EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN POST-COLONIAL MALTA:
CHALLENGES FOR A MEDITERRANEAN MICRO-STATE

RONALD G. SULTANA
Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

Abstract—This article presents a critical and evaluative account of the growth of educational provision in the small Mediterranean island of Malta. Education is defined not only in terms of its contribution to the economy, as in human capital theory, but also in terms of its facilitation of human development generally, as defined in the United Nations Development Programme. Both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the educational service are therefore addressed, and it is pointed out that the tardiness and accelerated nature of educational development in this post-colonial micro-state has led to a number of challenges. These are described and placed within the economic, political, social and cultural context that currently defines the Maltese islands. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

INTRODUCTION

Education can be considered as one among a number of features of a social formation that contribute to human development. The latter is conceived differently by a number of development agencies, depending on their respective philosophies and ideological orientations. The United Nations Development Programme (1995), for instance, thinks of human development in terms of a particular goal, that of creating 'an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives', widening people's choices and increasing the level of their achieved well-being. Besides health care, political freedom, guaranteed human rights and self-respect, education figures highly as a contributing element to the fulfilment of these aspirations. Agencies such as the World Bank, for instance, adopt a human capital framework and tend to look at people as a means to an end, that is as inputs to increasing production. In this model (cf. Schultz, 1961), education is an industry which generates the desired amounts of functional manpower, so that the development of educated and skilled people, their number, quality and utilization, is the most meaningful index of the wealth-production capacity of a country. Education produces an increase in general and in job-specific knowledge which individuals can subsequently apply in an expanding economy, both to better utilize new technical developments and to generate innovations. The result is a marked pay-off in terms of increased production, yielding greater national wealth, corporate profits and individual wages (cf. Sobel, 1978; Sultana, 1994a; Violas, 1981).

Human capital theory approaches have been very influential in Malta— from the post-war period (Balogh and Seers, 1955) to the present day (cf. Sultana, 1992a, pp. 2, 159, 289), irrespective of whoever was in government, and as is evident in the various Development Plans that closely link education with economic progress (Baldacchino, 1993; Sultana, 1992a). What I intend to do in this article is to associate myself rather more closely with the less technocratic, more emancipatory definition of education that is intimated by the UNDP perspective, in order to consider both quantitative and qualitative issues in educational provision in Malta. Adopting such a framework leads one to ask: 'How has educational expansion increased the well-being of Maltese citizens?' Of course, the quantitative dimension of the question is rather more easily addressed, given that 'all' it requires is a set of statistics to measure the trends and direction in the delivery of the service. The qualitative dimension, signalled by the woolly phrase 'well-being' of people, is much more subjective and less amenable to measurement. But for all that, the UNDP approach would have us insist, it is no less important. Indeed, the treatment of people as 'human capital', as units that contribute to production, obfuscates and mystifies the relationship that exists between education and production on the one hand, and domination and
exploitation on the other. Indeed, research has tended to show that rather than leading to well-being, education systems are directly involved in selecting and stratifying people—often on criteria that have more to do with class, race, and gender than 'objective' intellectual ability—and then channelling particular categories of students towards specific locations in a segmented labour market. Some of these segments are, of course, characterized by work conditions and remunerative capacities that lead to healthy, creative life-styles. But others are not, and schools are directly implicated in the 'cooling out' of groups of students who are thus channelled towards the less lucrative and fulfilling sectors in the economy. One striking way of putting this is to claim that education systems are predicated on a logic of success for some, and failure for others. For, if we had to imagine an educator's dream to come true, that is that all students successfully complete a course of study, how would society be able to select, park and store all these students in the job hierarchy?

This explains why educational sociologists in the post-war period have consistently argued that education systems should be considered as systems of violence rather more than of development, arguments that have been tested empirically by Maltese educational sociology researchers such as Darmanin and Sultana (cf. bibliography). Given that I am in agreement with the UNDP perspective, I will, in what follows, give an overview of both the quantitative and qualitative growth in education provision, and raise issues and draw conclusions related to the problematic relationship between both. This is particularly important not only in terms of the exercise of providing the education component of the human development index, but also because current official discourse in the field of educational development and policy making in Malta is steeped in quantitative rather than qualitative considerations, a point that has been made by the Minister of Education and Human Resources' consultative body in the report Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures (Wain et al., 1995).

**QUANTITATIVE EXPANSION OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION**

Malta's educational development is characterized by retarded growth when compared with the expansion of mass educational provision at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the rest of Europe and the United States. The Compulsory Education Ordinance, making primary education obligatory for children between 6 and 14 years, was only passed in 1946, a full century after mass elementary education had been made available in most European countries. Secondary education for all came even later, in 1970. Tertiary education—which in Malta is tantamount to university education, and which dates back 2 centuries—has only recently been opened up to wider access, with numbers quadrupling from 1337 in 1983 to over 6200 in 1995. Such tardiness in quantitative development of educational services can be accounted for in terms of a number of factors, chief among these being the colonial status of the islands under the British, the reactionary influence of the anti-reform party of the 1880s, whose adherents saw education as a threat to their cultural and class interests, and the fear of an equally reactionary church that derived much of its power by feeding on popular ignorance, and which conflated education provision under British rule with Protestant proselytism (Sultana, 1992a). The underdevelopment of industry and the slow pace of state formation under colonial government meant that effective movements in favour of mass education were generally weak or absent, and Malta's educational history is marked rather more by rhetorical appeals for the schooling of society—on the part of local and visiting commissioners (such as we find in the Storks Report of 1865, in the Keenan Report of 1880, and in the Mowatt Commission Report of 1912) or the enlightened activities by such visionaries as Manwel Dimech (Zammit Marmara, 1997) and Dun Gorg Preca (Sultana, 1996a)—than by steady and planned development.

