Chapter 12

Training & Development for the Socially Excluded

Joe Cutajar

Introduction
Social Inclusion has become a major problem in many countries and Malta is no exception. The growth in material wealth experienced over recent decades has not been shared equally amongst the members of our society. Due to a complex set of reasons, not all of which are financial, certain groups within society have been marginalised and are missing out.

Furthermore, major structural factors at play threaten to worsen the situation. The development of globalisation, the continuing spate of scientific and technological progress and the transition to the knowledge-driven economy may further marginalise those persons and groups that may find it difficult to access or exploit knowledge and learning. Exclusion in all its forms is a problem that needs to be addressed.

This paper focuses on the issue of social exclusion from employment and how education, training and human resource development generally can help to equip the socially excluded with the knowledge and skills required in order for them to find and retain gainful employment. It starts off by defining the various categories of socially exclusion and highlighting the various measures that have been adopted by the Employment & Training Corporation (ETC) - the local public employment service - particularly in order to re-integrate Malta’s 7,000-odd registered unemployed within the labour market.
Table 1: Distribution of registered unemployed (Part 1) by year and gender. Source: ETC Labour Market Research Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sept '97</th>
<th>Sept '98</th>
<th>Sept '99</th>
<th>Sept '00</th>
<th>Sept '01</th>
<th>Sept '02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>5805</td>
<td>6131</td>
<td>6776</td>
<td>5640</td>
<td>5166</td>
<td>5527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1096</td>
<td>1053</td>
<td>1235</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>1044</td>
<td>1244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6901</td>
<td>7184</td>
<td>8011</td>
<td>6594</td>
<td>6215</td>
<td>6771</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employment in all its forms is considered as one of the most important assets for individuals and economies. Through their participation in gainful employment, individuals become productive members of society and ultimately can fully integrate into community life. Although the financial benefits derived from working cannot be ignored, participation in integrated employment also leads to socio-economic independence, provides a measure of social identity and is ultimately a crucial improver for the quality of life of these individuals. For the country and consequently the economy, unemployment is considered problematic since it erodes the social fabric and acts as a barrier to economic prosperity. In this scenario, it has become imperative for the large majority of individuals in any society to have access to gainful employment.

**The socially excluded**

In today’s circumstances, the socially excluded include those categories of individuals who could not integrate in the mainstream and are excluded from opportunities that are central to participation in the social, political and cultural life of society. Their exclusion could have been the direct consequence of their limited access to education, skills training, health care and employment.

Within the local labour market, the socially excluded include six main categories of ‘clients’: (1) young school leavers who emerge from the educational system with little or no skills and
training & development for the socially excluded 267

Qualifications; (2) the long-term unemployed; (3) those who are unemployed and are over 40 years of age; (4) the registered disabled; (5) ex-substance abusers; and (6) ex-convicts. Within those in employment, they include the very low skilled who, as a direct consequence of this deficiency, are threatened by the restructuring process and are at risk of losing their job.

It is clear that exclusion incurs high costs on social security systems and on society in general. Such shortcomings not only disadvantage the individuals themselves directly, but they also constrain the collective progress of the nation's economy by their effect on overall competitiveness. The opportunity cost to national economies of having so many economically inactive people is substantial. Furthermore, a high level of inactivity within any given economy constitutes a barrier to further economic growth. It has been reported by several policy makers within the European Union that "low levels of employment prevent the country from realising its full economic potential at the world stage, while the costs of unemployment benefit create strains on public treasuries" (European Social Fund, 2000). The International Labour Organisation further asserts that social exclusion incurs high costs on social security systems and society in general; apart from the substantial opportunity costs to national economies of having so many inactive people (International Labour Organisation, 2002).

The determinant factor in all categories of socially excluded groups is the availability of the knowledge and skills required by the contemporary labour market; these factors are, in turn, the direct derivatives of education and training. These two concepts are increasingly crucial in today's markets characterised by rapid change due to globalisation and technological advances. Within this new scenario, those with low-level skill levels, outdated skills or non-employable skills are increasingly likely to be excluded from the labour market. It has been widely acknowledged that the scale and quality of human resources are major determinants of both the creation of new knowledge and its dissemination. The
contribution of education and training to growth has been widely acknowledged and estimates suggest that investment in education and training produces rates of return to individuals and to society comparable to financial capital (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002). This 'human capital' approach was further confirmed by an OECD study whose results suggest that low skilled and poorly educated adults run a major risk of long-term unemployment or of only finding jobs with low pay (OECD, 1999).

