

# VET Study visit Malta, 23 - 25 November 2011

## Visit details

### 1st day morning

Study visit participants:

- Rory o'Sullivan (expert from Ireland)
- Tarja Mänty (expert from Finland)
- Frančiška (Fani) Al-Mansour (expert from Slovenia)
- Shirley Jones (expert from UK Northern Ireland)
- Vincent Borg (expert from Malta and host)
- Maria Ciappara (expert from Malta and host)
- Anabel Corral Granados (European Agency staff member)
- Harald Weber (European Agency staff member)



*Shirley, Anabel, Rory, Vincent and Fani*



*Rory, Anabel, Tarja, Shirley, Fani and Maria*

## Directorate Student Services Hamrun

Welcome by **George Borg**, Director Student Services



*The student services being 'integrated' into a school environment*

The Maltese Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family has two directorates: Directorate for Educational Services – DES, and the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE). George gave an overview on the structure of the Directorate Student Services (see presentation **GeorgeBorg.pdf**) that was set up during the last 4 years. Before that, services were scattered and are now centralised. The Student Services consists of four sections:



- 1: Educational psycho-social services
- 2: Special Education and Resource Centres
- 3: Inclusive Education
- 4: Projects and Initiatives Section

The overall strategy in all services has been to work in a team and to work inter-disciplinary, instead of independently and spread.

to 1:

Counselling (working with personal, emotional and social needs of students) and career services is split to different persons, but all services were put together now in one building with representatives in colleges. This contributes to teamwork and inter-disciplinary co-operation. Case conferences on individual student take place for instance with all services participating in it. In Summer 2011 a college plus career guidance for students that have finished their compulsory schooling commenced named college-based "Walk-in Service" and was available during the holiday season (mid July to mid September). Guidance teachers meanwhile go also into primary schools, so their number was doubled (during financially difficult times!). There are now 135 guidance teachers in schools, working in primary and secondary education.

to 2:

Different units set up this section. For instance, there is an access communication and technology unit (ACTU) (a team of 6 persons / 3 speech therapists and 3 occupational therapists) or units that deal with students with autism (support team collaborate with local

NGOs), hearing disabilities (physical and human resources), visual disabilities (physical and human resources), with home tuition, early intervention, hospital classes (a team of 8 professionals), transition coordinators and SEBD specialist service (socio emotional and behavioural difficulties). With regard to autism, a co-operation with an NGO is ongoing, as the number of students with autism has doubled during the last years and the Directorate needed support.

The last resort if nothing else works is taking students to special centres, but with clear entering and exit criteria. During the last four years, four resource centres (ex special schools) provide education to everybody. They are not structured for special disabilities, but according to age groups. There is a primary education resource centre, a secondary education resource centre, and two young adult education resource centres of which one deals with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). Sometimes parents do not want to have their children in mainstream schools, but mostly the medical condition (i.e. medical support needs) doesn't allow this (e.g. need for a nurse). But if possible, these students attend at least part-time the mainstream school.

to 3:

There are 2359 identified learners with special needs. For them, learning support assistants (LSA) are available. Their training is available via evening courses of a free of charge 10 weeks induction course and a 20 weeks duration course with 140 hrs (with the cost of 200 euro) named as Certificate in Education for Learning Support Assistants. Teacher assistants should have the second course in order to get a permanent position in a public institution. 1208 teachers were trained in 70 hrs courses (compulsory, paid by the state), which was a precondition for a further level of a 140 hrs course, paid by the teacher.

to 4:

This section deals for instance with exchanges, competitions, healthy eating etc.

**Maria Ciappara** was giving a presentation of Malta's educational set-up (see presentation [MariaCiappara.pdf](#)). The educational system is divided among the public schools (college system that started 6 years ago) and the private schools (independent and church schools). All students of schools have free of charge transport. There are 10 colleges in Malta of which 9 are on Malta island and 1 is on Gozo. Colleges in Malta are always a group of schools, so as Maria is the principal, still each school has an own head of school. St. Clare's College, of which Maria is the principal, consists of the Pembroke Girls Secondary School (Sandhurst) and the Pembroke Girls Secondary School (St. Andrews). In specific, St. Clare's College consists of 7 primary schools (of which one is the resource centre St. Miguel) and 4 secondary schools. As a principal she has one support officer, who is usually a former head of a school. Her college has currently 449 students in Kindergarten (3 - 5 years), 1439 students in primary (5-11 years) and 1285 students in secondary education (11-16 years). With 2724 students in total it is one of the smallest colleges in Malta. It has 11 heads and 21 assistant heads as Senior Management Staff (SMT), 497 teachers and 144 learning support assistants (LSA), adding up to 652 members of staff. Different support schemes are available through LSAs, e.g. 1:1 full time, 1:1 part time, shared services, e.g. 2 hours and a half in one class per day in different classes, full time shared in the same classroom (assisting the teacher), or benefits scheme. Class sizes vary from about 1:15 in Kindergarten to about 1:25 in secondary education (maximum 2 students with SEN per class).