Despite such tardiness in development, local educational provision, considered in 'quantitative' terms, is ahead of that prevailing in developing countries, and in most cases compares quite favourably with small island states that have a similarly peripheral, intermediately developed economy. Indeed, at various points in this article I will draw comparisons with Cyprus, Fiji and Barbados, which like Malta are characterized by a low manufacturing capacity and limited natural resources, and have a similar scale of population. Like Malta, all three islands were British colonies, and all gained their independence at about the same time. Malta's educational system generally
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compares well—again in quantitative terms, and at the first and second level— with provision in more industrially developed nations, among them the United Kingdom and Italy, whose systems have had a great influence on our own.

In a matter of two and a half decades, considerable progress in educational provision has been achieved at a relatively fast pace. This is true in terms of both the overall reach of the educational service, and in terms of the repertoire of educational programmes the service offers. Taking 1970 as a watershed year since it saw the introduction of secondary education for all, today's students generally start school earlier and stay longer. The pre-primary sector, which started catering for 4-year-olds since 1977, and for 3-year-olds since 1988, now services 95% and 90% of each respective age group (Education Division, 1994). This is ahead of similar provision facilities in Mediterranean EU member states, namely Greece, Spain and Portugal, and better than Germany, and the U.K., which school up to 75'70 of their 4-year-olds (European Commission, 1995. p. 10). Maltese students are increasingly participating in post-secondary and tertiary education. Only 60% of each age cohort are in the former sector, compared with 80% of young people in EU member states who obtain an upper secondary school-leaving certificate (European Commission, 1995, p. 30). However, 15% of each age cohort of Maltese students, or 8.2% of all Maltese students and pupils (excluding those in preschool establishments) go to university. The relative share of higher education varies according to the Member States from 9% to 16% (European Commission, 1995, p. 33).

This expansion of services is reflected in a series of tables outlining a variety of aspects of educational provision on the island from 1970 onwards. Tables 1, 2 and 4 generally point to an upward curve, disrupted by a ‘dip’ in the early 1980s as the Labour Administration intensified its austerity measures and revised its education expansion policies.

More students get credentials at the second and third level of schooling (Table 3), and a wider variety of courses is available, especially at university level (Table 4).

Educational services have generally increased, with curriculum developments in personal and social education, health education, media education, information technology (to which the 1995 budget allocates Lm2 million), and environmental education at the first and second levels of schooling. Between 1985/1986 and 1992/1993, there has been an increase in the total teaching staff from 4868 (catering for 80,459 students) to 6321 (catering for 96,500 students), which works out to an overall teacher ratio capacity of 1:16.5 pupils and 1:15.3 pupils respectively. The same time period has seen an increase in the numbers of institutions in the educational system (from 273 to 316); in students following full-time education (from 74,547 to 87,816), and part-time and evening education (from 5912 to 8684) (Education Statistics, 1992/1993). Generally speaking, the teacher/pupil ratio, according to UNESCO statistics for 1992, works out to 1:17 at the pre-primary level, 1:21 at the first level, and 1:13 at the secondary level (hence scoring better than Fiji and Barbados, but generally as well as Cyprus and the U.K., and less well than Italy). Illiteracy levels, as high as 75% in 1911 and 42.5% in 1948 (UNESCO Compendium of Statistics on Illiteracy, No. 30, Paris 1988), are down to 10% according to the 1985 Census, and one expects that the 1995 Census will show that illiteracy in Malta has been more or less eradicated among the post-independence generation.

Private education, positively considered by neo-liberal economists in terms of increasing the possibility of parental choice, decreasing the burden on state budgets, and acting as a competitive market that encourages the state to improve its own services, has also expanded. In 1985/6 there were 90 private education institutions catering for 20,997 full-time and 492 part-time students; by 1992/3 there were 111 institutions catering for 23,905 full-time and 2265 part-time students (Table 5).

Overall, private institutions cater for 28.9% of Malta's students in compulsory education. While the majority of these are state-subsidized, free catholic church schools, some are independent, fee-paying institutions.²

One should also consider the informal and non-formal sectors of educational provision in order to gauge more fully the opportunities for

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Table 1 Post-secondary education between 1970 and 1993

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2746</td>
<td>3167</td>
<td>2602</td>
<td>3487</td>
<td>3751</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Reports of Working of Government Dept. and Education Statistics of the respective years
Table 2. Tertiary education between 1970 and 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>1042</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>1408</td>
<td>2511</td>
<td>6200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCAST</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training College</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1359</td>
<td>1686</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>1408</td>
<td>2511</td>
<td>6200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Reports of the Working of Government Department and Education Statistics of the respective years (adapted from Mallia, 1994).

Table 3. Number of students who sat for 'O' and 'A' level examinations: Summer session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'O' level English</td>
<td>1749</td>
<td>2989</td>
<td>2870</td>
<td>3273</td>
<td>4074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'A' Level</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'O' Level Maths</td>
<td>1214</td>
<td>2087</td>
<td>2039</td>
<td>2348</td>
<td>3186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'A' Level</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'O' Level Maltese</td>
<td>1444</td>
<td>2164</td>
<td>2495</td>
<td>2634</td>
<td>3160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'A' Level</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'O' Level Physics</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>1419</td>
<td>1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'A' Level</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources. Reports of the workings of government department of various years, examination results at the Examination Branch and matriculation results at the Matsec Support Unit (collected by Mallia, 1994).
*Since no data was available for the year 1970, reference had to be made to 1969.