Motivated by these concerns, governments in many countries are now more committed to promoting active social and labour market policies rather than simply providing monetary assistance in the form of social and unemployment benefits. In order to perform this function, governments are formulating labour market policies and strategies that will give the socially excluded individuals a "second chance" in employment after having dropped out of the labour force, or to help them return to work after periods of unemployment. This is being mainly achieved through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills necessary to re integrate in meaningful work.

Training and retraining programmes generally account for a significant share of active labour market measures. Such programmes have been described by the ILO as an aid to individuals to access new jobs and also cope with changes in the knowledge and information economy and society (International Labour Organisation, 2002). They also assist in (re)integrating people into mainstream economic life and combats social exclusion. Active labour market policies have a long tradition in developed countries and are today also being applied in many developing economies. Some of the most common measures include: job-search assistance and employment services; education and training for the different categories of persons seeking employment, including the long-term unemployed; and retraining programmes for workers with skills shortages threatened by redundancies.

Active labour market measures are likely to be most effective in
re-integrating people into employment when they include remedial education, job training which is relevant to labour market opportunities, job search assistance and direct provision of work experience.

In Malta, the state has entrusted this important social role to the Employment & Training Corporation. Set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 that prescribes its relationship with the Minister responsible for Labour and the National Employment Authority (Employment and Training Services Act of 1990), the ETC operates primarily as an 'honest broker': responsible to provide and maintain an employment service to assist persons to find suitable employment and to assist employers find suitable employees. The ETC Business Plan for 2000-2003 highlights the tasks of the Corporation and asserts that the Government's social policy is guided by the firm belief in the value of social inclusion (ETC, 2000). After all, equal access to training opportunities and to quality employment is central to social inclusion, as labour market participation brings with it both social and economic benefits (ETC, 2001). The Corporation is described as the state instrument for promoting such access. This is being undertaken by contributing to the technical and technological upgrading of the workforce and through a marked shift in focus towards active employment measures. In contrast to passive employment benefits, active employment measures aim, through training and incentives, to promote the employability of persons within the labour market and thereby facilitate social inclusion.

Employment services provided by the Corporation include:
• assisting job seekers to find suitable employment;
• assisting employers finding suitable employees; and
• providing career guidance and counselling to job seekers on the choice of employment.

In relation to training, the functions of the Corporation are:
to provide training courses and schemes with the purpose of assisting persons to find suitable employment; and

- to assist others within the workforce interested in improving and updating the quality of their knowledge and skills.

Besides the above, the Corporation provides personalised assistance to persons from disadvantaged groups.

In providing its services, the Corporation mainly endorses a mainstream approach, believing that services should be inclusive for all. However it has also been recognised that certain groups have particular needs and benefit most from a focussed or targeted approach.

Registered unemployed youths (16 to 24 years of age) represent 31% of the total registered unemployed population (ETC, 2002a). The majority of these fall within the category of low academic achievers. The percentage is higher with the over 40 years of age, where more than 36% of those on part 1 and part 2 of the unemployment register fall within this age category.

