

INCLUSIVE AND SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW



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June, 2005

INCLUSIVE AND SPECIAL EDUCATION:
REVIEW REPORT

June 2005

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Inclusive and Special Education Review Working Group

31st May 2005

Hon. Dr Louis Galea, B.A., LL.D., MP
Minister of Education, Youth and Employment
Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment
Floriana, CMR 02

Dear Minister,

Review of Inclusive and Special Education

We enclose herewith a Report following a review of Inclusive and Special Education we have carried out, in accordance with your letter and terms of reference of 2nd December 2004.

The Working Group are available to meet with you to discuss this Report, at your convenience.

We wish to thank all those who made their views known to us, and who helped us to progress with our deliberations.

Yours sincerely



Lino Spiteri
Chairman



George Borg
Member



Anne-Marie Callus
Member



Joseph Cauchi
Member



Micheline Sciberras
Member

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Executive Summary

1. Part I of the Report, sections 1 to 4, outlines the background and evolution of inclusive and special education in Malta.
2. Section 2 sets out a statistical framework. It includes the total and distribution of the school population in State, Church and Independent schools, as on 31st January 2005, of whom, 2.57% were students with individual educational needs. The framework also details the learning support given to these students; and the annual cost, in relation to total public expenditure, to the Gross Domestic Products (at market prices).
3. Section 3 provides a European perspective, drawing on a thematic report by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.
4. Section 4 lays out the main points of submissions made to the Working Group by stakeholders, including students, parents/carers, teachers, learning support providers, and NGOs. (These are included in full in the Annex to the Report.)
5. Part II of the Report is made up of Section 5, which evaluates the learning support that is being extended, from early assessment and intervention, the statementing process regarding children with individual educational needs (IENs), to inclusion in mainstream schools. (Special schools are appraised within Section 7.) The Working Group concludes that:
 - the objectives of the inclusive education policy have not been effectively implemented through systematic provision of a spectrum of support that satisfies meaningfully a basic spectrum of needs of children with a disability in the Maltese Islands;
 - development and implementation of the few mechanisms designed to promote inclusive education have not kept up with its progressive annual extension from early childhood through to post-secondary level;
 - the substantial and rising budgetary outlay allocated towards meeting the objectives of inclusive education policy is not yielding value for money by structuring and operating as sound and effective a policy of educational inclusion as is essential to meet the legitimate aspirations of students with a learning disability, parents and carers, and society in general.
6. Part III of the Report, consisting of Sections 6 to 9, contains the Recommendations of the Working Group.
7. In Section 6, the Working Group recommends that there should be a Repositioning Plan, spread over seven to ten years, based on a break with the expectation that learning support must be given on a one-to-one or shared basis, to include the following reappraisal and action:
 - screening at birth and early assessment and intervention should be strengthened with appropriate specialist resources, and include preparation of an individualised pre-school programme;
 - the process of statementing of children reported to have disabilities should be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team, as far as possible in a school environment;
 - provision to a student with IENs should consistently promote self-reliance, avoid the pitfalls of a culture of dependency, and be set within a whole-

school policy that maximises the input to, and contribution from all students, such that a coherent and mutually supporting policy becomes the engine for total, inclusive achievement; these objectives should underlie the whole process of inclusion, from statementing onwards;

- student teachers, and teachers in service, should be trained to prepare Individualised Education Plans (IEPs), and to assume responsibility for their implementation;
- class teachers should be guided and assisted in their approach to inclusive education by a newly created specialist cadre, to be made up of INCOs, and specialist teachers from special education resource centres (which should be formed from the restructuring of special schools, recommended by the Group in Section 7) ;
- specialist teachers should be education graduates, with a post-graduate qualification in areas specified by the Education Division (visual impairment, hearing impairment, severe behaviour and communication difficulties) in accordance with an analysis of current and forecast needs; Inclusion Co-ordinators (INCOs) would be part of the cadre of specialist teachers to be built up;
- the role of specialist teachers will be to provide support to class teachers, and to students with individual educational needs;
- certain groups of students with a disability, like those who are visually or hearing impaired, should be supported by the specialist teachers, and through outreaching from resource centres;
- where, notwithstanding the departure from extensive support recommended in this Report, continuous dedicated class support is clearly determined to be required by students with high learning support needs, a trained learning support assistant should be attached to the whole class, to assist the class teacher;
- trained learning support assistants (currently termed facilitators) should be qualified at diploma level; the diploma course should include core subjects common to all students in the first year, and specialisation according to disability in the second year; those who follow the course should be required to specialise in two different areas, thus ensuring mobility when it comes to work placement;
- personal care required by students with a disability should be provided by personal assistants, who would not be part of the teaching staff or trained learning support assistants, and who can give service in one or more schools; these assistants should be given basic training in personal care; they will be expected to tend to the personal needs of those students, who only need support in personal care; for those students who have other disabilities which justify support, as well as the need for personal care, such care should be given by their class learning support assistant.

7.1 The Working Group recommends that the Repositioning Plan should also:

- set clear milestones regarding (a) training undergraduates following the B.Ed. course to make sounder and more sustainable provision for IENs more relevant to the spectrum of individual educational needs, and reflecting philosophical, ethical and operational developments in best-practice country models; (b) increasing the pool of specialist teachers to provide for students IENs, through training; and (c) giving basic in-service training to teachers,

assistant heads, and heads of schools who have not had any formal exposure to the techniques of providing for IENs;

- mobilise school resources to expand the focus on provision for students with IENs, beyond the co-ordination that will be given by INCOs; for instance, schools should have, as is the practice in Iceland, a mentoring team to support and guide teachers who have in their class students with learning, behaviour, or communication difficulties;
- set a definite time-frame to establish a properly functioning National Support Centre.

7.2 The Working Group recommends that, along with the Repositioning Plan there should be a Parallel Programme of action by the Education Division, spread over up to four years, to make the Division more tuned to the needs of inclusive and special education. Within the Programme, the Division should:

- restructure the Directorate for Student Services and International Relations to encompass solely inclusive and special education, as well as other student support services; to include a sector within the Division to cater for issues related to literacy;
- offer clearly time-framed in-service training to heads of schools and teachers who do not possess the basics of providing learning support to students with IENs, and cannot effectively guide new support assistants;
- put in place a certificate course to upgrade learning support assistants who do not hold a diploma, structured to take into account experience to date and gaps and deficiencies within it; the course should be credited towards the diploma programme, which should become obligatory;
- give individuals who pursue such courses a one-off increment at the end of their course, subject to satisfactory completion; anyone who refuses to participate in upgrading should have their contract of employment reconsidered;
- extend the post-school-hours professional development services for teaching staff to learning support assistants;
- address inherent probability of mismatching supply of learning support to needs;
- develop a system whereby, when the learning support assistant in a class of a student who has been statemented as requiring support at all times is absent, the student is taken to the Resource Centre which normally outreaches that student;
- introduce clearer job descriptions pertinent to the functions required from facilitators and other learning support staff;
- raise, immediately, the minimum qualifications for new support recruits;
- in new calls for applications for learning support assistant positions, differentiate between different categories of needs, as well as between primary and secondary school deployment;
- ensure that, prior to placement, an induction course - and, where possible, a job-shadowing experience - should be mandatory for all learning support assistants;

- see to it that IEPs are, in fact, drawn up, and that this is done by a team of people working with the student; the IEP should be monitored and updated on an ongoing basis, and support services should evolve according to what is decided and agreed upon in the IEP;
 - put in place a transition plan for students with IENs, so as to smooth their progress from one level to another - that is, from home to kindergarten centres, to primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, and beyond into the adult world;
 - carry out continuous, focused and critical monitoring and evaluation of the process of implementation of inclusive and special education policy.
- 7.3 Consideration should be given to the State funding of the individual needs support service in Independent schools, on the same basis as it does with regard to Church schools. Apart from justification in terms of social justice, the marginal cost to the public purse should be insignificant.
- 7.4 Given the extent of provision within the State sector, the competing demand for assistance by NGOs, and the right of parents to be free to choose whenever possible, Government should review how it allocates such financial resources. It should determine how best to enable parents who select different programmes to benefit equitably from such public assistance.
- 7.5 The Group emphasises that State provision should be of the highest quality, thus enabling those who cannot afford to pay for private provision to access the highest quality provision of education possible.
8. Section 8 appraises the situation in special schools. The Working Group recommends that special schools should become resource centres, with a multiplicity of roles, to be able to:
- provide for the individual needs of students who, because of the degree or nature of their disability, would benefit more from special education, while still having a set inclusion plan in their IEP;
 - receive programmed visits by students with IENs in mainstream schools who can benefit from utilising the specialised resources in such centres;
 - outreach with their resources to provide services in mainstream schools; and
 - offer training to mainstream teachers, facilitators and other learning support assistants.
- 8.1 The job description of the human resources allocated to special schools should be sector-specific and correspond more to norms observable within the European Union, for instance as regards weight-handling limits; the management structure and the level of maintenance resources allocated to this sector need to be critically reviewed.
- 8.2 The Education Division should select a number of primary and secondary mainstream schools that would contain a unit which would cater for profoundly deaf students. The unit would provide students with individualised support, while maintaining maximum access to mainstream classes and to other school provision.

- 8.3 There should be one Transport Section within the Education Division to cater for the needs of all students, with properly trained personnel. Consideration should be given to extend State-financed school transport to children with a disability who attend non-State schools.
- 8.4 Some parents/carers would be ready to strive to put together the capital required to build a suitable small group home, but would be unable to fund the recurrent costs. The Group feels that the public-private partnership model, as it applies to caring for senior citizens in private retirement homes, could be adapted to this proposal. This could be done through a Public-Parent Partnership.
- 8.5 The phenomenon of a perceived rising trend of dyslexia requires specific analysis, both as regards its extent as well as the manner in which it is being - or not being - addressed.
9. The Group recommends various amendments to the Constitution of Malta, and to the Education Act of 1988 to update them according to the evolution of inclusive education. It also recommends the establishment of a Standing Committee of the House of Representatives on Disability Issues, equipped with adequate support resources. The Standing Committee on Disability Issues, should be chaired by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to reflect and confirm its inclusive national character and objectives.
10. The Working Group comments that disabled students are finding it hard to find work. Legal requirements should be enforced. The Public Service should give a lead by extended opportunities to persons with a disability who may be in possession of the basic requirements to fill such vacancies.

Introduction

On 2nd December 2004 the Minister of Education, Youth and Employment, Dr Louis Galea, B.A., LL.D., MP, appointed a Working Group to review inclusive and special education, with the following terms of reference:

1. Generally to report on the situation of inclusive education in kindergarten classes, primary, secondary and post-secondary, and special schools in Malta and Gozo.
2. To assess the policy and practice regarding inclusive education giving special attention to
 - a) the roles and functions of the respective officials, personnel, and structures, and
 - b) the service delivery at the different levels in particular the service currently being offered by the facilitators.
3. To report on the situation of special schools in Malta and Gozo and recommend the role and functions these schools should have in today's educational set-up for children and students with special needs in view of the National Curriculum and an Inclusive Education Policy.
4. To report on the human and financial resources dedicated to this area, on their effective use and value for money, and to advise on the financial sustainability of the current provision in both mainstream and special schools, and to recommend on the resources needed and how the provision of the service in this field can become more cost-effective.

The Group was invited to submit those recommendations it deemed appropriate for further sustainable progress in the field of inclusive education, including any legislative provision that may be necessary.

In the course of its proceedings, the Working Group was to consult with the main stakeholders in the field, including persons with a disability, their families, educators, professionals, and NGOs.

The Group was to endeavour to present its report by the end of June 2005.

The Working Group was made up of five members: Lino Spiteri M.A. (Oxon), chairing, and George Borg M.Ed (SEN)(Aberdeen), B.A.Educ, Dip.Ed. (SEN), Anne-Marie Callus M.Ed (Wales), B.Ed. (Hons), Joseph Cauchi M.Ed., B.A.(Hons), Dip. Ed. Mgt & Adm., Dip. P.G.C.E., Micheline Sciberras M.A. (Durham), B.Ed. (Hons), Dip. Y.S.

The Group approached its task by, first of all, seeking the views of stakeholders, including students, parents, school administrators, the University of Malta, the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), teaching and learning support staff in primary, secondary, higher secondary and special schools, the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), as well as the general public.

It met directly a good cross-section of the tripod system of education, comprising State, Church and Independent educational institutions, students with individual educational needs and parents, through a public consultation.

The Group met senior officials of the Education Division, and representatives of various units supplying educational services, such as the Child Development and Assessment Unit (CDAU), the Specific Learning Difficulties Unit (SpLD), the Statementing Monitoring Panel and the Statementing Appeals Board, the MATSEC Board, the MATSEC Review Working Group, and the Special Needs Committee of the University.

The Working Group also discussed the situation with Dr Alfred Sant M.Sc., M.B.A., D.B.A.(Harvard), MP, Leader of the Opposition, as well as with Dr Harry Vassallo, LL.D, Chairman of Alternattiva Demokratika.

Written submissions to the Group are extensively reproduced, with due respect to individual privacy where applicable, as an Annexe to this Report. The main points made by students and parents during the consultation meeting with the Group are also included. The Annexe deserves particular attention by anyone wishing to benefit from a fuller picture of the sector than is contained in the observations of the Working Group.

The Group sought and received the assistance of the National Statistics Office (NSO), the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the Ministry of Finance, and the Education Division to collate data regarding, among other things, the school population, the number of persons with individual educational needs and financing of inclusive and special education.

Section 1: Background

Like many other countries Malta recognises that inclusive education is a human rights issue.

Article 23 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that it is the right of disabled children to enjoy a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. It recognises the right of the disabled child to special care, education, health care, training, rehabilitation, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities. All these shall be designed in a manner conducive to the child achieving:

“the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development.”¹

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted ‘The Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities’. This defines the need for educational provisions for persons with disability in the mainstream. The Rules declare that States should:

- “have a clearly stated policy, understood and accepted at the school level and by the wider community;
- allow for curriculum flexibility, addition and adaptation;
- provide for quality materials, ongoing teacher training and support teachers.”²

The document emphasises that where the general school system cannot meet the needs of the disabled child, then special education provision has to be made.

The Salamanca Statement (1994), of which Malta is a signatory, among other things outlines the changing role of special schools. Such schools are seen as a:

“valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools...Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools. Finally, special schools or units within inclusive schools may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools.”³

As a signatory to the Madrid Declaration (at the European Congress on People with a Disability, 2002), Malta joined the rest of Europe in proclaiming that disability is a human rights issue. The Madrid Declaration echoes the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and states:

“All human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights. In order to achieve this goal, all communities should celebrate the diversity within their communities and seek to ensure that disabled people can enjoy the full range of human rights: civil, political, social, economical and cultural as acknowledged by the different international Conventions, the EU Treaty and in the different national constitutions.”⁴

¹ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 23.

² United Nations General Assembly (1993), The Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

³ Salamanca Statement (1994; p.12, para. 9).

⁴ Madrid Declaration (2002), European Congress of People with Disabilities (p.1, Article 1)

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Following the introduction of primary compulsory education for all in 1946, there has been steady progress throughout the system, including in the individual educational needs sector. The Education Act of 1974 stipulated that children of compulsory school age “with some mental, emotional or physical handicap” should be registered and attend such a special school as the Minister of Education may direct.

At present the legal framework relating to inclusive and special education is found within the Constitution, the Education Act, 1988 and the Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, 2000.

MILESTONES

Early milestones in special education provision in Malta since 1951 have included

- training of a head of school in England in speech therapy, and of two teachers to provide for ‘educationally subnormal children’;
- opening classes for children with hearing impairment, and making similar provision for visually impaired children;
- opening various schools for disabled students; and
- introducing a peripatetic service (specialist teachers providing services for specific periods to students in schools).

In March 1989, a circular was sent to all heads of state primary schools on “Integrating Handicapped Children”. It emphasised that:

- handicapped and otherwise disadvantaged children should have every opportunity to develop their potential so that they could grow up and lead as full and satisfying lives as possible within the community;
- if a handicapped child could manage successfully in an ordinary school s/he should go there; ...if handicapped children were to live within the normal community, they should not be segregated for their education in special schools but should be educated alongside other children in ordinary schools;
- the quality and personality of the teachers in the ordinary school were of great importance as solutions had to be found for the difficulties that must occasionally arise.”

An inclusive educational policy was introduced in state schools in 1995, as a consequence of which children with disability began to be placed in mainstream schools in increasing numbers.

AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION

Over the years there has been a growing interest in inclusive education, manifested in the setting up of various NGOs and state agencies, contributing towards changing society’s perspective and a new appreciation of disability.

Maltese society has become increasingly aware that inclusive education is not only a human right but can be an asset to society as a whole.

In recent years, there have been further developments in governmental, non-governmental and private entities in the provision of services in the inclusive education sector, with emphasis on collaboration and co-operation between all actors.

National Commission Persons With Disability (KNPD)

A strong inclusive education initiative has been increasingly evident through the

polymaking influence of the KNPD. In its consensus document, Special Education in Malta: a National Policy, published in 1993, the Commission declared that:

“...to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”

MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Disability issues in general are not a politically partisan issue. A Ministerial Committee on Inclusive Education, presided by the Minister of Education, was set up in 1996 by the Minister of Education and Culture, Mr Evarist Bartolo. After a change of government in 1998, it was re-appointed by the Minister of Education, Dr Louis Galea. The terms of reference for the committee included:

1. Addressing immediately and with effect the problems of students with a disability who were not at the time attending any form of schooling because of their disability;
2. Preparing a national plan of action on how to implement government policy as established in the KNPD national policy document. Identifying the human and financial resources that are needed so that this plan is implemented effectively;
3. Identifying the human and financial resources that are needed so that this plan is implemented and also the necessary training needed for existing and future personnel so that this policy can be implemented;
4. Ensuring that all possible measures were being taken so that education provision for students with a disability helped them towards the world of work according to the particular needs of the individual.

Over the years the Ministerial Committee (composed of representatives of the major stakeholders) discussed several issues and developed a number of policies. These included the setting up of the Statementing Moderating Panel, the Statementing Appeals Board and the publication of the Inclusive Education Policy to give direction and to monitor progress. The Committee was not reappointed after the general election of 2003, in anticipation of a broad review of the sectors.

THE NATIONAL MINIMUM CURRICULUM

The National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) published in 1999 emphasised as one of its major principles the issue of inclusive education. Principle 8 states that our society:

“believes in the broadening of democratic boundaries, in the fostering of a participatory culture, in the defence of the basic rights of children, in the constant struggle against all those factors that prevent the students’ different abilities from being brought to fruition and in the safeguarding and strengthening of our country’s achievements in the social and cultural fields.”

