

THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE IN MALTA

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The Youth Employment Service in this country, which dates back to 1947, still provides services to boys only, up to the age of nineteen years. Young girls are catered for by the Women's Section of the Employment Office. For this reason my examination of the work of the Youth Employment Service in this paper is necessarily limited to the problems affecting young boys.

Administratively the Youth Employment Service is still a branch of the Labour Division of the Department of Labour.

The Service is at present staffed by a Senior Labour Officer, a Labour Officer, a Clerical Officer and a Clerk Typist. The Senior Labour Officer is commonly known and addressed, both by the Department and by the public in general, as Youth Employment Officer, although this is not an officially recognised designation. This officer is in full charge of his section and is responsible to the Administrative Officer in charge of the Labour Division of the Department.

The number of young persons registering for employment for the first time during the last five years is as follows:

<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>
2052	1757	1353	813	1101

The number of young male persons on the Unemployment Register at the end of each of these years was as follows:

<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>
430	237	129	213	348

The following figures show the number of young men placed in employment during the last five years:

<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>
205	244	218	205	127

As can be seen from the above, many of the registrants cease to register. This is either because they find employment or because they lose interest after they have spent a long time registering for employment without succeeding in getting a job.

Every year about 6,000 young persons leave school and start seeking jobs. The number of boys who leave school is almost the same as that of girls.

During 1971 the number of young persons calling for advice at the Youth Employment Office exceeded 3,000. This number comprised school leavers, students attending different colleges, Technical Institutes and the University, and others who were in employment but had a personal problem.

In 1969 the Department of Labour issued a booklet called "A Guide to Careers". This booklet, which is in English, is intended for boys and girls of 14 years of age and over who stand at the crossroads of life and will soon have to make a choice on which their whole future may depend.

In 1970 another booklet, called "Ghajnuna Ghal Ghazla tal-Karriera Ghat-Tfal li Ghalqu t-Tlettax-il-Sena" was published by the Department of Labour. This contains useful information regarding Vocational Training Courses, etc, for boys over the age of 13 years.

Vocational training

Young people who call at the Youth Employment Office to register for employment for the first time are encouraged to learn a trade and every effort is made to place them in an establishment which offers facilities for trade training. The best form of training is, of course, through an apprenticeship.

Young persons may be recruited as apprentices with the Malta Drydocks Corporation, the Malta Government or with private industry. The method of recruitment is different in each case.

Apprentices with the Malta Drydocks Corporation have excellent facilities for training and eventually good employment prospects exist for those who successfully complete their apprenticeship. Apprentices with the Malta Government and with private industry have good opportunities to master their trade. They attend the apprentices school for one day a week, where they

learn the theory of the trade, in addition to other subjects related to the trade itself. They spend the rest of the week doing practical training on the shop floor.

The total number of apprentices undergoing training up to December of last year was 451, distributed as follows:

Private firms	-	159
Malta Government	-	82
Malta Drydocks Corporation	-	210

During 1971, 117 apprentices were engaged:
60 with the Malta Drydocks Corporation,
47 with private firms and
10 with Government.

It is a pity that Government does not take more apprentices in its departments, especially when one considers that there exists a shortage of skilled workers in this sector of employment. It is also strange that an establishment like the Malta Electricity Board does not take on any apprentices. There are other private firms and establishments, old as well as new where, unfortunately, no apprentices are taken on. Examples are the jewellery trade, electronics, tailoring, salesmanship and hairdressing.

Every effort has been made and is still being made by the Department of Labour to introduce Apprenticeship Schemes for those trades for which apprenticeship schemes have not yet been drawn up, such as electronics, hairdressing and salesmanship.

The presence of a television set in most homes and the regular visits paid to the hairdresser by many women today have created a need for skilled television technicians and hairdressers and stylists, a need which has to be met if we are to move with the times.

No scheme of training exists for salesgirls and salesmen. Such a personal service needs to be more sophisticated. I do not wish to cast any shadow on this class of employee, but one cannot deny that the behaviour of some of them towards customers leaves much to be desired. In some instances they are openly unco-operative.

