areas of policy, though, it is difficult to comment upon the experience of minorities – including those with disabilities. Sadly, our visit did not include contact with any minority groups.

The problems of delivering equitable services on the archipelago are fully appreciated. Gozitans, for example, may sometimes feel aggrieved at having to receive treatment on Malta. In fairness, it is difficult to see how this situation can be remedied without massive investment. This is probably not viable at the present time. It is important, though, that transport links between the two islands be efficient and affordable. Visiting a sick relative on Malta for extended periods of time must be very difficult indeed.

Autonomy, social cohesion and social exclusion

The family is a vital national resource protecting children and young people from social exclusion. The point has been made elsewhere in this document, but it is worth repeating: what happens to that minority of young people who either actively choose to live independently or are compelled to do so by circumstances?

Governance, power and information

The Health Promotion Department's communications strategy is professional and well-designed to reach its target audiences. There is evidence to suggest that power is being shared with young people (as evidenced by the peer-led education and outreach campaigns). The principle of empowerment, however, needs to be extended. The already cited example of the commissioner for children's office is a case in point.

4.5. Accommodation

Across most of Europe there is a clear trend towards young people leaving the parental home at a later age. This is particularly true for young men. In the 25-29 years age group, for example, four times as many Norwegian men live with their parents than is the case for women. In the case of Germany, it is three times as many (Middleton, 2002, pp. 62-68). Typically, in southern Europe a young person remaining in the parental home is perceived as less of a problem than it is in some north European countries. In Spain, for example, the average age of departure from the family home is approaching 30 years and yet this does not seem to be widely perceived as a social problem (Council of Europe, 2000). There would appear to be a similar consensus in Malta. The role responsibilities of parents are seemingly complemented by the expectations of their children.

Whereas governments in Europe generally accept a high degree of responsibility for assisting young peoples' passage from full time education into the labour market, the same cannot be said for the transition to independent living. Family solidarity is duly promoted at the expense of youth autonomy. Thus, eligibility for assistance with housing costs tends to be restricted. This is not only the case in Greece, but also in a north European state like the United Kingdom where entitlement to housing benefit is severely restricted for those under the age of 25. It is not an attack on traditional family values to point out that such policies are fundamentally discriminatory and represent an assault on the social rights of young people. To deny young people the choice of living independently could be represented as a denial of full citizenship. The blanket application of such exclusionary policies can also place vulnerable young people at even greater risk. Some young people leave the parental home because conditions have become intolerable as a result, perhaps, of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. As Williamson observes,

> "precipitated leaving of the family home leaves young people ill prepared for independent living and their homelessness is often accompanied by other problems such as unemployment, mental ill health and substance misuse. The case for housing issues to be considered as an element of youth policy is therefore unequivocal, if truly integrated and cross sectoral provision is to be developed."

> (Williamson, 2002, p. 73)

In the review team's meeting with the staff from the Housing Authority and the Department of Social Housing, we were informed that no strategy for youth exists. As indicated previously, Malta is not alone in European countries in this respect. Nevertheless, we were impressed with the professionalism of staff and the high degree of understanding exhibited in respect of certain vulnerable groups.

Those working in the field of housing are challenged by a number of difficulties. Malta is densely populated, there is an acute shortage of land on which to build, and house prices are rising. According to the National Report (2003, p. 128) the problem of housing affordability affects 80% of the population in one way or another. This inevitably inhibits freedom of movement on the islands. Malta has a high rate of home ownership – around 75% – but the rented sector is somewhat underdeveloped. As the Housing Authority briefing (2003), states,

> "the relatively small percentage of households (25%), who rent their property indicates that this is not such a popular option. The present rent laws of course do not favour this particular type of tenure, as in many cases it is more finan-

cially viable to service a loan and become a home owner rather than fork out rent money".

(Housing authority briefing, 2003, p. 1)

Another problem relates to the high number of vacant premises on the islands – partly the result of complex land and rent legislation. The total number of housing units is 155 202, of which 35 723 are vacant: 23% of the total housing stock. It should be noted, however, that 36% of these vacant dwellings are summer residences. It is a matter for concern that 55% of vacant properties on the islands are in varying states of disrepair. In some cases it would take considerable investment to renovate the properties to modern standards. Nevertheless, in a situation where housing prices are high – and as a consequence mobility is restricted – it is worrying that such a high percentage of properties remain empty. It would appear, moreover, that young people might be concentrated in poorer neighbourhoods, like the inner and outer harbour regions where housing tend to be of a poorer quality.

It is against the background of this challenging array of difficulties that the public housing sector (the Housing Authority and Department of Social Housing) operates. The social housing sector offers three main types of support. Properties are built and sold at more affordable rates, properties are built and rented to low income and vulnerable groups, and a variety of Housing Authority assistance schemes designed to meet the diverse needs of those struggling to meet accommodation costs. These three different types of support will be considered briefly.

Firstly, the public housing authorities build units for sale at affordable prices. These new accommodation units will cost at least 33% less than comparable properties in the private market. The average price of a two- to three-bedroom apartment/maisonette is MTL 17 000. The demand for accommodation units far exceeds supply. In 2002, for example, there were 800 valid applications for only 195 units (Housing Authority briefing 2003, p. 2). Those eligible to apply for such accommodation units are listed in the National Report (131-2) as follows:

1. "Applicants with physical or intellectual disability or mental illness.

2. Young single people. These young people are actually aged over 30.

3. Young married couples (applicants must be aged over 18).

4. Young engaged couples. Applicants must, again, be over 18.

5. Young separated couples (it will be recalled that divorce is not permitted in Malta) in possession of the final decree of a legal separation. The parties must also be aged over 18.

6. Families with children or young single parents. Applicants must be aged over 18. Obviously many young people who are members of such families will be helped indirectly."

Although the sale of housing units is not specifically targeted at young people, many of the applicants will be young. According to data available as of 5 November 2002, 69 of last year's successful applicants were aged under 30 (Housing Authority briefing, 2003, p. 5).

As far as the rented property sector is concerned, 144 housing units were offered by the Department of Social Housing in 2002. The review team was not presented with information on the number of applications for these units, but it is reasonable to suppose that once again demand exceeded supply. Those eligible to apply for

rented accommodation are those aged over 18 years, Maltese citizens or those married to Maltese citizens, and those who have resided uninterruptedly in Malta over a period of 12 months. The financial position of those eligible for social housing can be summarised as follows:

"Those who qualify for social housing cannot have an income that exceeds MTL 3 000 in the case of single persons or MTL 4 000 for couples and families. However, in the latter case, when there are children in the family, the limit of MTL 4 000 is increased by MTL 300 for each child up to a maximum of MTL 5 000."

(Housing Authority briefing 2003, p. 4)

The third package of schemes designed to assist those struggling to meet housing costs include adaptation and repair grants, rent subsidies, and loan interest subsidies.

Whilst the traditional, closely-knit Maltese family is far from being under threat, there are nevertheless subtle changes occurring in terms of structure, roles and attitudes (Tabone, 1994). Indeed the National Report highlights one of the trends.

"The number of single young people who have never married is growing. These are in search for new accommodation and so there is pressure in this sector. The demand of accommodation from single young people may be due to a number of factors. There is a new phenomenon of single young people who are striving for independence."

(National Report, 2003, 131)

The National Report goes on to highlight a number of deficiencies within existing housing policy and provision. It also makes some recommendations for change (pp. 137-38) with which the review team is in broad sympathy. Special provision certainly needs to be made in respect of the small but vulnerable 15- to 17-year age group. The potential for multi-occupancy tenancies and/or foyer schemes needs to be explored. It is particularly crucial that this age group have access to appropriate support and advice in such areas as education, training and employment. Some, whose departure from the parental home may have been precipitated by family problems, might also require support from social services.

The National Report draws attention to that group of young people who may already have enjoyed a measure of domestic independence while studying at university. These young people, quite legitimately, may not wish to return to a position of complete dependency on the family of origin. It is suggested that financial assistance for such groups of young people is appropriate.

Gozitan youth – including those attending university – often have to rent apartments in Malta. This can prove to be an enormous financial burden. It is suggested by the National Report that assisted or subsidised renting for this group would be a helpful measure.

During the course of the review team's visit it was suggested by some people that the eligibility threshold for social housing had been set too low. It is difficult for people from outside Malta to comment authoritatively on this matter, but it may be a matter worthy of review.

