

Small but mighty: Malta packs a punch in quality language education

6 Mar 2013

Malta is a popular language learning destination, but it's not just the sun and sea that attracts students. The island nation's rigorous quality standards are a shining example of best practice in the industry.

In order to learn more about the quality assurance systems in place in Malta and its language industry as a whole, *ICEF Monitor* sat down with [Mr Daniel Xerri](#), Chairperson of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Monitoring Board at the Ministry of Education and Employment in Malta. Our two-part video interview appears below.

Setting the gold standard

Recognising the importance of quality in international education, Malta was the first country in the world whose language learning industry became regulated by government legislation.

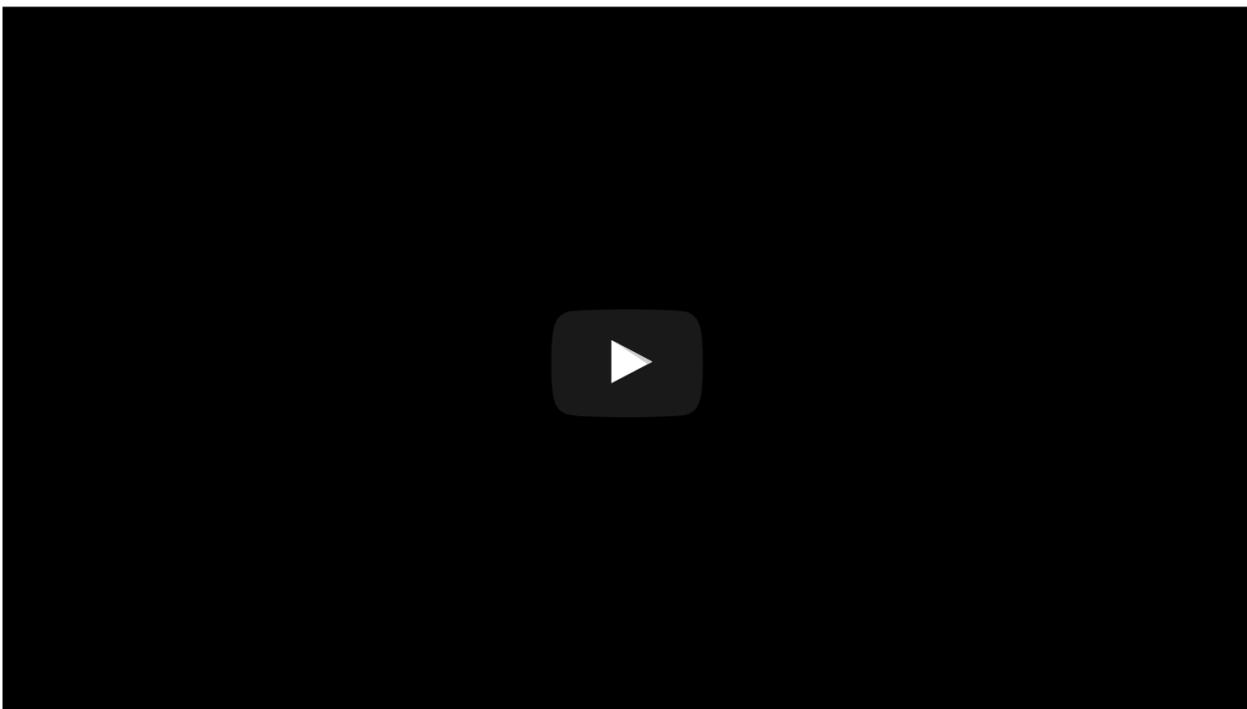
In 1996, the government-run [EFL Monitoring Board](#) was established. The EFL Board serves as a quality assurance body that is primarily responsible for checking the academic services offered by all EFL schools in Malta, and they created National Minimum Conditions for Schools Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

Regulations such as these ensure that all language schools in Malta are licensed and meet with strict guidelines – both academic (i.e., qualifications and roles for Directors of Studies, teacher certifications and classroom equipment) and non-academic (i.e., accommodation, host families, school facilities, leisure and cultural activities, which are regulated by the [Ministry of Tourism](#)).

Currently, all 41 schools in Malta must be licensed by the EFL Board, but it is expected that in the future, they will all need to be accredited as well.

The rollout for this accreditation scheme hinges heavily on Parliament's approval, which in turn is deeply dependent on the results of the forthcoming national elections on the 9th of March. Indeed, the island's pace is anything but sleepy lately as the country is also preparing for [FELTOM's](#) (Federation of English Language Teaching Organisations Malta) annual event next week.

Listen to the first half of our interview where we discuss the role of the EFL Board and the licensing process:



The EFL Board conducts annual, unannounced visits to every school in Malta, usually during the summer months – the busiest time of year. Inspectors sit in on classes, speak directly with

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students and teachers, and conduct health and safety checks. Particular attention is given to teacher quality and school facilities.