The NMC stresses that inclusive education is based on the commitment of the whole of our learning society to adopt and implement inclusive educational strategies and policies, as well as respecting and celebrating individual diversity. This changing culture moves beyond the education sector:

“Society has a moral responsibility to affirm diversity, if it believes in the broadening of democratic boundaries, in the fostering of a participatory culture, in the defence

of the basic rights of children, in the constant struggle against all those factors that prevent the students' different abilities from being brought to fruition and in the safeguarding and strengthening of our country's achievements in the social and cultural fields. "

Following the publication of the NMC, the National Curriculum Council was set up. The NCC appointed a number of focus groups, one of which was dedicated to inclusive education. In September, 2002, the inclusive education focus group published a document entitled "Creating Inclusive Schools"⁵. This document outlines strategies and practices needed for the practical implementation of the NMC. Through indicators, it provides a tool for evaluation and further development.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

The Inclusive Education Policy published in 2000 by the Ministry of Education:

- a. describes the function of the Individualised Education Programme (IEP) and stipulates situations when an informal process to its development is to be adopted and, alternatively, when a formal statementing process is necessary;
- b. regulates the setting up, composition, functions and procedures of a Statementing Panel;
- c. regulates the establishment, composition and functions of an Appeals Board."

THE PROCESS OF INCLUSION

The 1994 agreement between the MUT and Government refers to the class size when a class includes a student with a disability:

*"The maximum number of students in a class shall be as follows:-
Primary*, Secondary and Junior Lyceums, Forms I and II - 30*

(*provided that in classes having students with special needs the number of students will not exceed 26)"

This provision was made at a time when additional in-class teaching support to the class teacher had not yet been introduced. With the implementation of the inclusive education policy on a larger scale, it was decided to provide learning support in classes in mainstream schools, additional to the class teacher. Such in-class teaching support was to be provided for students statemented as having individual educational needs that are not met by a school's regular resources.

The statement is generated by the Statementing Moderating Panel. This follows a request for assessment of needs of students by parents. Heads of school and teachers are invited to participate in the assessment. The Panel's decision can be contested through the Statementing Appeals Board.

The Education Division provides support by allocating, to a class, a learning support assistant. In practice class support is given either on a one-to-one basis (one assistant to one student with individual educational needs), or on a shared basis, depending on the particular needs of the student. The assistant is expected to support all the children in the class, but to pay particular attention to the needs of the statemented student/s.

⁵ National Curriculum Council (2002), *Creating Inclusive Schools: Guidelines for the Implementation of the National Minimum Curriculum Policy on Inclusive Education.*

Initially there were no trained learning support assistants. Support was given by assistants who had basic academic qualifications, related to neither teaching nor providing for the individual educational needs of students. In parallel a course for facilitators leading to a diploma was organised by the Faculty of Education. It was attended by 34 persons. The number of statemented students grew more than was anticipated, and hundreds of 'supply kindergarten assistants' were recruited to help meet the demand. Two other part-time diploma courses were held. A fourth course was initiated by the Faculty of Education in October 2004, attracting 300 applicants for 100 places.

A post-graduate part-time course leading to a qualification for Inclusive Education Co-ordinators (INCOs) was also initiated by the Faculty in 2004/05, at the request of the Education Division.

CHURCH AND INDEPENDENT SECTORS

Church and Independent schools have kept pace, to a greater or lesser extent, with developments in the State sector, and abroad. Inclusive education has also become an integral part in the structure of these two other legs of the tripod of Malta's education system. In the case of Church schools, additional teaching assistants allocated on the same model as in State schools, albeit recruited through a different procedure, are funded by the state, according to the Holy See-State agreement on Church schools of 1991.

2 A Statistical and Financial Framework

The Working Group sought to construct a statistical and financial framework for its deliberations by producing the tables in this Section from data requested by it from the Education Division, the Ministry of Finance and the National Statistics Office (NSO).

Table 1 offers a snapshot of the schools providing education up to the higher secondary level in the tripod made up of State, Church and Independent schools, and in State special schools. It also breaks down the population in such schools into the various levels, as on 31st January 2005.

Table 1: Educational institutions and school population, Malta & Gozo (31/01/05) lation

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Kinder</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Higher Sec.</i>	<i>Special schools</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Malta:</i>						
State	55	65	30	1	5	156
Church	28	22	21	21	0	92
Independent	29	15	9	2	0	55
<i>Sub-total, Malta</i>	112	102	60	24	5	303
<i>Gozo:</i>						
State	11	11	2	1	1	26
Church	6	4	1	0		11
Independent	0	0	0	0		0
<i>Sub-total, Gozo</i>	17	15	3	1	1	37
<i>Total, Malta & Gozo</i>	129	117	63	25	6	340
<i>School population</i>						
<i>Malta:</i>						
State	4,366	16,867	16,414	1,800	267	39,714
Church	1,158	6,682	7,196	648	0	15,684
Independent	1,749	4,036	2,410	126	0	8,321
<i>Sub-total, Malta</i>	7,273	27,585	26,020	2,574	267	63,719
<i>Gozo</i>						
State	222	1,651	1,864	567	19	4,323
Church	276	673	350	0	0	1,299
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Sub-total, Gozo</i>	498	2,324	2,214	567	19	5,622
<i>Total, Malta & Gozo</i>	7,771	29,909	28,234	3,141	286	69,341

Source: Education Division, compiled

On that date there were in all 340 schools in the three sectors: 303 schools in Malta, (89% of total) and 37 (11%) in Gozo. The State sector was the largest, with 156 schools in Malta, of which five were special schools, and 26 in Gozo, including a special annexe to a mainstream school. There are no special schools in the other two national sectors.

While the State sector, as should be expected, is the largest, including over half (182) of the schools in Malta and Gozo, the other two sectors taken together come close behind. Of these, the Church sector is much the larger, with 103 schools in Malta and Gozo, compared with 55 Independent schools, all of which are in Malta.

The total school population on 31st January 2005 stood at 69,341 - of which 63,719 (92%) attended schools in Malta, and 5,622 (8%) in Gozo. Once again, the State sector was the largest, providing education for 44,037 students in Malta and Gozo, or 63.5% of the total school population. The Church sector stood second, with 16,983 students, or 24.5%. On the date, Independent schools were educating 8,321 students (in Malta, none in Gozo), or 12% of the total school population. It bears noting that the Independent schools had substantially more children than Church schools in kindergarten classes. That factor becomes more significant in the context of the data in Table 2, below.

Table 2: Students with IENs and in Special Schools Within School Population (31/01/05)

School Population	Kinder	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Sub-Total Mainstream	Special Schools	Total
Malta	7273	27585	26020	2574	63452	267	63719
Gozo	498	2324	2214	567	5603	19	5622
Total	7771	29909	28234	3141	69055	286	69341
Of which IENs & Special School Students				Higher Secondary	Total IENs, Mainstream	Special Schools	Total in IENs & in Special Schools
<i>Malta</i>							
State	56	679	247	3	985	267	1252
Church	18	222	145	0	385	0	385
Independent	0	4	5	0	9	0	9
Sub-Total, Malta	74	905	397	3	1379	267	1646
% of Malta Level	1.02	3.28	1.53	0.12	2.17	100.00	
% of total Malta School Pop.	0.12	1.42	0.62	0	2.16	0.42	2.58
<i>Gozo</i>							
State	2	79	21	0	102	19	121
Church	1	13	4	0	18	0	18
Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sub-total, Gozo	3	92	25	0	120	19	139
% of Gozo Level	0.6	3.96	1.13	0	2.14	100	
% of total Gozo School Pop.	0.05	1.64	0.44	0	2.13	0.34	2.47
Total, Malta & Gozo	77	997	422	3	1499	286	1785
% of Malta & Gozo Level	0.99	3.33	1.49	0.10	2.17	100.00	2.57
% of Total School Population	0.11	1.44	0.61	0.00	2.16	0.41	2.57
<i>IENs and in Special Schools</i>							
<i>Students in National Sectors</i>							
State	58	758	268	3	1087	286	1373
% of National Level	0.75	2.53	0.95	0.10	1.57	100.00	1.98
Church	19	235	149	0	403	0	403
% of National Level	0.24	0.79	0.53	0.00	0.58	0.00	0.58
Independent	0	4	5	0	9	0	9
% of National Level	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.01
Total	77	997	422	3	1499	286	1785

Explanatory note: IENs in State and Church schools are statemented students allocated a Facilitator or other learning support; in Independent Schools, they are students supported by a private Facilitator

Source - Education Division, compiled

The Table sets out the number of students with individual educational needs in mainstream schools, relating them to each level (kindergarten, primary, etc) and to the total school population.

Independent schools, at the time of compiling the Report, did not have statemented students in their school population. They reported only nine students (in two schools) with IENs. These are included in Table 2.

Some Independent schools also advised the Group that they have students with learning difficulties who may not be eligible for statementing once the process is extended to this sector. The schools provide such students with complementary teaching.

Various educators in the Independent school sector stressed their commitment to inclusive education, pointing out that frequently children are registered with them at birth, or soon after. Therefore, they advised the Working Group, they would not turn away students who, it subsequently results, have or develop a disability.

As things stand, however, the incidence of children with disability in mainstream schools is preponderantly evident in State schools. On 31st January 2005, out of a total of 1,785 students with IENs in the mainstream and in special schools - 2.57% of the school population - 1,373 were in State schools (1087 in mainstream and 286 in special schools). These students represented 1.98% of the total school population.

Another 403 students were in Church schools, or 0.58% of the school population. The nine students receiving learning support in Independent schools made up 0.01%.

There were only three students receiving an education at a higher secondary level. The figure of 77 children in kindergartens who were statemented is below the average of recent years. Should that level be roughly indicative of the foreseeable trend, there could be a gradual drop in students with IENs in the primary level.

Whilst the indicator of the annual statementing of children at kindergarten level will need to be monitored closely, it cannot be used on its own to attempt any definite forecast of how the population of students with IENs in mainstream schools, and in special schools, will move over the foreseeable future, since children are also referred for statementing later on in life.

Learning support of statemented children with IENs is provided by facilitators, supply kindergarten assistants, and other personnel currently providing learning support to statemented children. Henceforth, all these categories will be referred to generically as learning support assistants.

Learning support in State mainstream schools at the end of January 2005 was provided by a total of 858 facilitators and other learning support assistants. The staffing of the various categories is shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Learning support assistants, State schools (31/01/05)

Schools	Facilitators	Kindergarten Assistants, Special Education	Kindergarten Assistants	Part-time	Supply Kindergarten Assistants	Total
Malta						
Primary	183	49	25	2	315	574
Secondary:						0
Boys	36	1	0	1	96	134
Girls	25	1	0	0	41	67
Total, Malta	244	51	25	3	452	775
Gozo						0
Primary	29	10	14	0	11	64
Secondary:						
Boys	4	3			6	13
Girls	3		1		2	6
Total, Gozo	36	13	15	0	19	83
Total	280	64	40	3	471	858

Source: Education Division

Another 284 learning support assistants, of whom 74 were facilitators, gave provision in Church schools to the 403 statemented children attending these schools at the opening of 2005, as set out in Table 4:

Table 4: Learning support assistants, Church schools (31/01/05)			
Schools	Facilitators	Supply Kindergarten Assistants	Total
Malta			
Primary	23	142	165
Secondary:			
Boys	22	51	73
Girls	29	8	37
Total, Malta	74	201	275
Gozo			
Primary	---	7	7
Secondary:			
Boys	---		
Girls	---	2	2
Total, Gozo	---	9	9
Total	74	210	284

Source: Education Division

According to the information available at the Education Division at the end of January 2005, there were nine learning support assistants in Independent schools, eight of whom were giving support on a one-to-one, and the other on a shared basis.

The first line in Table 5 below, which details the expenditure related to individual educational needs expenditure in the context of the total outlay on State schools, shows that the outlay on emoluments to providers of learning support in those schools during 2005 is estimated to have cost Lm3.92million, against Lm1.34million during 2000.

Table 5: IEN-related Expenditure in Within Total Education Expenditure, 2000 - 2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (Prov.)	2005 (Est.)
<i>Recurrent Expenditure:</i>						
<i>Personal emoluments</i>						
IEN-related (learning support assistants)	1,344,632	1,821,746	1,690,053	2,449,635	3,394,576	3,918,182
Non-IEN-related	33,636,621	40,015,679	40,738,593	41,226,623	41,722,549	46,483,000
<i>Operational & Maintenance</i>						
IEN-related (School Transport, etc)	288,439	156,383	161,151	183,065	224,229	162,000
Non-IEN-related	4,129,063	4,144,823	3,974,378	4,204,009	4,074,567	4,185,000
<i>Special Expenditure - Non-IEN-related</i>	<i>57,673</i>	<i>36,228</i>	<i>18,226</i>	<i>31,062</i>	<i>28,715</i>	<i>28,000</i>
Programmes & Initiatives, Non-IEN-related	9,183,844	9,101,254	10,021,139	10,538,378	10,037,067	10,982,000
Contributions to Gov entities-Non-IEN related	8,793,582	12,039,960	13,543,000	14,377,451	16,288,000	17,400,000
<i>Capital Expenditure:</i>						
IEN-related (allocation to sp. Sch. etc)	148,553	99,302	23,831	35,516	39,526	2,100
Non-IEN-related (including FTS)	7,200,011	6,245,269	6,447,426	7,124,793	6,355,435	5,230,900
Total Education Expenditure	64,782,418	73,660,644	76,617,797	80,170,532	82,164,663	88,391,182
<i>of which</i>						
IEN-related Expenditure	2,015,749	2,307,967	2,115,035	2,884,216	3,874,331	4,298,282
% of Total Educ. Expenditure	3.11	3.13	2.76	3.60	4.72	4.86
Total Government Expenditure	648,389,000	695,253,000	743,668,000	781,623,000	837,465,000	898,480,000
<i>Of which:</i>						
Total Education Expenditure % share	9.99	10.59	10.30	10.26	9.81	9.84
IEN-related Expenditure % share	0.31	0.33	0.28	0.37	0.46	0.48
<i>Note: Education expenditure total excludes</i>						
<i>Allocation to Eden Foundation</i>	<i>234,125</i>	<i>230,536</i>	<i>240,000</i>	<i>216,000</i>	<i>216,000</i>	<i>216,000</i>
<i>Contribution to Church Schools</i>	<i>8,080,000</i>	<i>9,412,710</i>	<i>9,452,170</i>	<i>9,920,444</i>	<i>10,000,000</i>	<i>11,500,000</i>
<i>*Excludes interest on and repayment of loans, and contributions to Sinking Funds</i>						

Sources: Financial Reports, Estimates, Educ. Div., NSO, compiled

The Table also identifies other IEN-related expenditure, in addition to remuneration to providers of learning support. That includes other recurrent expenditure on school transport.

Capital expenditure out of the Education votes, particularly the allocation to the Foundation for Tomorrow's Schools is not included in the total of IEN-related expenditure.

As the note to Table 5 explains, the recurrent allocation to Church schools in terms of the Holy See-Malta Government agreement of 1991 is not included in the totals of expenditure by the state on the provision of education. That allocation includes the remuneration paid to learning support assistants serving Church schools, who totalled 284 at the beginning of 2005.

The note also explains that the annual allocation to the Eden Foundation is also not included in the expenditure totals. These two allocations are shown in the note to the expenditure Table 5, for fuller exposition.

The figures included in Table 5, therefore, while indicative of the outlay by the state and of IEN-related expenditure within that outlay, are understated. To the extent that they cover expenditure in the State sector, the Table indicates that the absorption of financial resources by this sector will have more than doubled - from Lm2million to Lm4.2million - between 2000 and 2005, the period covered in the Table.

In contrast, total expenditure on State education will have risen by around a third over the period. That is to say, IEN-related expenditure has risen at about three times the rate of total outlays on education.

The bottom part of Table 5 relates the cost of State provision for individual educational needs (IEN-related expenditure) to the total outlay on education in State schools, to allow for ratio analysis. It shows that, as a result of the faster growth of IEN-related expenditure, its proportion of the total State provision has steadily increased, from 3.11% in the year 2000, to an estimated 4.86% for 2005.

The last lines of Table 5 place education outlays and IEN-related element in the context of total Government expenditure (net of loan interest and repayment, and contributions to Sinking Funds). Whereas education expenditure is stable, or declining relative to total Government outlays, IEN-related expenditure is rising also as a proportion of total Government financing.

The last table in this statistical framework, Table 6, adopts the most significant measurement of outlays to determine how much of the value of annual domestic economic activity is taken up by a particular sector or sub-sector.

The Table relates education expenditure to the Gross Domestic Product, in both cases also at current prices. For 2005, in line with the mid-range forecast of the Central Bank, GDP has been assumed to rise by 4% over the 2004 provisional estimate.

The Table shows that the allocation of resources to inclusive and special education in State schools is rising. Whereas the proportion of GDP going to total education (as defined earlier), has remained broadly stable, the fraction of GDP taken up by outlays related to individual educational needs has risen substantially - from 0.13% in 2002 to an estimated 0.22% in 2005:

Table 6: Education Expenditure Relative to GDP, 2000 - 2005

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004 (Prov.)	2005 (Est.)
Gross Domestic Product (in LM000s)						
<i>(at current market prices)</i>	1,558,233	1,630,373	1,685,627	1,712,165	1,854,300	1,928,472
Total Education Expenditure	64,782,418	73,660,644	76,617,797	80,170,532	82,164,663	88,391,182
% of GDP	4.16	4.52	4.55	4.68	4.43	4.58
IEN-related Expenditure	2,015,749	2,307,967	2,115,035	2,884,216	3,874,331	4,298,282
% of GDP	0.13	0.14	0.13	0.17	0.21	0.22
<i>Note: GDP at market prices is assumed to rise by 4% during 2005</i>						

Sources: Financial Reports, Estimates, Educ. Div., NSO, compiled

3 'Special Needs Education' in Europe

A Comparative Summary

In 2003, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (*which in this section, as in the rest of the Report, should be taken to mean individual educational needs - IENs*), with the contribution of EURYDICE, the Information Network on Education in Europe, issued a thematic publication - "Special Needs in Europe", with the support of the European Commission, DG Education and Culture. What follows was synthesised from the document to offer a broad European comparative background against which one can set the situation in Malta, and the contents of this Report by the Working Group.

SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION IN EUROPE: INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Common characteristics of policies and practices

The current tendency in Europe is to develop a policy towards inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream schools, providing teachers with varying degrees of support in terms of supplementary staff, materials, in-service training and equipment. Countries can be grouped into three categories according to their policy on including students with special educational needs:

- *one-track* approach - includes countries that develop policy and practices geared towards the inclusion of almost all students within mainstream education. This is supported by a wide range of services focusing on the mainstream school. This approach can be found in Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland, Norway and Cyprus.
- *multi-track* approach - includes countries that have a multiplicity of approaches to inclusion. They offer a variety of services between the mainstream and special needs education systems. Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, the United Kingdom, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia belong to this category.
- *two-track* approach - based on two distinct education systems. Students with SEN are usually placed in special schools or special classes. Generally, a vast majority of students officially registered as having special educational needs do not follow the mainstream curriculum among their non-disabled peers. These systems were, until recently, under different laws for mainstream and special needs education. In Switzerland and Belgium, special needs education is fairly well developed. In Switzerland different legislation exists for special schools, special classes and services within mainstream classes.