The problem of vacant properties on the islands is raised in the National Report. Whilst it is acknowledged that the amount of money required to renovate whole

neighbourhoods of dilapidated properties might be prohibitive in the short term, the possibility of converting some houses into one-bedroom apartments with shared communal facilities is worthy of consideration. Such accommodation units could prove particularly attractive to young single people or childless couples. The review team appreciates the complexity of the issues that have given rise to the high number of unoccupied properties. The problem is certainly challenging, but it is not intractable. The government may, therefore, wish to address this issue in the near future. At least two policy options should be given active consideration. The letting of vacant housing units could be encouraged by giving financial incentives (via the taxation system or housing subsidies) to property owners. It is important, however, that rents should be affordable to young people. Alternatively, the public housing authorities could be given additional resources to purchase vacant properties and bring them within the social housing sector. Such properties could be rented or sold to young people. Financial incentives could, perhaps, also be given to young people prepared to renovate government-owned vacant properties.

Participation

Although the public housing authorities do not appear to have developed a discrete youth strategy, there is evidence that many young people do benefit from the various schemes of social assistance. There are, however, groups of young people (those aged 15 to17 for example) that are at risk of falling between the existing structures of provision. Whilst the numbers may be small, filling these service gaps now could save future public expenditure in such areas as health, substance misuse treatment services and the criminal justice system. Serious attention should be given to designing an integrated service that includes advice, mediation (in cases where there are disputes between family members), crisis accommodation and properly supported move on housing units.

Young people do not appear to be particularly involved in the design and delivery of accommodation services. This is a matter that should be reviewed.

Equity, diversity and special provision

There is a clear need for accommodation services to recognise the growing diversity of family life. This involves acknowledging the legitimacy of demands made in respect of single people, unmarried couples, households based on friendship networks and gay couples.

The social housing sector is making serious efforts to assist those citizens with disabilities and mental health problems. This is to be applauded, though no doubt there is more work to be done in this area.

Autonomy, social cohesion and social exclusion

The Maltese family undoubtedly meets the accommodation needs of most young people. On the whole it would seem that parents and young people are happy with this social arrangement. There does not appear to be a major problem of youth homelessness in Malta. According to supplementary data kindly provided by Ms Ellul, the youth homelessness figures are very low (though whether rooflessness or a wider definition of homelessness is being applied is unclear at the time of writing). Nevertheless, the fact remains that for those young people who do seek independence, there are very real obstacles. Achieving autonomy for them is often profoundly problematic. There are others – a minority, no doubt – who for a variety

of reasons cannot draw on reserves of social capital banked in the institution of the family. These young people are clearly at risk of social exclusion. Whilst some socially committed NGOs may be working with such young people, there is a need for a more strategic approach in respect of this vulnerable minority.

Governance, power and information

The state would appear to expect the family to continue to fulfil its traditional obligation of accommodating and supporting the young. Those young people who seek to gain more autonomy over their lives are therefore working against the grain of cultural tradition. Their claim to the social right of independent accommodation is, nevertheless, entirely legitimate.

The National Report highlights a possible breakdown in communication between the Housing Authority and disabled people eligible for assistance. Many disabled people are seemingly forced into a position of dependency on their families because they lack the financial means to make alterations to their homes or do not know where to seek advice (National Report, 2003, p. 136). Whilst the social housing sector is exhibiting increasing awareness around disability issues (evidenced by some very good schemes), the apparent breakdown in communication with this constituency needs to be addressed.

4.6. Criminal justice

This section of the report is shorter than those covering comparable domains like education and health because:

1. The review team did not have contact with any of the criminal justice agencies during the visit;

2. we were not presented with documentary evidence beyond that contained in the National Report.

Consequently it is difficult to comment with any authority on such cross-cutting themes as participation, diversity, equity and special provision. The team would, however, like to thank the author of the chapter on criminal justice, Sandra Scicluna, for making herself available to answer specific queries arising from her analysis. This chapter and the said meeting were extremely helpful to the team.

It is to be welcomed that the National Report devotes a chapter to young people and the criminal justice system because it is a neglected area of youth policy in many countries. This is regrettable because young people's offending is often related to underlying welfare issues and social problems. The criminal justice system can, moreover, exacerbate the problems such young people experience through labelling and stigmatising them as offenders. The system can also introduce young people to a network of criminally sophisticated offenders. Custody, moreover, certainly places young people at risk; not only in terms of their personal safety (peer bullying and intimidation being common features of many regimes) but also in respect of increasing the likelihood of recidivism. Custodial sentences, by removing young people from society, effectively disrupt educational progress and weaken family and community ties. Imprisonment, therefore, has a profoundly deleterious effect on transitions to adult independence. As such, the case for criminal justice being integrated into youth policy is beyond doubt.

As the National Report mentions (National Report, 2003, pp. 148-150) the discourse about young people and crime is very often actually concerned with deeper social

anxieties. Unruly young people are often perceived as "the omens of the often dreaded social change" and "enemies of traditional values" (National Report, 2003, p. 148). Whilst fear of youth crime cannot be attributed entirely to groundless "moral panics" (Cohen, 1980), it is nevertheless important to maintain a sense of perspective. Young people are just as likely to be victims – sometimes in the safety of their own homes – as they are perpetrators. This fact tends to be overlooked in the more heated discussions on crime.

The Maltese criminal justice system appears to hybridise aspects of both Italian and English law. A detailed overview of this system will not be given here. Suffice to say that the correctional system is divided into community corrections without supervision (fines, etc.), community corrections (probation, community service orders, etc.) and incarceration. The National Report provides a very clear account of the system and makes some eminently sensible recommendations. There are, however, some aspects of the criminal justice system to which the review team would like to draw attention. These are summarised below.

• The most striking point is the apparent absence, or relative inaccessibility, of reliable data. The National Report summarises the position.

"The courts of Malta do not hold any statistics on cases. The only possibility for a person to obtain details about cases is to go to the law courts and laboriously go over each case file. Without these statistics effective planning is difficult, as the numbers of people being addressed is not known. The police do hold statistics, but they consider all the cases that were arraigned in court, not the amount of persons found guilty. If one were to base policy on these statistics, the amount of persons in need of intervention would be much larger than those who will actually use them. Another source of data is the probation department and the prisons. These departments keep their own statistics and it is possible to know how many people were sentenced to probation or prison at any given time. Here again, the picture given is not complete. No-one knows how many people were fined, reprimanded or given a conditional or absolute discharge. These make up by far the most common punishment delivered by the courts. The statistics that were received were not very helpful in delineating the policy. They dealt with different age groups and few deductions may be drawn from them. The main problem is that the different sectors all hold their statistics separately, making comparisons impossible."

(National Report, 2003, p. 161)

It has to be pointed out that evidence-based policy and practice – including sentencing practice – cannot be developed in the absence of sound information. Court outcomes, the impact of sentences and recidivism rates are simply not known. It is difficult to see how a rational criminal justice system can be developed in the absence of good quality and readily retrievable information. It also makes it far more difficult to monitor the system for biases and mechanisms of discrimination that might be operating against certain groups. The recommendation of establishing an integrated data system (National Report, 2003, p. 163) is supported by the review team.

• Justice is, quite rightly, administered by the courts on an individualised basis (taking full account of the individual circumstances of each case). The review team was, however, concerned to learn that there are apparently wide disparities in sentencing practice. Whilst it is important for the judiciary to retain both independence and professional discretion, the principles of proportionality

and consistency also need to apply. The introduction of sentencing guidelines would not result in sentencing by formula, but it could lead to greater parity and equity.

- Custody should be the sentence of last resort, for the reasons already cited. In those cases where young people below the age of 18 are sentenced to custody, it is important that their time is not served in the company of adults.

- It is noted that the police prosecute cases. This model is often criticised because it is vulnerable to corruption. Moreover, it is argued that investigation and prosecution represent distinct stages in the criminal justice process. As such, the argument goes, it makes sense for these different functions to be represented by different agencies. The introduction of an independent prosecution service might be considered appropriate.

- Diversion of young people from the formal criminal justice system is afforded by the police cases system. Whilst there are some concerns about natural justice (in terms of the implicit admission of guilt by the suspect) the diversion of young people from the formal criminal justice system is a highly desirable aim. Whether the police should have sole discretion on the decision to prosecute (or refer to the probation service/social services department) should, however, be reviewed (see above).

- Given the essentially cohesive nature of Maltese society, the introduction of restorative justice practices might be a particularly appropriate development (Braithwaite, 1999; Johnstone, 2002; and *British Journal of Criminology*, 2002).

