

Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you once more to our English Language Teaching conference. Last year the EFL Monitoring Board took the bold step to organize the first ever ELT conference in Malta and we were highly pleased with its success. The feedback we received from delegates and speakers, both Maltese and foreign, reassured us that this conference should definitely become an annual event.

Last year alone, almost 82,000 students came to Malta to learn English from countries all over the world. These students chose Malta as their language-learning destination not only because of our culture, climate and beaches but also because over the past 50 years the ELT industry in this country has built an international reputation for academic excellence. There are now 42 language schools in Malta and Gozo. Over the past few years a number of these schools have taken the initiative to look beyond our five biggest clients and explore new markets in order to attract students from far-flung parts of the world. In the classrooms in which you teach you increasingly have a bigger mix of nationalities that make the language learning experience even more satisfying. However, we believe that these schools need to be provided with more support in order for the ELT industry in Malta to continue prospering. If we want this industry to contribute even further to Malta's economy then there should be provisions in place that facilitate the process of attracting students from an even wider variety of countries.

So far I've used the term 'industry' to refer to ELT in Malta and that's because the teaching of English is a profit-making sector in this country. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that this is an industry that is almost entirely dependent on a single profession, teaching. The quality of our teaching is what has built our international reputation. The facilities of our schools, the leisure activities we organize for our students, the non-academic services we provide them with are all well and good. They are a highly significant part of the package we offer to those visiting Malta for the purpose of learning English. In fact, the EFL Monitoring Board earlier this year started a process whereby we're seeking to ensure that the non-academic aspect of a student's stay is of the highest standard possible. Nonetheless, it is because of your knowledge and skills as teachers that this industry has thrived so much. Its success is due to the top quality teaching that you perform on a daily basis.

It is in recognition of the fact that the quality of our teachers needs to remain our first priority that last year the EFL Monitoring Board decided to start organizing an annual ELT conference. In doing so we were building on the CPD initiatives of MATEFL, FELTOM and the schools themselves. Just like the people forming part of these organisations, with which we've always collaborated, we see teaching as a lifelong learning process. Our knowledge, skills and attitudes as teachers need to be constantly nurtured and developed. Otherwise stagnation is inevitable and the repercussions of that are disgruntled students for whom no learning is taking place. We believe that teachers who aren't motivated to keep learning cannot inspire their students to do the same. The fact that you're

gathered in this room is probably testament to how much you share these beliefs about teaching.

However, the theme we chose for this year's conference takes this idea a step further. There are a number of people here today who, like me, are lucky enough to attend many conferences every year all over the world. I'm sure they all believe that attending a conference is not only a means for teachers to be inspired by different speakers in order for them to inspire their students. In choosing to focus on the theme of 'Inspiring Teachers' we wanted to underscore the significance of the idea that a conference like this one is also meant to encourage you to position yourself differently. You can be inspiring for your own peers if you start valuing your potential to be more than consumers of knowledge. Your experiences as teachers, in the classroom and in CPD events like this one, allow you to be contributors to other teachers' professional development.

In his most recent book Jeremy Harmer summarises many of the ways in which you can do this. As he points out, "Some of the most effective teacher development takes place when we work and share with colleagues and other professionals." For me, the emphasis in that sentence should fall on the word "share." Give a joint session at this conference or at one of the regular seminars organized by MATEFL, write a blog and comment on those written by so many ELT bloggers all over the world, use Twitter and Facebook to discuss issues you find relevant to your practice, rope in a colleague and engage in action research or collaborate in writing an article for a teachers' magazine, do peer observation with colleagues you trust, take part in webinars, and most importantly talk to your colleagues about your ideas and use these discussions to reflect on what happens in the classroom.

We would like to use this conference to bring about a mind shift amongst ELT professionals in Malta. We would like to see more and more of you mustering the courage to share what you know with your peers. We know you inspire your students and that's why ELT in Malta is a healthy sector. However, we would like all of you to position yourselves as inspiring teachers of teachers, in your schools, in the blogosphere, and at events like this in Malta and beyond these shores. With such a long-standing ELT industry we have so much to offer one another and teachers working in other countries. As one journalist described the ELT sector in Malta last year at the ICEF workshop in Berlin, we're "small but mighty." We have a wealth of ELT knowledge and experience to export far and wide. I hope this conference will help to ignite the spark of inspiration in some of you so that the act of sharing can take a leap forward.

Thank you.