Just last year so-called benchmark exams (children with 10 years of age) have been introduced to provide a snapshot of the students' knowledge and skills (on reading, speaking and maths).

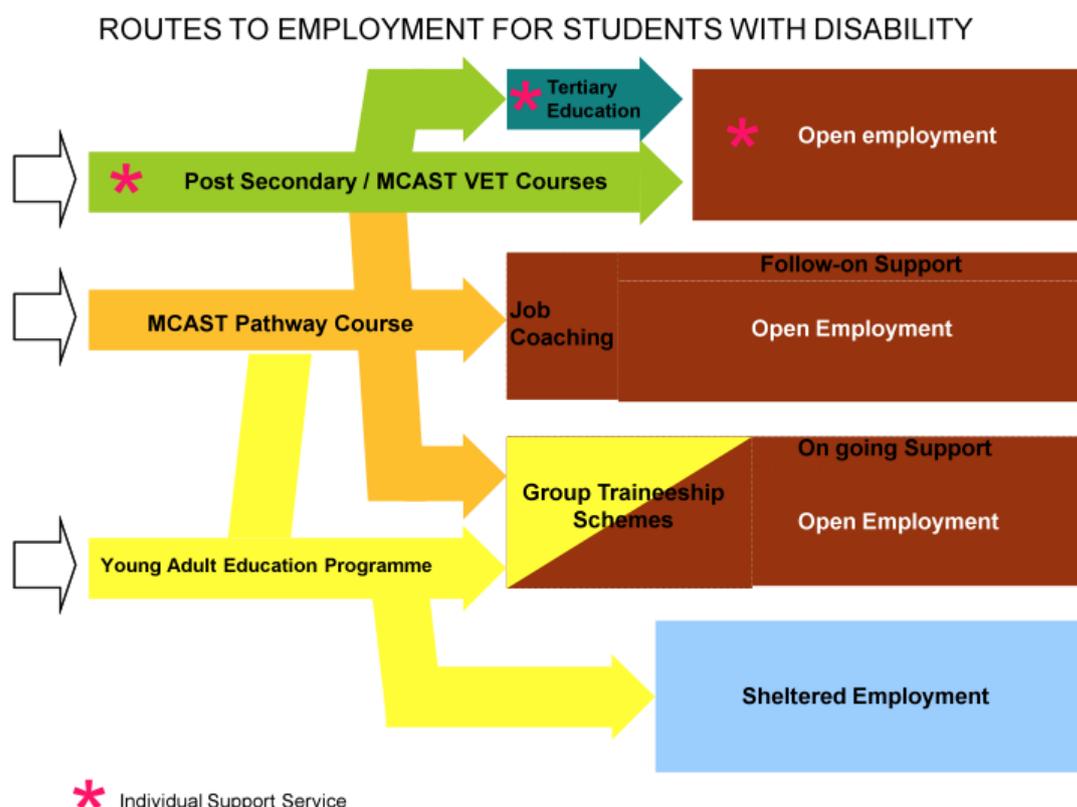
In post secondary education, 2 A-Levels, 3 intermediate levels and systems of knowledge are available and allow access to tertiary education. MCAST does not need these certificates, as it is fitting a hole between University and the Labour market needs. Tertiary education at the University means either 2 years for diplomas or 7 years for PhD courses. The University has currently about 2800 graduates per year.

Currently, a draft of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) called "Toward a quality education for all" is available which was produced in a wider consultation process, involving various stakeholders. About 75% of the teachers participated in a survey as part of this consultation process. The framework document is planned for approval in 2012.

### Visit of the Resource Centre for Young Adults Education, Wardija

Welcome by **Mario Testa**, Principal of Maria Regina College, and by **Tony Galea**, current head of the Resource Centre and **Niclas**, future head of the resource centre (from January 2012 onwards).