- By international standards, the age of criminal responsibility is very low (10 years). Whilst the impact of this is to some extent offset by a principle akin to the old (and recently abolished) English principle of *doli incapax*, consideration should be given to raising this age in line with international conventions. This is a matter that a newly appointed commissioner for children may wish to address. Those below the age of majority should be treated on the basis of a children first philosophy for the four reasons outlined by Drakeford:

"In comparison with adults, children do not possess a similar degree of independent agency.

Their characters are not fully formed and neither … are their capacities to frame fully informed moral judgements.

They remain dependent upon adults for almost all the key necessities of life.

The law itself determines that they are unable to take their own decisions in a whole series of areas which are available to adults."

(Drakeford, 2001, p. 43)

- On the basis of the research evidence presented in the National Report (2003, pp. 149-54), it would seem that there is scope for improving the quality of police training. Police officers should be sensitised to the issues confronting young people.

- It would appear that there is a willingness within the criminal justice system to recognise that alcohol/drug related offending is essentially a health issue. This approach is to be commended.

- The probation service appears to be under-resourced. If this is the case, then it is a false economy. Apparently there are currently insufficient numbers of staff available to supervise community-based sentences like probation orders and

community service orders. This effectively means that it is not possible to present community based sentences to the court as viable alternatives to custody. As a direct result, levels of custodial sentences are likely to rise – and thus increase public expenditure.

- Status offences by young people should not trouble the formal criminal justice system. They should be dealt with informally.

- The review team was concerned that a young person could be convicted for loitering "for prostitution purposes" (p. 157). The first concern should be for the welfare of the young person. The criminal justice system should focus instead on those who exploit young people.

As mentioned above, the team's assessment of the criminal justice system drew heavily upon the evidence contained in the National Report (2003). Ideally we would have liked to meet with representatives of the various criminal justice agencies. Meeting young people with direct experience of the system would also have been useful. Nevertheless, we trust the above observations will, at the very least, encourage those in public authority to review closely young people's position in the criminal justice system.

5. Conclusion

5.1. The national youth policy of Malta: an evaluation

The review team has been presented with the policy contained in the National Report (2003) and the draft policy developed by the National Youth Council (National Youth Council, 2003). It is not the role of the review team to redraft either document. We would, however, wish to comment on the salient issues arising from the main policy document; draw attention to particular details and lacunae; and give positive affirmation to some elements of the policy.

The first point to make is that whilst the youth policy would benefit from some amendments, additions and clarifications, it is essentially a sound piece of work. It should be recorded, though, that whilst efforts were clearly made to consult widely (National Report, 2003, pp. 2-3), the review team did hear criticisms about the way in which this process was managed. We are not in a position to judge the validity of these criticisms, but would simply wish to emphasise the importance of facilitating an appropriately conducive atmosphere in which consultative discussions can be conducted.

Summarised below are the main comments we would wish to make concerning the youth policy.

The state's responsibilities

It would be our suggestion that the introduction makes it clear that one of the purposes of the youth policy is to clarify and confirm the state's obligations and responsibilities to young people. This package of entitlements should then be duly detailed in the rest of the document (as, indeed, happens in this youth policy).

The role of the Catholic Church and issues of diversity

1.7 reads, "the state recognises that the Catholic Church in Malta is an important role model for young people". Whether an institution can actually assume role model status is debatable. However, the problem with 1.7 is that it is exclusive. The Roman Catholic Church is, of course, profoundly influential in Maltese life. It therefore carries a weighty responsibility. However, a form of words should be found to affirm the validity of other faiths and belief systems – including that of secular humanism. Whilst the Roman Catholic Church unquestionably enjoys a position of moral hegemony in Malta, respect for diversity should be explicit in the document.

Education

Section 5 on education is supported strongly by the review team. Reference to the accreditation of the "acquired experience and skill through non formal and informal learning" (5.5) is particularly welcomed.

Equality and diversity

Whilst a commitment to equality, pluralism and diversity is implicit in the document, it might be helpful to include explicit references to some of the groups who should be accorded equal rights and respect: for example, women, lesbians, gay men, people with disabilities and those from minority ethnic/faith communities. The acknowledgement of the existence of such groups in Malta would be a powerfully inclusive statement.

Environment

Section 9 could be strengthened. Reference should be made to the National Youth Council document (National Youth Council, 2003).

Mobility

Section 12 is welcomed but the precise meaning of the phrase "intercultural fundamentalism" is unclear.

National youth agency

The rationale for establishing a national youth agency is clear (see Chapter 3 of this report). Such an agency could potentially work in a more flexible way than present arrangements allow. However, given the experience of quango-style models of governance in certain parts of the United Kingdom, it is important that clear and transparent channels of democratic accountability are established from the outset. What will be the precise relationship between the agency, the ministry, the National Youth Council and young service users? If the national youth agency is to be an advocate for young people in policy-making circles, to what extent can it realistically afford to be critical of those in power? Thought needs to be given to the process of appointing a director to the agency. The charge of cronyism is one that haunts the institutional life of many British quangos.

The relationship between the national youth agency and the National Youth Council will be critical. It is beyond doubt that the National Youth Council should be the principal advocate for young people in Malta. This role cannot be usurped by the national youth agency. In order to fulfil its function as an effective advocate for youth, it is essential that the National Youth Council retain a strong sense of critical independence from government and, by implication, the national youth agency. It does not follow, though, that the National Youth Council should be excluded from the management structures of the national youth agency. Whilst it would probably be inappropriate for National Youth Council members to become embroiled in day-to-day operational decisions, there is no reason why they should not be involved in the strategic management of the agency. To avoid the danger of co-option, perhaps consideration could be given to the National Youth Council nominating its own representatives to the national youth agency. Election by peers rather than selection by governing politicians should enhance the reputation of both the agency and the National Youth Council amongst young people.

Furthermore, it is important that the staff employed by the agency enjoy good conditions of service. There is experience in some countries to suggest that outsourcing government functions can lead to poor employment practices. This need not be the case, however. Proper protections for national youth agency employees should be written into their contracts.

In the final analysis, the review team wishes to reiterate the point that whilst the respective roles of the National Youth Council and the proposed agency are potentially complementary, there needs to be a clear separation of powers, functions and responsibilities between the two bodies. As previously mentioned, the mooted agency should most certainly not usurp the role of the National Youth Council. Indeed, the creation of such a powerful new social actor in the youth field strengthens the argument for an empowered National Youth Council. That being said, the review team can see the advantage of a national youth agency in Malta, provided that its foundation – and the process leading to its foundation – is used to mobilise fresh and creative thinking. Process is vitally important to the success of a national youth agency; how decisions are made will be as important as the actual decisions taken. The mere establishment of a new agency is not a panacea for all the problems and ills that afflict the youth field. A national youth agency must work innovatively and in a democratic spirit if it is to inspire and animate the grassroots. The agency's mandate should also be future-oriented, with a remit that embraces both the national and European levels.

Training for youth and community workers

15.2.2 (b) calls for the recognition of "… the status of professionally trained youth and community workers and … making provision for their services." The review team received many representations on this issue. We are, therefore, very sympathetic to this proposal – particularly as youth and community workers have a vital role to play in developing civil society. Our only concern was whether there are sufficient funds available to finance more youth and community work posts. Is there a danger of overproduction of youth workers? One possible compromise is to explore whether it is feasible to modularise the youth work training programme. Youth and community development work modules could, perhaps, be taken alongside complementary modules in such fields as social work and human resources management. Whilst this would broaden the employment prospects for graduates there is obviously also a danger of diluting the integrity of the professional training offered by the Institute of Youth Studies. This is a matter for careful exploration and discussion, we would suggest.

The National Youth Council

The National Youth Council has a vital role to play in Maltese society. As previously stated, it should be a truly independent voice speaking on behalf of young Maltese people. There are, however, problems of social representation that the council needs to address. The review team heard from many young people that the National Youth Council was self-serving, elitist, politically sectarian and disconnected from the grassroots. Whether these criticisms are legitimate is ultimately irrelevant. The fact of the matter is that this seems to be a widespread perception. It is important, therefore, that the National Youth Council explore ways of engaging with the grassroots and ensuring its leading representatives are not overwhelmingly male, middle class and university-educated. Attention could also be given to ensuring that young people under the age of 18 are properly represented. Such members could be instrumental in forging links with the new children's commissioner.