Table 4. Number of degree and diploma courses offered by the university between 1970 and 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Learning that are available in Malta, that is, in UNDP terms, the opportunities for citizens to discover and realize their creative potential. The 'informal education' sector refers to educational influences and resources available to individuals in the environment, such as family, neighbours, workplace and leisure, in the market, the library and through the mass communication media (Hallak, 1990, p. 6). Here again there are clear signs of expansion, if not of actual learning, at least of opportunities for learning. While the quality of radio and television broadcasting does leave a lot to be desired, and while the most popular stations seem to be those dedicated almost exclusively to music (Malta Broadcasting Authority, 1993), Malta does have 11 national radio frequencies, plus two local television channels, besides several foreign channels and cable T.V., many of which feature educational programmes. By 1992, there were 424 television and video sets per 1000 persons in Malta. The Household Budget Survey (1993) shows that the proportion of total expenditure of an 'average' household dedicated to 'education entertainment and leisure' has gone up from 4.9% in 1980–1981 to 8.3% in 1988–1989, which is high even when compared to France (7.3%), Belgium (6.5%) and Spain (6.5%) (data from Mermet, 1992, p. 337). Similarly, two surveys published by the Ministry for Youth and Culture (1992a, b) confirm that more and more people are spending an increasing portion of their budget on books, magazines, leisure activities, cinema, entertainment and so on. A total of 50% of persons 15 years and over read newspapers daily; 36.5% read a magazine monthly. 38.3% read a book monthly, 69% listen daily to the radio, while 72% watch television every day (Ministry for Youth and Culture, 1992a,b, p. 22).
Compared to the more populated Cyprus (718,000 inhabitants) and Fiji (746,000 inhabitants), Malta (359,500 inhabitants) has a higher consumption of printing and writing paper, scoring 12,607 kgs per 1000 inhabitants compared to 10,204 kgs and 4132 kgs for Cyprus and Fiji respectively (UNESCO, 1991).

In this context one could also mention increasing investment in personal computers in the home, with preferential bank loans to students ensuring wider access to units. Of course, not all entertainment is educational, and computers might be used as nothing more than sophisticated games rather than learning stations, but there is no denying that educational opportunities have, through these means, become intensified. The government in power since 1987 has in fact insistently argued that an investment in information technology at all levels of society, including education, will lead to a regeneration and modernization of the national economy, and indeed a National Strategy for Information Technology (Camilleri, 1994) has been devised.

Other developments that facilitate the coming about of what one could call the ‘learning society’ have taken place in the ‘non-formal’ education sector, i.e. those educational activities organized outside the established formal system—whether functioning separately or as an important part of a broader activity—and designed to serve identifiable clienteles and educational objectives (Hallak, 1990, p. 6). Voluntary organizations and associations, many of which claim a direct or indirect educational mission, have increased from 173 in 1983 to 218 in 1991 (Tonna, 1994, p. 22). Private tuition—which is to be considered as a form of service parallel to the formal education sector—is resorted to by 70.7% of students in state primary schools, and 82.9% in state secondary schools (Falzon and Busuttil, 1988); travel, which includes cultural tourism, has increased by over 300% since 1973 (Tonna, 1994, p. 54).

### Table 5 Number of students in state and non-state sector in 1992–1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Non-state</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school</td>
<td>7578 or 63.0%</td>
<td>4447 or 37.0%</td>
<td>12025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st level</td>
<td>24166 or 68.1%</td>
<td>11322 or 31.9%</td>
<td>35488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd level</td>
<td>22080 or 74.6%</td>
<td>7526 or 25.4%</td>
<td>29606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary</td>
<td>4999 or 89.0%</td>
<td>610 or 11.0%</td>
<td>5609</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source. Central Office of Statistics (1994).*

### PROBLEMATICIZING THE QUANTITATIVE DIMENSION OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The quantitative leap in education provision achieved by the different governments since the post-war period has to be acknowledged, and tribute given to all those involved. Two issues, however, need to be raised. One refers to the ‘actual financial investment’ of the state in education, the other to the more ‘qualitative aspects of educational provision’. Both stop the rather too unproblematic celebration of the prevailing state of affairs.

### ACTUAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A primary concern is the consideration of the absolute and relative financial investment in education. UNESCO figures are revealing. If we extract figures relating to 1988, and compare these with those of Barbados, Cyprus, Fiji, U.K. and Italy, we note immediately that the Maltese state’s investment in education is not very high, when taken as (1) a percentage of GNP, or as (2) a percentage of government expenditure, as shown in Table 6:

The EU member states typically annually invest between 5.4% (Germany) to 6.1% (Denmark) of their national wealth (measured as GDP) in the education field (European Commission, 1995, p. 56). Governments moreover spend between 10% to 30% of their total budget on education (Psacharopoulos, 1990, p. 37). Of course, we are not comparing like with like here, given that, among other variables affecting the figures, private enrolment as a percentage of total number of students differs between the countries listed. But it is certainly clear that Malta is not among the high investors in education, despite the rhetorical claims by different governments that human resource development...
Table 6. Government expenditure on education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Govt. expend. on education as % of GNP</th>
<th>as % of govt. expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

— Data not available.


is the key to Malta's future. This low investment becomes even more apparent when one compares current expenditure per pupil as a multiple of GNP per capita (see Table 7).

Having considered financial investment in education across countries, it would be useful to further compare and contrast the investment patterns of the two major political parties in Malta, namely the Labour Party, in government between 1971 and 1987, and the Nationalist Party, in power since 1987. This is an important exercise because the general impression is that there has been an intensification of investment by the state in the education sector since the change of government. Indeed, the present Minister of Education and Human Resources has claimed in an address at the 28th session of UNESCO's general conference (Falzon, 1995a, p. 5) that 'education is one of the Maltese government's top priorities and in the last decade has been consistently allocated about 10% of total government expenditure'. However, a careful and detailed study featuring in a now defunct Malta Labour Party publication noted that political rhetoric of investment in public education masks the fact that the key characteristic between the Labour and the Nationalist administration is continuity rather than radical change. The author points out that: where structural changes have taken place in the composition of total educational expenditures, this has happened in areas that are really extraneous to the delivery of public educational services. The clearest example of this is of course, the growing allocation from the state to the church-run private schools. One could also argue that the system of paying stipends to students and pupils is equally extraneous to the delivery of public educational services, since payments made to students in no way affect the running of such services (except by pumping money away from them).

*Society, 1991, p. 28*

A recent Education Division (1994) publication confirms these views, and has claimed that despite apparent overall increases in budget allocation, 'the actual disposable funds have "decreased" and that "the funds available to the Education Division . . . can actually allow only small improvements in educational provision" in such areas as upgrading of equipment base, improvement of plant, introduction of new methodologies, introduction of new courses, upgrading of teacher skills, and creating appropriate structures for ensuring continued educational development (Education Division, 1994, p. 19). Furthermore, there seems to be a large discrepancy between amounts specified in the business plans of the Education Division and those allocated in the budget estimates (Bartolo, Response to Education Budget Estimates, 9.12.95).