Germany and the Netherlands were positioned within the two-track system but have been moving towards the multi-track system. The developmental stage of countries with regard to inclusion varies a lot. In Sweden, Denmark, Italy and Norway, clear inclusive policies have been developed and implemented at an earlier stage. Major legislative choices were made years ago. In most of the other countries, extensive legislative changes can be recognised:

- Already in the 1980s, some countries defined their special needs education system as a resource for mainstream schools. More countries follow this approach today, such as Germany, Finland, Greece, Portugal, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic.
- Parental choice has become a topic for legislative changes in Austria, the Netherlands, the UK and Lithuania.

- Decentralisation of the responsibilities for meeting special educational needs is a topic of the legislation in Finland (municipalities), the UK, the Netherlands (school clusters), the Czech Republic and Lithuania.
- Legislation concerning special needs education at the secondary school level is now being developed or has recently been developed in the Netherlands, Austria and Spain.

Definitions of special needs/disability

Definitions and categories of special educational needs and “handicap” vary. Some countries define only one or two types of special needs (for example Denmark). Others categorise students with special needs in more than 10 categories (Poland). Most countries distinguish 6-10 types of special needs. In Liechtenstein no types of special needs are distinguished; only the type of support is defined.

In almost every country the concept of special educational needs is on the agenda. More people are convinced that the medical approach of the concept of “handicap” should be replaced with a more educational approach: the central focus has turned to the consequences of disability for education. More countries are using the assessment of students with special needs for the implementation of appropriate education. This is mostly done through individual education programmes (or plans).

Numbers of students with special needs vary considerably across countries. Some register a total of about 1% of all students with special educational needs (for example, Greece), others register more than 10% (Estonia, Finland, Iceland and Denmark). These contrasts in the percentage of registered students with SENs reflect differences in legislation, assessment procedures, funding arrangements and provision, and do not reflect differences in the incidence of special needs between the countries. About 2% of all students in Europe are educated in special schools or (full-time) special classes.

Some countries (including Cyprus, Iceland and Italy) place less than 1% of all students in segregated schools and classes, others up to 6% (Switzerland). The countries in northwest Europe seem especially likely to place students more frequently in special settings, as opposed to southern European and Scandinavian countries.

Differences in the placement of students with special needs reflect more than variations in population density. Some countries have a long history of inclusive policy and practice; others have only recently started developing an inclusive policy.

Special schools

The transformation of special schools and institutes into resource centres is a very common trend in Europe. Most countries report that they are planning to develop, are developing or have already developed a network of resource centres in their countries. These centres are given different names and different tasks are assigned to them. Some countries call them knowledge centres, others expertise centres or resource centres. In general, the following tasks are distinguished for these centres:

- provision for training and courses for teachers and other professionals;
- development and dissemination of materials and methods;
- support for mainstream schools and parents;
- short-time or part-time help for individual students;
- support in entering the labour market.

A few countries have gained experience with resource centres (Austria, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, for example); others are implementing the system (Cyprus, the Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Portugal and the Czech Republic). In some countries special schools are obliged to co-operate with mainstream schools in

the catchment area (Spain), or special schools supply ambulant or other services to mainstream schools (Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, the UK).

The role of special schools in terms of inclusion is strongly related to the education system of the country. In countries with almost no special schools, like Norway and Italy for example, their role is structurally modest (in Norway, 20 of the previously state special schools, are defined in terms of regional or national resource centres). In Cyprus, the 1999 Special Needs Education Law demands that new special schools must be built within the boundaries of a mainstream school to facilitate contacts and networking and, where possible, promote inclusion.

Additional topics in relation to special provision and inclusion

Individual educational programmes

Recent views on inclusion have stressed the fact that inclusion is, in the first place, an educational reform issue and not a placement issue. Inclusion starts from the right of all students to follow mainstream education. A few countries (for example, Italy) have expressed this clearly in direct and legal terms and they have changed their educational approach so as to offer more provisions within mainstream education.

Countries aiming to provide SEN facilities within the mainstream school stress the view that the curriculum framework should cover all students. Some specific adaptations to the curriculum may be necessary. Most countries use individual educational programmes for students with special needs. This document presents information on how a mainstream curriculum is adapted, and what are the necessary additional resources, goals and evaluation of the educational approach. Adaptations can take different forms and in some cases, for specific categories of students, they may even mean omitting certain subjects of the general curriculum.

Secondary education

Another topic in the field of special needs and the curriculum is the provision of special needs at the secondary level. Inclusion generally progresses well at the primary education level, but at secondary level serious problems emerge. Specialisation and the different organisation of secondary schools result in serious difficulties for inclusion at the secondary level. Generally the 'gap' between students with special needs and their peers increases with age.

Attitudes of teachers

It is frequently mentioned that attitudes of teachers strongly depend on their experience (with students with special needs), their training, the support available and some other conditions such as the class size and workload of teachers. Especially in secondary education, teachers are less willing to include students with special needs in their classes (especially when they have severe emotional and behaviour problems).

Role of parents

Most countries report that in general parents have positive attitudes towards inclusion; the same holds for the attitudes in society. Attitudes of parents are largely determined by personal experiences. Positive experiences with inclusion are quite rare in countries where the facilities are concentrated in the special school system and not available for the mainstream schools. However, if mainstream schools can offer these services, parents soon develop positive attitudes towards inclusion. The media can also play an important role here (experience in Cyprus is an example).

In countries with a more segregated school system, parental pressure is increasing towards inclusion (for example in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland). Positive attitudes of parents are also reported in countries where inclusion is a common practice (for example Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Sweden). At the same time, countries report that in the case of more severe special needs, parents (and students) sometimes prefer special needs education within a segregated setting. This is the case,

for example, in Norway and Sweden, where parents of deaf children want their children to have the possibility of communicating with their fellow students through sign language. It is also the case in Finland for severe special needs.

Parental choice is an important issue in Austria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the UK. In these countries, parents generally assume that they have the legal right to express a preference for the school they would like their child to attend. In other countries the role of parents seems to be rather modest. In Slovakia, for instance, although parental opinion is needed, the decision for the transfer of a student to a special school lies within the competence of the headmaster from the special school.

Barriers

Quite a number of factors can be interpreted as barriers for inclusion. A few countries point out the importance of an appropriate funding system. They state that their funding system is not enhancing inclusive practices.

Other important factors relate to the availability of sufficient conditions for support within mainstream schools. If knowledge, skills, attitudes and materials are not available in the mainstream settings, inclusion of students with special needs will be difficult to achieve. An adequate teacher training (in initial teacher training or through in-service) is an essential prerequisite for inclusion.

A few countries, like France, consider class sizes in mainstream schools to be a negative factor for inclusion. These countries point out that it is extremely difficult for teachers to include students with special needs when they already have a relatively high workload.

Students

Additionally, factors at the level of students have been mentioned. Countries highlighted the fact that in some cases (deaf students, severe emotional and/or behaviour problems), inclusion is a real challenge. This is especially the case in secondary schools.

Teachers and Special Needs Education

Inclusion and teacher support

Class teachers play a key role in relation to the work to be done with students with special educational needs who have been included in mainstream schools. They are responsible for all students. In case of need, support is mainly delivered by a specialist teacher in the mainstream school - inside or outside the classroom.

A clear distinction appears between, on the one hand, countries where support is delivered by a specialist school staff member and, on the other, those where support is delivered by a specialist professional external to the school. In this case, special schools, through their teachers, play a key role in supporting included students and their class teachers. This situation is in line with the tendency of special schools acting more and more as resource centres. In some countries (Sweden, for instance), both types of support exist.

Support is addressed to both students and teachers, but the main focus is still on the student, even though some of the countries clearly indicate that priority is given to the work with class teachers. Support addressed to the class teachers can be perceived as a tendency, but is not yet implemented.

As far as support of students is concerned, it is implemented in school with a lot of flexibility, depending on the available resources and the students' needs. Support is provided inside and outside the classroom. The main forms of support provided to teachers consist of the following:

- information;
- selection of teaching materials;
- elaboration of individual educational plans;
- organisation of training sessions.

External educational services, located outside the mainstream school, may also intervene providing various types of support to students, teachers and parents. They can be special schools; local, regional or national resource centres; local educational support teams; or school clusters.

Services other than education are also involved in supporting students with special educational needs in co-operation with mainstream class teachers. They include support services, mainly health services (through medical staff and different therapists) and social services, as well as volunteer organisations.

The following is a tabular summary of provision of different forms of educational support to class teachers in various countries:

COUNTRY	TYPES OF PROFESSIONALS AND SERVICES
Austria	Mainly by specialist teachers from special schools or from visiting services. They support both the class teacher and the student. Classroom and specialist teachers work as a team, sharing the planning and organisation of the educational work. Professionals from visiting services may offer temporary direct support to included students presenting specific disabilities.
Belgium	Mainly by specialist teachers from special schools and from Centres for Student Guidance. They provide information, advice and support to the class teacher. It is possible to find remedial teachers working as school staff members. They mainly support students presenting short-term difficulties, but more and more providing direct support to class teachers and the school, trying to co-ordinate provision of support, working methods and educational programmes.
Cyprus	By specialist teachers fully or partially attached to the school and by specialists, such as speech therapists, who have specific time allocated to each school. Outside the school, central services, such as inspectors, SEN co-ordinators, education and psychology specialists, or health and social services, also provide the necessary support.
Czech Republic	Mainly by specialist teachers or other professionals, such as psychologists. They provide advice and support to class teachers, parents and direct support to the included student. Support is provided through special educational centres or pedagogical psychological advice centres according to the specification of the student's need. These specialist advice and guidance centres are in charge of determining, proposing and providing support and of elaborating the individual educational plan in close co-operation with the class teacher, the parents and the student (in accordance with his/her impairment and level of active participation).

Denmark	Mainly provided by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. They co-operate inside the class with the class teacher on a part-time basis. 'Group teaching' outside the classroom is another possibility where the student needs regular support in more than one subject. Local pedagogical psychological services are in charge of determining, proposing and following the type of support to be provided to the student in close co-operation with the mainstream school.
England and Wales	All schools have a member of staff who is the designated special educational needs co-ordinator with a wide range of responsibilities, articulated in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practices, including: overseeing provision, monitoring students' progress, liaising with parents and external agencies, and supporting colleagues. Support is also provided by external agencies - specialist support services (from the education department and the health authority), colleagues in other schools, and other LEA personnel. Peripatetic staff work increasingly with teachers, in order to develop teaching approaches and strategies within the school, rather than directly with students.
Finland	Mainly provided by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. A counselling teacher, school social worker or school nurse, depending on the local educational authorities, can also provide support to the school in general, to the teacher and/or the student. A student welfare team is set up involving the student, their parents, all teachers and any other experts involved in order to prepare an individual educational programme to be implemented in the mainstream school. There also exists a 'student support group' involving all professionals and the principal of the school to ensure good educational conditions and progress.

COUNTRY	TYPES OF PROFESSIONALS AND SERVICES
France	Mainly by specialist professionals from various services. They support included students on a short- or long-term basis. They also help the class teacher and the school staff. Specialist teachers from special support networks also provide support to students presenting temporary or permanent learning difficulties.
Germany	Mainly by a specialist teacher from a special school or from a social service. Support is diverse and includes preventive measures, joint education actions in mainstream schools, education co-operation between special and mainstream schools etc. There can also be a support teacher working as a school staff member. They are mainly teachers specialising in language or behaviour problems. They work mainly with students inside or outside the classroom according to the students' needs.
Greece	Mainly by a specialist teacher from a special school. Their work consists of directly helping the student, assisting the teacher with the variety of teaching materials and in differentiating the curriculum - informing other students and ensuring good co-operation between the school and the family.
Iceland	Mainly by a remedial teacher working as a school staff member. Other types of support are also provided by specialist teachers, psychologists or other professionals from the local municipalities. They will provide general advice on the curriculum and on the teaching of the main subjects; guidance for students and psychological counselling. Their aim is to support teachers and head teachers on daily schoolwork and school improvement.
Ireland	Can be provided by a specialist or resource teacher working as a school staff member. They are dealing with students with assessed learning disabilities. Support can also be provided by a remedial teacher working as a school staff member. Their main aim is to work with students with difficulties in reading and mathematics. All primary and post-primary schools have such a teacher. Another type of support is a visiting teacher from the Visiting Teacher Service (Department of Education). They work with individual students, both inside and outside the classroom, and advice teachers on teaching approaches, methodology, programmes and resources. They also provide support for parents. The Psychological Service of the Department of Education and Science provides assessment and advisory service for mainstream schools with a focus on students with emotional and behaviour problems and with learning difficulties.

Italy	Mainly by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. They act as class teachers, providing support in the mainstream school after obtaining parental authorisation. Support teachers share responsibility with the class teacher concerning the work to be done with all students. Implementation of an individual education plan is one of their main tasks. They also support students inside the classroom; students with disabilities are not to be pulled out of their classes unless absolutely necessary.
Liechtenstein	Mainly by a specialist teacher from a special school. They mainly provide support to students but also to teachers and parents.

COUNTRY	TYPES OF PROFESSIONALS AND SERVICES
Lithuania	<p>Mainly by specialist teachers, school psychologists, speech therapists, social pedagogues from special schools or from pedagogical psychological services. Specialist teachers provide class teachers with information and practical support: elaborating an individual educational programme, selecting educational materials etc. Support can also be provided by a remedial teacher, speech therapists, school psychologists working as school staff members. Pedagogical psychological services at local or national levels provide assessment of students and guidance for education of included students.</p>
Luxembourg	<p>Mainly by specialist support professionals from the SREA (Ambulatory Remedial Department). They are professionals in education and rehabilitation and share responsibilities with class teachers with regard to direct support to the student. Class teachers are always in charge of the organisation of the class.</p>
Netherlands	<p>Mainly by a support teacher from a special school. They work with the class teachers to develop educational programmes, to prepare and provide additional materials, to work with students individually and to contact parents. Support may also be provided through mainstream schools with experience in inclusion. Support focuses on information to teachers, assessment and providing teaching materials. Support teacher may also be one of the mainstream schoolteachers providing direct help and support to the student.</p>
Norway	<p>Mainly by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. They co-operate with the class teacher part-time or full time. Support can also be provided by an assistant in the classroom. There is close co-operation between the three of them. The local educational psychological services are the ones to advise school and parents on the content and organisation of the education required for the student. They are the people mainly responsible for advising teachers on the daily work.</p>
Poland	<p>Teachers working with disabled students receive support from the National Centre of Psychological and Pedagogical Support or from regional Teaching Methodology Centres. These centres provide training courses for teachers. Mainstream schools are to provide psychological and pedagogical support to students, parents and teachers, organising, for example, remedial classes.</p>

Portugal	Mainly by specialist teachers, or other professionals either from local support teams or internal school staff members. National policy gives priority to the second situation. The aim is to create co-ordinated teams which will provide guidance to class teachers. They co-operate with the head teacher and the school to organise the necessary educational support; they co-operate with class teachers in order to reorganise the curriculum in a flexible way; to facilitate differentiation of educational methods and strategies; to support teachers and students and contribute to educational innovation.
Spain	Mainly by a specialist support teacher working as a school staff member. They work in primary and secondary schools and play an important role with the student and the teacher, planning together the curriculum differentiation and its implementation. They also support families and work in co-operation with other professionals. Another type of support is a remedial teacher for learning support, present in all primary schools. Support can also be provided by local psychological pedagogical support teams. They are responsible for the assessment of students, advising teachers and school staff on the measures to be taken, following students' progress and involving families.

COUNTRY	TYPES OF PROFESSIONALS AND SERVICES
Sweden	Mainly by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. Support to build up knowledge in the municipalities can be provided at a national level through the Swedish Institute for Special Needs Education.
Switzerland	Mainly by support teachers, specialist teachers or specialist professionals from special schools or mainstream schools (milder forms of SEN). They provide support to included students and their teachers.

Initial teacher training in special needs education

Class teachers are perceived by all countries as the main professionals responsible for the education of all students. This means that they need to receive the appropriate knowledge and skills in order to meet different needs of the students. It is important to consider the type of training offered to all future class teachers during their initial special educational needs training.

All countries refer to the fact that class teachers receive some form of compulsory training concerning students with special needs during the initial training. This must be seen as a positive impact on teachers' responsibilities regarding students' individual needs. It provides future teachers with a broader base of information and at least some kind of basic knowledge about the diversity of students' needs which they may encounter later. Nevertheless, data give the impression that such training is often too general, vague or insufficient, with limited practical experience and may not satisfy teachers' later professional needs.

Compulsory training on special needs varies greatly in duration, content and organisation. Initial teacher training cannot attempt to cover the vast range of teachers' needs. But differences regarding content on initial teacher training reflect, to some extent, differences regarding inclusion policies in different countries. Initial training in special needs education appears to be delivered in three ways:

- by providing general information which is the case for all countries, but which seems to be of limited use for future teachers;
- by providing specific subject studies in some of the countries; this seems to ensure better knowledge in special needs even if differences in content and duration are quite large across the countries;
- by permeating all subject studies in a limited number of countries; this situation is referred to by the Netherlands, Norway, England and Wales.

In a few countries (the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Slovakia and Spain) specialist training is offered to teachers in the form of initial training.

Some form of initial training in special needs education is also proposed, in parallel, as an option in a large number of countries.

Supplementary training in special needs education

Supplementary training concerns those teachers who wish to work with students with special educational needs in special or mainstream schools. It usually takes place after initial training. In countries such as Belgium, France or Italy for example, teachers can start additional training immediately after completing initial training,

however, in other countries, it is necessary to have worked in the mainstream system beforehand and in the majority of these cases a minimum period is even imposed. In countries like Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands both of these situations are possible.

Supplementary training is compulsory only in a few countries; in the majority of the countries it is offered as an option, but in many cases it is strongly recommended. In countries where supplementary training is compulsory, it mainly covers specific training related to different types of impairment, i.e. visual or hearing impairment. As to the rest of the countries, in practice, teachers need and are encouraged to follow in-depth training in order to obtain or retain their jobs or to gain promotion. A further element needs to be considered: an improved salary or professional profile experienced by specialist teachers, such as in Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), France, Germany, Greece or the Netherlands. This gives an added incentive for teachers to follow such additional training.

Duration of both compulsory and optional supplementary training varies greatly. It may consist of an additional year of specialist training covering a certain type of disability, or it may cover a broader specialisation and last for 2-4 years (both cases lead to a diploma).

As to whether the studies followed are general or specific to a particular type of disability, the majority of countries offer both options. Germany and Luxembourg seem to be offering the highest level of specialisation.

All countries provide in-service training for teachers mainly on a voluntary basis. It takes place in schools, resource centres or training institutions. In-service training sessions are very flexible and highly variable from one country to another. It constitutes one of the most frequently used and useful means of support for class teachers working with students with special needs included into mainstream education.