**Vincent Borg** gave a short presentation on the Ministry's vision of the routes to employment for students with IEN. The aim is to facilitate employment for people with disabilities. The following scheme shows the potential pathways:



There is no plan to set up sheltered workshops, yet day centres should also change and provide opportunities for a number of hours or days to participate in real / authentic work.

**Niclas** gave a presentation on the structure of the resource centre (see PREZI presentation at [http://prezi.com/e5calgsovvvc0/present/?auth\\_key=73y4y1t&follow=i00sk84nn0v2](http://prezi.com/e5calgsovvvc0/present/?auth_key=73y4y1t&follow=i00sk84nn0v2)). In this he highlighted, that resource centres exist because of the Salamanca statement (1994) aiming that special schools become a centre for training staff and a supportive place for the community. Aiming of maximising the students' independence though empowering students to take responsibilities on their own life and make informed choices and take decisions independently or by working with others. Parent involvement is an essential part of the work, as they are necessary for building up confidence in the skills and abilities of their children. The centre plans to develop curriculum modules that lead to day centres, employment or further education. The Centre also works in collaboration with other educational institutions such as MCAST and the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC)

Their target group is aged 16-22 years, i.e. students stay for 6 years in the centre. With regard to content, a) personal development and core subjects, b) individual services and c) vocational preparation are offered.

to a): this offer contains e.g. coping strategies, management of change, assertiveness or social competencies. Core skills contain numeracy, literacy, basic computer skills, but also self care, independent living skills, self advocacy, planning etc.

to b): ICT, multi-sensory studio, sensory motor room, optiMusic (room in which a main instruments with light and music is used in order to perform group activities) and gym. It is noteworthy that the centre managed to get donations, and major companies have paid for the most expensive resources.

to c:) The centre follows the principle *place - train - maintain*. This is based upon work exposure opportunities, both centre and community based, with the aim to raise employability skills.

Use of an IEVP - *individual educational and vocational plan*

The plan is to spread into the community and to move out of the institutional context.

Challenges the centre is facing:

- lack of age appropriate resources, and rarely availability in Maltese language
- Training requirements for the staff (need for more opportunities in order to learn specific skills as behavioural training)
- The stigma of the preceding special school (to seclude students instead of being a facilitator)
- Problematic access to the labour market

The group then started a round through the centre, visiting all classes:

10 groups with a total of 91 students (official maximum: 80) are in the centre, of which 2 groups are always in the community while 8 are in the centre (rotation of groups). Each group has one (subject) teacher and 3 LSA (around 1 staff per 2 learners). The whole centre has 13 teachers and 37 LSA. All students do all subjects. The students are divided in groups with different levels of ability and there are 5 groups of students from 16 to 19 years old and other 5 groups with students from 19 to 21 years old. There is also a full-time nurse available. Just recently, the accessibility of the building was enhanced. In the computer lab, quite a lot of software is available, yet almost no offers in Maltese can be found which then often requires adaptations.

The school council consists of 8 persons, of which 3 are parents and 3 are staff that are elected every 3 years. They discuss main concerns with the school management, but they are also involved in fundraising activities. Parents are also involved in the process of setting up the IEVP. In the current process of change, parents still have a lot of questions

with regard to the new programme. The school council's head says that some children are benefitting more than others from this new approach. Further differentiation is required. As the school is still in the process of change, continuous training of teachers is needed (on SEN and vocational aspects). An evaluation took place about the first phase, and changes have been implemented. With regard to the IEVP, assessment of the "V"-part is still difficult. In this respect, liaisons with institutions abroad are made to learn from others.

Teachers come directly from mainstream training, so a lot of training needs to take place afterwards. Students from the first year of the university degree on teaching studies are coming for observations currently, but it is hoped that the University takes this up and sends students in for practical phases in the future.

Teachers asked regarding their perception of the ongoing change answered that they had doubts and questions, as in every process of change. They said that it was important to stick together both teacher and LSA and work hard in planning during the summer months. But now, teachers would stick closer together, and collaboration became an important aspect, without collaboration it could not be successful. They appreciated that their voice is heard in sessions with the school management as part of the ongoing evaluation.

One of the bigger changes affected the teachers who had to change from having one class for many years (teaching everything to them) to become subject teachers with changing students all the time. However, as the school has a very young staff (the senior is 2.5 years in that school), this shift was mastered without major problems.

Some students had problems or difficulties with the changes, but it just took a time to adjust.