Despite the above-mentioned criticisms, it is important to record the review team's impression of a talented and committed group of individuals. Moreover, it is certainly in everyone's interests that the National Youth Council establishes itself as an effective vehicle for representing young people's interests and concerns. The position and status of the National Youth Council must be secured through adequate funding. The tenure of representatives on the council also needs to be extended in order to ensure effectiveness and continuity.

The international review team had a very interesting and open exchange of views with the National Youth Council (see Alexandros Liakopoulos' position paper in Appendix 3 for a more detailed analysis of some of the key issues) and raised a number of items. Some of the salient points of discussion are summarised below:

- The well-established traditions of political polarisation in Malta have resulted in the council being either Nationalist Party or Labour Party led. The review team believes that young people's common interests are of greater importance than party political divisions. Attention needs to be given to some form of supra-party representation. It is a matter of great importance that sectarian divisions are transcended in the interests of all young people.

- The short tenure of office of the executive body of the National Youth Council (currently one year) is problematic. It could be argued that because youth generations are measurable in periods as brief as three to five years, truly representative and responsive leaderships can only be achieved through short terms of office. A tenure of one year, however, is far too short a period within which to establish competence, confidence and, indeed, continuity.

- The preponderance of university students on the National Youth Council exacerbates the problem of the brief tenure of office mentioned above. For most students the latter part of the academic year is dominated by examinations. In effect this shortens the term of office for many student members of the council. We consider that this strengthens the argument for a longer tenure of office.

- The lack of international and European experience within a number of NGOs was cited as something of a limitation.

- The established tendency to split and divide along party lines over political issues is problematic.

- The council's present level of resourcing is incommensurate with the responsibilities the body is expected to discharge. The material conditions within which the council is currently expected to operate are inadequate.

- Inadequate consultation on youth issues was cited as a perennial problem. The processes of consultation within the existing political and administrative structures require radical improvement if young people are to be engaged in meaningful dialogues.

The international team detected a fundamental problem at the heart of the relationship between government and the National Youth Council. What the public authorities appear to need in Malta is a professional NGO counterpart that they do not see being fulfilled by the National Youth Council. The National Youth Council, however, does not currently have the opportunity, training or minimum material conditions to grow into the role of a professional counterpart. The resulting institutional vacuum has led to the attractive idea of establishing a national youth agency. However, entrusting the national youth agency with any of the functions that properly reside with a National Youth Council would be wholly unacceptable to the

review team. As previously mentioned, the establishment of a powerful national youth agency demands robust measures be taken to empower the National Youth Council. Provided clarity is established with regard to the responsibilities and role boundaries of these two bodies, we see no reason that their co-existence cannot invigorate the whole area of youth policy and practice. It is not for the review team to adjudicate on the detail of the disputes between the National Youth Council and the public authorities. Suffice to say, the present relationship is far from being ideal and certainly represents a waste of talent and resources. The democratic opposition usually assigned to youth councils elsewhere in Europe does not appear to be fully accepted in Malta. On the basis of comparative experience, the international team would argue strongly that – far from being a problem – the cultivation of a properly autonomous and critical National Youth Council is a priority for the democratic health of wider civil society.

NGOs

There is a need to establish a proper statutory framework within which NGOs can operate. Such a framework does not appear to be in existence at the present time.

5.2. Recommendations and challenges for the future

The international review team wishes to highlight the following recommendations to the Maltese authorities.

Learning, training and access to the labour market

- The reforms currently being pioneered within the education system are welcomed. It is important, however, that the progress of such initiatives as schools councils and participation officers are evaluated regularly. The training of teachers must also take full cognisance of the philosophical changes being effected.

- The position of Maltese within the education system should be reviewed. Whilst the aim of full bilingualism (in Maltese and English) should be upheld, it is important that young people are not disadvantaged by being forced to sit examinations in certain subjects through the medium of English at too an early a stage. Maltese is an official language of the country and should be accorded equal status.

- The aims of the education system and the Employment Training Corporation need to be more closely aligned in order to meet the needs of young people and the economy.

- A strategy must be devised to increase the level of employee participation in further education and training. Particular efforts should be made with employees working in the private sector and those young people with weak educational profiles.

- The mission of the Employment Training Corporation needs to be communicated more effectively to both staff and service users.

Health and social protection

- Given the vulnerability of young people to poverty and social exclusion, a comprehensive package of supportive measures should be designed in the domains of social security, housing and health. Targeted policies and services

also need to be developed in respect of those at acute risk (public care leavers, for example).

- The proposed establishment of a commissioner for children is welcomed and fully supported. It is important, however, that the commissioner's office be adequately resourced. Children and young people also need to be represented on the council of children.

- A discrete youth strategy needs to be developed in the field of housing. An integrated service for young people should include access to advice, mediation (in cases where there are disputes between family members), crisis accommodation and properly supported move on housing units. Special provision also needs to be made for the vulnerable 15- to 17-year age group.

Criminal justice

- The criminal justice system should establish an integrated data system. This will assist the development of evidence-based practice by sentencers and those tasked with managing offenders in both custodial and community settings. It will also help identify any institutional biases that may exist within the system. In England and Wales, for example, the systems in place are capable of monitoring possible discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity and neighbourhood.

- A children first philosophy (see section 4.6) should be adopted in respect of young people under the age of 18 who commit offences.

- Custody should be the sentence of last resort in respect of young people in the criminal justice system.

- As far as possible young people should be diverted from the formal criminal justice system. Extending the use of cautions could be considered alongside the introduction of restorative justice measures.

- Consideration should be given to raising the age of criminal responsibility.

- In order to strengthen the credibility of community-based sentences, the probation service must be properly resourced.

Equity and diversity

- The acceptance and affirmation of diversity must be made explicit in all policy documents covering the youth field. This includes references to gender, disability, sexuality, faith and ethnicity. Monitoring systems must also be put in place in order to detect any institutional biases that may be operating against certain social groups.

- The results of the KNPD national disability survey (2003) imply that there is a need to identify those institutional blockages that are impeding the progress of young people with disabilities in such areas as education, training, employment and housing. It is important to develop a strategy that not only widens access to services but also acknowledges the right of such young people to exercise their autonomy. It is essential, therefore, that young disabled people should – at the very least – co-author those polices that affect them most directly.

Research, evaluation and policy implementation

- In order to develop evidence-based policy and practice it is essential that robust data collection and evaluation systems are put in place. As has already

been noted, there are some domains in policy in which systems could be improved. As the National Report comments;

"There is no hiding from the fact that statistical information in Malta is lacking and that co-ordination between relevant domains is not as healthy as one would wish it to be."

(National Report, 2003, p. 91)

- There is evidently some valuable research being undertaken in the youth field. The team formed the impression, however, that this is not always having the required impact upon policy formation and practice. It is therefore essential that clear lines of communication be established between researchers, policy makers, educators/trainers and practitioners.

- Following on from the above recommendation, it would be helpful if research and information capacity could be increased in order to provide digestible guidance to managers, practitioners, front-line staff and the population at large. Publications in the main policy streams affecting young people could include "Key messages from research for policy makers" and "Good practice guidelines for front-line workers". Empowering and participatory forms of qualitative research need to be developed alongside quantitative approaches. We note that there are good examples of this happening in some fields.

- Young people need to be meaningfully engaged in the policy development process. How this can be best achieved is the key question. At the very least reference groups or focus groups should be established in such areas as housing, education and employment.

- Local government needs to be nurtured and developed. Young people can play a key role in such developments.

Malta and international relations

- The international review team recognises the importance of Euro-Mediterranean co-operation and believes that Malta can occupy a key role in this project. It therefore welcomes the intention of the European Commission to entrust Malta with a EuroMed information centre. This is an important early step in fulfilling Malta's mission as a bridge between cultures. Malta is well-placed to act as a bridge between North Africa and Europe. More could be made of its potential role as a mediator between the Islamic, Christian and secular worlds.

- The international team envisages the increased mobility of Maltese youth in future. Indeed, young people already seem well-disposed to the notion of European citizenship (Azzopardi, 2002). It is important, therefore, that attention be given to maximising participation in existing packages of opportunity as well as exploring new possibilities.

- One area the team did not explore in sufficient depth is the nature of those transfers in human and social capital that take place between the country and its emigrant communities in such places as Australia, Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. It occurs to the review team that these important international connections could be revitalised and constructed into imaginative opportunity schemes.