4 Highlights from Submissions

As said in the Introduction, written submissions to the Working Group, and the main points made by students and parents during the consultation meeting with the Group, are being extensively reproduced as an Annexe to this Report. This section highlights the main aspects covered in the Annexe:

TOPIC	COMMENTS
Inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating environments responsive to the differing developmental capacities, needs, and potential of all students from kindergarten (including child care centres and private kindergartens) to tertiary and adult education • Systems of streaming and inclusion are incompatible • Inclusive education should also embrace gifted children • Inclusion is an integral part of the School Development Plan • The 'Noholqu Skejjel Inklussivi' guide of the Inclusive Education Focus Group can help implement policies
Impact of inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presence of disabled children in a mainstream school is very beneficial for the other students • KNPD's "holog" educational pack can be said to create more awareness of disability issues in schools
Code of Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Code of Ethics for teachers needs to be reviewed and to include reference to inclusive education • There should also be a Code of Ethics for learning support assistants
Co-ordination between agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be greater co-operation between Operations Department and the Department of Student Services and International Relations within the Education Division • Need to review communication between various entities working within this area • There should be closer coordination between the Child Development and Assessment Unit, MATSEC special arrangements board, further education institutions, the Employment and Training Corporation, and Day Services for Disabled People.
Co-ordination within schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is useless employing learning support assistants when their work is not monitored • Inclusion Co-ordinator (INCO) can also provide initial assessment and make referrals as necessary
Role of learning support assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of having professionals, not baby sitters • Overprotection results in jeopardising the child's independence and also the child's enjoyment of schooling • Some demands are made only of those learning support assistants with a diploma, including nappy changing and attending therapy sessions • When a learning support assistant does not function well, his/her ability to be a learning support assistant should be questioned. They should not be simply transferred to another child • It is important to match child with learning support

	<p>assistant (in terms of both needs and character), and not simply place them with each other according to who is next on the list</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job seen as easy because of the hours • In an independent school, a learning support assistant is working with teachers in different classrooms to support different children • Communication books between home and school are very important • Learning support assistants should be changed regularly and according to need. This helps children adapt to change • Learning support assistants judge on their own the student's ability, decide what work is to be done, which subjects can be followed and at what level, and when to stay out of class or use a resource room • Different learning support assistants have different job descriptions • One-to-one support should be kept to a minimum • For some children, a shared learning support assistant is better than a full-time one, since it fosters independence • Learning support assistants should not have more than 2 children and they should not be shared with different classes • Where learning support assistants are shared between two children, the latter should have similar educational capabilities and be compatible • There should not be more than one learning support assistant per class • Some practices adopted for children who have a learning support assistant benefit other children, e.g. less homework, more structure • Learning support assistants should realise that they are there for other children in the class, not just the stated one • Collaboration between learning support assistants and teachers is essential for the stated child to belong to the class • The teacher is ultimately responsible for the child's education. Parents should consult with the teacher, not only the learning support assistant • The demarcation line between the role of learning support assistant and that of teacher should be made clear • Some teachers only want learning support assistants to help students with mobility problems • Some parents see having a statement for their child as a way of ensuring that their child stays within the mainstream in the secondary, rather than being sent to an opportunity school • It is better for learning support assistants to remain within the same school as in that way they get used to the environment and work better. • Carefully selected caretakers can be given training by the ETC to support students with physical disability in their personal needs • There should be an audit of all personnel working in the inclusion and special education field, including specific learning difficulties (SpLD), and Complementary Education • Learning support assistants should become 'Teacher
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	<p>Assistants (Learning Support)'. They should be assigned to a specific year group and move with a child only when this has been identified as being necessary in the Individualised Education Programme (IEP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning support assistants should be monitored regularly • The fact that medication is not supervised is detrimental for some disabled students
Specific Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicine should be given in school when necessary • Need for guidelines about the administration of medicine during school hours, based on common-sense, flexibility and good-will • Lack of insurance policies for staff stops them from helping out in the administration of medication • When children's needs are not seen to appropriately by the learning support assistant, mothers have to be constantly available for their children and cannot hold down a job or have time to themselves • It can also have repercussions on the children's health • Children who are being toilet trained at home need to continue the training in the school as well • If a learning support assistant refuses to do certain tasks, it should not be the disabled child who suffers the consequences. This includes toileting, medicine, feeding and the use of specialised equipment such as standing-frames
Absentee learning support assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in Church schools are being kept at home when learning support assistants are sick or away on training. These schools can't use the ad hoc reserve pool on call at the Education Division • This amounts to absenteeism • The system of substitute learning support assistants is not working • There should be a relief learning support assistant in each school who would get to know the children well • There should be a reserve learning support assistant working between two schools regularly • Statements should state whether one-to-one learning support assistant is being given for academic or behavioural support, or both. Where it is for the former, students can stay at school when the learning support assistant is absent. If there is behavioural support, decision on whether a child can stay on his/her own should be based on his/her needs. Refusal to accept a child when the learning support assistant is absent should be a last resort
Absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absenteeism among disabled children should not be tolerated. Doctor's certificates should not always be accepted
Support by other children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During Art, P.E., Football, Ballet, Gym and Computer, special needs students can be supported by classmates.
Support by volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an independent school, a volunteer is supporting children while receiving support herself from a learning support assistant
Role of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents should be allowed to speak to teachers throughout the year, not only on Parents' Day

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of consulting with disabled people and parents of those who cannot represent themselves when taking decisions • Parents' support groups can be set up within school hours • Support can be given also through the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) or by INCOs • Training can also be provided by schools for parents whose children have difficulties in learning • Teachers and learning support assistants should also be trained in how to deal with parents, especially those who have some difficulties
<p>Role of school administration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to review the administrative support given • The whole school should be responsible for children with individual educational needs (IEN's) • Heads and assistant heads need clear policies to guide them • Their point of view needs to be listened to as well • There should be assistant heads in all schools, no matter what the size. This applies also to special schools
<p>Staff Training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning support assistants are recruited with minimal qualifications and have to wait a long time to attend the diploma course • Heads, education officers, assistant directors and directors of education should receive formal training in inclusion • The Education Division should give yearly training to assistant heads responsible for inclusion about IEPs and how to monitor them • Staff development sessions should be open for both teachers and learning support assistants • Learning support assistants with the diploma should be able to read for the INCOs diploma and to use both as a means of bridging towards a Bachelor's Degree • The INCO course should also be made available for staff working in other agencies • B. Psy., graduates employed as learning support assistants should have a conversion course available for them at University • Specialisation for teachers is not advisable since it leads to labelling and does not promote the true inclusive spirit • Newly graduate teachers do not seem to be much skilled in differentiated teaching and inclusion issues • The one-week induction course is inadequate • Shadowing experienced learning support assistants is a way of training new ones • Need for training of learning support assistants and teachers in basic signs for children with hearing impairment and those with intellectual and communication difficulties • Further studies in the support of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or sensory impairment • Need for learning support assistants to be trained to work with adult students and not just children • Teachers should have a reduced load to spend more time with children with IENs • Some learning support assistants need to specialise in specific impairments, including deaf, blind, challenging behaviour, dyslexia

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning support assistants should only be confirmed in their post on the basis of a professional performance assessment • Heads should indicate the strengths of each learning support assistant so that the Education Division is able to deploy new learning support assistants with competencies that the school lacks • The contracts of supply personnel unwilling to undergo formal training should not be renewed • In-service courses should also be available for learning support assistants. These should be demand not supply driven • There are barriers to professional development of learning support assistants • The Diploma in Educational Administration and Management should become a professional Masters degree that includes modules on inclusive education • Teachers who will have a learning support assistant in their class should have advance training on the role of the learning support assistant and implementation of the IEP • The Faculty of Education and the Department of Psychology within it should input into inclusive education training
<p>Role of school stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have an important role to play in inclusive education. This should be strengthened through increased cooperation between MEYE and MFSS. • Involvement of NGOs working with disabled persons and with children is valuable • From Year 6 and upwards, classmates can be chosen to provide support and eliminate the learning support assistant where s/he isn't necessary • The Ministry/Division should have a section which coordinates between departments and agencies in the case of individual children • INCOs should also be employed in the secondary sector especially area secondaries
<p>Multi-disciplinary approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should also be occupational and physiotherapists, psychologists, counsellors and social workers in mainstream schools (state, church and independent). These should be available over and above the services of the (SENT) Special Educational Needs Teams • The delay in assessments is unacceptable, given the increase in the number of staff assigned to SpLD and School Psychological Services. Parents choose to go private, although they may not always afford it • Children may be misdiagnosed, especially with (ADHD) Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, Asperger's Syndrome, or other learning difficulties • SENT meetings are useful and should be extended • The Foundation for Educational Services (FES) programmes are also valuable • Learning support assistants should accompany children at CDAU/Child Guidance Clinic
<p>Psychological services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychologists should not be stopped from observing children in the classroom, where children are best observed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychologists should also consult with parents and teachers • The working hours of school psychologists should be revised
CDAU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car park is too far from unit • Waiting room is not child friendly • Assessments only done in the morning - parents have to take leave • Assessment based only on what parents report - or not done fully • No follow-up service after assessment is made • Parents should be provided with a list of support groups and service-providers
Early intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of Individualised Family Plan for the early years • An independent school refused to send a report to the CDAU because the child was referred by the parents without the school's recommendation
Complementary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better use can be made of complementary teachers who should not have the same working hours as class teachers so that they need not always take children out of class during lessons. When slow learners are taken out between 8.30 and 10.00, they miss much more than they would have gained in remedial work • These teachers should also do remedial work in Maths, English and Maltese • Teachers providing these services need to be given support. They feel as if they are working in a vacuum
Support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of peripatetic teachers for visually and hearing impaired students • Lack of training in braille and sign language
Challenging behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with challenging behaviour are not being given adequate support
Preparation of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with IENs not properly prepared for school, not being told how they can seek support • Peer preparation is important to avoid uncomfortable situations
IEP's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEPs must be mandatory and all the necessary resources mentioned must be available. IEPs should also establish time frames and targets to be reviewed on the agreed dates or when necessary • An advisory unit should be set up that complements CDAU and monitors the drawing up and implementation of IEPs • Teachers and learning support assistants should be involved in all MAPs, IEPs and assessment sessions • IEPs from the early years should include life skills which the other pupils might acquire naturally • IEPs should be drawn up before the learning support assistant is allotted • MAPS and IEPs are a great help because they provide a clear guideline agreed upon by all those concerned • Monitoring of IEPs should be done through weekly

	<p>checking by heads; weekly monitoring visits by INCOs; and the introduction of reflective journals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heads who detect relationship problems between particular teachers and learning support assistants should act as mediators
Written guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and those who take care of IENs need written guidance before formal schooling starts
Statementing Moderating Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A monitoring board should oversee the implementation of Statementing Panel decisions • Heads should be primarily responsible for the implementation of these decisions • Heads should refer children to the Statementing Panel only after all other possibilities have been exhausted • 21 days are not enough for the Statementing Appeals Board to interview the parents, the school and write its recommendations • The Statementing Moderating and Appeals Boards should draw up guidelines/criteria upon which a learning support assistant is granted/recommended. The situation is ambivalent • Parents who are proactive and can afford the services of NGOs are in a much better position to impress the Statementing Board and obtain the service. Those who are keen to get a learning support assistant find means and ways to get the necessary certificates to diagnose their child • Statemented children should be regularly monitored to ensure that they do not receive more, or less, support than they need • Children statemented in Year 6 need to be given an ad hoc programme to help them catch up • Children with ADD/ADHD should be observed in class by the statementing board since the behaviour outside will be different due to various aspects • Where a learning support assistant is needed urgently, the statementing process should be speeded up • Children with dyslexia, hearing or visual impairment should be assigned trained learning support assistants. Support given by peripatetic teachers is not enough • Statement should be provided when child reaches school age and should be based on ability, not disability • The Statementing Moderating Panel should be resourced with its own full-time personnel • Board members should be qualified in Disability and Inclusion • The Board should comprise a disabled person, a parent, a learning support assistant and a psychologist as well as educators. Board should also include representatives of DSSIR, (KNPD) the National Commission Persons with Disability, CDAU, SpLD Unit, Faculty of Education and others • Recommendations made are not always accurate as they are based on a brief encounter with a child the Board does not know • Learning support assistants and teachers should also appear before the Board • This board should be autonomous in its decision-making

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its reports should be given to teachers and parents as these are the people who will be the primary workers with the children
Access to the curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum should be inclusive of all students with IEN • For some children, the primary curriculum needs to be adapted, with some topics left for secondary school • An opportunity for more practical activities during lessons would aid some children greatly • Some children need not attend lessons which need a long attention span or if the subject is too abstract. This time should be used to work on life skills or other needs
Class placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there are many statemented children in a single year group, some end up in the A class and since in 5A and 6A, the other children are preparing for Junior Lyceum exam, the child may end up working only with the learning support assistant
Classroom size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The class population should take into consideration the dimensions of the classroom
Assessment of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This should be done in less time, focus on individual needs and take place in different settings (eg home, school), not only the clinic • Doctors should know more about autism so that they can diagnose it early • Disabled children have a right to an early assessment carried out by a trans-disciplinary team • Special education provision (such as the allocation of a learning support assistant) should be based on individual needs • Some students who are slow learners are not assigned a learning support assistant, while others with a slight impairment have one • There should be a panel that reassesses children's needs and consults with parents about the service being given
Exam support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support given by MATSEC Board a positive development • Need to review the special concessions offered during school- based, local and foreign examinations' • Exams need to be adapted where this is necessary, with the right support being provided • For dyslexic students, a laptop, word processor or text editor is a necessary tool. In the case of at least one student, a laptop was granted by one board but not by MATSEC • Dyslexic students should be assessed on their knowledge of a subject not on spelling • They should be allowed more time since they take longer to write • Dyslexic students with a reading age of 10 years should be assigned a reader for exams, since they read very slowly and this hinders comprehension • In some countries, dyslexic students are allowed to give answers through pictures or on audio tape, at all scholastic levels • Dyslexic students should be given extra time and/or reader during exams • During correction of exam papers, dyslexic children should be given concessions for spelling mistakes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If students are informed earlier than March about the support they will be given, they can sit their mock exams under the same conditions that have been granted • Junior Lyceum exam system is too rigid for dyslexic children. Help given may not be enough and these children should not be penalised for spelling mistakes if they do not have a scribe. • Directive whereby only Child Guidance Psychologist, SpLD Unit or School Psychological Services psychologists reports are accepted is only creating more pressure on these already overloaded agencies • Children who cannot sit for a standard exam should be tested according to their own level of work • Some children are not given the assistance they need because it is not certain whether they will get support during exams. This is de-motivating
Classroom size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion cannot work in classrooms of 30 children
Resource rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled children can be placed in special units in mainstream schools and join other children for crafts, music and art • Use of time-out room for students with challenging behaviour • Resource rooms are necessary to give more individual attention without disrupting the rest of the class
Resources for teachers and learning support assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning support assistants need more resources such as ample space, teaching materials, software, books, adequate changing room with showers and adapted toilets • There should be a multi-sensory room in every school. Educational resources to adapt curriculum for children aged 6 and upwards are scarce. Schools can be given a yearly budget to buy these resources. • A temporary alternative site for the National Support Centre should be found • Large print on coloured paper greatly aids dyslexic children • There are also books which are suitable for them. Each library should have them.
ICT/AT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computers and Assistive Technology should be available for those disabled children who need it • Funding can be obtained from the EU Minerva programme • It is important that disabled children, especially those who are visually impaired, are not left out of ICT education
Specialist schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If certain schools specialised in certain disabilities, the purchase of expensive equipment will be rationalised • Staff in special schools should be able to meet all the children's needs • Specialised services in special schools should be available for mainstream students as well • Students attending the Sannat Unit in Gozo should attend a separate school that is built according to their needs • Parents are discouraged by some NGOs to visit special schools

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special education should only be a last resort. Special education should always have a return to mainstream education as its ultimate aim • Cooperation between mainstream and special schools should be encouraged • Questions about the suitability of inclusive education for students with PMLD or autism
State vs church schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem with state schools is that they are very exam oriented
Hearing impaired students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chronic lack of teachers of the deaf • Lack of training for those teachers currently teaching the deaf • Importance of early intervention for hearing impaired children. • Complementary teachers are an important source of educational support for hearing impaired students, even those who have a learning support assistant and a teacher of the hearing impaired • Total inclusion is not necessarily the best solution for hearing impaired students • These students have a communication problem that can be overcome by interpreters not learning support assistants • This entails the training of interpreters by foreign experts and funding for the development of (LSM) Maltese Sign Language • A Board should supervise the education of hearing impaired students made up of teachers, hearing-impaired adults, parents and academics • Hearing-impaired students should be excused from getting certain qualifications because of the language barrier • Need for teachers to take and act on the advice of the teacher of the hearing impaired on how these children learn best • Teachers of the hearing impaired can run inset courses and seminars for parents, learning support assistants, teachers and head teachers in the mainstream to sensitize them on the difficulties encountered at school by hearing impaired children and discuss their individual roles to render inclusion successful • Learning support assistants can work on a one-to-one or shared basis, depending on need of hearing impaired child and also support other children while the teacher is doing individual tuition with the hearing impaired child • Hearing impaired children need note-takers, especially at secondary, post-secondary and university level • A lack of assessment tools to check the language development and linguistic skills of Maltese-speaking hearing impaired children. • Need for improved acoustics in schools • Need for audiological equipment and an audiology technician at Helen Keller School • Need for this school to also have spare hearing aids • Parents have a right to choose communication mode (aural verbal, oral or sign language). • Hearing impaired children need plenty of individual tuition in a special unit or resource room

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to review situation of deaf students when they need interpreters and other resources • Deaf children are not reaching reasonable educational targets • They are leaving school with very limited spoken and written language competence while they do well in subjects such as maths, physics, and technical drawing • There should be a language policy that states that deaf children should become bilingual in Maltese and LSM by the end of primary school. This should be reflected in the IEP • Exposure to sign language enables deaf children to learn other languages more easily. Deaf adults can give an important contribution here • There are low expectations and therefore low achievements for deaf children • The Deaf Education Module in the Bachelor of Education course is encouraging • There needs to be more support for parents and professionals working with deaf children • In schools where peripatetic teachers of the hearing impaired are deployed as Assistant Heads, the Ministry could consider turning them to primary schools with a special interest in the Education of the Deaf
<p>Physically disabled students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wheelchair user has to be accompanied by a learning support assistant when she does not feel she needs one • Need to review physical accessibility to buildings and all classrooms, including the Drama Unit, the Home Economics Centre, PSD Seminar locations, etc. • Learning support assistants should not have to carry students up stairs • Any necessary changes to classrooms need to be planned • Parents of mobility impaired students in church or private schools have to take the children to school themselves. If the child is unable to transfer from the wheelchair to the car and back, the problem is worsened since it would be impractical for the parents to have a van with a tail-lift each. Private hire is expensive
<p>Financial support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be more government financial support to Eden Foundation so that programmes for autistic children can be increased from once to twice weekly • Financial support for parents of disabled children who face extra costs related to their children's disabilities (e.g. for children to attend programmes by certain NGOs). Mothers of disabled children very often can't work in order to stay at home and take care of them
<p>Transition between schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary school heads should inform secondary school heads about the arrangements necessary for disabled children • The process of changing schools should be properly planned • Transition from one level to another should be an integral part of school policy • Transition should start immediately after the Junior Lyceum exams to bridge the gap

<p>School leavers' transition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem with over-crowding at Day Services for Disabled People means that students have to remain in special schools until a space is found for them • Need for post-secondary opportunities for disabled students with the necessary support • Need to review requirements for disabled students to enter higher education institutions • Need to review available information and guidance offered regarding employment for people with special needs • ETC should be involved in the transition planning process of school leavers with IENs • It is important that vocational skills are acquired by disabled students including basic literacy and numeracy, communication skills and ICT • Need for familiarisation with different places of work • Monitoring and supervision of young people with psycho-social or learning difficulties should go on beyond secondary education into post-secondary and tertiary levels • Need to train students with low academic skills in practical subjects • Students with intellectual disability need to continue learning after they leave school in order to fulfil their potential • The transition process should start at the age of 14 • Day Services for Disabled People for persons with severe intellectual impairment should be expanded and consolidated to provide dignified, meaningful activities • There should be better planning for the transition from special school to Day Services. The transition should start before the student's final year in school • For some students, it is more beneficial to seek employment or participate in a training programme • Students should be given the opportunity to continue developing their skills after the age of 16 through MCAST and the Day Services for Disabled People • The latter should be split into two, according to ages • Guidance teachers should be trained to give support to disabled school leavers
<p>Extra-curricular activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SkolaSport provides a segregated class for disabled children and is not inclusive • Need to review extra curricular activities available for disabled people and the equipment provided • Disabled children should have more opportunities to participate in inclusive activities such as outings, drama, ballet, gymnastics, athletics • Participation in Special Olympics should be encouraged • The benefits of leisure education are being underestimated • Disabled children should be involved in physical education and sports like their classmates
<p>Transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of adequate transport to children with disabilities in primary schools • Transport should be insured • It should be inspected regularly • It should be established as a right

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The service needs to be reviewed to avoid unnecessary costs• Children should not start out on trips very early in the morning and should not be kept in the van for more than 30 minutes, as much as possible
Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a need to enforce legislation
Community issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children's corners should be available in all waiting rooms, churches and all recreational places in order to enable the family to lead a normal life together

5 Evaluating Learning Support Provision

While there is, undoubtedly, a social and political commitment in the Maltese Islands to inclusive education, based on a two-track approach, and a growing recognition by the majority of stakeholders that inclusion enriches all students (disabled and non-disabled), there is also in force a clear philosophical and operational contradiction.