These are matters about which complaints have been made for many years, but no concrete suggestions were ever put forward, by interested bodies. In many instances employers

blame Government for lack of facilities. Employers are now organised; they have their own associations; and they should therefore make suggestions and even prepare schemes of training.

The Government has the appropriate machinery to study the proposed schemes of training and implement them. One of the functions of the Youth Advisory Committee is to advise the Minister of Labour on any matter relating to the employment of young persons. Employers could therefore submit apprenticeship schemes to the Youth Advisory Committee for their eventual recommendation to the Minister of Labour.

The composition of the Youth Advisory Committee is not prescribed in the law. The latter only states that it "shall consist of such persons as the Minister shall appoint for such time and under such conditions as may be determined by him". But it imposes a most important condition, namely that not less than two of the members shall represent employers and not less than two shall represent employees, provided that the number of members representing employers and employees shall be equal.

A frequent complaint by employers engaging young persons to learn a trade is that patience is needed and time is lost in teaching them the basic elements of the trade; employers also complain of the damage caused to the tools and material by these young persons especially during the first year of their training. Such complaints could, in my opinion, be substantially reduced if Government were to introduce one year Basic Training Course in a Government Training Centre or elsewhere.

The ideal function would be to channel school leavers who want to learn a trade to a course in a trade of their choice. During the period of their training, they would thus be able to learn the principles of the trade they have chosen. Arrangements could then be made with employers to interview these young trainees and choose those suitable to become apprentices in the various trades.

Such a scheme has been introduced in the United Kingdom. In 1960 the Ministry of Labour decided to set up classes at Government training centres throughout the country to help smaller firms to appreciate the advantages of systematic full-time training at the beginning of an apprenticeship. In Engineering, for example, the syllabus was based on the principles of the jointly approved syllabus of training apprentices, fitters and turners and covered the first year of apprenticeship. The course

was not intended to cover technical college work but was designed to give good basic training as it might be given in the employer's workshop.

Something on the above pattern could be implemented if our school leaving age is raised to 16 years.

If such schemes were ever to be implemented, one would expect young persons to have a chance to choose the trade of their liking and in accordance with their aptitudes. It is against all principles of vocational guidance to persuade a person to learn a trade which is not to his liking. In the past there were instances where some young persons had no freedom to choose a trade course in our Technical Institutes: they had to accept Tailoring or else fail to be admitted to the Institute, as all the courses in other trades were full. Some of these unfortunate youngsters accepted such a proposition, in the hope that they might eventually have a chance to transfer to another course in the trade of their liking.

In 1969 Government appointed Part-Time Trade Inspectors for the existing Apprenticeship Trades to visit establishments where apprentices are engaged, in order to make sure that the processes of the trade are satisfactorily taught to apprentices. These Inspectors submit their reports to the Department of Labour (Youth Section) and if some irregularities are reported, the employer is notified by letter to rectify those irregularities. A follow-up inspection is then carried out by an official of the Youth Section in order to see whether this has been done.

Every establishment where apprentices are engaged is also visited by an official of the Employment Section at least once a year to ensure the observance of the provisions of the Industrial Training Act, Act X of 1952, which regulates the training of apprentices and learners.

The officials of the Youth Section investigate complaints lodged by apprentices or other young persons in employment. They mediate in all trade disputes where young persons are concerned. Several disputes between employers and employees have been settled to the satisfaction of both.

Very good relations exist between employers and the Youth Employment Section and employers are in constant touch with the Youth Employment Section. Many employers seek and accept the advice of the officials of the Youth Employment Section

on differences which may arise between them and their young employees. In some instances drastic action by employers against their young employees is avoided through the immediate intervention by officials of the Youth Employment Section.

At the end of their apprenticeship, apprentices are finally trade tested by a Trade Testing Board; if they pass the test they are issued with a Journeyman's Certificate.

Unfortunately many employers are still reluctant to engage apprentices. They argue that they have never had apprentices, and have always done well with the youths they have taken on. They are inclined to regard apprentices with suspicion and are not prepared to take the trouble to train them. With the aim of creating an incentive to employers and of increasing the number of apprentices in industrial establishments, Government pays a subsidy to employers who engage apprentices.

