SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR TOURISM DR. EDWARD ZAMMIT LEWIS DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE 2013 FELTOM ELT REPORT

‘The Government and English language industry must work together to tap new source markets’

Good morning,

I hope you have had an enjoyable and productive meeting.

It is a privilege for me as Minister of Tourism to close today’s event.

We have a booming tourism industry in Malta and one of the reasons is the development of niche markets. The ELT sector is one of those niches, attracting approx 80,000 students each year. The importance of the ELT sector in Malta cannot be underestimated. I pledge my full support to the development of this industry.

I would also like to take this opportunity to publicly thank FELTOM for its invaluable work over the years – your activism and professionalism have allowed the industry to contribute significantly to the Maltese economy. You have managed to build a resilient industry able to withstand various challenges.

This is an industry that has done very well for our country. Malta has established itself as a centre of excellence in English language teaching, thanks to the high quality of our EFL (English as a Foreign Language) schools. The Government, by means of the Ministries for Tourism and Education is committed to strengthening this position.

Last year (2013) was a challenging year given the economic problems in various important source markets. And yet it proved to be a positive year nonetheless. The ELT industry still managed to register an increase in both student weeks and in their length of stay, contributing towards the country’s economy and employment.

In the past ten years this segment grew by an average annual rate of 3.5%. In 2013, EFL students accounted for almost 4.6% of all tourist arrivals in the Maltese Islands. More importantly these students have a higher than average length of stay (3.1 weeks) and a total number of student weeks of 233,834. These figures are remarkable
And there is potential for further growth; we are not only targeting the young generation, which is beneficial, but also attracting mature students. This market is an opportunity to address the seasonality issue. Mature students like to travel in the off peak months and they are very welcome.

We are committed to raising our game, giving Malta more visibility, accessibility, a competitive edge and a quality and diverse product.

The tourism industry, including the ELT niche, is essentially an experience. The unique full immersion experience that Malta has to offer, set against a vibrant, historical backdrop needs to be at the core of our marketing efforts.

I need to commend FELTOM for taking a lead role in this regard and for projecting Malta as a safe and high quality ELT destination. Your efforts are bearing fruit and as you continue to project Malta in new source markets, especially in Asia and the Middle East, I can assure you that you have the Government's backing.

The accessibility aspect shouldn't be overlooked.

An analysis of the source markets indicates that the advent of new routes has allowed the ELT industry to expand its reach, especially in Eastern Europe. The importance of our national carrier Air Malta cannot be underestimated; the Government will ensure that Air Malta continues being a main player in Malta’s tourism market.

The new routes being operated, especially to Eastern Europe, together with the relationships Air Malta is fostering with legacy carriers, will continue to provide new source markets for the ELT market to develop.

Competitiveness remains central for all industries and especially so tourism. Malta’s main competitors have improved their positions and this calls us to be even more vigilant.

The Deloitte report highlights an increase in costs as impinging negatively on profitability. The industry operators need to consolidate their operations, reap efficiencies and take measures to streamline their costs. As the Government implements its pledge to reduce electricity and water tariffs, I am confident that this service industry will benefit immensely.

Being a service industry, tourism and ELT tourism needs to be based on a high quality offering. And this should apply across the industry supply chain. It is no use having courteous and professional teachers if the drivers or host families do not offer such a service too.

Malta needs to continue diversifying its product offering. The tourism sector is a testament to this ability. The industry has successfully moved away from sun and sea tourism into new areas such as MICE travel (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) cruise tourism, ELT tourism, diving, cultural and health tourism. Even established niche markets need to reinvent themselves to meet consumer demand.
The ELT sector is no exception and I commend FELTOM’s role in working towards the further diversification of the industry, especially through the English for Specific Purposes sub-sector targeting business, legal, medical and aviation English. As the Ministry that launched the aviation policy earlier this year I am aware of the synergies that can be created between the aviation cluster and the ELT sector.

Allow me to thank FELTOM once again for its commitment to improving the service quality across the industry. Its strict accreditation scheme, and the revised scheme which should be launched later this year, embodies this commitment.

The strong co-operation that exists between the Government, through the MTA and the EFL Monitoring Board, with Feltom and the various stakeholders in the industry has resulted in this industry becoming stronger and more resilient, with a bright future ahead.

The Government is committed in supporting the English language teaching industry in Malta to prosper Educational Tourism.

The aim is to tackle adequately the present and future challenges while keeping our eyes open for new opportunities, and strengthening the co-operation that exists within the sector.

Thanks for your attention. And I wish you the very best for the future.