Table 2: Distribution of registered unemployed (Part 1) by year and age group. Source: ETC Labour Market Research Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Sept '97</th>
<th>Sept '98</th>
<th>Sept '99</th>
<th>Sept '00</th>
<th>Sept '01</th>
<th>Sept '02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-19 years</td>
<td>1185</td>
<td>1109</td>
<td>1329</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>1008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29 years</td>
<td>1688</td>
<td>1726</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1572</td>
<td>1544</td>
<td>1789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>1622</td>
<td>1628</td>
<td>1741</td>
<td>1383</td>
<td>1242</td>
<td>1369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>1565</td>
<td>1777</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1636</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>1558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 years +</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>1113</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>1047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6901</td>
<td>7184</td>
<td>8011</td>
<td>6594</td>
<td>6215</td>
<td>6771</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In September 2002, some 39% of the unemployed have been on the unemployment register for more than a year; of these, 9% are considered very long term unemployed: that is, they have been registering continuously for more than five years.
Table 3: Distribution of registered unemployed (Part 1) by year and duration of registration. Source: ETC Labour Market Research Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Sept ’97</th>
<th>Sept ’98</th>
<th>Sept ’99</th>
<th>Sept ’00</th>
<th>Sept ’01</th>
<th>Sept ’02</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-8 weeks</td>
<td>1061</td>
<td>1281</td>
<td>1454</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>1347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-16 weeks</td>
<td>1004</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-24 weeks</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-52 weeks</td>
<td>1430</td>
<td>1276</td>
<td>1267</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 weeks +</td>
<td>2873</td>
<td>3318</td>
<td>3767</td>
<td>3606</td>
<td>2945</td>
<td>2952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6901</td>
<td>7184</td>
<td>8011</td>
<td>6594</td>
<td>6215</td>
<td>6771</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, the educational levels of the Maltese workforce and of the adult population generally are low when compared to those of EU member states. According to the latest national census, some 52% of the local working population has not completed secondary education, while 36% ended their studies after completing secondary education (Central Office of Statistics, 1996). 60.2% of the working age population declare that they have no qualifications. This is true of about one third of those under 25, half of those between 25 and 40 and over two thirds of those over 40 (ibid.). And, according to the same report, some 9% of the working population is illiterate. This percentage shoots up to 19% amongst those seeking employment.

Active Labour Market Measures

Occupational Guidance & Counselling

The assistance provided by the Corporation to assist such categories takes different forms, depending on the type of client and his or her requirements. One very important form of assistance provided by the ETC to the socially excluded is the dissemination of information on the labour market. Labour market information has
been described by the International Labour Organisation as an important resource to guide collective and individual investment in building up individuals' employability and a competitive, flexible workforce. The ILO also asserts that quality, timeliness and careful targeting of client groups are hallmarks of effective labour market information systems (ILO, 2002).

Within the present scenario, it is being anticipated that career guidance and counselling is becoming an essential element of the learning process. Information on the labour market helps the individual to make the right decision on the type of vocational programme to follow and is one of the primary motivating factors for individuals to take on further education and training programmes. The Corporation provides guidance and counselling to its various client groups. These include new labour market entrants, seasoned workers and the unemployed who need assistance in making informed decisions about ways and means to gain and maintain skills and employment. Such advice is also provided to youths in the form of information meetings, before they leave compulsory education. The socially excluded are provided with information and assistance by the Corporation's employment advisors so that they can select the most appropriate training programmes and/or supported employment opportunities that will help them overcome their deficiencies and become employable.

Initial & Continued Training
The provision of adequate training and re-training opportunities is one of the other key functions of the Corporation. This is to be expected since one of the main causes of exclusion is the inadequacy of any existing skills held by such individuals. Through the provision of initial and continued training and development, the ETC fulfils its mission to support economic progress, reduce the unemployment rate and increase social integration. Training is provided to overcome skills gaps within the workforce and to assist employers find suitable employees. The training programmes,
schemes and initiatives provided by the Corporation are all labour market driven; that means that they are designed with the direct needs of employers in mind. All training initiatives are primarily directed at equipping those seeking employment with the knowledge and skills required for labour market entry and retention.

To achieve this aim, the Corporation has been managing, organising or running a large number of training programmes, schemes and initiatives. These include Apprenticeship and Traineeship schemes, short-term job-related trade and non-trade courses, basic and advanced information technology (IT) programmes, literacy programmes and the Basic Employment Passport. Other schemes introduced during these last few years to assist particular client groups include the Employment Training Placement Scheme and the Training & Employment Exposure Scheme. The latter two schemes provide training and employment for the over 40's and the registered unemployed respectively.

Training is provided at basic and advanced levels, both as initial training prior to entry to the labour market (as is the case with Apprenticeships, Traineeship Schemes, the Basic Employment Passport and certain mainstream programmes) and as on-going vocational training as is provided in re-training programmes and schemes.

Training provision is supply-driven, diverse and flexible, designed to make up for the clients’ deficiency and labour market needs. The main reason underlying this trend is to make training supply respond better to economic and social needs and render it more flexible in the face of rapid demand shifts. The training services provided have been successful in improving skill levels and employability. This has particularly been the case in those schemes and initiatives where training was oriented to market opportunities and provided as part of an integrated and targeted set of measures to promote labour market inclusion, rather than as a ‘stand-alone’ programme. Job-related training, vocational guidance and counselling, and remedial basic education, combined with training
in specific skills, have improved the prospects of the socially excluded of finding a job.

