



THE NATIONAL POLICY

**FOR THE TEACHING
OF MALTESE AS
A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

**IN THE FRAMEWORK OF
BILINGUALISM
AND PLURILINGUALISM**

2019

CONTENTS

Foreword	5
The socio-linguistic context	7
1. Bilingualism	7
2. Plurilingualism	7
Maltese, the National Language	8
Registration in schools for Maltese as a Foreign Language (MFL)	9
The induction period	9
The Teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language	10
1. In the Early Years	10
2. In Primary School (8-11 years)	10
3. The Middle School (11-13 years)	10
4. The Secondary School (13-16 years)	11
5. To Adults	11
The training of teachers	12
The administration	12
Teaching materials	13
Space and logistics	13
References	14
Appendix 1: Suggestions for promoting bilingualism in schools	15
Appendix 2	16
a. The committee that prepared this document	16
b. Consultation meetings	16



FOREWORD

This National Policy for the Teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language in the Framework of Bilingualism and Plurilingualism is based on A Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo (0-7 years) published by the Ministry for Education and Employment in 2016, and on the National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo published by the Ministry for Education and Employment in 2014.

These documents emphasise the need to strengthen the bilingual development in Maltese and English through education (see *A National Curriculum Framework for All*, published by the Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). This *National Policy for the Teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language in the Framework of Bilingualism and Plurilingualism* is binding on all schools following the National Curriculum Framework and all their students.

For balanced bilingualism to succeed there needs to be continuity from one scholastic year to another and from one educational cycle to another, as well as in the teaching curriculum and language use. This Policy provides national guidelines for administrators of educational institutions and entities (such as child care centres, kindergarten centres and schools), teacher educators, teachers, parents, students and for whoever offers educational services (for example speech psychologists and pathologists).

All schools following the National Curriculum should prepare and implement an action plan to suit their context as part of the School Development Plan (SDP), based on the principles outlined in this Policy. They should allocate human resources and funds to carry out their action plan. The authorities responsible for schools should give full support and allocate all the necessary resources so that the schools can develop and implement the language plans and strategies to meet their students' needs in the framework of this Policy. After the plan is developed in each school, it is recommended that a trial be carried out followed by a full and efficient implementation of the plan in the shortest time possible.

In order to achieve the ultimate goal of balanced bilingualism, it might be necessary to give more prominence to Maltese in teaching and for communication purposes. This should be included in the School Development Plan.



THE SOCIO-LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

The Maltese socio-linguistic context is one of a strong and living bilingualism in Maltese and in English (*Malta Country Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014*). Moreover, Malta is not isolated from the rest of the world, and in a context of globalisation, technological advances and migration, Malta is a plurilingual country. Therefore, it is necessary that this policy takes into account all the opportunities offered in the local context of bilingualism and plurilingualism (Language Policy Unit, Council of Europe, 2015).

1. BILINGUALISM

It is scientifically established that bilingualism from an early age fosters the cognitive, social and linguistic development of an individual. Living bilingualism from an early age onwards offers a better cognitive performance (executive control) from which the individual continues to benefit throughout his life (Bialystok, 2011). Balanced bilingualism stimulates the non-verbal cognitive processes (Vaughn et al., 2018); helps one to learn other languages faster (Singh, 2018); and strengthens a person's communicative ability (Siegal et al., 2010).

To strengthen balanced bilingualism:

1. Due importance should be given to Maltese and English as means of instruction and communication in all subjects (except for languages) taught in schools so as to achieve the ultimate goal of balanced bilingualism (see Appendix 1 to see how this can be achieved);
2. The teaching of Maltese and English as subjects should be given equal importance, for e.g. the time allocated for the teaching of the languages as subjects;
3. In all the subjects' assessments and examinations (except of languages) at all levels, including SEC, candidates should be given the right to answer in Maltese or in English;
4. All communication from the school administration and the national administration should be in Maltese and in English;
5. Maltese should be given prominence in signage, websites, brochures, concerts, meetings and celebrations in every educational institution and body.