Inclusion should mean enabling all students to participate in the life of mainstream institutions to the best of their abilities, whatever their needs. Yet, inclusion in the Maltese education system is deeply embedded in a framework of selectivity - and implicitly thereby, exclusion. State schools, for example, operate on the principle of streaming students from Year 5, if school size permits. The Junior Lyceum Examination results in disproportionately few students with a disability advancing to Junior Lyceums, and the vast majority going to Area Secondary Schools and Boys' and Girls' Centres.

A degree of positive discrimination is practised towards disabled students. Regardless of their examination results at the end of Year Six, they are entitled to choose between a Boys'/Girls' Centre (formerly known as Opportunity Centres), or an Area Secondary school. The Working Group observes that, with the right management, methodology and attitude, combined with adequate resources, such schools can yield encouraging results.

The Group notes that, whereas streaming in the last two years of the primary grades in State schools contradicts the commitment to inclusion, most Church schools that provide automatic transition from their primary level to the secondary level, as a general rule do not stream their students, but provide them with education in a mixed-ability environment. This system is more in keeping with the spirit of inclusion.

This same principle is found in Independent schools. The Common Entrance Examination for entry into most boys' Church schools at secondary level is, by its very nature selective and, therefore, exclusive. However, it should be noted that these schools offer a number of places for students with individual educational needs.

This paradox in the State sector may eventually be addressed should State education migrate, say, towards a system of school networking, as practised, for instance, in the Netherlands. Such a system of networking between schools should provide more flexibility for schools to adapt their educational provision according to the needs of the students, and within the framework of the National Curriculum.

With the network system, schools would be more autonomous and not so bound by the central educational authorities to offer teaching and learning environments based on the abilities and potential of each student. Meanwhile, the implicit deleterious effects of the contradiction, while it remains in force, cannot be disregarded.

Apart from such contradiction and incoherence, the Working Group does not believe that the policy of inclusion has been clearly focused. The policy and its implementation have not kept pace with essential basics that underlie and should underpin the principle and practice of inclusion. Moreover, the Group contends that the operational system currently in force is not truly adequate to meet the key demands and goals of education and inclusion, and to give value for money.

As shown in the Statistical Framework (Section 2), the financial resources absorbed by the State system to meet individual educational needs are rising faster than other outlays on education. They have doubled since 2000, and are also taking up an increasing proportion of the Gross Domestic Product (measured at current prices).

That trend could be considered laudable if it also reflected a strong improvement in the structure and quality of IEN provision. However, on the basis of the submissions

made to it, as well as its own observations and analysis, the Group does not believe that higher financial outlays have been translated into a better quality of provision.

The Working Group concludes that the system of support provision to meet individual educational needs in the State sector is based on a fundamentally flawed allocation and utilisation of resources: human as well as financial.

EARLY ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION

Any aspect of educational policy requires a sound and early start. Proper provision for students with individual educational needs, in particular, requires the earliest possible assessment and intervention.

The so-called Congenital Anomalies Register kept by the Department of Health indicates that around 20 babies are born each year with some disability, mostly Down Syndrome or Spina Bifida. Identification and diagnosis of other disabilities takes place later, directly by parents, through medical advice, or by educators. No central record is kept of disabilities diagnosed after infants reach one year of age.

The Working Group feels that more systematic screening is required in the early years of a child's life. The Child Development Assessment Unit (CDAU) plays a useful role in this regard. It tackles some ten cases a week on average.

However, in view of its clinical orientation, it does not take into account other aspects of a child's development, such as the emotional, social and educational needs. This is evidenced, for instance, by the fact that part of the assessment is carried out by a clinical psychologist, with no input from an educational psychologist. Though the unit is important in itself, it is not of enough relevance to the educational process that should start with early assessment of educational needs, and intervention where necessary.

The Group believes that once early screening for difficulties and disabilities is in place, parallel to this, educators and other professionals need to be immediately involved in the early intervention process, especially in the first three years of life. The aim of this would be to help the family to deal with the different emotions experienced when facing the reality of difficult and/or disabling conditions.

Once families are helped with the emotional aspect, they also need to be given, not only ongoing support, but also appropriate, updated advice and information. This should be provided in an easily accessible and timely manner, so that families can make informed choices, especially with regard to their child's educational provision.

These recommendations entail the extension, strengthening and reshaping of the role of the early intervention service provided by the Education Division. Another important addition should be the provision of educational psychological services as part of the assessment process. This should lead to the development of an individualised pre-school programme which would serve as a link with the school when the child reaches school-going age.

At the age of three, 98% of children start to attend kindergarten and proceed to the primary level at the age of five. At present it is common for schools to identify children experiencing difficulties, and consequently to inform parents/carers. However, the Working Group noted that this practice is sporadic and highly dependent on the educators' level of awareness, training and experience.

The Group believes that, at regular intervals, national benchmarking should be made by class teachers, who should receive specific training and support for this purpose. One aim of this exercise would be to identify difficulties and disabilities, so that the appropriate professionals may be consulted, enabling an individualised educational

programme (IEP) to be designed for the child. This should be done without hastily referring for diagnosis children whose difficulties should be dealt with in class.

With regard to early intervention and assessment, a number of parents informed the Group that circumstances often constrain them to seek costly private provision of educational assessment and assistance services regarding their children, whereas they feel that timely state provision should be theirs unfailingly to choose as of right.

The Working Group appreciates such parental concerns, whilst recognising that those who seek private provision because they wish to do so, are entitled to exercise their right of choice.

STATEMENTING

The process of early intervention reaches a key stage when children are referred to the Statementing Moderating Panel (SMP), where reported individual educational needs are assessed and learning support, if any, decided upon. Parents/carers have the right to appeal to the Statementing Appeals Board should they not be satisfied with the conclusion of the SMP.

Table 7: Referrals and statementing of students, 2002-2004

State Schools, Malta						
Year	Referrals	Statemented Students	Fulltime Support	Shared Support	Other Support	Pending
2002	255	201	73	58	71	0
2003	347	246	88	82	76	21
2004	365	213	91	74	48	64
Sub-total	967	660	252	214	195	85
Church schools, Malta						
Year	Referrals	Statemented Students	Fulltime Support	Shared Support	Other Support	Pending
2002	80	72	19	35	18	0
2003	76	63	24	17	22	2
2004	95	73	22	32	19	10
Sub-total	251	208	65	84	59	12
State & Church Schools, Gozo						
Year	Referrals	Statemented Students	Fulltime Support	Shared Support	Other Support	Pending
2002	36	29	12	8	10	0
2003	48	25	8	7	10	0
2004	26	17	4	10	3	2
Sub-total	110	71	24	25	23	2

Source: SMP

Table 7 shows the number of students referred to the SMP for assessment and statementing between 2002 and 2004. Referrals in respect of State schools in Malta increased over the period, from 255 in 2002, to 365 in 2004. They fluctuated in Church schools in Malta, dipping in 2003, and rising sharply in 2004. The figures for Gozo are only available for the State and Church sectors combined. Here, the fluctuations were wide, with the total of referrals rising in 2003, to 48 from 36 in the previous year, and falling to 26 in 2004. The number of students referred and statemented with one-to-one or shared individual learning support - the second column in the Table - was erratic.

The Working Group was advised by the SMP that one main reason for referrals that remained pending, particularly in Malta, in 2004, was that applications were not supported with the requisite professional written reports. The Group was also informed that there was a growing incidence of support being given to students who were diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), or Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The number of students statemented and given support in Church schools rose from 40 in 2000, to 61 in 2004.

The Group was told that the SMP does not statement students as requiring learning support unless it concludes that this is justified. It appears, however, that referrals to the SMP are at times made without first tapping other services or implementing other strategies at school level. At other times, referrals include claimed multiple difficulties to increase the probability of support being allocated.

On the other hand, various educators felt that, not infrequently, children who are statemented as requiring one-to-one or shared assistance, in reality have learning difficulties that in the past used to be addressed, and should still be addressed, by the class teacher.

From the point of view of the SMP, the Group was told that, often, recommending learning support is the only service available, given the vacuum that exists regarding other much-needed services, such as, personal assistance and other roles identified in the Inclusive Education Policy.

The Working Group, while recognising the evident commitment whereby the SMP and the Appeals Board carry out their difficult tasks, feels that early consideration should be given to making statementing the responsibility of multi-disciplinary teams. As far as is practically possible, such teams should carry out assessments in a school environment.

The Group is aware that forming such teams may prove to be difficult due to a dearth of trained personnel. In this regard, the Group is of the opinion that not enough planning and investment has been carried out by the Education Division in the area of training, thus resulting in a lack of required professionals, amongst others educational psychologists, inclusive education specialists, and counsellors.

The Working Group believes that the Education Division needs, with urgency, to plan and implement, arrangements to train more professionals, particularly in the areas of special education, educational psychology and counselling. Given the constraints that the University may have at present to offer supervision at a Master's degree level in these sectors, the Group recommends that the Division should vigorously explore ways and means to give post-graduate training abroad to individuals who will later be deployed in Malta to give similar training themselves. Alternatively or in parallel, the Division should collaborate with foreign universities to offer courses locally.

INCLUSION IN PRACTICE

Under the two-track approach operated in Malta a policy of inclusion is followed in mainstream schools, while special schools are providing a service for a tiny minority of students whose needs can best be met through the individualised learning provision to be found in such schools. Special schools and related issues are discussed separately and in more depth in Section 7.

To fulfil and sustain a policy of real and progressive inclusion two key factors are required: learning support in mainstream schools provided by adequately trained personnel, and the adaptation of syllabi within the framework of the National Curriculum to meet individual student needs.

Table 8, abstracted from Table 2 in Section 2, highlights that, at the end of January 2005 there were 1087 statemented students in State schools, from kindergarten to the higher secondary level. There were also 403 statemented students in Church schools, and 4 students receiving private learning support in Independent schools. There were a further 286 students in special schools. The resulting total of 1,780 students represented 2.57 % of the total school population.

Table 8: Students with IENs and in Special Schools

Sector	Kinder	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Total IEN students in Mainstream	Special Schools	Total IEN students & in Special Schools
State	58	758	268	3	1087	286	1373
Church	19	235	149	0	403	0	403
Independent	0	4	5	0	9	0	9
<i>Total</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>997</i>	<i>422</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1499</i>	<i>286</i>	<i>1785</i>

Explanatory note: IEN students in State and Church schools are statemented students allocated a learning support assistant. In Independent schools they are students who receive learning support paid for by their parents.

Source: Education Division

Experience in a broad spectrum of countries in Europe (Section 3) indicates a widespread belief that learning support in mainstream schools is given effectively by specialist teachers. It also suggests that, to help put in place a dynamic teaching set-up, general teacher training should give considerable input regarding provision for individual educational needs. Specialisation should also be made possible. A distinction is also made in those countries between provision to meet IENs, and provision of care for personal physical needs.

Furthermore, European experience records extensively that specialist support available in mainstream schools, or outreached by special schools, or by specialised personnel from other central or local services, generally tends not to be provided on a one-to-one basis. There are some examples of one-to-one support provision, such as in parts of the United Kingdom.

When education provision for students with IENs in Malta evolved into the principle of inclusive education from 1995 onwards, starting in State kindergartens, and moving up a level year by year, it was put into practice through a system of one-to-one learning support. There were very few specialised teachers available. Moreover, the structure of the B.Ed.(Hons) degree offered by the University gave little, if any, input regarding individual educational needs. Neither were there, at the time, learning support assistants who had received any training in providing education adapted to students with IENs. The process of inclusive education, therefore, did not commence on the basis of, at least, a nucleus of trained teachers and learning support assistants, much less of a core of specialists.

Learning support assistance in class, soon to become commonly known in Malta as the 'facilitator' system, commenced through deployment of Kindergarten Assistants. Recruitment in this category was - and still is - subject to a minimum entry requirement of four passes at SEC level, and to an age threshold of 18 years. This paralleled provision in the U.K. across the local educational authorities spectrum, incorporating similar weakness, without being balanced by strengths in the form of specific allocation according to individual need.

Meanwhile, an evening University course leading to a Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education was initiated in 1995. Thirty four facilitators were trained. From 1999, a series of five courses leading to a Certificate in Education for Learning Support Facilitators, were held. In 2003 and 2004, two further courses were offered, leading to a Diploma in Education (Individual Educational Needs). The pool of facilitators increased, but the increase did not keep up with the number of students statemented with IENs in mainstream schools. This rose steadily as the policy of inclusion advanced year-by-year through the primary and secondary levels. In 2004, the University offered another diploma course, which attracted three applicants for each of the 100 places made available.

The University has also restructured the B.Ed. programme, to include credits covering individual educational needs. The Faculty of Education informed the Working Group that credits had to be reduced due to the EU harmonisation process. The course

covers preparation of individualised education plans in the primary stream, but not, as yet, in the stream that prepares undergraduates for the secondary sector.

The post-graduate Diploma in Education, Management, and Administration for those who aspire to head a school continues to have no content regarding provision for IENs.

A two-year post-graduate diploma course started in 2005 at the University for prospective appointees as Inclusion Co-ordinators (INCOs), a position that was mentioned in the Strategic Plan for the implementation of the National Curriculum. The University is also considering offering specialisation in the area at a Masters level.

As the scholastic year 2004/2005 completes the first decade of inclusive education, two-thirds of learning support assistants are untrained. The large majority of class teachers have still not received training in preparing Individualised Education Plans. The Working Group learned that, remarkably, there were no applicants when an in-service training programme (INSET), specifically targeting development of IEPs, was offered to teachers, on a voluntary basis, in July 2002.

The Island shares a reality, highlighted by European countries, commented upon in the EADSNE report (synthesised in Section 4). In some instances, such as those of deaf students, and students with severe emotional and/or behavioural problems, inclusion remains a challenge. A widespread scarcity of trained learning support makes the challenge much harder to tackle.

The Working Group feels that the prevailing situation does not show that significant, fundamental change for the better has taken place. Certainly, not enough to demonstrate that the education system in Malta is truly recognising, improving and deploying its educational human resource base to mobilise and celebrate human diversity by effectively including students with individual educational needs.
Learning Support Assistance

LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANCE

This unsatisfactory situation in the provision of learning support to students with IENs is aggravated by fragmentation of class support between trained and untrained categories (evidenced in Table 3, Section 3). While the Working Group could observe strong commitment among learning support assistants towards statemented students, it is evident that, as a general rule, and with some notable exceptions, those who have not benefited from professional training cannot reach the same level of achievement as their qualified colleagues. Moreover, facilitators (who would have been trained at diploma level) are not monitored and evaluated to ensure that they extend support up to the level expected of them.

The mixed resource base, particularly skewed as it is towards the untrained segment of individual assistance providers, hinders and - the Working Group feels - even undermines the fundamental objective of creating and allocating key support resources. These resources should mobilise and make the fullest possible contribution towards fulfilling the aspirations and objectives of a sound policy of inclusive and special education. The different categories of learning support assistants have ambiguous job descriptions and, at times, there is an incorrect or too narrow interpretation of their role. Their range of responsibilities is not uniform or coherent across the inclusive and special education spectrum. Thereby, it has a propensity to generate both confusion, as well as inefficiency in the system.

Fragmentation also affects negatively the use of the second key element that has to underpin implementation of a policy of inclusive education - the Individualised Educational Programme. As students with IENs have a wide range of needs, there has to be adaptation of the syllabii, as may be necessary, to meet their needs in mainstream schools. This is done by drawing up and implementing an IEP.

Those who hold a Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education would have received training in developing and implementing an IEP. It is part of their duty to fully participate in the development, implementation and review of an IEP for students with individual educational needs, and reporting progress of students with such IEPs on a regular basis. Calls for applications for positions of Support Kindergarten Assistants to give learning support, specify a similar requirement. It is evident that the requirement cannot be fulfilled in the absence of proper training, even if some SKAs do take a personal interest to instruct themselves.

The confusion in the set-up is compounded by the job descriptions applied to the two main categories. Those classified as facilitators, who have therefore been given pedagogical training in their diploma course, are required to support students with individual needs also in their personal care and hygiene. Other assistants, who are not qualified, and so are generally much more restricted in their ability to give learning support, are not similarly clearly obliged to attend to personal care and hygiene needs.

All too frequently, this results in allocation of a facilitator to a student who, as regards personal care and hygiene needs, could - and, the Working Group feels, should - be supported by a personal assistant. It can and does result that children with the highest learning needs are assisted by unqualified staff, and also that learning support assistants may be carrying out 'student-sitting', rather than providing education.