Table 7. Current expenditure per pupil as a percentage of GNP per capita

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Malta</th>
<th>Barbados</th>
<th>Cyprus</th>
<th>Fiji</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>Italy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st level</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd level:</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd level.</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the reasons that can be identified for this decrease in actual resources despite an increase in overall budget allocations are the following:

- The 1989 agreement on teacher salary increase, which now takes up Lm30 million (53.6%) out of the Lm50 million allocated by the 1995 Budget estimates for recurrent expenditure in education.
- The imported inflation which reduces the state’s purchasing power when it buys, as it inevitably does, learning materials—including books, equipment and so on—from abroad.
- The increasing investment and channelling of funds towards a university, to which the 1995 budget allocated Lm7.2 million for recurrent expenditure, together with another Lm4 million in stipends. One analyst, noting a 724% increase in state financial investment in the University in the first three years of the Nationalist government’s administration, concludes that ‘capital allocations to the University have been in large part responsible for the growth in education investment since 1987’ (Society, 1991, p. 26).
- The annual transfer of funds to the private church school sector, which had grown from Lm1.1 million in 1990 to Lm5 million in 1995, and which, while being spent on education, diminishes the Education Ministry’s bargaining power with the Ministry of Finance in trying to prise more funding for the state school sector.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the more money thrown at education, the better the educational service will be. But higher quality does tend to be correlated with sufficient resourcing, and it is significant that despite the prevailing political rhetoric that would have Malta leap into the information society of the future, educational investment in real terms remains constant. This, of course, begs the question, and raises the issue embedded in the UNDP definition of human development as an end in itself, with education contributing to that development. Another way of confronting this issue is to consider the question of ‘quality’.

**THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION**

As in most developing countries where educational development occurred later than in industrially developed nations, Malta’s accelerated expansion of educational services has been achieved at the expense of quality provision. Hallak (1990, p. 23) notes:

> . . Developing countries have been able to reduce or overcome many of the effects of unfavourable cultural, social, institutional and financial conditions, and to make significant and sustained educational progress in the 1960s and 1970s, because of the convergence of the political will of governments with social demand for education. Even though it is difficult to compare different societies at different times, it can be said that enrollment and literacy grew at much faster rates in the developing countries in the three decades between 1950 and 1980 than in industrialized economies at similar stages of development. However, this rapid expansion brought problems of increasing costs and low quality that assumed crisis proportions in many countries in the 1980s.

That crisis was compounded by world recession, marked fluctuations in oil prices, aggravating debt crises and high rates of inflation, all of which led to worldwide declining growth in real public spending on education. Developing and developed countries have had to struggle with an economic crisis whose depth and duration fail to be accounted for, let alone addressed, by traditional understandings of the workings of markets. In such a context, there has been a steady restructuring of educational policies and priorities away from the social democratic concerns of the sixties and early seventies, with education being seen less as an equalizing force than as a means to regenerate ailing economies. While some would argue that it is precisely this eye on the market, and the competitive spirit infused in teaching and learning systems, that has brought about qualitative improvement in educational provision, others consider that these changes—the most trenchant of which have taken place in Thatcherite Britain—have brought about precisely the opposite. Authors have noted the attacks on the social wage affecting both the amount and direction of educational expenditure (Sharp, 1988), a greater emphasis on vocationalism and instrumentalism (Blackmore, 1990; Sultana, 1992a, 1994a), the commodification and privatization of education (Psacharopoulos, 1992), curriculum differentiation, intensification of the competitive ethos, and the impregnation of education with market and management discourse (Ball, 1993). Many have argued that such changes have proved disastrous for precisely those groups who formed the target of the earlier social democratic advances (Sharp, 1988, p. 205).

This rather dark picture is not reflected to the same degree in the current state of educational provision in Malta, where there is no perceived sense of economic crisis given a practically full
employment situation, low inflation, and general confidence in the market, despite the presence of a number of challenges which leave no room for complacency (Briguglio, 1995). The situation is complex if we try to represent educational development since the 1970s within a political framework of 'new right' or 'left wing' discourse. In my own work (Sultana, 1992a, 1994a, 1995a) I have pointed out the contradictions in the Labour Party position, noting that severe economic crisis and ideological conflict with a strong private school sector led to elements of 'new right' strategies, including austerity measures, strengthening the classification between education sectors, utilitarian vocationalism, and restricted access to higher education. All this, however, took place within a political context that privileged equity in education and in the market of work. In her sophisticated analyses of educational policymaking in Malta, Darmanin (1991a,b, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995), points out, on her part, the contradictions in the Nationalist position on education, but nevertheless maintains that despite these tensions, the overall emphasis on privatization and the privileging of the value of 'freedom of choice' for parents between schools places the present government squarely within the 'new right' camp.

While Darmanin's arguments are useful in that they challenge prevailing political rhetoric, they are not quite convincing when one considers that few of the policies adopted by 'new Right' governments in response to financial austerity have been implemented locally. There have been no cuts in teachers' salaries (see Table 8), there has been no increase in the pupil/teacher ratio in order to keep numbers of teaching staff down, nor have there been drastic cuts in expenditure and upkeep of schools, or strategies to shift the burden of financing books or material to families, or attempts to cancel construction and equipment orders. Darmanin (1995) is on stronger ground when she points out the state's attempt to roll back its involvement in funding the public education sector by encouraging the opening of private schools, and by transferring an ever increasing portion of its budget to church schools, or when she argues that the state has facilitated the creation of an education market, with choice only truly available for those families who have the financial capital to pay fees or, in the case of church schools, for those parents who have the cultural and social capital to position themselves in time and space to make use of the opportunities available.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources is not divesting itself of its responsibilities towards state education. Minister Falzon has, for instance, resisted intensive lobbying on the part of some independent schools who have been requesting state financial subsidies, claiming that, as far as he is concerned, he will not allow public revenue to be diverted away from state schools, and that 'priority of funds available has to be given to the upgrading of State schools' (Falzon, 1995b, p. 29). Despite fears that decentralization and devolution will lead to parents shouldering more of the costs of 'free' state schooling, Minister Falzon is on record saying that the role of State School Councils should primarily involve educational and administrative matters rather than fund-raising activities for the school (Falzon, 1994). During his budget speech, the Education Minister also intimated a resolve to slow down private school expansion, arguing that there was 'no point in having private and independent schools if they did not offer different philosophies' (The Sunday Times, 10.12.95, p. 5).