Key youth policy actors: the national youth agency and the National Youth Council

- The review team understands the rationale that lies behind the creation of a national youth agency. It represents a potentially exciting and fresh initiative in the modern management of Maltese youth resources. Whilst we would draw attention to the cautionary comments contained in the main text of this report, we welcome the establishment of a national youth agency.

- The creation of a national youth agency should imply a corresponding strengthening of the National Youth Council. As has already been made clear in this report, the National Youth Council does not currently possess the material resources to function autonomously and effectively. The issue of autonomy is vitally important and closely related to the resources at its disposal. Irrespective of the political party in power, a fixed percentage of the budget should be allocated to the National Youth Council. A bi-partisan approach by the two main political parties to the question of resources would, moreover, help create a genuinely independent and representative organisation for young people.

- National youth council members' one-year tenure of office must be extended to at least two years.

- The National Youth Council should conduct a critical review of its democratic practices. It must find ways of connecting with the grassroots and making the executive more socially representative. It should also explore ways of transcending the destructive political sectarianism that has apparently characterised its history to date.

- It would be enormously helpful to establish a coherent statutory framework that would clarify not only the citizenship rights of young people but also the roles, responsibilities, duties and rights of public authority, the National Youth Council, the national youth agency and the NGOs working in the youth field.

- It should be ensured that Maltese youth policy is opportunity-focused in orientation, particularly in such areas as employment, health and housing.

The youth work profession

- A professionally accredited youth worker training scheme should be developed. This could be achieved in co-operation with European partners.

- Greater efforts need to be made in the areas of non-formal learning. This is consistent with the Council of Europe's recent recommendations. Youth work is clearly central to a non-formal education strategy and must be resourced accordingly.

Council of Europe: international reviews of youth policy

- In future it would be helpful if international review teams were given greater assistance with social and cultural orientation prior to visiting the country being reviewed. This could take the form of key texts being distributed to team members along with guidance on further reading and useful website addresses.

More detailed guidance on the above recommendations can be found within the main body of the report. It is to be hoped that, taken as a whole, this document can contribute to a fruitful dialogue to further develop youth policy in Malta.

Appendices

1. Itinerary of review team's visit to Malta, 5–11 May 2003

Monday, 5 May

19.30   Dinner at the Hotel Les Lapins, Ta'Xbiex with the Director of Youth and Sport and the national review team

Tuesday, 6 May

9.30   Meeting with the Director of Youth and Sport at the Hotel Les Lapins, Ta'Xbiex

11.00   Meeting with the Honourable Minister for Youth and the Arts, Mr Jesmond Mugliett BE and A (Hons.), A and CE, MP

12.15   Lunch at the Kampanella Restaurant, Valletta

14.00   Meeting with the Director General of Education, Mr Charles Mizzi

17.00   Meeting with the national review team at the Hotel Les Lapins, Ta'Xbiex

Wednesday, 7 May

10.30   Meeting with the representatives of the Housing Authority and the Department of Social Housing

11.30   Meeting with the Permanent Secretary and staff of the Ministry of Social Policy

12.15   Lunch

14.00   Health Promotion Unit – Ministry of Health (Dr Mario Spiteri and staff)

20.00   ZAK – (representatives from 20 youth groups), 213, Brared Str., B'Kara

Thursday, 8 May

am: Departure to the island of Gozo

12.30   Lunch at Rikardu Restaurant, Victoria, Gozo

14.00   Visit to the Citadel, Victoria and Dwejra (the Inland Sea)

17.00   Meeting with the Gozo-Salesians, KDZ, and OASI NGOs

2. Glossary

CDEJ: European Steering Committee for Intergovernmental Co-operation in the Youth Field

CoE: Council of Europe

ECOSY: European Community Organisation of Socialist Youth

ETUC: European Trade Union Congress

IUSY: International Union of Socialist Youth

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

Quango: Quasi-autonomous non-/national-governmental organisation

3. Position paper on the National Youth Council of Malta
Alexandros Liakopoulos (ETUC youth)

1. introduction

This paper aims to highlight the huge importance of establishing an effective, empowered and autonomous National Youth Council (NYC) in Malta. The institutional recognition of such a council by government and wider society is also crucial; institutional validation is one tangible indicator of a society's positive attitude towards its young people. It is imperative, though, that a National Youth Council should fulfil its central role as an indefatigable advocate for young people, not only in the national context, but also at the European level. This paper – written by the international review team's representative from the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe– seeks to draw together the different experiences, insights and information gathered on the subject during the visit to Malta.

Although this paper, quite naturally, reflects the author's own ideas, it will be noted that the analysis is not inconsistent with that contained in the main body of the report. Indeed, the paper complements the main report. As such, this paper should not be regarded as a dissenting minority report. Rather, given the potentially vital role of the National Youth Council in creating a vibrant civil society in Malta, it was deemed important that the member of the team with the most relevant expertise should present a more detailed analysis of this whole area. Bearing in mind the nature of the author's involvement in the international team of experts (youth NGOs' representative), it was felt that he would be well-placed to make an incisive contribution on these matters. His direct and ongoing experience in such live issues as youth representation and participation in civil society inform the analysis that follows. The objective of establishing the National Youth Council as a representative and responsible institutional actor in Maltese society forms one of the guiding principles of the paper. Consequently, in a sprit of constructive criticism, it is necessary to inspect the actual deficiencies in the organisation and *modus operandi* of the National Youth Council. Possible solutions, based on international best practice and the authors' own ideas, are duly recommended.

The structure of the paper comprises this brief introduction (chapter 1) and two main chapters. The second is a general chapter that aims to provide an overview of the importance of establishing a properly functioning NYC. It draws heavily on some of the lessons that can be gleaned from international experience. The third chapter attempts to describe that actual situation in Maltese society. Particular attention is

given to the framework within which the NYC currently functions. The problematic situation with regard to the proper representation and participation of youth in the country is addressed as well as some of the internal problems of the NYC (in terms of organisation, institutional provision, participation and representation). In both chapters the author's proposals are incorporated into the text in order that problems and possible solutions are linked clearly.

The paper draws upon the experiences of the team's visit to Malta, including our meeting with the National Youth Council on 10 May 2003. The solid foundation of the author's expertise, however, has been gained through his involvement with youth issues, policies and organisations at local, national and international levels over the past ten years. The author is aware of the profound sense of responsibility that is involved in submitting a paper of this nature. It is therefore offered in a spirit of friendship and respect. It is hoped that it will be received by our hosts as an important contribution to a critical debate.

2. The importance of a strong, representative and autonomous NYC

a. Mission

The National Youth Council of a country is, or should be, the main advocate for the collective representation of youth and its interests. This should be recognised by the national authorities, civil society and the international community.

b. Composition and membership

A National Youth Council (NYC) should bring together the widest possible range of youth organisations and NGOs that are be able to accepting its statutes and rules. Some of the main articles of statutes that are common in a large number of NYCs refer, *inter alia*, to the democratic structure of its constituent organisations, membership, the acceptance of democratic principles and support for the rule of law. At the same time, of course, the statutes set the rules for the internal organisation of the NYC and for all related electoral procedures.

In order for a youth organisation or NGO to become a member of the NYC, it needs to accept and work within such statutes. In most cases these statutes are the result of internal democratic processes and collective agreement by the founding members of the NYC. Subsequently, of course, these articles, rules and statutes are subject to amendment via established democratic procedures. Through this pre-defined agreement, represented in the statutes, NYCs create a stable basis on which the collective representation of common youth interests can be pursued. NYCs set the rules for the election to their governing structures and determine the internal distribution of power within the organisation as a whole. In common with other institutions, the wording of the statutes, rules and underpinning principles define the NYCs degree of openness and accessibility in relation to youth organisations and NGOs.

c. Nature of the institution

NYCs are essentially tertiary umbrella organisations composed of their member organisations – which in most cases are nation-wide organisations with local branches. Consequently, NYCs can – via the affiliated organisations – access all those young people who are members of member NGOs. This nation-wide network of young people forms a potentially vital infrastructure in civil society. These young

people and their collective interests are duly represented by the democratically elected governing structures of the NYC.