2. PLURILINGUALISM

The Council of Europe and the European Commission stress the importance of plurilingualism in education and society (Candelier

et al., 2012; Beacco et al., 2016; European Commission, 2017). The various languages of migrant students in schools should be respected and considered as an asset and a linguistic resource which also enriches Maltese students.

To strengthen plurilingualism:

1. Every language should be shown concrete and visible respect;

2. Ways should be found for students to still use their native language if this is not taught as a subject (see, for instance, the implementation in Ireland in Little & Kirwan, 2018);
3. Students who speak languages which are taught as subjects at school (for e.g. Italian and French) should be encouraged to contribute to activities related to the learning of those languages in school and to activities in the community.

MALTESE, THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE

Maltese is an official language and it is the National Language of Malta and Gozo. It is a sign of our identity and of the local culture and abounds in linguistic wealth. Maltese is necessary for democratic participation and active citizenship.

Therefore:

1. No student, in any school in Malta and Gozo that follows the National Curriculum, and for any reason whatsoever, should be exempted from Maltese lessons and from any assessment of their knowledge of the Maltese language;

2. Every educator who works in child care centres, in kindergarten centres and in schools (including Community Liaison Workers and LSEs), should have a qualification in Maltese or in MFL;
3. The Council for the Teaching Profession should ensure that every educator who is employed in any educational institution is able to communicate with the students and the parents in Maltese. Foreign teachers should be informed from the outset about what level of Maltese according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) is required from them;
4. There should be incentives for migrant parents to learn Maltese;
5. Communication between the administration and the educators and home should be in both official languages, i.e. in Maltese and English.



REGISTRATION IN SCHOOLS FOR MALTESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (MFL)

Registration for the learning of MFL should be open to migrant children/ students, and, on a voluntary basis, to children/students with one parent/guardian in possession of a foreign ID card. In the first phase of the registration the parents/guardians of the child should be given clear information regarding the obligation for everyone, without exception, to learn Maltese and to be assessed on their knowledge of Maltese, as explained below.

Therefore:

1. Standard procedures should be established for registering children for MFL;
2. Registration must be carried out by trained personnel and according to established criteria for provision or not of an induction course;
3. There should be standard criteria to determine the proficiency in Maltese as per Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) of the children who will be registered;
4. A formative and summative assessment system should be implemented periodically following the children's registration in a Maltese school to verify the level of progress in the Maltese language;
5. Every student who, following assessment, is not found to have the desired command of Maltese should be enrolled in a dedicated induction programme for MFL;
6. Migrant children in Early Years settings (0-7) should be fully exposed to Maltese so that they acquire it according to the Learning Outcomes Framework in this crucial stage of their linguistic, social and intellectual development.

THE INDUCTION PERIOD

There should be an induction period for migrant students who know neither Maltese nor English so that they can cope with the levels suitable for them according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: (CEFRL) and/or Learning Outcomes Framework.

In the case of the learning of Maltese:

1. The learning programme for MFL which was designed to be used during the induction period should be properly implemented and covered;
2. The Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes should include a Unit in charge of developing programmes and resources for the teaching of MFL and its assessment, as well as the induction period for each student according to their age and needs.

THE TEACHING OF MALTESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Under this Policy all children attending schools following the National Curriculum should be entitled to learn Maltese and meet the national assessment standards as listed in the Learning Outcomes Framework and/or the assessment standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This should be written in the document they are provided with when they are registered in the school.

1. IN THE EARLY YEARS

The *Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo (0-7 years)* should be followed to ensure that balanced bilingualism is achieved between Maltese and English.

Migrant children who enter in the early education cycle should be given support to develop their listening comprehension and oral skills in Maltese before the reading and writing skills.

All children entering in the early education cycle (0-7 years) should enter the National Curriculum system.

Migrant children, or those who have one parent in possession of a foreign ID card, should be assessed, before entering the third year of primary school (at 7 years of age), to determine whether they require lessons in MFL or in Maltese.