All in all, Malta has not succumbed to the kind of dynamics in educational policy-making and provision that have characterized many developed and developing countries where, in the grips of economic recession, education is abandoned to the whim of market forces. This is clear from the Minister's consultative committee's report, entitled Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures (Wain et al., 1995) that, while not yet adopted as a framework to guide reform, has helped steer discourse away from narrow market concerns towards a debate on the four regulative principles of entitlement, effectiveness, equity and economy (understood as the principle which, in a context of scarcity, channels resources to the most educationally needy).

There is therefore a prevailing environment that allows issues of this sort to not only surface, but to remain on the agenda, though there are increasing numbers of those who, as has become

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-1989</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>1994</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Lm2962</td>
<td>Lm3470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headteacher</td>
<td>Lm3514</td>
<td>Lm4019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Cost-of-living increase adjustments are made regularly with each annual budget.*
clear in reactions to the publication of Tomorrow's Schools, would rather follow British practice and introduce league tables, vouchers, and further strategies to intensify differentiation between schools and pupils (cf. The Malta Independent, 23.4.1995, p. 18). Darmanin's warnings and forebodings do serve, therefore, to maintain a vigilant attitude regarding the social forces that would influence educational policy-making in Malta. Such vigilance is also important because, as I have argued in other contexts (Sultana, 1994b, 1995c), Malta's request for membership in the European Union will usher in, as it already has begun to do, the winds of neo-liberal thought. Indeed, the EU Avis has made the liberalization of the market a condition of entry, and there are clear signs that economic policies will have a snowball effect on other areas such as health and education provision. In the more immediate present, it is evident that the networks of influence on ministerial policy-making extend beyond 'progressive'-minded individuals and pressure groups. The Management Systems Unit, whose mission it is to help government restructure its services and to render them more efficient, is generally 'manned' by expatriate consultants steeped in 'new right' ideology and practices. Their hold on the Ministry cannot be underestimated.

What, then, can be said of the quality of educational provision in Malta within this context? Earlier it was argued that quantity has been achieved at the expense of quality. This is not to say that there have not been sectors registering a qualitative improvement in some areas, although even here, serious evaluation still needs to be carried out if one is to justify such a claim. Among these areas one could mention the equalization of access for women at the University, the intensification in the in-service training of teachers, the reform in the trade school sector, the reorganization of the administrative set-up of the Education Division, the selection of heads of schools on the basis of credentials and training in educational administration rather than on the basis of seniority, the involvement of teachers in curriculum construction, especially with reference to the Technology component of the reformed secondary level vocational schools, the increasing attention being given to the integration and mainstreaming of students with special learning needs, the attempt to promote gender equality through the curriculum, the focus on parental involvement through School Councils, and so on. Another positive feature is the trend to make curricula more responsive to the local situation, with a number of textbooks by Maltese authors reflecting Maltese and Mediterranean concerns being introduced in schools, and with the launching of 'local' end-of-cycle examinations in the form of the MATSEC (Matriculation, and Secondary Education Certificate) initiative (Sultana, 1996b) that permits teacher input in assessment, and Maltese rather than British control over the curriculum, which was the case when local students sat for U.K. General Certificate examinations. One could also note the increasing number of initiatives in educational development, many of which are organized at the grass roots level, and indicative of a culture favouring educational reform. Among these one could mention the Primary English Project, the Movement for Humanistic Education, which drew up and promoted a Charter for Students' Rights (see Sultana, 1992b), the Eden Foundation, a non-governmental state-subsidized organization which is at the forefront of educational provision for—and mainstreaming of—children with special learning needs, and more recently, the national Association for School Councils, which has the goal of promoting educational partnerships between parents and teachers, and the launching of SCOOPS, meant to encourage the co-operative ideal among students.

Two other areas are worthy of note. The first refers to the process of decentralization and the strengthening of school-based development processes. While there are serious issues related to the devolution of responsibilities and decision-making to individual schools, especially if this takes places in a context of insufficient resourcing and training, or without sufficient regard to the principles of equity and entitlement, decentralization does carry with it the promise of igniting dynamic processes and proactive behaviour that could make the school more responsive to its community of learners. Heads of schools have generally strongly endorsed, for instance, the initiative which has provided them with impressed funds to allow local purchase of minor goods and services, though many also felt that the concept of school-based rather than division-based management of resources should be extended further (Management Systems Unit, 1993, p. 8). A second general trend which could have a positive overall effect on the provision of quality education in Malta refers to a reform process that is increasingly characterized by incrementalism rather than by sudden and sweeping change, as
well as by research and consultation with people to be affected by the reform contemplated. Examples of this are the gradual postponement rather than outright abolition of streaming in the first level of schooling, the operations review by the Management Systems Unit (MSU), whose report is meant to guide the Ministry in its modification of the administrative structure of the Education Division, and the consultative committee's report on Tomorrow's Schools. Faculty of Education research and analyses have also increased in view of a larger staff complement and in response to needs expressed by the Education Division and Ministry.

Progress has been registered in a number of key areas, therefore, even though educational development in Malta is not characterized by a history of linear progression. Indeed, it is important to point out that some essential services have either been discontinued—as is the case of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, educational support for hospitalized children, and compulsory physics—or have been temporarily shelved due to lack of human or other resources—as is the case with the educational psychological services. Decreasing access for young women to technological literacy—an unintended consequence of the present reform in the vocational school sector—also constitutes an area of concern. Over and above this, there are other important aspects of education that remain intensely problematic. I will consider some of these key areas in turn, providing related information to illustrate what is being referred to as the gap in the qualitative dimension of educational provision.