Young persons who do not possess the required educational qualifications to become apprentices are engaged as learners. They too learn the trades, but they have very little supervision with regard to trade training, and the progress they make in learning a trade depends mostly on the honesty of the employer. During 1971, 261 learners were engaged by private firms. There are 654 learners with private firms at present. These figures show that the number of learners undergoing training is substantial. These need more supervision, but due to the limited staff at the Youth Employment Section, such a task is impossible at the moment.

Technically speaking, a learner could learn a trade as well but in many instances his standard of education is low, consequently he cannot perform certain work without supervision. He may be able to carry out work assigned to him but he cannot do it all by himself.

It would be a step in the right direction to make it obligatory for employers to send their learners to a special school, like that for apprentices, for one day per week. These lads, who play a very important part in the employment sector, would at least be able to learn the essential basic educational requirements.

The prejudice against Technical Education which existed in the past is slowly fading away. Parents are now realizing that Technical Education is not something degrading. They no longer

discourage their children from following a Trade Course of their liking.

Vocational guidance

Ever since the Youth Employment Section was set up in 1948 it has been the intention of the Department of Labour to develop a sound system of vocational guidance and thus provide an essential social service which fulfils four important functions needs of the community:

- (1) to indicate to the Education Authorities the requirements of employers, thus serving as a link between the schools and the labour market;
- (2) to help the education authorities in the formation of the educational background of school children during the school years, in such a way as to lead them to the realisation of their personalities in a way compatible with the actual requirements of commerce and industry and the other sectors of the community;
- (3) to provide school leavers with useful information which serves to direct them to the type of employment for which they are most suited;
- (4) to help direct the labour supply to areas where it is most in demand.

One form of vocational guidance which served these very useful purposes in the last few years, was a system of school talks, organised jointly by the Department of Labour and the Education Department, enabling trained officials from the Department of Labour to meet personally school children and their parents in order to discuss careers and to offer collective, and even individual, guidance where possible.

The success of these talks can be gauged from the fact that out of an estimated average of 6,000 school leaving population each year, about 1,666 boys in Malta and 172 boys in Gozo listened to such talks in 1970. A total of 58 talks were delivered during that year at various Government Primary Schools in Malta

and 4 talks to schools in Gozo. An estimated number of 874 parents in Malta and 76 in Gozo also attended the talks. Unfortunately these talks were temporarily suspended at the request of the Education Department during 1971 when a change in the school system was taking place. I regret to have to say that no talks have been delivered this year either.

At a meeting held at the Education Office on 18th April, 1972, however, attended by the Directors of Education and Labour as well as other senior officials of both Departments, it was agreed that School Talks should be given by trained officials of the Department of Labour to Students attending Forms IV and V of the Grammar and Technical Schools. Whether school talks will be given to other students attending other forms or not will be decided at a later date.

An efficient system of vocational guidance is highly desirable and tends to gain in importance as a result of:

- (1) the industrialisation of these Islands' economy and its increasing sophistication over the last few years, offering an increasing number of specialised jobs which call for special training;
- (2) the raising of the school-leaving age and the change in the educational pattern which calls for the proper direction of the educational background of youths at an early stage;
- (3) the keenness of competition on the labour market which makes it essential, both in the interest of the community and of the individual workers, that waste of skills and energies be reduced by an efficient direction of the labour potential to the fields where it can be most advantageously utilised.

The keen interest the Education Department is showing in developing in schools a sense of vocational conscience cannot but be appreciated, yet no system can attain the desired results unless it is inspired by a close knowledge of the labour market. Indeed, no other Department except the Department of Labour can furnish the needed authoritative information about the trends and demand for labour which tend to vary and change between one skill and another or between one occupation and another, as also

in its overall aggregate aspects from time to time. Furthermore, no other officials can provide as effectively as those of this Department the continuous link between Government and employers. The Department of Labour is exclusively responsible for providing vocational guidance to youngsters when they leave school. It is not seen therefore why attempts should be made to keep the Department out of the picture during the formative years of the child when it is expected to provide efficient guidance post facto, at a time when shortcomings which may have been allowed during the formative period can be corrected only with difficulty.

Reference was made in the report of the Manpower Expoert, who visited Malta in 1966, to the need for an extension of activities in the field of vocational guidance.