In the process of setting up an IEVP, the group teacher, an LSA representative (of that group), parents and any stakeholders (e.g. occup. therapist, NGO) brought in by the parents meet. In preparation, the group teacher has met all subject teachers beforehand. The IEVP is updated yearly, after a 3 to 4 week observation phase by the teachers.

## 1st day afternoon



### Visit of the VET units

*The VET units were located in extra buildings*

Students have during the morning the independent living skills units and the working skills units during the afternoon.

*Unit 1* deals with office related work, e.g. copying, binding, shredding etc. The focus is not on the profession. The tasks facilitate to build up employability. The next step is to get real work in the unit, e.g. asking Ministries to give some work to them. All students go through these VET units, the older ones spending more time in there however.

*Unit 2* deals with creative work (art and craft). A production process is set up, where students either perform single steps in the process or cope with the whole process, depending on their abilities. Instructions are given in writing as well as explained via pictures. As there are no sheltered workshops yet, it is thought of creating co-operatives similar to those founded by unemployed people, yet with the need for a support.

*Unit 3* deals with gardening. The Ministry of Agriculture gives materials to the unit so they can plant about 1000 trees each season.

The three topics of the units are only exemplars to learn on real tasks and to work towards improving the employability, and therefore will focus on the wider skills needs of the labour market.

Presentation by **Maria**, responsible until recently for transition in the centre. She managed to find work placements for similar tasks as taught in the VET units in a local council office, a gardening centre and an old people's residence. She went with 2 to 3 students (they were selected on their working potential) on a rotation basis each week to one of the locations (from March to June 2011). If students e.g. faced problems with counting money, she gave feedback to subject teachers (here: numeracy) to focus on that issue later on. She developed a checklist with employability skills, including e.g. the skill to commute by bus, to deal with timing, money management etc. This list is believed to be common to all professions. In the future, work exposure shall become a regular offer of the centre.

In the discussion about what the responsibilities of the centre are / will be, it was made clear that finding a job is the responsibility of the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), so the school would encourage parents and students to seek support there. It is clear that different support schemes will be needed. Some might be happy with an initial support plus follow on support, while others might need an ongoing support. From

experience it was reported that employers are often more interested in the support than in subsidies (e.g. benefits during the first 3 years of employment of a person with a disability).

The 5 students who benefitted from the work exposure are still in the centre, as there are no vacancies available in the day centre. As there is also a reform of the day centres going on, they will provide continuous learning experiences in the future as well, including sheltered employment opportunities. The links to the companies who offered places for work exposures can be used also in the future, yet not for transitions of the students into jobs. In the future it is planned that employers can approach the resource centres as well to request support.



Certificates at the end of the resource centres time are not yet worked out. In mainstream it is worked upon a portfolio approach, so maybe the resource centre will provide something similar. But first, a syllabus, curriculum and assessment scheme needs to be worked out. A discussion is going on whether the centre should provide certificates below level 1 (BTEC).

In the winding up session, asked for the biggest strengths and challenges of the centre in the process of change, the following answers were given:

- + Suitable employment schemes will give rationale to our work
- Training of teachers, as time is limited. Some teachers take up own initiative, other not yet. They don't have specialised courses at the university level.
- Expectations on the side of teachers and of parents need to be heightened
- Some parents do not understand the rationale of the change
- Sometimes, expectations of parents are also too high. The IEP could be a tool in mainstream education to bring parents to a more realistic view on their children's' abilities. They agree on the relevance of a good assessment of students and particularly from the mainstream education.
- + young and innovative staff

## 2nd day morning



Visit at the Maltese College of Art, Science and Technology

### *Entrance to MCAST*

**John Bartolo**, Director, Student Services, at MCAST

MCAST (see presentation **MCAST.pdf**) offers 150+ courses, opened 2001, this year 10th anniversary. It has 10 Institutes and the Gozo Centre. Currently there are about 6000 full time students and about 5000 part time students. It has more than 400 fulltime employees. Students attending are 16+, as compulsory education needs to be finished. In the Board of Governors representatives from industry, chamber of commerce etc and the principal guarantee a close connection to the labour market. Statistics from 2010 show that 82% continue education, 8 % get a workplace and 10% continue with something else.



Key offers are a library and resource centre, student council, sport facilities and an international office. The support services includes an information centre, the pathway programme, vocational guidance (planned to go out to secondary schools at this time of the year) addressing parents as well, personal counselling (including therapy), inclusive education, and the learning support unit (e.g. it was noticed that more often students have challenges on numeracy or literacy skills; 20 lecturers give extra lessons in classes of max 10 students in English, Maltese, mathematics and IT, but also personal development (independent living skills))

Initial assessment tests give hints on which level to start.