Learning support assistants are allocated on a first-on-the-waiting list basis, and not according to the needs of statemented students. This arrangement, which prevails because of the centralised system of recruitment, does not permit matching,

To the extent that - because of their job description and lack of matching - facilitators are misallocated, the system is performing below its available potential, restricted as that is.

When recruiting supply kindergarten assistants to fill learning education support positions, the Education Division gives preference to applicants in possession of qualifications at the advanced matriculation level, or above. But the low minimum qualification and age requirements have been retained. Successful applicants to SKA positions are required to attend a three-day induction course.

The Division has advised the Working Group that there have been no students with IENs in the mainstream who have left school before the age of 16 during these last five years. Nevertheless, the Group considers that statemented students are not receiving all the support that should be available within the existing inclusive set-up. For instance, the 1995 regrading agreement between the Government and the MUT, included in the duties of a facilitator that of systematically promoting peer support for the better inclusion and acceptance of children with individual needs. Yet, ten years on from the agreement, the Education Division has confirmed to the Group that there still exists no formal peer preparation programme in mainstream schools.

TEMPORARY ABSENCE

There is a further gap in the system. The one-to-one support element preponderant in it, and also the fact that in certain cases students with high support needs, do require constant individual attention, meaning that, when a learning support assistant is away, problems arise. There is a reserve pool of 'helpers' from applicants waiting to be recruited. But the Working Group encountered a widespread view - among educators and parents/carers - that the system is not working well, if it is working at all.

When the learning support assistant does not report for work, or is carrying out duties outside the class, such as invigilating during examinations, schools generally do not allow students with IENs to attend. At times, schools ask parents/carers to take their child back home because the learning support assistant has not reported for work, and there is no substitute available.

This gap affects negatively both students and parents/carers: students lose education provision, and parents/carers cannot plan their days with certainty.

The helpers' pool, to the extent that it exists, is not available to Church schools. The Private Schools Association commented to the Working Group as follows: "When facilitators are sick or away on training...we have to ask students not to attend school, as directed by the MUT. We feel that, even in the light of the Church-State Agreement on Education that guarantees parity between State and Church schools students, our students should have their right to full inclusion guaranteed."

SUPPORT IN CHURCH SCHOOLS

Any analysis of the system has to be set against the tripod set-up of the system.

The State meets the cost of the support service made up of facilitators and various categories of kindergarten assistants in its schools, from kindergarten up to higher secondary schools, and schools run by Church institutions. Parents in Independent schools pay privately for one-to-one, or for shared assistance for their children, apart from limited support given by the schools themselves.

The Working Group noted that, given the relative autonomy of Church schools, each school is at liberty to select its own learning support assistants, subject to final approval by the Education Division. Consequently, Church schools are better able to match learning support resources to the needs of individual disabled students. Some schools also match by subject.

One-to-one or shared providers of learning support for students with IENs in Independent schools, of which there seem to be very few, are selected and paid for by parents, apart from a degree of support provided by some of the schools themselves.

Such autonomy emphasises, through sharp contrast, the deficiencies in the centralised system which encompasses State schools. These deficiencies in the system deepen at the secondary level. In that sector, different teachers teach different subjects. This, coupled with the increasingly demanding level of each subject's content, makes the practice of inclusion more challenging and complex, especially where students with intellectual, communication or behavioural difficulties are concerned.

The fact that the selective process of the Junior Lyceum entry examination, and the Common Entrance Examination in most boys' Church schools, severely restricts transition to such schools, in clear contradiction to the objectives of inclusion policy, simply concentrates the deficiencies on the limited number of students who do achieve transition.

During 2005 learning support to children with a disability in State schools is estimated to cost some Lm 3.92million in emoluments, almost triple the 2000 outlay (Section 2). Asked to supply estimates of comparative costs, the Education Division indicated to the Working Group that provision of inclusive and special education absorbs some Lm3,300 per student annually. That is more than twice as much as the approximate average cost of educating other students, estimated at Lm1450. These amounts do not include emoluments to state-financed learning support staff allocated to Church school classes that include students with IENs. They numbered 284 (Table 4), and supported 403 statemented students (Table 2), at the start of the year.

The Group found scant evidence that the outlay of human and financial resources in State schools is allocated and utilised to maximum effect, in terms of its contribution to the objectives of inclusive and special education.

NATIONAL SUPPORT CENTRE

The Working Group noted that an important part of the inclusion policy - setting up a National Support Centre to act as a one-stop-shop for services and their providers, training for teachers and learning support assistants, interaction among professionals, providing services and information to parents and students - remains only an objective.

Steps to set up the Centre were taken in 2001. Before it could begin to function within the limitations indicated in this Section, it was discovered that the building allocated to house the Centre required repairs so extensive, that it was more sensible to pull it down and rebuild, utilising the available space to satisfy more efficiently and effectively current and forecast needs.

The project, which would also enable proper monitoring of provision of inclusive and special education, remains a dormant letter.

In short, the main aspects of the position as observed by the Working Group are that:

- most class teachers and head-teachers have not received any formal training in the provision of education for students with IENs;
- learning support is given in State schools to students with IENs, either on a one-to-one basis, or on a shared basis, by 858 learning support assistants (as on 31/01/05); these are not matched to a student, but are generally allocated on a next-on-the-waiting-list basis.
- of these learning support assistants, only a third - 280 - hold the Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education and are, therefore, classified as facilitators; the rest (inappropriately called Supply Kindergarten Assistants), had been given a 13-hour induction course - some of them after they had been placed in a class;
- the key tool, the Individualised Educational Programme, is not being developed and implemented as required to underpin inclusive education in practice;
- Church and Independent schools, because of their autonomy in selecting staff and in administration, can deploy their human resources more effectively than in the centralised State system.

The Working Group concludes that:

- the objectives of the inclusive education policy have not been effectively implemented through systematic provision of a spectrum of support that satisfies meaningfully a basic spectrum of needs of children with a disability in the Maltese Islands, monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis;
- development and implementation of the few mechanisms designed to promote inclusive education have not kept up with its progressive annual extension from early childhood through to post-secondary level;
- the substantial and rising budgetary outlay allocated towards meeting the objectives of inclusive education policy is not yielding value for money by structuring and operating as sound and effective a policy of educational inclusion as is essential to meet the legitimate aspirations of students with a learning disability, parents and carers, and society in general.

The eventual introduction of INCOs, initially in primary schools and over an unspecified number of years, should be a positive step to address some of the prevailing shortcomings in the system. It cannot be a truly meaningful measure, however, unless it is part of a comprehensive and coherent plan to structure and reposition inclusion on a stronger basis, now that the learning process has gone through its first decade.

In the following sections 6 and 7, the Working Group recommends and outlines a long-term Repositioning Plan, as well as changes in the short-to-medium term that should be implemented through a Parallel Programme of action.

6 A Repositioning Plan and Parallel Programme

The Working Group, taking into account the situation described and evaluated in the previous sections of the Report, recommends that a Repositioning Plan be drawn up. The Plan should redefine the current scenario within the inclusive and special education sector, by redrawing policies, systems, and practices. It should put in place a spectrum of supply to meet, with more focus, efficiency and effectiveness than at present, a defined spectrum of individual educational needs.

The Plan should be drawn up by the Education Division, in consultation with the major stakeholders in the sector.

The consultation process should include, in particular, inputs from disabled students and their parents/carers, disabled persons' organisations, public and private educators, the University, MCAST and the MUT.

The Plan should be implemented over seven to ten years, starting from 2006, according to a clear timeframe established at the outset.

The Group believes that repositioning should

- be based on a break with the expectation that learning support must be given on a one-to-one or shared basis, since such a culture of dependency is antithetic to the real objectives of education, and harmful to any student;
- recognise, as the Working Group came to do, following thorough consultation and analysis, that providing all disabled students with the same learning support service is not effective. The Plan should, therefore, ensure that a spectrum of supply should be offered to meet the spectrum of needs of students with IENs.

Furthermore, the Working Group recommends a short-to-medium term four-year Parallel Programme, starting immediately, to address existing shortcomings and gaps, in a manner that should also dovetail with the Repositioning Plan.

The Plan and the Parallel Programme should incorporate the recommendations made in the following Section 7, regarding special schools.

The various aspects of Malta's own experience in promoting inclusive education, and relevant experience of countries that have made good progress towards inclusion, should be the point of departure of long-term repositioning and parallel remedial action.

6.1 REPOSITIONING PLAN - OUTLINE

The Working Group recommends that the Plan should include the following reappraisal and action:

- screening at birth and early assessment and intervention should be strengthened with appropriate specialist resources, and include preparation of an individualised pre-school programme;
- the process of statementing of children reported to have disabilities should be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team, as far as possible in a school environment;
- provision to a student with IENs should consistently promote self-

reliance, avoid the pitfalls of a culture of dependency, and be set within a whole-school policy that maximises the input to, and contribution from all students, such that a coherent and mutually supporting policy becomes the engine for total, inclusive achievement; these objectives should underlie the whole process of inclusion, from statementing onwards;

- student teachers, and teachers in service, should be trained to prepare Individualised Education Plans (IEPs), and to assume responsibility for their implementation;
- class teachers should be guided and assisted in their approach to inclusive education by a newly created specialist cadre, to be made up of INCOs, and specialist teachers from special education resource centres (which should be formed from the restructuring of special schools, recommended by the Group in Section 7);
- specialist teachers should be education graduates, with a post-graduate qualification in areas specified by the Education Division (for example, visual impairment, hearing impairment, severe behaviour and communication difficulties) in accordance with an analysis of current and forecast needs;
- the role of specialist teachers will be to provide support to class teachers, and to students with individual educational needs;
- certain groups of students with a disability, like those who are visually or hearing impaired, should be supported, by the specialist teachers, as well as, through outreach from resource centres;
- where, notwithstanding the departure from extensive support recommended in this Report, continuous dedicated class support is clearly determined to be required by students with high learning support needs, a trained learning support assistant should be attached to the whole class, to assist the class teacher;
- trained learning support assistants (currently termed 'facilitators') should be qualified at diploma level; the diploma course should include core subjects common to all students in the first year of training, and specialisation according to disability in the second year. Those who follow the course should be required to specialise in two different areas, thus ensuring mobility when it comes to work placement;
- personal care required by students with a disability should be provided by personal assistants, who would not be part of the teaching staff or trained learning support assistants, and who can give service in one or more schools. These assistants should be given basic training in providing personal care; they will be expected to tend to the personal needs of those students, who only need support in personal care. For those students who have other disabilities which justify support, as well as the need for personal care, such care should be given by their class learning support assistant.

The Repositioning Plan should also:

- set clear milestones regarding (a) training B.Ed. students to make provision for IENs which is sounder, more sustainable and more relevant to the spectrum of individual educational needs, and which reflects philosophical, ethical and operational developments in best-practice country models; (b) increasing the pool of specialist teachers to provide for students IENs, through training by local expert; and (c) giving basic in-service training to teachers, assistant heads, and heads of schools who have not had any formal exposure to the techniques of providing for IENs;
- mobilise school resources to expand the focus on provision for students with IENs, beyond the co-ordination that will be given by INCOs; for instance, schools should have, as is the practice in Iceland, a mentoring team to support and guide teachers who have in their class students with learning, behaviour, or communication difficulties.
- set a definite time-frame to establish a properly functioning National Support Centre.

The Working Group took due note of the absolute and relative acceleration in outlays on special needs education, identified in Table 5 of Section 2 of this Report. Continued acceleration could add to budgetary tension. That, however, is not a major motivation of the Group's recommendation to reposition inclusive education policy and provision. To reiterate, the system is not working as it should. It is wasteful and, to a considerable degree, ineffectual. Current and future further training of learning support assistants, and ongoing, effective monitoring, should bring about improvement. Nevertheless, financial and human resources could be much more effectively and efficiently utilised to achieve a considerably higher social and individual return.

The Group, basing itself on published and other data made available to it, understands that the number of children whose disability translates into IENs should stabilise at around the levels reached in 2005. The training aspects of the Repositioning Plan would require additional financing. Nevertheless, the present value of such financing should be considerably offset by the recommended phased departure from extensive one-to-one support.

The repositioned system, the Group holds, should give better value for money in the form of more relevant and effective provision to students with IENs, and greater satisfaction and better results for parents/carers, teachers and support staff, and society in general.

Progress in implementing inclusive education policy, including through the Repositioning Plan, should be assessed through continual critical appraisal of the extent to which inclusive and special education enable meaningful improvement in the life and prospects of students with IENs. If inclusive education does not lead to the fullest possible inclusion of the disabled person in society, it would not be reaching its fundamental goal.

6.2 PARALLEL PROGRAMME

The Repositioning Plan recommended by the Working Group is a long-term project. It would require fundamental philosophical and attitudinal changes. Irrespective of whether the recommended restructuring is effected or not, early short-to-medium term measures to upgrade the prevailing arrangements are still called for; in the context of implementation of the existing Inclusive Education Policy, as repositioned by this Plan.

The Group is of the opinion that a clearly defined Parallel Programme of action, spread over up to four years, once again with a clear timeframe, should make the Education Division more tuned to the needs of inclusive and special education, and should also ensure that as many as possible support staff who do not possess at least a basic relevant qualification, are required to acquire one.

6.3 STRUCTURES

The Directorate for Student Services and International Relations should be restructured into a Directorate for Support Services, solely encompassing inclusive and special education, as well as other support services, namely: school psychological services, school social work service, guidance and counselling services, and the Safe Schools Programme.

There should also be a sector within the Division that caters for issues related to literacy. This would include services offered by the Specific Learning Difficulties Unit, the Foundation for Educational Services, and the Complementary Education Unit. The Group strongly emphasises that there needs to be strong and clear collaborative links between this sector and the Directorate responsible for students services.

There should also be closer coordination and collaboration between all stakeholders, especially schools, parents/carers, students and relevant entities such as CDAU, MATSEC Board, Higher Education institutions, and the Employment and Training Corporation.

6.4 IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Heads of schools and teachers who do not possess the basics of providing learning support to students with IENs cannot effectively guide new support assistants who have not received induction training, and to whom IEN provision would be totally alien, as they are not trained to offer a differentiated programme of education. Suitable and clearly time-framed in-service training, therefore, should be offered by the Education Division, utilising its own qualified and experienced staff as well as resources from outside the Division.

Such training should also ensure that strengths inherent in the teaching resources base are shored up and enhanced.

6.5 LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS - TRAINING AND UPGRADING

The Parallel Programme should include a certificate course to upgrade learning support assistants who do not hold a diploma. The course should be structured in such a way as to take into account experience to date and gaps and deficiencies within that experience. This should be done in the context of the objective to correlate qualifications and training more directly with the requirements and needs of inclusive and special education. The courses should be credited towards the diploma programme, which their recipients should be obliged to follow in due course.

To add inducement to obligation, the Working Group feels, individuals who pursue such courses could be given a one-off increment at the end of their course, subject to satisfactory completion. Conversely, anyone who refuses to participate in upgrading through the certificate course proposed above should have their contract of employment reconsidered.

At another level, the exclusion of facilitators and other support learning assistants from post-school hours professional development sessions for teachers, held each term, should be reviewed. Support learning personnel would benefit from attending such sessions, and thereby be able to improve the quality of their support. Compensating them, too, for the limited hours of post-school attendance should not cost the public coffers more than a few thousand liri annually.

The Group shares the concern expressed to it regarding how many facilitators - let alone untrained learning support staff - there may be who are capable of working with older students, not just young students, and also over the lack of training offered to provide for IENs within that area.

6.6 INDUCTION TRAINING

The present practice of placing in class, prior to induction, inexperienced and untrained SKAs (reminiscent of the deployment of emergency teachers fifty years ago) should be stopped without delay. It was explained to the Working Group that this practice was a precaution to minimise the risk that newly recruited SKAs who gave up their job soon after they were recruited, would thereby waste the investment made in them through the induction course.

The Group disagrees with this approach. It believes that, prior to placement, an induction course - and, where possible, a job-shadowing experience - should be mandatory for all learning support assistants.

6.7 MISMATCHING

The inherent probability of mismatching supply of learning support to needs should be addressed in the Parallel Programme. Church schools match assistance to students and, in some schools, match subject speciality as well. New ways need to be explored whereby there is matching in State schools. One may consider the possibility of schools advertising vacant posts and interviewing candidates themselves. In this way, a school's senior management can match the needs of each student to the competencies of the applicant.

There is no established handing-over procedure when students move up in their school, when they change schools, when they advance to the secondary level, or when the learning support assistant is changed. There is practically no continuity. Though records are generally kept and MAP sessions are held, documentation is not regularly circulated among the main stakeholders. Furthermore, meetings between stakeholders are, at best, sporadic.

A continuity gap is particularly evident in the case of support staff hailing from Gozo and working in Malta, usually waiting for the first opportunity to be transferred to their island home when a vacancy arises there.

6.8 TEMPORARY ABSENCE OF LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS

An operational gap, detailed in Section 5, arises out of the temporary absence of learning support assistants. The Group feels that a suitably restructured SMP should recommend, at the statementing stage, whether a student can remain in class during the rare occasions when the class learning support assistant is temporarily absent. This should, at least, ensure that instances of students who cannot stay in a mainstream class without direct support is substantially reduced. A system should be developed whereby, when the learning support assistant in a class of a student statemented to require support at all times is absent, the student is taken to the Resource Centre which normally outreaches that student.

The Working Group recommends that the Education Division establishes and implements a clear procedure to address these and other possible gaps, to ensure smooth continuity.

6.9 RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS

To remove confusion and set direction in respect of learning support provision, clear guidance should be given at the recruitment stage to facilitators and other support providers that they are required to give support, along with the class teacher and other colleagues, in the education of all students in the class. They should always be directly involved in drawing up IEPs and, when necessary, support students with a disability in their personal care and hygiene.

The job description in calls for applications, as well as agreed conditions of work, offer such guidance, but there should be better application of the specified conditions. The job description of non-facilitator learning support assistants should be reviewed, through the relevant industrial relations process. It should be redesigned to include listing of high-incidence and most-demanding personal needs, like those detailed in the job description of facilitators, including personal care and hygiene, lifting and handling of students.

This should take place whether or not the Group's recommendation to reposition the system is taken up. A policy regarding administering of medication should also be published and implemented without further delay.

6.10 RECRUITMENT

Immediate needs arising out of new or replacement requirements have to be catered for. The Working Group feels that the minimum qualifications for new support recruits should be increased straightaway, to at least two good passes in advanced matriculation subjects, or comparable qualifications. Strict assessment of applicants, against set criteria of competence, should be carried out without fail.

The Group was surprised to learn that the Education Division was proceeding with interviews of over 600 applicants to join the learning support service as SKAs, on the basis of the prevailing minimum threshold of four 'O' levels. The Group appreciates that short-term requirements have to be met, but feels that it is injudicious to try to meet them on a long-term basis using the same current approach once it is evident there should be critical changes, at least in the minimum entry requirements. The fact that there could tend to be dropping out and outward mobility after such recruitment cannot be a serious consideration in the context of formulating and revising.