The following is an extract from a report by Mr. J.M. Vincent Smith, an expert who came to Malta in 1967 to make an assessment of the present and future Manpower situation:

"Especially because of the opportunities to be offered to boys and girls by the expansion of industry and tourism, it is of the highest importance that they and their parents should be made aware of the openings available for school leavers by way of employment, training or further education, and should be given guidance in the choice of a suitable career, both at school and at the Youth Employment Office. Amongst other things there is a need for boys and girls to be steered away from the prevailing view that there is something undignified about manual work in industry.

"The initial requirement is that a decision should be taken about the allocation between government departments of responsibility for this specialised work which extends well beyond the functions of careers masters in individual schools. First-hand knowledge of industry and of the state of the labour market are an essential requirement, as well as training in the techniques of vocational guidance".

There is a dire need too for implementing some of the recommendations made by Mrs M. Vestin in her report on Pupil Guidance which she submitted to the Hon. Minister of Education, Culture and Tourism in November 1969. One of the suggestions made by this expert was "that the Minister of Education and Labour should also set up a standing committee of restricted proportion between the two authorities to facilitate the necessarily frequent co-operation, concerning plans, action, evaluation, material and other aids, etc."

It is indeed strange that no standing committee has been appointed so far to study the needs of the Vocational Guidance.

It is an undeniable fact that educational guidance and vocational guidance are complementary to each other, but up to now each Department has been working in isolation, keeping the other in the dark about progress that is being made or methods that are being adopted.

Conclusion

School leavers are in real need of advice and counselling over a very wide range of problems. For a long time they may have looked forward to leaving school but when the time comes they frequently find themselves quite unprepared to meet the realities of the change from school to work, grossly ignorant of the choice of nature of the occupations available to them, bewildered by the shortage of the right kind of jobs to meet their own needs and abilities, and sometimes faced with a lack of understanding on the part of those responsible for their care in employment.

Young people who, because of necessity or lack of vocational guidance, accept employment not of their choice suffer a great deal of frustration. In this situation young people often pretend to accept cheerfully that which, in their own eyes, is less than second best, whilst others demonstrate that they find it difficult to resign themselves to a job which denies them opportunities for expression of their personal tastes, interests and disposition.

Many boys enter forms of employment which preclude them from obtaining systematic training, apprenticeship or any qualifications, and, in consequence, they abandon all idea of a progressive career. Unhappily some employers dismiss the youngster as soon as he becomes too old to be paid the minimum wage. Careful and long-term preparation for this difficult situation should transform this whole period from one in which the young person meets a series of crisis to one of planned transition. This would not only assist young people to adapt themselves, but it would also go far towards ensuring that they find an opportunity for personal and occupational fulfilment.

In a number of European countries, post-war educational reform has resulted in earlier emphasis on vocational guidance within the compulsory period. In Belgium, preliminary vocational

guidance has been introduced into many schools before the fixed school-leaving age is reached. In Czechoslovakia, the last two years of compulsory school attendance now include the provision of vocational guidance to all pupils. In Sweden and the United Kingdom, vocational guidance is brought into the school systematically, and it is now being given to pupils two years prior to their leaving school. In the United States, vocational guidance is generally started in the secondary school, and sometimes in the last year of elementary school. This is also true in Canada. In both countries there appears to be a trend to stress the initiation of vocational guidance before the end of the elementary school course so that guidance procedures may play a part in the adjustment to be made between elementary and secondary school.

Now more than ever it is important that the link between the Youth Employment Section of the Department of Labour and the Department of Education should be strengthened, for Malta is becoming more industrialised and young persons and their parents are becoming conscious about careers. It is against the interest of the pupils and their parents that such an informative service should cease to function in the schools. It is also the duty of the State to see that young persons are given all help required so that they may eventually enter into a career which is to their liking, thus limiting labour turn-over in industry as much as possible.

Both the Ministers of Education and Labour should be responsible for seeing that such help is given.

It is also essential that a Manpower Survey be conducted so that the manpower requirements of the future may be estimated. The information derived from such a survey could help the Government to make the necessary plans for training our future work force according to the requirements of our industry and other services.

It is true that at present Government is faced with many thorny problems, but I feel that the problem of Youth Employment should be given the importance that it deserves.