Links between vocational teachers and subject teachers are actively used, e.g. in mathematics; if the concept of ratio is treated in agriculture, then it is also treated in mathematics. It is planned to extend this programme (started last year) also to level 2.

The college offers full time courses, part time courses and ESF funded courses free of charge, and tailor made courses to be paid by industry who asks for these courses.

Studying at MCAST: maintenance grant, supplementary maintenance grant (e.g. if single parent, unemployed parents etc), apprenticeships (2 days work, 3 days college) at level 4 but some also level 3, work placements (for example at the diploma of management and social care), attendance records (minimum 80% attendance for certificate), multiple forms of assessment (attempt to present assessments in a practical manner, mostly continuous e.g. via assignments)

Awards bodies: BTEC, AAT, MFSA, LCCI, ITEC, EAL Awards, Matriculation, City & Guilds

Until now training programmes are provided until level 6 (=degree). Level 1 was introduced last year. Levels 1 and 2 for students without formal qualification. Level 6 requires level 5 beforehand. Students can also start without formal qualification from lower levels. There are success stories of students who started at lower levels and finished with levels 5 or 6.

Assessment and interview are the basis for a decision if no formal qualification is available, i.e. not necessarily a start at level 1 is needed, also higher levels might apply with acknowledgement of previous experience.

Average class size is 20, maximum 25.

If students repeat a course, they will lose their allowance.

Teachers are mixed BEd, University, industry but with degree. Vocational teacher training unit trains teachers in a one year programme in the science of teaching; not compulsory, but necessary for progress.

Level 6 started just 6 years ago.

Apprenticeship: contracts are only for training (course participants on level 3 and 4 get 60% of minimum wage during that time), companies not necessarily employ students afterwards.

Not all courses lead to higher levels, e.g. some courses at level 3 or 4 leading to employment.

No tracing of students after they have finished due to missing funding.

**Joseph Zammit**, Inclusion Coordinator at MCAST, presented a short movie about inclusion at MCAST (see video at <http://vimeo.com/user5755713/study-visit-malta-mcast-video> password is *Malta2011*). Joseph works with 11 LSA to facilitate inclusive education for students in full time courses. 333 students are having an identified learning support need, of which 126 have dyslexia, 59 a learning difficulty, ADHD 49 and others. The offers provided range from one-to-one support, support during exams by psychologists, extra time etc. Confidentiality towards classmates is guaranteed if requested. To get support, an IEP needs to be provided. This plan is for students with disabilities only, and it is a plan of what is to be done with the student. In the (secondary) school there is a session with parents ('map session') after which the IEP is set up between the teacher and the LSA. All students with disabilities from secondary education comes with the IEP. This IEP is used at MCAST, but not updated afterwards.

In the process of deciding on the right support, parents or facilitators are also involved. The LSA provide support in the key subjects Maltese, Mathematics and English, but also in general topics like organisation, time management etc.

The services provided are available only for full-time students, part-time students are not eligible for support.

Last year it was possible through ESF funding to provide 10 hrs (5 x 2 hrs) on Inclusive Education to all staff, including clerks and administrative staff, just missing (but planned) the top management.

LSA background: diploma at University (2 years) for LSA, some with A levels and some with a degree. They are also invited to follow the student service's courses currently offered to LSA.

**Sonja Casha** is running the Pathway Programme with 17 other colleagues. The aim of pathway is to allow students getting the knowledge and practical skills to gain and maintain employment. Currently, the programme has 30 students with mild and moderate learning disabilities with 8 students per group in average and 1 full-time LSA. 2 groups are in their first year, 2 groups are in their second year. Two out of the four lecturers at MCAST in the Pathway Programme hold a masters in Inclusive Education, another one just started a PhD (funded). In some groups students of other courses are placed to gain experience with working with people with disabilities.

Self confidence and self esteem seem to be most relevant aspects for their target group. In this context, also independent living skills are trained with students with mild and moderate learning disabilities and/or difficulties. Ongoing assessments are going on, and students are also in the Pathway Programme expected to work at suitable work placements. The course duration is 2 years full-time.

A few entry requirements need to be met: tolerance to both classroom and community learning, basic literacy and numeracy, intention to gain employment, to sit for an interview and an initial assessment, and provision of all required documents.

Students with an 80% of attendance receive a certificate of attendance and a full transcription of learning outcomes.