Participation in employment and in further training programmes and schemes depends to a large extent on the possession of basic skills. There is clear evidence that educational attainment is a primary determinant of individual income and labour market status (Lisbon European Council, 2000, paras. 28, 29). Other evidence shows that unemployment rates generally diminish with higher educational levels, thus reducing related social costs (Eurostat, 2002). In order to remain active within the present context, each and every person needs to have the necessary basic skills required to participate in employment and undertake further learning opportunities. Individuals seeking employment cannot be offered any form of training unless they obtain such basic skills.

**Basic Skills**

Conscious of such shortcomings, the Corporation has directed a lot of effort to provide remedial training and education in key competencies that include basic literacy and numeracy (application of numbers), technology and communication skills. Proficiency in literacy and numeracy skills is fundamental for labour market entry while employment prospects available to those without these basic skills are very limited and shrinking. The absence of such basic skills restricts entry to a very large range of occupations as well as to training and development opportunities proper. This also applies to those in employment since, without a solid core of basic skills, they are unlikely to be able to attain the more advanced technical skills required to cope with the innovation brought about by scientific and technological change.

The situation is somewhat worsened by the fact that those adults who have a low level of educational attainment are less likely to be motivated to seek and participate in further education and training opportunities than those who have higher-level educational qualifications. The psychological state of these individuals is also
indicative of this condition and is likely to increase their state of depression and continue to further reduce the prospects of employment. As a result of this vicious cycle, the current patterns of education and training may worsen rather than ease labour market inequalities and social exclusion.

The ETC has therefore taken it upon itself to provide basic skills training and re-training opportunities to disadvantaged individuals. Programmes on offer include training in functional literacy, and the Basic Employment Passport scheme targeting youths who do not intend to further their studies on completion of compulsory education.

**Literacy and Numeracy**

The importance of basic literacy and numeracy for gainful employment cannot be underestimated. Individuals described as illiterate are difficult to place in jobs while those in employment will not be in a position to cope with the required changes brought about by scientific and technological developments and as a consequence would soon be threatened with redundancy.

The Employment & Training Corporation has taken a number of initiatives aimed to combat this form of exclusion. The Literacy & Numeracy Skills for Employment programme has been established for two main reasons:

- To provide illiterate unemployed persons registering for work with an opportunity to acquire the literacy skills required for the trade courses offered by ETC, thus making them more employable; and
- To provide illiterate employed persons with an opportunity to acquire that level of literacy skills which would help them both to secure their job as well as to advance when or where the opportunity arises.

The first functional literacy programmes were developed as a joint project between the ETC, the Paolo Freire Institute for Faith
& Justice run by the Maltese Jesuits and the Literacy Unit of the University of Malta. This programme catered for the registered unemployed residing in Zebtun and the surrounding villages.

Knowing that this project will not be sufficient for the needs of the illiterate population, the ETC started similar initiatives at its own training centres at Hal Far and Valletta. After some time, this programme was extended to other localities with the collaboration and support of Local Councils and a number of Church Institutions. Through this initiative, Local Councils and Church Institutions were invited to participate by providing facilities within their premises that could be used for the delivery of training. The Corporation assumed the responsibility of providing a qualified trainer, select trainees, and monitor the training programme and its facilitation. The Corporation has, in all these situations, forked out the expenses incurred in the process.

The literacy courses consist of 160 hours of training distributed over a period of 6 months: 6 hours of training per week, spread over 2 or 3 days. Each group is usually limited to approximately 5 trainees to enable the trainer to tackle individual learning needs and methods. Besides the enhancement of literacy skills, benefits from the programme have included personal self-esteem, socialisation within the community and familiarisation with the Maltese labour market. Lately, literacy and numeracy skills programmes have also been delivered at employer’s establishments to those in employment willing to learn such skills.

