



Bilingualism

We have been fortunate in Malta that the founding fathers of our Constitution almost 50 years ago were far-seeing and broad-minded enough to make English one of the official languages of Malta, after Maltese

That decision has ensured that, in the Mediterranean, in a sea where modern civilisation began, in an island that borders both Africa and Europe and acts as a bridge between them, that is uniquely placed at a crossroads, a nation that is blessed with the facility to learn, speak and use English, we gain an advantage over other countries in this region of incalculable proportions.

English is increasingly the language of global communication. It is spoken as a second language by around 375 million people. As I write this, about 200 million Chinese are in the process of learning English. It has official status in at least 75 countries, with a total population of over two billion. A quarter of the world's population speaks it. It is the language not only of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Byron, Dickens and Jane Austen, but also, increasingly, of commerce, diplomacy, business, science, technology and the internet.

In Europe, young people between 15 and 24 years are five times more likely to speak English as German or French. At European Union meetings speakers automatically choose the language that excludes the fewest people in the room. This is almost always English. English is quite simply the best instrument for communication because it is now the world's language.

English gives Malta the ability and the means to conduct and attract business, commerce and visitors to these islands, to the considerable benefit of our economy and the enrichment of our culture. A couple of years ago a leading firm of

accountants carried out a survey of all foreign firms working in Malta. In answer to the question enquiring what had attracted them to Malta, the majority – over 80% – said that it was because Malta was an English-speaking country. Our bilingualism gives us a huge competitive edge. In this respect, Malta's use of English helps us to achieve our goals of economic growth and international communications and friendship. It enables us to speak to the world.

In the case of VTCT exams and other international boards, the exam papers are set in English and examiners are foreigners as well. Portfolios are also presented in English. Thus, being a bilingual country will facilitate more the communication.