Pathway is organised into three courses of study. Each course incorporates various study subjects:

- Numeracy and literacy
- Life skills (hands on)
- Vocational studies (e.g. every Friday job orientation visits, and in the second year they do it in industry)

The programme tries to match interests of students with jobs available on the labour market. In the second year, work placements are happening every Friday with the hope that the employer would hire the students afterwards (some success stories available).

Most of the students in the Pathway Programme come from mainstream education. (However, if Vincent Borg sees that a student in Wardija could join the Pathway Programme, he would suggest such a change after the first year in Wardija). Of the last year's 13 graduates, 10 found employment. 5 to 6 of these 10 were hired by those employers where they had their work exposures. One of them decided to continue studying, and he/she is now on level 3. Still, only 1 has a full time job, the others only part time due to the previous fact to lose the pension when entering a full time position. However, as this has changed recently (i.e. they will retain the pension despite a full time position), in the future more full time employments are likely.

All the Pathways classes are located in the same corridor. Students from other educational levels are there for their own placements and helping the teachers and LSA. In the classes teachers use both languages, English and Maltese.

## Meeting with students and parents

**Maria:** before coming to MCAST, she attended the Guardian Angel school in Hamrun, and studied 2 years then in the Pathway Programme. She enjoyed very much the job visits. She is now using buses to go to work on her own. In a restaurant / cafeteria she prepares tissues and tables, cleans up etc. In the beginning people were monitoring what she was doing, but now she is able to do all tasks on her own, without assistance.

**Mattheus:** He is doing office work (EXCEL and WORD, copying) in a home for elderly people. He is doing this voluntarily without an assistant while he is seeking employment (4 hours per day). He learned everything needed for this in the Pathway Programme. As he loved before the school environment, Pathway was matching well as it provides a similar context. He is registered at the ETC to find employment soon.

**Jean-Paul:** He is a second year student. His mother wishes the course to be longer (than 18 years age) to give him the chance to mature more. Maybe it would be possible to increase the working experience from year to year more (e.g. twice a week). He is doing office work, and last year he gained some experience at the Maritime Institute. He enjoyed very much to work on computers in the IT course. His plans for after the course is to start working and to own a car.

**Shirley:** She is in her second year and has problems with communication. She is using a computer to express herself. She enjoys going to school. Her father says that the experiences with the Pathway Programme are marvellous. She is doing well academically is more happy, expresses emotions, and looks forward to go to school every day; she has become more independent. Shirley herself says that she feels more accepted, that she gets extra time and an LSA, and that computers are allowed during studies and exams. She achieved A levels in Maths and Italian and she has mastered the ECDL (European Computer Driving License). She wants to study accounts.

In the discussion it was emphasised that Pathway has smoothed the step to level 1 (mainstream). It was announced that MCAST was granted an ESF project ('inclusion for employment') to revise the syllabi of pathway, levels 1, 2 and 3, to review the procurement of real resources, to train for inclusion, and to develop new methodologies for staff and support staff (advisors, counsellors, LSA).

## 2nd day afternoon

Visit to the Employment and Training Corporation - ETC in Hal Far



*ETC main building, meeting room, and entrance*

Welcome by **Charles Cassar**. ETC is the National employment agency of Malta. It aims at dealing with the training and employment needs of all people, including those with disabilities. They have offices in the main geographical areas. Its supported employment section is for all disadvantaged groups on the labour market (see presentation [ETC.pdf](#)). It has three units:



- Register people with disabilities unit
- Special cases unit (e.g. inmates)
- Very long term unemployed (VLTU, i.e. 5+ years unemployed) unit

It works in close collaboration with other entities that provide services. It starts with a profiling of job seekers, followed by the development of a personal action plan. Different support schemes are available:

- Bridging the gap scheme (BTG): work exposure opportunity for 4 to 52 weeks, 8 to 12 weeks in average
- Work trial scheme, could be used as a start, followed by the BTG scheme
- Employment aid programme: subsidy programme
- Community work scheme, mainly for VLTU
- NGO cooperation agreements

Wording in handout: Case load = registered disabled persons

Process: Persons need to identify themselves as a person with a disability > medical doctors will certify the disability > appointments with an occupational therapist to identify abilities > appointment with an employment advisor > mainstream training or specialised training. The full process is free for the clients.

Vincent explains that there is the hope to set up a new training organisation for people like those from Wardija to address them better. In the new 6 year programme at Wardija, contacts to ETC will be established earlier than before.