2. IN PRIMARY SCHOOL (8-11 YEARS)

Migrant children who enter the primary cycle should be assessed in order to determine whether they require an induction period before they enter the National Curriculum system and in this case they should follow an induction programme delivered by teachers trained in the teaching of MFL so that they can catch up with the National Curriculum in the shortest time possible. These teachers can be based in one school if there are exceptional MFL

learning needs in that school, or peripatetic to meet the needs of more than one school.

Those students who do not reach the expected level in Maltese in order to continue the *Learning Outcomes Framework from the Teaching of Maltese* with their fellow students shall be able to follow the *Learning Outcomes Framework from the Teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language*. As from the scholastic year 2024-25, *Learning Outcomes Framework from the Teaching of Maltese as a Foreign Language* will be aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

At the end of the sixth primary year, based on the benchmark or other equivalent assessment, it should be decided in agreement with the parents, which route (Maltese or MFL) they should follow in Middle School.

3. THE MIDDLE SCHOOL (11-13 YEARS)

Migrant students who are registered from the 7th year of middle school upwards should be taught and assessed according to the MFL programme. Based on the assessment, and in agreement with the parents, at the end of each year, it should be decided whether a particular student should continue the MFL programme or enter the Maltese language route.



4. THE SECONDARY SCHOOL (13-16 YEARS)

The teaching and assessment in preparation for the SEC in MFL, which should be linked with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: (CEFRL), should start at this stage. Those students who would have just arrived in Malta in the secondary cycle should be taught MFL according to their needs, i.e. they should start from the first stage of MFL learning, i.e. Level A1 of the CEFRL and not join those who would have already advanced in MFL. Those students, for whom it was decided that MFL would be the best route according to the assessment at the end of the middle school cycle, should continue following the MFL programme.

On the other hand, those foreign students who master the Maltese language should be urged to enter a route of Maltese language learning, and sit for the Maltese language exam.

5. TO ADULTS

MFL learning should be offered to the adults arriving in Malta. All teachers and educators should

eventually be able to communicate in Maltese or in MFL for their profession, and their ability is to be indicated according to the competence level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEFRL).

Only applicants who have their ID card as follows can apply for the MFL SEC exam or equivalent (for e.g. the Maltese examination offered to students who attend European Schools):

1. If they are 16 years old and over, they should have the Alien - A ID card, or a foreign identity card;
2. If they are less than 16 years old they can use either their own Alien - A identity card, or that of a parent who is a holder of a foreign identity card.

Applicants who attended, or are still attending, middle, secondary or higher school abroad can apply to sit for the MFL exam, provided they are in possession of documented evidence from their educational institution.

The teaching of MFL should not replace the teaching of specialised Maltese to children and students who need particular intervention because of their needs.

THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS

Every teacher of each subject should be competent enough in Maltese to be able to understand the questions and difficulties of Maltese students, and to be able to explain to them and guide them as necessary, even in Maltese. Thus during the courses in preparation for the teaching profession it should be ensured that each prospective teacher is competent enough to teach in Maltese.

All teachers of Maltese should be prepared as necessary to teach MFL as a subject.

Teachers who deliver MFL courses and who complement the classroom teacher when the children require MFL teaching should receive specialised training (for e.g. the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching Maltese as a Foreign Language course, and other courses offered periodically in the schools). There should be incentives, such as financial or progression ones, to engage more teachers, including those who have reached retirement age, in this field or who, for some other reason, would like to return to service.

THE ADMINISTRATION

All administrators in the educational field should understand the importance of MFL, and therefore they should be given training and support to draw up and implement the best structures and methods for the teaching of MFL.





TEACHING MATERIALS

Material for the teaching of Maltese competes with far more updated and attractive teaching resources and materials used for other languages.

Therefore:

1. The Ministry for Education and Employment should set up working group made up of experts and teachers of Maltese as a Foreign Language to draw up the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Maltese as a Foreign Language and any other related material required for the teaching of MFL;
2. Attractive courses and digital games should be developed immediately for the teaching of MFL;
3. MFL resources teachers should be recruited, so that at least one teacher can focus on MFL resources for early years and primary years, and the other can focus on the middle and secondary years;
4. The Maltese spell checker should be made available to all educators, school administrations and students.