School buildings

There are two key problems in this area. The first refers to the need for new schools, given demographic changes and residential patterns focused around new housing estates. The second refers to the need for the upgrading and refurbishing of old schools, most of which were built in the early post-war period. The Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands (Ministry for Development of Infrastructure, 1990) identifies the need for 18 new primary schools combined with kindergarten centres, 21 new kindergarten centres and three secondary schools in the coming years. This is an impressive number of new buildings which will strain any government's budget, and while an increasing allocation for such projects is being made in annual budgets, and some improvements have been registered, a number of construction schedules are not being kept. Despite a commitment to have two boys' secondary schools functioning by October 1996 (Falzon, Budget Debate, Sitting No. 369, 12.12.95, p. 362), the foundation stone of either has still to be laid. There are a number of reports that indicate the dire need for the refurbishment of already-existing school buildings. The conclusions of the Committee on Safety in State Schools, for instance, point out the extent to which some establishments are a health hazard to those who attend them. The MSU Operations Review highlights the bad state of repair of buildings, and the inadequate, if not missing staff rooms, sports facilities, resource centres in schools. It has also noted that most buildings are inaccessible for people with special needs. A research team from the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering has shown the extent to which school buildings in Malta are often unsafe, and uncomfortable, occasionally overcrowded and dysfunctional, and generally fail to cater for the well-being of the students they host (Mintoff et al., 1995).

Top heavy education development and investment

In the context of scarcity of resources, a high government priority has been consistently given to the post-secondary and tertiary levels, to the detriment of the secondary, and especially the primary sector. This is partly due to the political influence and prestige of the university, and increasing social demand for access to this sector—a demand partly stimulated by government. While the channelling of resources upwards has been intensified since 1987, it would be true to say that from the 19th century onwards, Maltese educational history has been characterized by 'top-heaviness' (Fenech, 1992), with governments generally being more willing to prime the more prestigious tertiary level. A University vice-Chancellor, for instance, noted in his annual report for the academic year 1892–1893, that in a situation where mass elementary education had not yet been introduced, a full third of State aid in education was taken up by the University. He argued:

If the available funds were not limited, if the children of the poor were all enabled to receive free primary education, if the teaching appliances and the school buildings left nothing to be desired, and if the pay of the teachers was adequate in all classes, such a distribution might possibly be defended. These conditions are, however, quite unfulfilled and, for this reason, there must be a large number of children for whose education the State makes no provision whatever. . . . The State pays from 5 to 30 times as much for
the children of the comparatively well-to-do portion of the population as for children of the poor. This is an absolute reversal of the principles upon which the systems of national education of all countries are based.

The situation has much improved, of course, since the end of the 19th century. But while in Malta today we cannot talk of 'the poor' in the same manner, the fact still remains that the 1996 budget estimates allocate 19.3% of the total education vote to the university. If we keep in mind that 68% of all students attending University in 1994 come from the top three occupational groups, i.e. the professional, the administrative and managerial, and the executive and clerical strata (Sultana, 1995b), then the vice-Chancellor's criticism dating back to a century ago still carries a resonance today. In other words, the relatively comfortably-off reap an inordinately large portion of public education funding. Due to the partisan political issues entangled in the higher education sector in Malta, alternative forms of financing this level—such as means-tested student subsidies and loans—are not on the agenda.

**Staffing**

Another factor which is detrimental to the provision of quality educational services in Malta is the number of unqualified teachers. A study presented by Farrugia (1995) as a background paper contributing to the writing of the Ministerial consultative committee on education shows quite clearly the extent of untrained teachers in schools. These presently make up 29.1% of the teaching corps. To put it differently, one in every three students in Malta is taught by untrained teaching personnel (Table 9).

The irony of these figures is that the employment of unqualified staff is not the result of staff shortage as much as a misuse of the human resources available. This includes the over-use of the optional subjects system whereby a fully qualified teacher is engaged with a very small number of students, sometimes as few as three or four. Another cause is the way administrators of primary schools inflate pupil numbers in order to obtain a larger staff complement, with the result being that many classrooms have no more than 25 students. Misuse of resources also arises from the fact that a good proportion of trained teachers are not involved in teaching duties but perform administrative work which can be carried out by non-teaching personnel, though due to the 1994 MUT agreement the situation has improved in this regard. Also, under present conditions, the work done by subject co-ordinators is minimal and does not warrant the light loading. The Operations Review (MSU, 1993, p. 10) also notes that since recruitment of teachers for state schools tends to run behind schedule—presumably because of the large numbers of teachers involved in the deployment exercise, but also because of the complex and bureaucratic structure of civil service regulations—the private schools pick up many of the best candidates and classes in state schools are without qualified teachers'.

**Selection and channelling**

The issues of staffing and of top-heavy educational development are intimately connected with what is arguably the key problem with quality education provision for all in the Maltese islands. As Sultana (1992a, 1995b) and Farrugia (1995) have noted, the most qualified teaching staff tends to opt for, and purposefully deployed by the Education Division, to service the most achieving students. Practically all the research available (see Darmanin, 1991b and Sultana, 1991 for an overview) points out the extent to which the best human and material resources are siphoned off towards that sector of education which most

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher sect.</th>
<th>1st Degree</th>
<th>P-G Dip</th>
<th>High Deg</th>
<th>Tech. qual</th>
<th>Other (A-Level)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>1261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade &amp; technical</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary &amp; post-sec.</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>1746</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

directly channels students towards the post-secondary and university level. Indeed, one could argue that the Maltese educational system is predicated on the constant closure of opportunities from the very early years of primary schooling, with students who seem unlikely to perform well in the selective 11+ exam losing a degree of their entitlement to a quality education at primary, secondary and—with the opening of a Junior College for University-bound students—arguably post-secondary levels as well. In 1994, for instance, the examination which regulates entry to the ‘grammar school’-type state Junior Lyceums excluded half of the candidates, with 20% of the total eligible not even attempting the papers (Test Construction Unit, 1994). These, together with failed candidates, proceed to area secondary schools where students are provided with what amounts to a diluted curriculum and restricted chances of upward educational mobility. They can opt to move laterally in the system by opting for trade schools after their third year of secondary schooling, but these vocational institutes have not been very successful in providing an all-round education (Sultana, 1995b), and further entrap students in narrow occupational paths. It is of utmost importance to highlight the fact that this selectivity is marked by social patterns, that is school sectors tend to attract and retain socially homogeneous groups, identifiable by their socio-economic background. This is most true of trade schools (where 85% of students have fathers in a manual occupation), and of university education (where, with the exception of engineering and education, there is an under-representation of working class background students). Some private independent schools are further accentuating social selection by virtue of the fees they charge, rendering themselves enclaves for the monied classes.