To assist the particular client group of unemployed youths reintegrate in the labour market in the shortest time possible, the Corporation organises mainstream training programmes and the Basic Employment Passport Scheme. The latter was introduced to overcome difficulties encountered by those coming out of the educational stream with little or no basic skills; while the former provides knowledge and skills training in a particular competence.
Basic Employment Passport Scheme
The Basic Employment Passport was introduced in 2000-2001 operational year. The aim of the scheme is to provide basic employment skills to young school leavers who are coming out of the present educational system with little or no skills/qualifications, academic or otherwise. Individuals with such a handicap will not be in a position to participate in programmes leading to some form of vocational qualification. For the same reason, they are difficult to place in gainful occupation. Meanwhile, those unqualified school leavers who secure employment would find it hard to cope with technological change and would be constantly threatened by redundancy.

The Scheme targets Maltese youths (males and females) that normally have no option but to register as unemployed looking for work once they finish compulsory schooling at age sixteen. Indeed, all those youths who anticipate that they will not obtain the required academic and/or vocational qualifications to enter the labour market or pursue further studies are invited to attend this programme. No entry requirements are set for those selected to participate.

The Basic Employment Passport Scheme is divided into two parts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Basic Skills programme</td>
<td>10 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Work Experience or further skills training, depending on the programme</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The BEP programme was based on the recommendations put forward in the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2000). This memorandum defines 'basic skills' as those required for active participation in the knowledge society and economy — in the labour market and at work, in the community and in a democracy, as a person with a coherent sense of identity.
and direction in life. Its components include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Skills</th>
<th>Applied Literacy, Applied Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital Literacy</td>
<td>Basic IT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>Self-confidence, Self-direction, Personal and Social Skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Skills</td>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the programme targets those individuals who have failed, or been failed by, the compulsory educational system, the use of alternative training methods combined with the trainee-centred concept was adopted to ensure a greater probability of effective knowledge and skills transfer. The idea was to make participants aware of their assets (and not just their weaknesses) as learners, exploiting individual capabilities and overcoming deficiencies through the development of compensating strategies.

**Competence-Based Mainstream Courses**

Besides providing remedial training in basic skills, the ETC assists the unemployed through the provision of short, competence-based training programmes. Programmes are available for those seeking employment, persons in employment interested in upgrading their skills, women returning to the labour market, persons with special needs and youths entering the labour market for the first time. Specific programmes are organised for each of these particular client groups as well as in collaboration with employers to make up for certain skills shortages. Training programmes are provided in both trade and non-trade areas. The duration of such programmes depends on the level of outcome to be achieved, content and the trainee.

One of the strengths of the ETC is that it can react swiftly to shifting labour market requirements. In fact, new short courses are continuously being introduced to make up for shortfalls identified through the ETC Employment Barometer (ETC, 2002b)
and to satisfy unfilled vacancies submitted by employers. Besides the above indicators, the ETC has maintained regular dialogue with bodies such as the Malta Development Corporation (MDC), responsible for attracting new foreign direct investment, and social partners through a number of steering committees.

Besides providing in-house training, the Corporation has also sought the collaboration of a number of public and private entities to provide training on its behalf.

The Over 40 Unemployed
The unemployed aged over 40 and the long-term unemployed (that is, those who have been continuously on the unemployment register for at least 12 months) are being provided with opportunities where they can upgrade their skills base and obtain new work experiences. Besides short-term training programmes mentioned earlier, they are assisted with two different schemes:

- The Employment & Training Placement Scheme and
- The Training Employment Exposure Scheme

The former provides participants with initial, on-the-job training with an employer who agrees to employ the trainee for an indefinite period. In the latter case, the unemployed is provided with initial training by the ETC and is then placed with an employer for on-the-job work exposure in an occupation of his/her choice. Both schemes have been successful in upgrading the skills base of the participants. These schemes were introduced as those aged over 40 are becoming more difficult to place in employment, not just in Malta but also across Europe. Consequently the economic active pool of the workforce is getting older as time goes by (Central Office of Statistics, 2000). At European level, it has also been confirmed that, as a result of continuous lowering of the labour force exit thresholds and the operation of age discrimination in the labour market, people over 40 are regarded as nearing the end
of their working lives (European Foundation for the Improving of Living and Working Conditions, 1997).