One inherent and major problem all NYCs face is the fact that they must represent the youth of the country as a whole. The fact remains, however, that the composition of all NYCs is based primarily on the constituency of organised youth. Young people who are not members of an organisation – and in most countries this group forms the overwhelming majority – will almost inevitably be inadequately represented in the structures of NYCs. Some NYCs have identified this inherent institutional deficiency and have developed structures and practices to address the challenge of representing unorganised youth. A variety of enfranchisement strategies have been deployed to engage with this large, unrepresented constituency. NYCs have, for example, hosted open seminars and/or conferences on issues of concern to young people. Campaigns have also been conducted with a view to recruiting volunteers for explicitly political and/or social issue activities. The second phase of an enfranchisement strategy attempts to involve these unaffiliated young people directly with the NYC without necessarily requiring them to become members of a constituent organisation. Accordingly, these direct entrants become recognised as an integral group within the institution of the NYC. This recognition can be extended to voting and election rights (including the possibility of assuming leadership positions within the NYCs representative structures). The point should be underlined that every country has its own unique history and set of social conditions. Consequently, the precise strategies used to engage with unorganised youth will inevitably vary from place to place. Nevertheless, instructive lessons can be drawn from comparative experience. The main conclusion to draw from any survey of international experience is that the NYC of Malta must acknowledge the importance of the issue and devise strategies that are likely to prove effective in the local context.

d. Main functions

Some of the main functions the NYC discharges are summarised below:

- Institutional representation of youth in relation to government and other public authorities. NYCs should promote youth policy interests; defend and extend young people's rights; and work with public authorities and other agencies on policy formulation and delivery. In some cases NYCs may be able to establish partnership arrangements with government in key policy areas. Joint policy forums and mechanisms for co-decision making are just some of the more progressive practices that might be established.

- Development of appropriate policies and practices to address specific problems. NYCs are developing their political work on specific issues of concern to youth. In response to local social conditions NYCs organise campaigns, seminars, conferences, information-days, Internet debates and training sessions.

- External representation and international networking. NYCs represent the youth of their countries within the youth structures of such international organisations as the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union. They also represent the youth of their countries within international umbrella youth organisations such as the European Youth Forum, the Balkan Youth Network and the Euro-Med Youth Network. At the institutional level, while participating in the forums and meetings of international institutions, every NYC aims to influence the policies and practices of these powerful bodies. Through participating in international youth networks and umbrella organisations, NYCs

are not merely promoting their national interests. By forming alliances with other NYCs they are also able to address those youth issues that transcend national borders. Such global networking also creates rich opportunities to access international expertise, share best practice and exchange practical skills. The products of such invaluable lessons can, of course, be adapted and applied to the local national context.

e. Reputation and visibility of the NYC of Malta

During the team's visit to Malta the author formed a strong impression that the usefulness of the NYC is unclear to many people – including many young people. Moreover, in some quarters the NYC is most certainly not respected. Some of the comments we heard from young people in youth NGOs implied that they did not recognise the importance of the institution. Others criticised the NYC on the basis of bitter experience. We have heard, for example, that the NYC "… remembers us only once a year when they need to have their congress". Some other comments were even more contemptuous and scornful.

The representation of member organisations on the NYC is a subject on which the current and future leadership of the NYC should work as a matter of urgency. A positive response to this open challenge will create the necessary environment for wider and deeper participation of youth organisations within the NYC. The more active and meaningful participation of such organisations in the NYC will generate more respect for the council and guarantee it higher visibility in Maltese society. The stronger the bonds forged between the NYC and its constituent member organisations, the stronger its position will become within society. By strengthening its democratic mandate, the NYC's public contribution on the issues of the day will assume the added value of popular authority. In order to achieve this aspiration, the NYC must engage in the challenging task of improving channels of communication between the NYC and the grassroots youth organisations. Information must flow in both directions. Information about existing policies and current campaigns must be disseminated effectively. Even more importantly, it is essential that the grassroots are able to take an active part in formulating policies and initiating campaigns. Efforts could be made to organise seminars, conferences, information-days, campaigns and social events. Regular publication of news needs to be sent to member organisations via bulletins and newsletters. Imaginative use of the Internet can certainly facilitate a genuinely interactive dynamic between the NYC and the grassroots.

f. Legal basis

The legal basis for the functions of NYCs is certainly open to dispute in many countries. The problem resides in the fact that in many states there are no proper laws to cover and codify the functions of NGOs. This problem exists in Malta and needs to be addressed accordingly by the government. Currently the NYC of Malta and all other NGOs are afflicted by difficulties arising from this problematic situation. Many such difficulties could be cited, but the main ones stem from the fact that they lack an appropriate legal personality. One consequence is that the financing of the NYC of Malta by governmental authorities tends to be occasional, conditional on circumstances, and project-based. As the financing is not legally guaranteed, funding can potentially become an instrument for manipulation by government and other powerful political actors. This unpleasant and unhealthy situation restricts the autonomy of the NYC as it does not have any other significant sources of income.

This system of public financing is clearly vulnerable to cynical political abuse. It would be possible, for example, for a government to use funding as a means of obtaining a convenient political compromise. It could even apply pressure for favourable NYC leadership election results. In a country where politics appears to be fiercely partisan, any suspicion of government interference in internal NYC affairs needs to be dispelled. The question of the legal basis of NGOs along with that of public financing for the NYC should be addressed as soon as possible.

In many countries the question of public financing for NYCs has been resolved through drafting an appropriate statute that allocates a specific percentage of the gross domestic product/overall government budget. A sufficiently generous allocation is given to ensure that the operational requirements of the National Youth Council are met. Should such a practice seem too progressive at the present time, it is beyond question that the NYC should be given a legally unassailable position. A transparent framework that defines the relationship between the NYC and the government of Malta should include robust legal safeguards to protect the independence of the council.

3. The social reality of Malta and its reflection in the NYC

a. Civil society

During our visit to Malta the collective impression formed by the international team of experts is that civil society is under-developed and therefore needs to be invigorated. Given the political history of the islands and the powerful presence of the Roman Catholic Church, the public and political spheres are dominated either by government-oriented party-politics (or party-oriented governmental politics?) or by an antagonistic relationship between the state and the church. In this situation, civil society does not have very much space within which to grow and develop.

Even if the number of youth NGOs in relation to the total youth population of the country is impressive, the vast majority of them do not seem to have either the human resources (in terms of membership), material conditions or appropriate structures to function properly. Whatever the avowed purpose of their existence, they are probably not in a realistic position to fulfil their original aims. Such NGOs are known as stamp organisations.

Among the more active youth organisations, the situation reflects the political parameters of wider society. The most important organisations, in terms of membership power, are either political or church-based/affiliated. This social reality is reflected in the composition of the membership of the NYC and, even more significantly, that of its governing structures. Here one can mostly (if not completely) find representatives of these political and religious-based youth organisations.

b. Paternalism as a constraint to youth autonomy and social change

One cultural feature that made a deep impression on the team was the paternalistic dynamic that operates within many NGOs. Even in cases where the organisations and NGOs were youth-based – including cases where the notional leaders were young – power clearly resided with those who could not be described as young (in terms of chronological age, at least). Our team had had the experience of meeting youth organisations where young leaders were present, but older people nevertheless somehow conspired to dominate the dialogue. This, indeed, probably reflected the fact that it is mainly older people who occupy the most powerful

positions within these organisations. Even if these older people maintain an active, positive and inspiring interest in youth, it does not erase the fact that they are not themselves actually young. It would appear, moreover, that they are not really willing to relinquish or transfer their power in favour of young people. Ironically, one of the most common assertions we heard from these senior figures was something along the lines of, "we are here to give space to young people!" Such sentiments, of course, reveal the fact that they believe they own the space in the first place. Even if they were expressing a genuine desire to concede space to young people, they failed to understand that their mere presence in meetings placed oppressive constraints on young people. It possibly also reflected a certain lack of trust and belief in young people's abilities. All of this, no doubt, reflects a tradition in which elders have dominated Maltese society. The autonomy of young Maltese people and their organisations appeared to us to be very limited. The heart of the problem seems to be older people's reluctance to relinquish control and transfer power in favour of young people. The implication is clear. Young people are to be trusted with the development and delivery of such important work.

The situation described above reflects the traditional contest at the social level between conservative and progressive thinking. Conservatives tend to defend the existing social order. This leads them to support and maintain existing social structures and the traditional distribution of power. Progressives, meanwhile, challenge the existing social order. In radically different ways they are acutely aware of such issues as the transference of power and the emergence of new players in the political process.