There have been attempts to mitigate the effect of these processes of selection and channeling of students. Church private schools now do not directly charge fees, and access to them is, in most cases, regulated by a socially neutral lottery system rather than by competitive examination. In the state school sector, streaming has been postponed to the fourth year of the primary school, and remedial help offered to low-achieving students. Junior Lyceum entry has been widened through the use of criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced examinations. There were 2753 students in three junior lyceums in 1983. There are 8859 students in 10 such schools 12 years later. Students finishing their secondary schooling at the fifth form level now have the option of choosing between two nationally-set Secondary Education Certificate examination papers in any subject. The first paper is more challenging than the second one, and leads to a university education. Those students who do very well in the less demanding paper can also remain on the university track, while others get a certification which can lead to further education in other post-secondary vocational establishments. While this new system could lead to the closing of options and opportunities (Darmanin, 1996) for those who self-select (or worse, are channelled by teachers), and choose to sit for the second paper, it does mean that more students can obtain credentials that have some value in the further education and job markets. These and other efforts on the part of the educational policy makers are laudable, though they are also quite problematic given that they operate in a context of intense competition with a strong non-state sector, which plays the educational game by different rules. It is very difficult for non-selective strategies to gain legitimacy among parents and teachers when private schools represent quite the opposite educational culture. It is not surprising, therefore, that close to 90% of teachers in primary state schools have expressed themselves in favour of streaming (Department of Education, 1989), and that Education Division leaders, while sympathetic towards policies that weaken the classification between students and education sectors, tend to retort: ‘We’ll be ready to go comprehensive if and when private schools show us the way’.

**Outcomes**

One crucial question that needs to be asked in considering quality educational provision refers to the fortunes of those who enter the school system. This is where the dearth of research in Malta is most strongly felt, and indeed, one key weakness of the Maltese educational system is the lack of attention to outcomes. Much emphasis is placed on provision of services, but we know very little about how successful such provision is, and it would be salutary if Malta would regularly take part in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) exercise, to be able to monitor its own achievements and weaknesses in relation to those of other countries. Despite the lack of outcomes-based research,
there are nevertheless several possible indicators that provide us with an insight on the prevailing situation. Ethnographic accounts provide us with a graphic picture of the stress experienced by junior-lyceum bound primary school students in their sixth year of study (Cassar, 1991), and a recent study co-ordinated by Sedqa, Caritas and the Education Division has reported that 8% of students take tranquilizers at ages 11 and 15 to cope with junior lyceum/private school entry and school-leaving examination anxiety (The Malta Independent, 3.12.1995).

Again, qualitative research shows the extent to which students in low streams in primary schools develop a negative self-image (Galea, 1991), which translates itself into a counter-school culture and a resistance to schooling (Azzopardi and Bondin, 1991; Chircop, 1994). This leads to absenteeism (steepest in the trade school sector, where according to a 1988 study by Scicluna Calleja et al., the average absenteeism rate for boys was 25%—or 35 days out of a total of 148 school-attending days, and for girls 34%—or 50.5 days out of the same total) and high drop-out rates (during the year 1987–1988, the Department of Education approved 861 requests for permission to leave school before the age of 16). Related to this is the problem of 'child' labour, highlighted by three separate research reports (see Sultana, 1993, 1994c) which provide data on the extent of student involvement in the twilight economy during both term time and the vacation period. As many as 70% of boys and 25% of girls in the vocational school sector are known to hold down one or more jobs, to the detriment of their investment in education.

There is also increasing evidence that in Malta, it is the examination tail that wags the education dog. Education development has, as in most other countries, been confused with a pursuit for more and more paper qualifications, and in her thorough study Mallia (1994) has shown the extent to which the education system suffers from the diploma disease. The disease has an influence on teachers, students and parents, who are all beleaguered by an over-loaded National Minimum Curriculum which only a select few can, in fact, keep up with. As the Tomorrow’s Schools report (Wain et al., 1995, p. 20) pointed out, this leads to an undue emphasis on coverage rather than mastery, and results in a failure on the part of students to integrate knowledge. Teachers are also tempted to work mostly, if not exclusively, with those students who cope with the syllabus.

The examination bind also tends to lead to a joyless, unimaginative magisterial mode of knowledge transmission which further alienates pupils from learning. This is confirmed by current research being carried out by undergraduates with over 200 children of returned migrants. These students attending Maltese primary and secondary schools found little to commend when comparing their present educational experiences with life in schools of their countries of origin (Australia and Canada in the main). Not only is the educational experience alienating, but it also seems to be ineffective, as it does little to encourage problem-solving skills and self-directed learning. This emerges clearly from the examiners’ remarks regarding the scripts submitted by students at the 1994 Secondary Education Certificate Examination. In subject after subject we find the same analysis, captured by such comments as ‘On the whole, candidates do reasonably well when required to recall textbook material, but fail miserably when asked to apply or extrapolate their knowledge’ (re. computer studies examination), or students show a ‘preference for rote learning’ (re. economic studies), and so on (see Bartolo, 1995, p. 10).

**EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The question of outcomes raises that of the relationship between education and economic development, or, in other words, the evaluation of the ‘product’ of the Maltese education system in terms of labour market needs. There are a number of indicators suggesting that Malta’s educational system is not perceived by employers to be adequately responding to employers’ needs, whether these are expressed in terms of technical skills or attitudes (cf. Harper, 1990). This is true for both the most vocationally oriented secondary level institutions, i.e. the trade schools (cf. Sultana, 1992a, pp. 300), but also for other sectors (Zahra and Ebejer, 1992) including tertiary education (Mallia, 1994; Baldacchino, 1995). For instance, a number of position papers issued by the Federation of Industry have criticized the quantity and quality of technically-trained tradespersons, and while noting that ‘the country’s educational system is not expected to provide personnel at all levels tailor-made for a particular industry’,
it is 'certainly expected to provide personnel suitably trained in the basics that form the platform for the various industrial sectors' (FOI, 1989a, p. 2; also FOI 1988b, 1989b, 1991).

The Federation has also argued that one of the main obstacles to economic development is the serious skills shortage in the light engineering sector, a shortage that represents an obstacle to Malta's aspirations to restructure its economy away from labour intensive to capital and high-technology intensive industries. A Training Needs Survey carried out among 396 firms concluded that there is a widespread demand by employers for more 'trainable' people (cf. Harper, 1990). In other words, local employers are looking for personal qualities such as motivation, adaptability, standards of work and a sense of responsibility, as well as general education, meaning literacy and numeracy, the ability to read and follow simple instructions, convey messages accurately, understand simple diagrams, perform basic calculations, and have knowledge of such matters as wages, social security, work books and trade unions. An emphasis was placed by several employers on the upgrading of the general level of education of unskilled labour rather than on specialized training. Basic rather than advanced technological knowledge was seen to be more useful because of changing machinery, which is becoming increasingly highly technological. In-depth interviews with 60 employers also revealed that in the case of trade school students, it is character traits rather than educational or even skills qualifications that are given priority (Zahra & Ebejer, 1992, pp. 40, 79). Overall, studies that have attempted to gauge employers' evaluation of the education system's contribution to industrial development have all pointed out the general feeling that at all levels schooling tends to be too abstract and unrelated to the 'real' world of work.

Of course, employers' views, while useful and important, cannot be taken at face value. This is especially so in a context where they have historically, and for a number of structural and cultural reasons, been too ready to export training costs onto the state education system, hoping to reap private profits from public funds. They have not been as ready to contribute to human resource development and training either in the workplace, through sponsorship of student-workers up to 1987, or through involvement with schools. In addition, the government 'has' reacted to perceived needs by reforming the trade school sector in line with World Bank policy, emphasizing the general education component for vocational students, and opting for general technological literacy rather than specific vocational skill training. The state has also embarked on a costly introduction of computer equipment for students in the first year of the primary level upwards, to ensure that tomorrow's workers are technologically literate, and hoping, perhaps against the better advice of the likes of Foster (1965), that education will be the horse that drives the economic cart, and that supply of higher quality workers will attract demand by foreign and local entrepreneurs in the high technology sector, leading to a transformation of Malta's economy towards a high-wage, high-ability society.

CONCLUSION

This review of educational development in Malta has highlighted the achievements since the 1970s—when mass secondary education was introduced—as well as the weaknesses that prevail today. It has been argued that the reach and diversity in educational provision in this small island is impressive, and compares well with services offered in similar small states with intermediate developed economies, and with some of those to be found in more industrially developed nations. Indeed, it has been argued that the fact that 'new right' market ideology has not established its hegemonic hold in the education field as thoroughly as it has done elsewhere means that issues such as equity, entitlement, and educational priority for those with learning difficulties remain on the agenda, even if they are far from being thoroughly implemented in practice. It has also been pointed out, however, that this ideology has made some inroads thanks to the promotion of education as a 'consumer good' where the principle of 'freedom of choice' is given priority over the principle of solidarity.

Indeed, a key challenge for the Maltese education system seems to be the extent to which it is able to respond to both values at the same time, that is, to develop a differentiated system (at the secondary, post-secondary and tertiary level) to cater for distinct learning (and labour market) needs without, however, intensifying social stratification. At a macro level, this implies not only educational, but also economic restructuring for a more equitable distribution of educational, financial and social capital. It additionally implies
the recognition that every student has an entitlement for a quality education, and that all students are guaranteed access to a specific minimum standard, with teachers and institutions having a degree of autonomy to modify, extend, and teach using pedagogies which are most appropriate to their talents and to the orientation of their students.

A number of other challenges that currently face the Maltese educational system have also been outlined. Chief among these is the necessity for evaluation of outcomes at all levels, so that the various promising initiatives and ever-widening repertoire of educational services on offer are subjected to monitoring in order to ensure effectiveness. Without this kind of appraisal, the call for 'quality education for all' remains an empty slogan, difficult to define let alone implement. Such an evaluation must never lose sight of the structural context in which educational provision does in fact take place, given that problems tend to be connected to several issues at the same time, and cannot be positively resolved unless this complexity is acknowledged and addressed.

NOTES

1. Malta has a population of around 360,000 and covers a surface area of 316 square kilometres. It obtained its political independence from Britain on 21 September 1964, and was declared a Republic on 13 December 1974. Malta has a GNP of 7,200 US dollars per capita (1 Malta lira = US$2.83), an unemployment rate of 3.5%, and inflation rate of 3.9%. It is a member of the Commonwealth, and has recently applied to become a member of the European Union.

2. Through a series of negotiations which started in 1985, and which were completed in 1991, the government has bound itself to pay the budgeted salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff in Church schools together with an additional 10% for school needs. The Church, on its part, remains responsible for building, repair and maintenance of its schools and other capital expenditure. In return for free education, the Church has handed over much of its property to the State.

3. Maltese post-secondary and university level students are provided with a stipend, a strategy initially introduced by the Labour government as part of a worker-student scheme, in order to encourage working class access to higher level studies (see Sultana, 1995c). After 1987, students were given the stipend across the board and as a subsidy rather than in 'payment' for work done. A final year student receives a monthly allowance of Lm130 16, which is equivalent to 337.3 dollars. The minimum weekly wage in Malta is Lm38.

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