The recruitment of non-qualified personnel has raised the total of learning support assistants in State schools from 779 learning support assistants in November 2004, to 858 in January 2005, as shown earlier in various tables, and on to 865 by end-February. The incoherence of the existing system, therefore, is becoming more entrenched. New calls for applications for learning support assistant positions should be based on a projection of the number of students with IENs, related to discernible trends. Calls should differentiate between different categories of needs, as well as different levels within the educational system (primary and secondary).

A clearer job description pertinent to the functions required from facilitators and other learning support staff should accompany any further calls for applications. Appraisal of applicants should ensure they are fully aware of what would be expected of them. The selection process should assess more critically applicants' suitability and disposition towards the post applied for.

6.11 CRITICAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Whatever upgrading takes place, it will remain necessary for the Education Division to carry out continuous, focused and critical monitoring and evaluation of the process of implementation of inclusive and special education policy.

The Group did not find convincing evidence that this is being done to the degree required by the demands of the issues in hand, and of the relatively high cost of meeting the objectives of such an important policy.

6.12 THE INDIVIDUALISED EDUCATION PLAN

According to the current Inclusive Education Policy (2000), an Individualised Education Plan should be drawn up for every student who has an impairment that interferes with his/her educational progress. The Working Group observed that to date, only one-third of the students currently have an IEP, due to the training gap prevailing within the range of learning support assistants.

This gap is commented upon above. The Group has made pertinent recommendations, which should be prioritised for early implementation.

The Group stresses the fact that IEPs should be drawn up by a team of people working with the student. These should include the school administration, class teacher, learning support assistant, parents, and, as much as possible, the student. Other professionals working with the students - such as, different therapists and the social worker - should be involved in drawing up the IEP. The IEP should be monitored and updated on an

ongoing basis. Support services should evolve according to what is decided and agreed upon in the IEP.

6.13 BEYOND REAL NEED

The Working Group recommends that the Parallel Programme should include an early review to determine whether learning support services at times continue to be extended even when they are no longer required - or wanted.

There could be instances where a student, thanks to the support and services received over the years, and to personal effort, aspires to independence and manifestly can do without further personal support - yet is not allowed to decline it.

More than just a waste of resources, the Working Group feels, this is an unwarranted intrusion in the life of an individual. Insisting on supplying support services in such a case can also be harmful to the person's development. Whereas the legal implications should be carefully looked into and suitably covered, the Group holds that the rights of a disabled individual start with the exercise of personal choice.

The essential purpose of all aspects of education, not least inclusive provision, is to promote the fullest possible individual achievement, development, independence and adaptability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises the right of young people to have special assistance to achieve self-reliance to lead a full and active life. The Working Group feels that there has to be more focused and ongoing critical overseeing to ensure that no aspect of inclusive and special education policy and provision instils or runs the danger of encouraging a culture of dependency, rather than promoting self-reliance.

To provide a student with support when it is not truly needed or beyond what is required, or maintaining it for longer than may be necessary, is harmful to the disabled student. That harm is more significant than the implied waste of human and financial resources through unwarranted support provision.

6.14 TRANSITION TO FURTHER EDUCATION AND THE ADULT WORLD

A test for inclusive education in an inclusive society is the extent to which students with IENs advance to, and through, further education. That the process is a very difficult one is evidenced by the low number, so far, of students with IENs attending the higher education sector. One should also take into account that, while there are students with disabilities who do progress without requiring any individualised support, it is a fact that, after the further sifting of the qualifying examinations to the secondary level, few students with IENs manage to advance to and from the secondary level.

Transition takes place at various stages of students' lives. Thus, the Group believes, the Parallel Programme should ensure that a transition plan is put in place for students with IENs, so as to smooth their progress from one level to another - that is, from home to kindergarten centres, to primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, and beyond into the adult world.

It has been reported to the Working Group that, when students with IENs move to a secondary school setting, the receiving schools are not always involved in the MAP sessions carried out at the end of the last scholastic year in the primary school. Moreover, when the receiving schools are involved they do not receive a copy of the MAP session report, and there is no follow-up session at the beginning of the next scholastic year. This gap should be effectively addressed, without delay.

The Group is of the opinion that the Parallel Programme should ensure that the stakeholders are involved at the major decision stages. MAP sessions should start

early enough in the school year, so as to ensure coordination between the different providers, and facilitate transition as much as possible.

In order to ensure that the transition to the adult world is as seamless as possible, the IEP of students aged fourteen and over should include appropriate transition provision - specifically, an Individualised Transition Plan (ITP).

The Working Group also believes that the need for a structured vocational educational programme for students with disability, becomes more evident at the post-secondary level. Most of disabled students at this level are not being prepared for the world of work, as is highlighted in the Salamanca Framework for Action (UNESCO 1994). This document states that:

“young people with special educational needs should be helped to make an effective transition from school to working life. Schools should assist them to become economically active and provide with the skills needed in everyday life, offering training in skills which respond to the social and communication demands and expectations of adult life”(page 34).

A document issued by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, entitled Transition from School to Employment, (October, 2002) states that:

“Vocational training is often not related to real employment practices; it often takes place in segregated provision and it is not usually oriented towards complex professions. People with disabilities don’t receive the appropriate qualifications required for employment “ (Page 12).

The Parallel Programme of action should ensure that the Education Division holds immediate discussions with post-secondary and tertiary education institutions. These discussions should explore and actuate new modules or courses that offer appropriate accreditation for disabled students (for example in Information Communication and Technology training). Such discussions should be held, within the appropriate framework, on an annual basis.

6.15 LEARNING SUPPORT IN FURTHER AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

Those students who do manage to progress to higher education institutions, also encounter difficulties, the likes of which are indicated in the submission to the Group by MCAST, included in the Annexe. In 2003/4 there were two profoundly deaf students who could not attend MCAST because the latter did not have enough resources to employ interpreters. In that year too, a severely disabled student could not be provided with the necessary support by MCAST. In 2004/5, a student (out of eight) dropped out of the MCAST Pathway to Independent Living course. His parents could not make the necessary arrangements for his transport.

The MCAST paper also reveals the barrier of limited resources. There were just three part-time support learning providers to facilitate support for students who may require it within nine MCAST Institutes.

The situation at MCAST, with the broad range of courses and training that it offers, which also broaden the possibilities to persons with a disability, requires more direct analysis, with a view to increasing the institution’s ability to provide more extensively for IENs. The Working Group recommends that such an analysis be carried out as soon as possible, as part of the Parallel Programme.

The descriptive submission by the University, which also highlights how the institution caters for individual educational needs, does not record similar resource barriers, though there are hearing-impaired individuals who assert that it is difficult for them

to undertake University studies. (On the other hand, a blind undergraduate is making steady progress through a demanding degree course.)

6.16 CAREER GUIDANCE

The Working Group believes that the gap between secondary and further education can be reduced if students with IENs are given adequate career guidance when they are preparing to leave school. Guidance teachers and counsellors need to be provided with further training in career guidance for disabled students.

Moreover, guidance teachers and counsellors should be specifically trained to acquire the skills necessary to support students with IENs in their personal, emotional and psychological needs. Training should also include sensitisation to the difficulties that students with particular impairments may encounter.

6.17 DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia, which is not usually classified as a disability unless it is very severe, seems to be a growing condition or, perhaps, a condition that is being identified much more than hitherto among the student population in the Maltese Islands. The Working Group noted that most schools are not equipped, and teaching staff are not at all adequately trained, to identify and cater appropriately for the implications of this situation.

The Group shares the view of experts in the field that consideration should be given to the setting up of learning zones in primary and secondary schools. Such zones would offer students the opportunity to follow programmes, designed according to their needs, for a stipulated period of time. The ultimate aim of such programmes should always be the reintegration of students in their mainstream class.

This would mean that, for the duration of the special programme, students would lose out on the normal curriculum taught in their class. Such losses, however, can be compensated for. In any event, dyslexic students who are unable to follow along with the rest of the class would still lose out on their education provision. The Working Group noted, in this regard, that the SpLD Unit has successfully tried out a pilot project with a small group of students. These students, accompanied by their parents/carers, attended tuition at the Unit on how to learn in their own way. This model can be examined further as part of the Parallel Programme.

The Unit guides parents on how their children can develop the necessary coping skills. The Group also noted that SpLD offers training for school staff on a voluntary basis. The Group recommends that such training should be made obligatory for all educators. This requirement is particularly relevant in the context that the clear objective of intensive provision for a short span of time, as recommended above, is reintegration in the mainstream. Once the student is placed there again, SpLD specialist staff should work with school staff to coordinate effective education provision. For this reason too, therefore, it is essential that teachers should have basic training in support to dyslexic students.

6.18 EXAMINATIONS

The Working Group encountered widespread concern among parents of students with dyslexia, or other learning difficulties, regarding how examinations at every level are modified for such children, in particular at SEC and MATSEC level. The Group suggested to the Special Needs Committee (SNC) of the University to make available clearer information regarding examination requirements to the general public. The SNC provided the Group with a relevant note, which is included in the Annex.

The Group noted inconsistencies between the special examination arrangements made for students with IENs by the MATSEC Board and the real individual educational needs of the students. Such arrangements do not always recognise in full individual capabilities.

The Group recommends that the MATSEC Board examines more pro-actively measures and arrangements considered as best practice in other countries. Whereas any form of assessment should be of the highest standard, more relevant modifications need to be made to recognise the capabilities of all students with IENs.

The Working Group noted that, currently, the special arrangements for both SEC and MATSEC examinations are generally assessed by the appropriate professionals, such as the School Psychological Service, the Specific Learning Difficulties Unit, and also by professionals within the private sector. Then, the cases are referred to the Special Needs Committee at the University for their consideration and recommendations to the MATSEC Board regarding special examination arrangements. Due to this process, the School Psychological Services and the Specific Learning Difficulties unit dedicate a substantial amount of their time to such assessments. The Group recommends that these assessments be carried out by a specifically set up psychological services unit at the University.

The Group feels that the phenomenon of a perceived rising trend of dyslexia requires specific analysis, both as regards its extent as well as the manner in which it is being - or not being - addressed. In addition to the above recommendations, the Group recommends that the Education Division carries out an in-depth study and action plan focusing on this situation. This should be an early part of the Parallel Programme.

6.19 GIFTED CHILDREN

A policy of inclusive education should also provide for children with intellectual abilities that are well above the norm, or gifted children. Not only is no such provision to be found in Malta, a very difficult task in itself, but there seems to be no identification of such circumstances. Systematic screening is not yet in place.

It is unlikely that, whereas some other societies reckon that around one in one thousand students tend to be gifted, there is not a broadly similar incidence in the Maltese Islands. That implies that there may be around 70 gifted students out of the total of students receiving their education in State and other schools.

Whereas this number may not be statistically significant, no person is a number and every individual's worth is important to the person and to society in general.

The lack of knowledge regarding, and provision for, gifted children because they are not adequately identified, reinforces the Working Group's endorsement of a widespread view that multi-disciplinary screening at key stages, and differentiated teaching throughout have to be extensively reinforced. This should be catered for in the Parallel Programme.

6.20 PARENTS' COSTS

The Working Group took due note that, as announced in the Budget Speech for 2005 parents of children receiving their education in Independent schools who require the services of a learning support assistant, and whose need is confirmed under the stipulated statementing procedure, are now being given income tax relief on their payment for such services.

The Group recommends that consideration should be given to the State funding of the individual needs support service in Independent schools, on the same

basis as it does with regard to Church schools, both in terms of a more focused statementing process as recommended earlier, and of financing. The Group makes this recommendation conscious of the need to husband public financial resources. Yet, it believes that, apart from justification in terms of social justice, the marginal cost to the public purse should be insignificant.

As things stand, parents of a child with IENs who, notwithstanding the tax relief that is now offered to them, cannot afford the additional cost of learning support in an Independent school would send their child to a State or a Church school. Thus, the cost of the service is met out of public finances. The marginal cost of paying for learning support assistants in Independent schools, if not actually zero, should therefore be minimal.

Those who can afford to pay may still prefer to get the services of their own handpicked support provider, and partly offset their outlay with benefit from tax relief. The main beneficiaries would be parents/carers who, to meet the after-tax cost of a learning support assistant, have to take on inordinate economic activity, perhaps dual or/and multiple employment, quite possibly diminishing their ability to look after their disabled child and, perhaps, their other children.

The Group feels that there should be better dissemination of information to parents to increase awareness of services available to them, of rights as well as of obligations.

6.21 STATE FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO NGOS

The attention of the Group was drawn to the fact that the state allocates financial assistance to the Eden Foundation only, in regard to NGO provision for IENs, under an agreement “for the provision of services to children with disability” (April, 1996). There is recognition of and appreciation for the pioneering and ongoing work of the Foundation, which is non-profit making. Nevertheless, it was pointed out to the Group that such positive discrimination out of public funds is inequitable. On its part, the Eden Foundation reports that it incurs shortfalls notwithstanding the State’s contribution. It holds that it has not been given the recognition and State financial backing that it deserves.

If a social cost-benefit analysis is carried out, it is very probable that the State’s allocation to the Foundation, which has been diminishing in real terms, yields a positive return. That does not remove the equity factor (comparative treatment) raised by those who feel they, too, should be given State aid, nor does it address the consideration that parents should be free to choose education provision given by NGOs.

The Working Group suggests that, given the extent of provision within the State sector, the competing demand for assistance by NGOs, and the right of parents to be free to choose whenever possible, Government should review the agreement with the Eden Foundation, and how it allocates such financial resources, should be reviewed. It should determine how best to enable parents who select different programmes to benefit equitably from such public assistance.

To offer one possibility, Government could consider splitting the affordable allocation, such that part of it is directed equitably to private providers of support, and the balance be given directly to eligible parents, according to recognised just criteria, to allow them to choose according to their preferences.

While the Group recognises and respects parental right of choice, it reiterates most emphatically that state provision should be of the highest quality, thus enabling those who cannot afford to pay, or do not opt, for private provision, to access the highest quality provision of education possible.

7 Special Schools

As noted in Section 1 (Background), currently there are five special schools, a special annexe to a school in Gozo, and a crafts centre. These are:

Helen Keller School, for hearing and visually impaired students
 San Miguel School, for students with multiple disabilities
 Guardian Angel School, for students with severe intellectual disabilities
 Dun Manwel Attard School (Wardija), for students with moderate intellectual disabilities
 Mater Dei School for students, with emotional and behavioural difficulties
 St Patrick's Crafts Centre
 The Special Annexe in Gozo is in Prof. G. Aquilina School, Sannat

The Working Group feels that while, whenever possible, students with IENs should be provided inclusive education in a mainstream environment, special provision should continue to be made available for those who would gain more in a selective set-up and environment.

The Group, however, is of the opinion that the existing set-up of special schools, which provided for 286 students as on 31st January, 2005, should be restructured to develop them, as far as possible, into resource centres. This would optimise utilisation of valuable human and capital resources to provide support to inclusive mainstream schools, and in time, training to personnel in those schools.

The Group feels that such resource centres should have a multiplicity of roles, to be able to:

- provide for the individual needs of students who, because of the degree or nature of their disability, would benefit more from special education, while still having a set inclusion plan in their IEP;
- receive programmed visits by students with IENs in mainstream schools who can benefit from utilising the specialised resources in such centres;
- outreach with their resources to provide services in mainstream schools; and
- offer training to mainstream teachers, facilitators and other learning support assistants.

This would also be more in line with the Salamanca Statement (1994), of which Malta is a signatory, which also outlines the changing role of special schools. Such schools are seen in the Statement as

“a valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools...Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools...Special schools or units within inclusive schools may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools.”

Such a development would require a review and, where necessary, upgrading of staff deployed in the centres. Centres should be resourced increasingly by personnel specialised in providing for IENs. These should be led by specialist teachers, and include specifically trained learning support assistants, with a clear job description that covers caring for all the needs of the student. The resource centres should also be staffed by personal assistants, trained and charged to provide physical and personal care as may be required by students.

Existing resource gaps should be addressed. These gaps include the need for more frequent provision of physio, and speech and language therapy, as well as the

introduction of occupational therapy. Over the life of the Repositioning Plan, the Education Division should be allocated appropriate professional resources to give it control and enable it to deliver these services, according to the needs and exigencies of the education system.

Use of specialised resources and equipment should be part of the training and responsibilities of teaching and support staff providing specialised education in resource centres.

The job descriptions of the human resources allocated to special schools should be sector-specific and as clear as possible regarding the range of responsibilities that have to be satisfied by the various grades of staff. To reiterate the job descriptions of all support staff should include listing of high-incidence and most-demanding personal needs, including personal care and hygiene, lifting and handling of students. Job descriptions should correspond, where applicable, to the norms observable within the European Union.

The Working Group considers that the special unit in the Sannat School, Gozo, has clear potential to be turned into a resource centre with a multiplicity of functions. The Centre should be enabled to make available services that can also support more effectively programmed visiting by students from mainstream schools in Gozo.

The Group believes that the potential within the special school at Wardija could be utilised more efficiently if the school becomes a resource centre whose outreach speciality, within its multiplicity of roles, would be provision related to the autistic spectrum.

On no account should the centre be used as an easy first-stop to place students permanently in a segregated environment on account of their impairment.

The St Patrick's Craft Centre requires particular attention. It is neither a mainstream, nor a special school. It has no identity, with inevitable repercussions. The string of rooms in a good location, are in an unacceptable state, despite the staff's valiant efforts.

The Centre is not allocated proper maintenance resources, has no cleaning staff, not even a janitor. Its present teaching staff of two teachers and three instructors, in addition to from looking after a population of 40 students up to the age of 16 with emotional and behavioural difficulties (of whom around half usually turn up), have to clean and maintain the Centre themselves.

The Group feels that the set-up at the centre should be reviewed with urgency. It has the potential to become a learning centre for students with behaviour and emotional problems - following a specific programme for a stipulated period of time - with the aim of re-integration into mainstream education.

The Group emphasises that budgets allocated to resource centres would have to be adequate and the support for refurbishment available from the Foundation for Tomorrow's Schools more direct and urgent, even if one must appreciate the pressures on the Foundation's resources.

7.1 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Irrespective of whether or not special schools are converted into resource centres, the Working Group is of the opinion that management of special schools cannot remain structured as is the case to date, notwithstanding the many difficulties encountered by those who run them. The management structure and the level of maintenance resources allocated to this sector need to be critically reviewed.

The prevailing management structure is based on a general model too dependant on school population. The Group noted from its visits to the five special schools, the St

Patrick Craft Centre and the special annexe in Sannat that the management of staff in a special school is inherently very demanding since the teaching-and-support staff to pupil ratio is generally higher than in mainstream schools. School management would become even more demanding should special schools be turned into resource centres as proposed above.

The Group feels that, in addition to a head of school, special schools should be allocated an assistant head, as well as more clerical support time than is done at present.

The Working Group took note, as was also stressed by parents, that persons who reach the special schools leaving age - 19 - and who would benefit from moving to Adult Training Centres (ATCs) are not always able to do so. When student capacity at ATCs is taken up and the centres cannot accept additional clients, youths who have been attending a special school sometimes tend to remain in it.

The Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity provided the Group with up-to-date information on the scope and position of ATCs. The aims of ATCs, said the Ministry, is to give clients the support they need to have the best quality of life, and to offer their families with the respite and support they need.

As in April 2005 there were nine Centres, populated as shown below:

Table 10: Population in ATCs (31/04/05)

<i>Centre</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Support workers</i>
St Venera (for blind persons)	26	6
Fleur de Lys	69	18
Hal Far	88	29
Mtarfa (Two)	102	38
Marsascala	66	17
Pembroke	9	3
Cottonera	19	4
Swatar	14	4
Total	393	119

Source: MFSS

The Ministry advised the Group that an exercise is being carried out to establish the actual capacity of these Centres. Clients-to-workers ratios are worked out taking into consideration each individual client's needs. Some of the support workers are disabled persons themselves.

The centres impart the following skills: basic education; independent living skills; personal skills; cooking and food safety; crafts; gardening; drama and music; supported employment.

Amongst the problems encountered in regard of ATCs, the Ministry highlighted:

- lack of space, especially in the Mtarfa, Marsascala and Fleur de Lys Centres;
- lack of support workers to carry out the Individual Care Plans;
- lack of professional support workers;
- lack of adequate training to staff.

While ATCs are outside its remit, the Working Group feels that the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, within the competing wants for, and constraints of, public funds, has a priority claim to budgetary resources to be able to address at least the main requirements highlighted by it. That would also impact on the ability of special

schools to function more effectively and justly, whether in their present form or as resource centres.

Shortfalls in space, professional and other support workers, and training, restrict the flow of special school students to ATCs. This disadvantages such students, and simultaneously restricts new entry to special schools, since students not accommodated at an ATC at age 19, tend to stay on. The restriction is creating waiting lists. To these multiple unwelcome effects, one has to add the consideration that those who stay on in special schools after the official leaving age of 19, continue to share the same environment with younger, in some cases much younger, individuals.

The Group believes that appropriately resourced ATCs could provide another useful contribution to students with intellectual disabilities who leave special and mainstream schools. This can be done by transforming ATCs into adult resource centres that provide more extensively part- or full-time work opportunities, and meaningful community-based activities.

The Working Group noted that over-population in special schools does not apply across the board. In fact, a contrasting observation is that capacity and capabilities in some special schools might not always be fully utilised. The potential of the specialised resources in them is thereby underutilised, making for inefficiency in the economic sense. This reinforces the recommendation of the Group to turn special schools into resource centres with the multiple functions outlined above. This should maximise utilisation of scarce specialised human and capital resources at the points of highest individual need, and highest social return.

7.2 PROVIDING FOR HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS

The Helen Keller School presently caters for students with sensory and other impairments, and also offers outreach to students with hearing impairment in schools. Notwithstanding the track record of the school, and the fact that hearing-impaired students within the state educational sector are fewer than 100, the observable situation, confirmed by the submissions to the Working Group is less than satisfactory.

Those with a hearing impairment would find it easier to get effective education provision, in the special school as well as in inclusive mainstream school, if they have adequate technical aid and teaching assistance. Various parents emphasised to the Group that technical aid was inadequate.

With regard to teaching assistance, the Group noted that there is a scarcity of specialist teachers, made more acute by the dropping out, for one reason or another, of teachers trained in the teaching of the deaf. This, as well as dispersion of provision, restricts the ability of Helen Keller School to offer sufficient outreach.

Profoundly deaf students, in the majority, need an environment where communication can take place fluently. Since most of them communicate through sign language it is imperative that they are provided with an environment where this language is “spoken” and understood. The absence of minimal training to most education providers in sign language is also a barrier to social inclusion.

The Working Group recommends that the Education Division selects a number of primary and secondary mainstream schools that would contain a unit which would cater for profoundly deaf students. The unit would provide students with individualised support, while maintaining maximum access to mainstream classes and to other school provision.

It was suggested to the Group, by hearing-impaired students, that graduate speech therapists who are not absorbed in the State medical service be offered the

opportunity to undertake supplementary training so that they can be utilised to support hearing-impaired students.

The Working Group feels that these practical suggestions should be examined further in the Parallel Programme with a view to early implementation. It also believes that profoundly deaf students whose first language is Maltese Sign Language, making them a linguistic minority, should be provided by the Education Division with sign language interpreting, if they are to be offered appropriate support.

Moreover, more effort should be made in the Parallel Programme to improve the acoustics in classrooms attended by hearing-impaired students, and also to meet without undue delay the needs of hearing-impaired students in regard to hearing and other technical aids. The Education Division should also find a solution, through the appropriate industrial relations channels, to the difficulties encountered by students whose teachers decline to wear radio aids essential for them to be able to follow the lesson.

7.3 PROVISION FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

Blind and visually impaired students have various needs that require a range of services, such as, mobility guides, readers, braille instruction, computer access etc.

Though the incidence of this impairment is relatively low, specialised teachers, especially in mobility training and braille, are a must. At present there is no one teaching mobility to blind persons. The blind community recently lost the services of the only braille instructor in the public service. A teacher of braille is due to retire soon. Thus, there will soon be no one qualified to teach braille in the Maltese islands.

The Working Group recommends that, as part of the Repositioning Plan, a training programme should be devised and implemented so that these services be provided by the Helen Keller School which the Group has recommended should evolve into a resource centre.

7.4 SCHOOL TRANSPORT

The Working Group observed that the Education Division has two sections on transport with separate roles. One is responsible to provide transportation to students attending mainstream and special schools. The other, to purchase and maintain the Division's vehicles including tail-lift vans owned by the Division. Co-ordination between the two sections is not adequate.

Escorts of disabled students are the school's responsibility. Staff members whose duty it is to escort students who use wheelchairs have no guidance and training to perform this job.

The Group recommends that there should be one Transport Section within the Education Division to cater for the needs of all students, with properly trained personnel responsible to:

- a. hire escorts for disabled students, and train them to identify and use the right equipment needed for the various types of wheelchairs/buggies, and the use of passenger restraints;
- b. prepare evacuation plans and drills;
- c. ensure that contracts for transport to mainstream schools, now committed to inclusion, should be awarded to providers who have an adequate number of

vehicles which are accessible to all, including wheelchair users; and work towards the objective that, within the period of the Parallel Programme, all school transport shall be accessible to all, including wheelchair users;

- d. along with the Health and Safety Unit of the Division, perform risk assessments on the Division's vehicles transporting schoolchildren, including tail-lift vans, and also all hired vehicles;
- e. ensure the proper upkeep of vehicles;
- f. from time to time give Division drivers in-service training;
- g. form policies, and update them from time to time.

More generally, the recommended single Transport Section within the Education Division should carry out an early review of transportation practice concerning, but not restricted to, students with a disability. It should also assess safety systems that ought to be in use, to what extent escorts are specifically trained and supervised, and critically evaluate other factors that relate to safeguarding against hardship and accidents.

The Working Group feels that coordination by one Transport Section, should bring about a better, more efficient and cost effective service than the fragmented system currently being used. It notes that the financial outlay on transport to special and mainstream schools in respect of students with a disability is rising, without evidence of correspondingly higher satisfaction of needs. One should examine whether, if the recurrent cost of private provision is capitalised, the resulting amount can be utilised to give a better service, under proper management. The exercise can determine whether private provision should be acquired at less cost.

Various parents referred to the transport situation in non-State schools. They feel that students with a disability enrolled in these schools are also experiencing considerable difficulty, or finding it impossible, to get suitable transport to school. This situation, at times, imposes too heavy a burden on parents in terms of financial outlay, and time to get their children to and from school (especially in the case of working parents).

The Group believes that consideration should be given to extend State-financed school transport, reviewed as at (c) above, to children with a disability who attend non-State schools. The additional cost should be relatively marginal. It would also be zero in cases where parents, because of such difficulties, would be constrained to transfer their children to State schools.

7.5 PUBLIC-PARENT PARTNERSHIP

Finally, the Working Group wishes to go somewhat beyond its remit to record a genuine and deeply felt concern of a significant number of parents/carers of disabled children, who are apprehensive over what will happen to their children when they are no longer able to care for them. Some parents/carers informed the Group that they would be ready to strive to put together the capital required to build a suitable small group home, whatever the sacrifice that would involve for them. However, funding the recurrent costs, even if these were to be carefully controlled, would still be beyond them.

The Group feels that the public-private partnership model, as it applies to caring for senior citizens in private retirement homes, could be adapted to this proposal. This could be done, through what might be termed a Public-Parent Partnership, provided that:

- priorities are set at a national level within the context of evolving public social policy; and
- there is fair, but strict, regulation and monitoring at all levels.

In this case too, the marginal cost to the state should not be as high as one might feel at first blush, since disabled persons dependent on individual care could eventually require full-time state provision.

Finding the right balance and formula would require deeper evaluation. There does seem to be, however, potential for a non-commercial type of public-private co-operation through the proposed Public-Parent Partnership.

The return that parents crave on their financial outlay is not monetary, but peace of mind stemming from the knowledge that support to their disabled children will continue to be provided long after they are unable to give it themselves.

8 Revising the Legal Framework

The Working Group feels that, whereas action to make inclusive and special education more effective and efficient has to be prioritised, some changes in the legal framework, including the Constitution, are called for.

The Constitution of Malta refers to education under three articles, all included within the Declaration of Principles.

Two articles - 10 and 11 - under 'Education' refer to education in general:

10. "Primary education shall be compulsory, and shall be free of charge."
11. (1) "Capable and deserving students, even if without financial resources, are entitled to attain the highest grades of education."
(2) "The State shall give effect to that principle by means of scholarships, of contributions to the families of students and other provision on the basis of competitive examinations."

The only reference in the Constitution to disabled persons is included in the 'Social and Insurance' section, under Article 17:

17. (3) "Disabled persons, and persons incapable of work are entitled to education and vocational training."

The Working Group feels that, in general, the Constitution should be more specific about provision - and not just entitlement - of education to persons with a disability. For example, the Constitution of Slovakia guarantees "special care for handicapped citizens in preparation for their career". Amendments to Malta's Constitution should incorporate more suitable language, and specify the principle of inclusion.

Unlike various other countries - for instance, Cyprus - Malta does not have one specific law regarding students with IENs.

As observed in Section 1 (Background), specific provisions regarding education for students with IENs are found in the Education Act, 1988 and the Equal Opportunities (Persons With Disability) Act, 2000.

The references in the Education Act - including, the Group would point out, two provisions that actually *exclude* children with special educational needs from the mainstream - are:

4. "(b) It shall be the duty of the State to provide a system of schools and institutions accessible to all Maltese citizens catering for the full development of the whole personality...";
16. "(1) It shall be the duty of the State to provide for the primary education of the children of Maltese citizens being of compulsory school age who do not have special educational needs, or who have not qualified for secondary education."
17. "It shall be the duty of the State to provide for the secondary education of the children of Maltese citizens who have completed their primary education and who do not have special educational needs.
18. "(1) It shall be the duty of the State to provide special schools for the children of Maltese citizens being minor children having special educational needs.

(2) A minor shall be deemed to have special educational needs when that minor has special difficulties of a physical, mental or psychological nature.”

The Group feels that the above legal provisions need to be critically reviewed and revised.

The provisions in Articles 16 and 17 excluding children with special educational needs from State mainstream secondary are an antithesis to a policy of inclusion and have become anachronistic. The terms providing for exclusion should be deleted and replaced by terms specifically providing that children with individual educational needs should, as far as possible, be provided with education in primary and secondary schools, suitably enabled to provide for these needs.

Article 18 (1) should be amended such that, in line with the recommendation made by the Working Group in Sections 6 and 7, it shall refer to “provision in resource centres, whose specialised role will include provision for children with individual educational needs who would benefit more from being in such centres than in mainstream schools, for such time as may be appropriate depending on their needs”.

Article 18 (2) should be replaced by a definition applicable to all three related Articles: i.e. 16, 17 and 18. The definition should read: “a physical, sensory, intellectual or psychological nature”.

The Group recommends that this part of the Education Act should also stipulate the obligation of non-State educational institutions to provide inclusive education. It should also register an undertaking by the State to provide adequate financial resources to cover individual or shared learning support that parents may be required to pay for directly in Independent schools, subject to the procedures applicable in the State and Church sectors, and to appropriate regulation.

Once the Constitution is made more assertive regarding inclusive and special education, and the Education Act is amended along the lines recommended above, it should be even less necessary to enact specific legislation, as is the case in some other countries. It would nevertheless be desirable to monitor and evaluate, on an ongoing basis, both local developments as well as models and experiences elsewhere, over and above the obligation of education authorities to carry out operational monitoring and evaluation.

The Working Group suggests, therefore, that consideration should be given to establishing a Standing Committee of the House of Representatives on Disability Issues, enabled with adequate support resources. Among its main objectives, the Standing Committee on Disability Issues would:

- monitor and evaluate how prevailing legal provisions regarding disabled persons, including education, are being implemented;
- keep track of relevant developments in progressive foreign societies, particularly in relatively small countries, like Eire, Cyprus and Iceland;
- keep abreast of best current practice in the sector;
- report its observations to the House at least once a year; and
- recommend to the House new legislative provisions that it feels may be necessitated by philosophical and practical developments, both in Malta and abroad.

The Group further suggests that such a standing committee should be chaired by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to reflect and confirm its inclusive national character and objectives.

9 Crossing the Workplace Desert

Article 1 of the Constitution of Malta declares that:

“Malta is a Republic founded on work and on respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual”.

The Declaration of Principles in the Constitution starts with the declaration (Article 7) that the State:

“recognises the right of all citizens to work and shall promote such conditions as will make this right effective”.

Article 21 of the Education Act, 1988 specifies that:

“It shall be the duty of the State, having provided for the education of Maltese citizens to enable them to form their own independent judgement, to establish such scholastic facilities which the State may deem necessary to provide those citizens with the opportunity to qualify in trade, skills, artisan or technical or commercial activities, and in the professions in order to prepare, instruct and instil discipline in those citizens for work in the community.”

The right to work is irrevocably related to education. A main purpose of education is to prepare one to exploit and even to create opportunities for oneself in the workplace according to one’s abilities and aptitudes. It is a basic aim of educational services to prepare disabled persons for “employment and recreation opportunities” (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

The Madrid Declaration (of the European Congress on People with a Disability, 2002), too, stresses that:

“all communities should celebrate the diversity within their communities and seek to ensure that disabled people can enjoy the full range of human rights: civil, political, social, economical and cultural...”

There is always some gap between declarations and implementation of principles. In the case of persons with a disability, the gap between the right to work and actually finding work does not seem to be diminishing. In the 1969 Employment (Handicapped Persons) Act, Maltese legislators established that employers of more than 20 persons were obliged to include a minimum number of disabled persons equivalent to a “quota” or “standard percentage” of two per cent. It is an observable reality that this requirement is honoured more in the breach than in observance.

Whereas the Employment and Training Corporation, and the National Statistics Office are working to collate employment data on disabled persons in employment, this area has yet to be filled out in considerably more detail to permit fuller analysis of the prevailing situation.

The Working Group noted that there are no tracer studies in respect of disabled school leavers, a gap which the Group feels should be addressed.

A key point stressed by parents of disabled students was that, for their children, transiting to the workplace was like trying to cross an unending desert, hardly ever alleviated by an oasis of any description. This is reflected, even if paradoxically, in the evident pride with which educators - particularly in special schools - mention that a few individual students manage to find part-time, at times also full-time paid work.

A Labour Force Survey (LFS) carried out by the NSO in June 2002, indicated that out

of 147,871 persons in employment, 7,226 - or 4.89% - claimed to be with disability or long-standing health problems. Of those who made such a claim, 1,738 were employed in government departments or ministries.

This contrasts, the Group noted, with the result of an exercise carried out in August 2002 by the Office of the Prime Minister to establish the number of registered disabled persons employed in the Public Service.

The result was made available to the Working Group by the Principal Permanent Secretary. It showed that there were 174 Public Service employees who were registered as disabled persons with the KNPD, or 0.6% of the total of the 30,644 employees in the Service.

The total of 174 KNPD-registered disabled employees in the Public Service is minute, compared with the 1,738 employees in Government departments and ministries who claimed to be disabled, and were classified as such, in the NSO Labour Force Survey of 2002.

This contrast casts doubts on, to what extent, the rest of the 7,226 who, in the NSO survey, claimed disability or long-standing health problems, can be termed as disabled in the sense of this Report. The number of really disabled persons in employment was, probably, very much lower.

Disaggregating employment data should gradually permit a clearer picture of the real number of disabled persons in employment to emerge. It is a fact, however, that there are, month after month, several hundred registrants on the ETC Register of Unemployed Disabled Persons (322 at the end of 2004).

The Working Group agrees with parents of disabled students that the inclusive and special education process must not lead to an employment desert. It is not enough to stress that disabled persons should be recognised for their positive potential, rather than be rejected, frequently with blind prejudice.

There ought to be awareness among employers that, whatever the different colour of our personal make-up, all of us together make up the rainbow of humanity. If it did not include each one of us, the rainbow would be incomplete.

The Group holds that there should be far more stringent enforcement of those provisions that seek to extend to students and other persons with a disability the opportunity to transit to the workplace, and to make their contribution to it through suitable gainful employment.

Employers should be spurred to follow the example of those among them who spurn prejudice, and uninformed reluctance, to recognise that, to provide opportunities to disabled persons, is not only morally correct and fair, but also enriches their workforce and economic operation.

9.1 PUBLIC SECTOR LEAD

The Working Group also considers that the public sector should give a lead towards that direction.

The Group notes that the Public Service does have a positive policy regarding the employment of persons with a disability.

The Group was advised that, according to that policy, if a registered disabled person does not satisfy the eligibility requirements in calls for applications, but is, nevertheless, capable of carrying out in essence the duties attached to a particular post/position, such a person may ask for special consideration, when applying.

The Group was also advised that a procedure exists in the Public Service Management Code, to be followed in such cases.

The Working Group is of the opinion that, given the very large size of the Public Service, it can fulfil a more active role in providing employment opportunities for disabled persons.

Around 1,000 persons leave the Service each year, due to retirements, resignations, medical boarding out, dismissals or death. The Group suggests that a number of openings created thereby could, in the first instance, be offered to persons registering as disabled with the ETC, and who may be in possession of the basic requirements to fill such vacancies.

Should it be necessary, Public Service recruitment regulations can be reviewed to permit for this possibility.

9.2 CONCLUSION

The above suggestion, regarding making public sector employment opportunities more accessible to disabled persons, is to be seen in its full context.

The suggestion is by no means intended to diminish the fact that the top and abiding priority of provision - to satisfy individual educational needs - must remain the fullest appreciation and development of the positive qualities and potential of each individual.

Nor should the suggestion divert attention from the fact that there has to be a dynamic and consistent approach to utilise and build upon such qualities, and to realise the potential through inputs that consistently add value and enable the individual to reach the highest achievable degree of self-reliance.

The Working Group on inclusive and special education affirms that, only in this way, can the rightful and irrefutable demands of the disabled individual for self-realisation and human dignity, be satisfied.

