



Malta

Dolores Cristina
Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport



Dolores Cristina was appointed Minister responsible for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport on the 12th March 2008, following her election from the 9th and 10th Districts. Her wide portfolio also includes public broadcasting services, libraries, museums and national archives, and arts.

Her previous Ministerial appointment (2004-2008) was as Minister for the Family and Social Solidarity, with a portfolio covering social security and social services, pensions, housing, equal opportunities, children, family, voluntary organisations, and welfare of irregular immigrants. From April 2003 to March 2004, she was Parliamentary Secretary within the then Ministry of Social Policy, focusing on housing and gender equality.

Inclusive education: what of the future?

Successive Maltese governments have firmly believed that the biggest natural resource of my small island-country is its people, and that this major asset can best be enriched through high-quality educational services. Universal Primary Education (with free tuition) became compulsory in Malta in 1946 and compulsory Secondary Education (also with free tuition) was introduced in 1971.

Malta not only provides free tertiary education, but pays stipends to students who proceed to post secondary and tertiary education. Our financial gurus argue that this policy is not economically viable. My political colleagues and I counter-argue that the nation must enable all those who can participate in post-secondary and tertiary education to have the opportunity to do so without exerting unbearable financial burdens on their families. The nation's educational bill becomes heavy but the intellectual and vocational returns are worth the investment.

These provisions satisfy the requirements of those in the mainstream. To ensure that persons with special needs also benefit from our inclusive policies, my Ministry trains and employs 'facilitators' who, through constant attendance with individual special-needs students, help them share the same educational experiences as mainstream students. The Government believes its duty is to underwrite this service in spite of the cost. More gratifying is the fact that, through this service, young people –later adults- are enabled to feel and become an integral part of society.

What of the future? It is, of course, much easier for Ministers of Education to pronounce policies embracing full inclusive education, than to implement them. My Ministry strives to enhance its services and overcome new challenges that face us. One such challenge is to bring into the fold young people who have become emarginated and as a result deprive themselves of a proper education. We have to deal also with the new phenomenon of 'illegal' immigrants who land in Malta on their way from Africa to mainland Europe. Many are school-age children and youths who need and deserve the rudiments of basic education. I am determined that these citizens of the Global Village will benefit from our inclusive education initiatives. In the process Malta will contribute to UNESCO's long-standing aim of Education for All.