Leaving aside political labels, one needs to recognise that social progress is directly connected with the freshness of ideas advanced by young people. This almost inevitably makes young people the political adversaries of their elders. Older people tend to defend the social standards they have inherited from previous generations as well as those social changes they themselves have initiated in their lives. Social change is, of course, continuous across generations. The relationship between social conditions and social norms is therefore a close one. The signs of the times, one way or another, are inscribed on all individuals' lives. Older people will, to varying degrees, defend the values that resonate with their life experiences. Young people, however, will also advance those ideas that are consistent with their social experience. Their ideas may appear inappropriate, difficult to understand or simply wrong to the elders. In fact, young people are expressing nothing more than their response to the material changes taking place in the spheres of social, cultural, political and economic life.

Malta is a society based on strong religious belief, the bonds of patriarchal family structures and the wisdom of elders. Maltese people have been educated to follow the well-trodden paths of their elders. This pattern of social reproduction is well established. Whilst this brings a large measure of social stability to Maltese life, the total dependency engendered also brings the very real risk of social exsiccation. Failure to recognise the value of fresh ideas generated by young people is a problem not only for youth, but also for society as a whole. Autonomy and the space for self-development are pre-requisites for the formation of active, mature citizens. Young people need autonomy and their own space.

Maltese society appears to be deeply troubled about the prospect of social change. Seemingly, this society is intent upon reproducing traditional social relations in an uncritical fashion. This cloning process is a cause for concern. Although the past need not be completely jettisoned, new challenges should be addressed with new

ideas and practices. Ideally, society should try to mix the wisdom of elders with the fresh ideas of youth. Over-dependence on the former or, indeed, the latter should be avoided. These different generations can be conceived of as the two extremes of an axe. The best result for society can be achieved through balancing the axe. An unbalanced power relationship between the generations can result in unhelpful social rivalry. In Malta there is a serious imbalance in social relations between the generations: the elders occupy a dominant position in society and youth is dis-trusted. Maltese society must learn to trust to its youth and confront constructively its fear of new, innovative ideas.

Notwithstanding the above comments, the author gained the impression that most young people themselves accept the status quo. In most other European countries youth plays a leading role in contesting established power relations. This is, indeed, widely perceived as a common characteristic of youth across the globe. This tendency is not so apparent in Malta. Of course this should not be perceived as a deficiency of youth itself. Young people are shaped by the society that nurtures and educates them. If young people learn nothing more than unquestioning respect for their elders, then their capacity to develop their own perspectives will be severely limited. Consequently, young people's autonomy is restricted by the social institutions of family, church, state and education. Given the limitations imposed by this social environment, who can blame them for not developing their own ideas? Who can blame them for not challenging the inherited social order? Who can blame them for not claiming the future for themselves? Who can blame them for being afraid of expressing difference? Who can blame them for basing their beliefs on received prejudices and stereotypes? It is only the courageous few who are opting to challenge the status quo and, in so doing, they risk their own exclusion from mainstream society. The NYC should address this fundamental problem at a number of levels; it should lobby the authorities for reforms in the education system; promote and develop progressive education polices in its member organisations, and utilise the youth autonomy section in the white paper on youth (published by the European Commission) as a basis for the popular mobil-isation of young people in Malta.

c. The nature of the membership of youth organisations and its relationship to the representativeness of the NYC

Returning to the issue of the membership of youth organisations, most members, activists and volunteers are university students. Whilst it is positive that access to higher education seemingly increases the likelihood of participation in youth organisations, there are some issues that need to be addressed. The fact that most of the leaders of these organisations are students, or have been students in the past, is creating a situation in which university-educated young people dominate the elected leadership of the NYC. Whilst the commitment of the student commu-nity is to be credited, the fact remains that an organisation such as the NYC should represent the whole of Maltese youth in all its diversity.

Currently, young people who have not had access to higher education find them-selves under-represented (perhaps even unrepresented) in the NYC of Malta. Actually, this was one of the most common criticisms we heard from young people concerning the representativeness of the NYC. In order for the NYC to properly rep-resent Maltese youth, it needs to address this question as soon as possible. If it fails to do so, it will continue to be considered elitist by many Maltese young people. As a result it will probably fail to attract their positive interest (let alone

enlist their active participation). The democratic legitimacy and authority of the NYC is at risk if it fails to become more socially representative of Maltese youth as a whole.

d. The internal competition for power in the NYC and the resulting problems

Another criticism from which the NYC suffers is the fact that many youth organisations do not consider the environment in which they are expected to participate conducive. The nature of the power relations between the political and youth organisations tends to mirror the traditional contest between the main political parties. This is highly de-motivating for those youth organisations in civil society that wish to distance themselves from party politics. For this situation to change the NYC needs to revise its statutes in order to establish clear criteria for the membership of youth organisations and NGOs. Meanwhile the leadership of the NYC must ensure that it resists the temptation of gaining unfair political advantage through the cynical manipulation of the rulebook. If it fails to act responsibly in this respect, the NYC will continue to be criticised for being an elitist club for future politicians. This last comment was made by young people we met on more than one occasion.

During our stay in Malta the team received many critical accounts of the history of the NYC. These were received from young people as well as those in positions of power. There were some associated with the national review team and public authorities who implied that the NYC could not be fully trusted. Obviously, the negative image of the NYC could be seen to bolster the arguments of those who might wish to transfer the council's power and resources elsewhere. However, both the NYC and the public authorities should treat such negative criticisms as a challenge. The aim should now be to create a strong, stable, dependable, representative and inclusive NYC. The attainment of this aim would benefit not only young Maltese people, but also society at large. This is precisely why, whenever such criticisms were voiced, the author invariably attempted to highlight the indispensable nature of a properly functioning NYC. It does not follow that because an institution is not functioning properly, it should be destroyed completely. In the case of the NYC, it should be reformed and democratised. In order to effect this transformation, though, it is necessary to provide the NYC with proper institutional guarantees.

It is important to acknowledge the necessity of a dependable NYC that is capable of overcoming its troubled past. The leadership of the NYC must prove itself worthy of trust. It must obviously first win the trust and respect of its membership. Gaining the trust and respect of the public authorities will hopefully flow from the NYCs enhanced legitimacy with its own membership. The NYC must, therefore, encourage the active participation of its member organisations in an open spirit of mutual cooperation. The obstacles that currently impede such progress must be removed. Meanwhile the NYCs dealings with the public authorities should be characterised by professionalism. It must prove itself to be an independent but dependable institutional partner.

By the same token, it is the responsibility of the public authorities to give the NYC tools with which to do the job. First and foremost the council must be provided with the necessary resources. The NYC must then be meaningfully involved in all relevant discussions regarding policy formation and delivery. The status of the NYC as the authoritative voice of youth must be recognised by government and other public authorities. It should be the starting point for any consultation on youth policy issues.

Last but not least, the political parties should understand that the NYC should not be used as yet another arena for political competition. Even if this injunction goes unheeded by the political parties, the political youth organisations should claim their autonomous status. It is their responsibility to ensure that damaging political divisions within the NYC are avoided at all cost. Sadly, it would appear that such schisms continue to be a feature of the present council.

The NYC should be recognised by everyone as a forum for mutual co-operation. Agreed upon solutions to common problems must be negotiated by those with diverse backgrounds and conflicting political tendencies. Political youth organisations must understand that they are not there to promote and impose their own interests. Instead they must work collectively to promote the common interests of all member organisations. Therefore, all members should try to identify the common ground and focus on those issues around which unity can be built. Areas of disagreement, moreover, need not be the cause of damaging splits and divisions. If more inclusive working practices can be adopted – in conjunction with an acceptance of the healthy diversity that the democratic process will undoubtedly produce – then the future can be very bright for the NYC.

e. The current leadership of the NYC

In conclusion the author wishes to underline the fact that, in spite of the justifiable criticisms to which the NYC is subject, our team's meeting with the leadership left us with a very positive impression. It was our collective view that most of the people present were fully aware of their weighty responsibilities and the importance of their mission. This does not imply that the present NYC leadership is to be absolved completely for any negative developments during its tenure of office. The leaders, like their predecessors, must also accept the criticism that they have failed to open up the organisation to wider constituencies of young people. The suspicion remains that they too may have restricted the participation of some groups of young people in order to secure power. For the time being, at least, the sectarian tradition of internal competition between the main political youth organisations continues. As has already been indicated, the more damaging aspects of this political culture must be changed.