SPACE AND LOGISTICS

In order to implement this Policy:

1. The provision of adequate space within the schools should be ensured in order to achieve these learning objectives;
2. Schools should be given the resources they request so that they can reach the established objectives of MFL;
3. Each Directorate unit and each school administration that follows the National Curriculum should support the teaching of MFL, and be provided with secretarial assistance, so that, for instance, all official documentation is written in both the official languages of Malta.

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APPENDIX 1: SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING BILINGUALISM IN SCHOOLS

There are various ways in which bilingualism can be used as a communication tool in teaching, for instance:

1. In early education children can be exposed to Maltese and English in such a way as to develop their competence in both languages without them falling behind in any one of the languages. Therefore, it should be ensured that sufficient use of resources, books, storytelling, songs, etc. in Maltese is allocated in the weekly work plan, such that the learning opportunities match the learning intentions specified in the planning so that no language lags behind.
2. In the primary, middle and secondary sectors, bilingualism can be divided in the following ways:
 - a. Subject topics are divided into those taught in English and those taught in Maltese (for e.g. in Geography, Maltese geology, agriculture and fishing in Malta can be taught in Maltese, whereas the physical geography of Europe and the world are taught in English);
 - b. Syllabus work of the same subject is divided between a teacher who teaches in Maltese and one who teaches in English;
 - c. Students are provided with notes in Maltese where the subject textbook is in English and vice versa;
 - d. Reading, writing and homework is divided equally each term between Maltese and English in as many subjects as possible;
 - e. Projects in the language that is not regularly used should be encouraged in as many subjects as possible;
 - f. Electronic resources and teaching material in Maltese for the teaching of all subjects should be created.

Assessment and examination papers from the primary level to the final year of secondary school must be in Maltese and in English for all subjects except for language subjects.

Each school should draw up a language policy that caters for its particular circumstances, provided that the language policy explained in this document is observed. Where necessary, more time, resources, etc. should be allocated to any of the official languages when it is the socially disadvantaged language, and the method for doing this as well as how the plan is going to be implemented should be determined.

APPENDIX 2

A. THE COMMITTEE THAT PREPARED THIS DOCUMENT

Prof. Antoinette Camilleri Grima (President)
Mr Josef Borg (Secretary)
Mr David Muscat
Dr Charles Daniel Saliba
Mrs Maria Dolores Coleiro
Dr Tania Muscat
Mrs Jacqueline Żammit

B. CONSULTATION MEETINGS

Consultation meetings were held between June 2018 and January 2019 with:

- Officials from Identity Malta: Mr Felix Vella, Mr Nazju Ciantar
- Primary School Head teachers: Mr Ethelbert Fenech, Mrs Josette Dalmas, Mrs Silvana Anna Ungaro
- Middle and Secondary School Head teachers: Mr Lino Borg, Mrs Mary Rose Leone, Mrs Tereža Camilleri
- Educational Officers in charge of the Migrants' Unit: Mrs Jane Farrugia Buhagiar, Mr Robert Cilia
- The Director for Quality Assurance: Dr Jacqueline Vanhear
- The management board of Santa Clara College: Mr Keith Bartolo, College Principal; Mr Karl Tabone, Administrative and Financial Officer; Mrs Jane Grima, Education Officer-Curriculum; Mr Joseph Xerri, Support Officer; Mr Noel Calleja, Head of Gzira Primary School; Mr Paul Magro, Head of the National Sports School; Mr David Caruana, Head of San Ġwann Primary School; Mrs Marie Louise Farrugia, Head of St. Julian's Primary School; Mrs Ruth Cilia, Head of Pembroke Primary School; Mrs Claudine Muscat, Head of Sliema Primary School; Mrs Mary Rose Leone, Head of Pembroke Secondary School.
- The President and Vice-President of the Early Childhood Development Association of Malta: Dr Anna Baldacchino, Dr Charmaine Bonello