Any school which fails inspection or does not comply with the legal regulations will be fined and forced to close if they do not make the necessary changes, but such drastic measures are not common.

Protecting each school and the entire island's reputation as a quality study destination is not only limited to face-to-face visits. Today, social media is a powerful word of mouth tool, and the EFL Board is mindful of the fact that a few negative mentions online can be quite harmful.

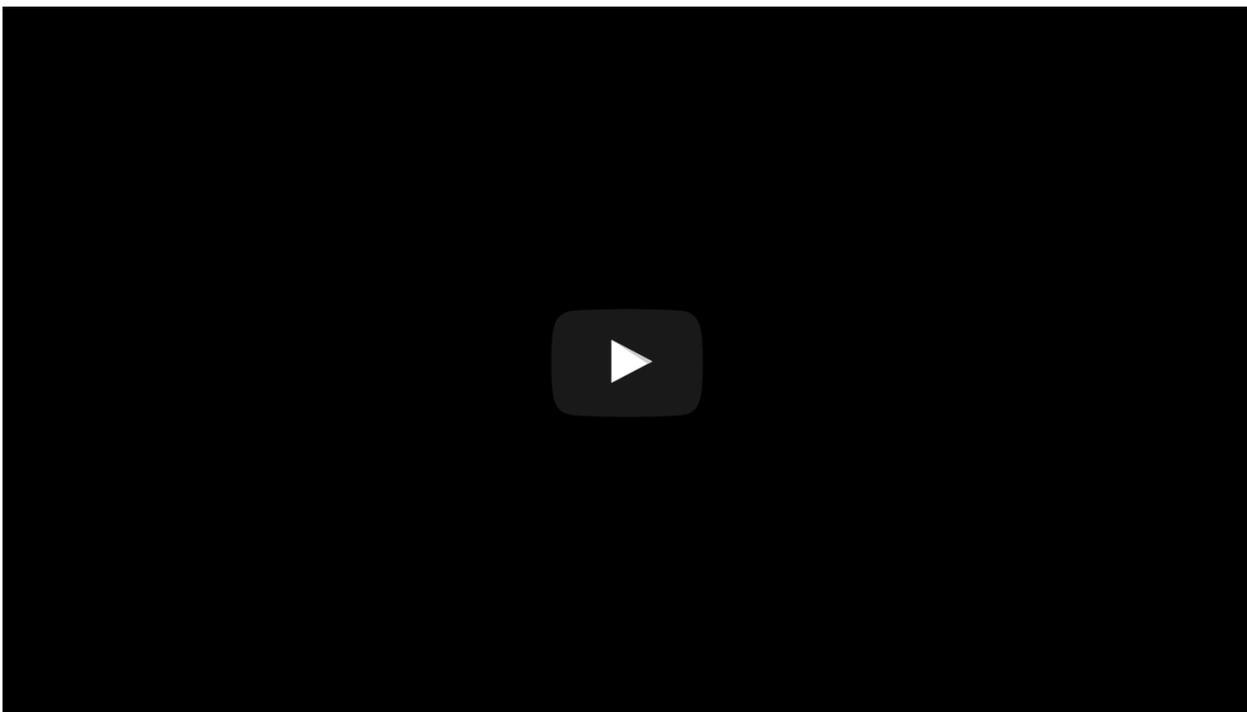
Keeping a watchful eye ensures that any potential problems are dealt with immediately and professionally. If a student has a particular complaint, the EFL Board can intervene to assist and counsel that student. It is their policy to find a solution which works for all parties. Complaints, however, are very rare, which is perhaps a testament to the effectiveness of the quality controls in place.

Not just fun and sun

Such strict quality measures are beneficial to the schools to help them offer a good product, but also to aid their marketing efforts. Malta does not just offer a sand-and-sun study destination; the quality is even better than the weather.

The second half of our interview with Mr Xerri explores Malta's image and brand – does its reputation as a “fun and sun holiday” help or hinder its reputation for language learning?

As the EFL Board is committed to fostering a culture of continual professional development amongst teachers, we also discuss Malta's investment in technology in learning and methods for sharing best practices amongst all schools on the island.



Meanwhile, Malta's tourism sector is looking strong with total arrivals for the last quarter of 2012 at 297,348 – [up by 6.4%](#) when compared to the corresponding quarter during 2011 – and January 2013 arrivals [up 5.8%](#) over January 2012.

For background on Malta's performance in 2011, please see our article [“Student arrivals down in Malta but ELT sector resilient.”](#)

Editor's Notes:

For 2012 market results, please see [“Malta on the rebound, language student arrivals up 18.2% over last year.”](#)

The EFL Board will host the second annual ELT Malta Conference on 6-7 September 2013 in St. Julian's, Malta. Sessions will address such matters as professional development, innovative language teaching methodology, research and best practice techniques.

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