However, as a team we have been persuaded that there is hope! The leadership of the NYC, or at least a large section of it, recognises the importance of its role. It is willing to engage in a considerable amount of voluntary work. The level of commitment and professional quality of its work is evidenced by the production of an impressive text on a proposed national youth policy. One of the most encouraging signs, however, is that a section of the leadership acknowledges the deficiencies of the NYC and appears committed to overcoming these difficulties. The author therefore wishes them well in the challenging work that lies ahead. The divisions of the past should be put to one side and the collective endeavour must be to create a properly facilitative framework for the future. The reward for these efforts will be a representative, inclusive, and effective organisation for youth. The emergence of an authentic and authoritative advocate for Maltese youth should, moreover, greatly enhance the prospects of the rising generation.

4. Additional information provided by the Employment Training Corporation (ETC: 2003)

The rapporteur is grateful to Mr Edwin Camilleri (Manager, Labour Market Information) of the Employment Training Corporation for submitting additional information to the international review. Unfortunately, the timing of the submission meant that it was not possible to include it in the main body of the report. Extracts from Mr Camilleri's submission are therefore presented in this appendix.

The national minimum wage: 2003

NB: MTL 1 = €2.34

Full-time workers
Under 17	MTL 49.00
Age 17	MTL 50.22
Age 18+	MTL 53.13

Part-time workers
Under 17	MTL 1.23
Age 17	MTL 1.26
Age 18+	MTL 1.33

Gender

"… the gender pay gap (including both full- and part-time employees) was 92% in 2002, that is women earn 92% of the wage of men."

Public transport costs

"Public transport in Malta is not very expensive. It ranges from 15 cents (zone 1) to 20 cents (zone 2) per trip. There are no concessionary rates for young persons or jobseekers – except for elderly persons aged over 60. Gozitan workers, if they do not reside in Malta, have to transit every day by bus and ferry every day. Gozitans have reduced rates on the ferry (30 cents per head without car) – however cumulatively they spend more on transport than Malta."

Area of highest unemployment

South-harbour region.

5. Additional submission of evidence by the Malta Gay Rights Movement (Malta Gay Rights Movement: 2003a)

The rapporteur was pleased to receive a submission from the Malta Gay Rights Movement. Unfortunately, the timing of its arrival meant that it could not be included in the main body of the report. Extracts from the submission have therefore been reproduced in this appendix.

The Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM) does not receive any funding or support from the government. It does its own fundraising and seeks sponsors in order to be able to run activities and projects. It is in fact a young movement established around two years ago. The (...) members come from all walks of life although the majority are young adults between the ages of 18 and 30.

MRGM is a member of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and participates in many of its conferences. Members, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 25 are able to participate in international conferences organised by ILGA or youth training seminars sponsored by the EU (...) (the MGRM) (...) keeps abreast with EU lobby groups and legislation and advises the movement in its struggle to achieve the full implementation of the *acquis communitaire* in Malta. To this day the government refuses specifically to include sexual orientation as a specific category in its anti-discriminatory legislation in the place of work.

There are as yet no specific support services targeting gay, lesbian and bi- and trans-sexual (GLBT) youth. MGRM is currently in the process of establishing a gay helpline, which will be run by volunteers, a majority of whom are young people. These have already received training in collaboration with the government social work agency APPOGG which runs a 24-hour helpline. The plan is for this helpline to run between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. Monday to Friday with volunteers working in pairs on a roster basis. We are at the moment going through the process of applying for NGO status in order to be able to acquire a phone list at a non-business rate in order to make the project sustainable. Hopefully the gay helpline will be up and running by the end of 2003.

MGRM is also in the process of establishing a number of support groups. The plan is to have one group for young people aged 16 to 25, another for those aged over 25 and a third for relatives and friends of LGB persons. A number of suitable professionals have already been contacted and identified to facilitate these groups on a volunteer basis. Hopefully we will be able to launch this much needed service in the next few weeks.

One of the major difficulties encountered by MGRM is a lack of meeting space. Originally the movement was offered a meeting room by the General Workers Union and about a year ago it obtained a small rental house. This is too small to run support services from but at the moment it hosts our weekly meetings. It is also used regularly during the evenings to host sub-groups working on particular projects and to meet with individuals who request help, advice or support.

MGRM is also working on establishing a youth group for GLBT youth or those exploring or questioning their sexuality. This will hopefully serve as a safe space for young people who are in the coming out process to interact with their peers and to participate in informal education and other social activities. Again, suitable meeting space is an issue.

Sexual education in schools is very limited. It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty whether sexual orientation is tackled at all and if, where it is mentioned or explored, this is done in a gay affirmative way. Little is known about the attitudes of teachers towards homosexuality although in general teachers tend to be a conservative group and therefore the probability is that homophobic tendencies will prevail. One of MGRM's aims throughout the coming scholastic year will be to explore the possibility of working with the education department in piloting some awareness training with teachers. MGRM also wants to obtain permission for information about its support group, youth group and helpline to be distributed to students in post-secondary schools. Ideally this information and promotional material would also be available to students in secondary school, however we are envisaging resistance in this respect as students might be deemed too young and there might also be opposition from parents. Bullying in schools is another problem faced by GLB students although the extent of this is not well known. It is very difficult for young people to have positive gay role models as many teachers, youth leaders or colleagues are often afraid to come out.

There are very few places for young people to meet. There are three gay bars on the island.

Occasionally gay parties are organised by the gay community or by the MGRM but also by party organisers. There is a gay pride party held each year which is usually the biggest event of the year. No gay pride parade has ever been organised as coming out is often a problem for the gay community and there is still fear of an adverse reaction from the general public as well as the religious authorities. Alcohol and drug use, particularly marijuana and ecstasy are common in Malta and present also within the gay community. Because there are so few alternatives for gay young people and because they experience additional pressures due to their sexual orientation, it is likely that drug and alcohol abuse is greater in this group.

Coming out is in fact one of the most difficult issues GLBT young people face in Malta. MGRM is contacted by numerous young people who (are) seeking advice and support about this issue. Coming out to parents is a particularly contentious issue and some young people report being beaten, forced to leave their partners, not allowed to go out, or alternatively thrown out and having to seek alternative accommodation. One of MGRM's main functions is to advise young people on when it is safe to come out. Religious beliefs and mores are still strong on Malta and the Catholic Church is often unaccepting of the gay lifestyle although individual priests might be more accepting and tolerant. The predominance of the Catholic Church in Malta also means that GLBT youth are often alienated from the church. If they are involved in a religious group they experience difficulties in accepting their sexual

orientation and in reconciling their homosexuality with their faith and religious beliefs. There are no Christian groups for GLBT individuals.

The gay community is still campaigning to achieve recognition of same sex unions. Same sex couples are not entitled to any of the benefits enjoyed by married couples. Gay couples have no legal backing as regards visitation rights and inheritance. They are not entitled to housing benefits of any other social security benefits enjoyed by married couples. It is as yet not possible for gay couples to foster or adopt children. MGRM met with leaders of two political parties in Malta prior to the general elections held last April. Following these meetings the Labour Party and the Alternative Democrats included in their political manifestos some reference to their commitment towards gay rights. The Nationalist Party only agreed to hold a meeting with MGRM a week prior to the election when their political manifesto had already been published. This manifesto made no mention of the gay community at all.

Although attitudes towards LGBT individuals are slowly changing there is still a long way to go. The Malta Gay Rights Movement is still in its infancy and much more campaigning and awareness needs to happen before tolerance and equality are achieved. MGRM organises a week of activities called "Diversity" every summer, publishes a newsletter twice a year and holds an annual conference to contribute towards this end. It also participates in radio and TV debates and responds to gay issues on newspapers. It also runs a website which is updated regularly and which keeps the community informed of MGRM's activities and projects.

6. The Jukebox Queen of Malta (2000), by Nicholas Rinaldi: an extract

The international team was particularly indebted to Charles Berg's research on the literature relating to Malta. This included drawing our attention to fictional accounts of Maltese life both on the islands and abroad. The rapporteur was especially interested to be directed to Trezza Azzopardi's novel set in Cardiff's old Tiger Bay (Azzopardi, T., 2000); an area of the city he thought he knew well. It is ironic that a visit to Malta should teach him something new about the place where he lives. The passage quoted below, however, evokes the hospitality with which we were received, the fine meals we ate and the convivial evenings we spent in the Maltese warmth of May 2003.

> "Melita cut the bread into thick slices, then cut open a tomato and rubbed it across the bread until the bread turned pink with the pulp and juice. She drenched the bread with olive oil and added oregano and thyme. 'We call it *hobz-biz-zejt*, bread and oil'."
>
> (Rinaldi, 2000: 132)

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