**The Employment & Training Placement Scheme (ETPS)**
The ETPS is an active labour market measure aimed at assisting employers to provide the necessary training to unemployed persons during the probationary period. The Scheme is also used to entice employers to employ registered unemployed persons who lack the required skills for particular occupations. Within this context, the Scheme provides the unemployed with an opportunity to upgrade their existing skills and acquire new skills that are relevant to current and future labour market needs. Within the Scheme, on-the-job training is delivered at the employers' establishment with the employer or the immediate superior of the employee assuming the role of mentor and trainer in the process.

The Scheme has been extensively used during the last operational year by both the Employment Services Division (ESD) and by the Supported Employment & Placement Unit (SEPU) at the ETC. The former utilises this employment initiative to assist unemployed clients who have been on the unemployment register for more than one year and with persons who are over forty years of age. The Supported Employment Unit uses the Scheme to entice employers to employ clients who are either very long-term unemployed, registered disabled, ex-convicts or ex-substance abusers.

The ETPS has served to achieve a number of social objectives, such as improving the employment possibilities for a large number of registered unemployed clients. At the same time, it might not be regarded as a very cost-effective option when one considers the length of training awarded per client, which at times could be termed excessive.

**Training & Employment Exposure Scheme (TEES)**
The aim of the TEES scheme is somewhat similar to the ETPS: it assists long-term registered unemployed clients who are over 40
years of age to find and retain employment. The scheme offers participants an opportunity to obtain the necessary training and experience required by the labour market.

The first phase of the scheme includes skills sampling, whereby the participants are given a taster of different skills. The skills provided included: food preparation, food & beverage service and housekeeping, computer awareness, electrical work, woodwork, tile laying, refrigeration & air conditioning, mechanical fitting, electronic assembly, plumbing, core skills, health & safety, retailing, storekeeping, gardening and welding skills. Training is organised at the ETC training centres and at other institutions, including the Institute for Tourism Studies at St Julian's and Malta Shipbuilding at Marsa.

The second phase of the scheme is of flexible duration. All participants receive training in one field or another. During the second phase, contacts are made with employers to find and secure adequate work/training placements for the participants. Moreover, monitoring visits are carried out by an ETC official to ensure that the training provided satisfies pre-set standards as well as to obtain feedback on, and from, the individual trainees.

Supported Employment

Other socially excluded groups being catered for by the Corporation include persons with disability, those coming out of correctional facilities, ex-substance abusers and persons having social problems. In these instances, the ETC is seeking collaboration with a wide range of partners and stakeholders. Partnerships have important advantages since they are likely to increase the resource base available and in the process they will help to promote programmes that are relevant to current economic and social needs.

Supported employment, training and vocational guidance is also being provided to persons with disability. The Corporation works hand in hand with partner organisations with which it has a co-operation agreement in order to provide training and employment
placements to disadvantaged persons. Employers and disabled persons benefit from the 'Bridging the Gap' Scheme designed to facilitate the transition from unemployment to employment by exposing clients to a real working situation. The scheme allows the employer to evaluate the trainee and provide initial training at minimum expenses since the allowance is paid by the ETC. Consequently, the scheme provides an opportunity to persons with disability to prove themselves, increase their prospects of employment and more importantly integrate them within the workforce.

Other socially excluded groups being addressed by the Corporation are those coming out of correctional facilities, ex-substance abusers, and persons having social problems. For the former, the ETC organises training programmes within the Corradino Correctional Facility, facilitating re-integration within the labour market. Ex-substance abusers are provided with one-to-one guidance and training that suits their needs, followed with placement at an employer's establishment.

**Conclusion**

Though provision is on the increase, the vocational, education and training programmes described above are not likely to be enough to address the problems being encountered by socially excluded groups. Such problems are bound to increase with globalisation and the shift towards a more knowledge-driven and skills-based society. Although important and essential, such initiatives may be insufficient to resolve unemployment problems and increase labour market participation unless they are integrated within a comprehensive economic and labour market strategy that seeks to promote economic and employment growth.

For this reason, the ETC has been consulting with the social partners, enterprises, individuals and civil society to ensure that its education and training policies are embedded in a holistic
framework that dovetails with Malta's current and future economic realities. This strategy should contribute to the careful identification of training needs and programmes that are relevant to labour market requirements. Thus should improve the likelihood that training interventions will meet the requirements of both employers and the socially excluded so that gainful and meaningful employment is sought and retained.
References


Employment & Training Corporation (2002b) *Employment Barometer*, Malta, ETC.


