

Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

**Early Years**  
An International Research Journal

**Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group

Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

ISSN: 0957-5146 (Print) 1472-4421 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ceye20>

## Shaping early childhood education services in Malta: historical events, current affairs, future challenges

Valerie Sollars

To cite this article: Valerie Sollars (2018) Shaping early childhood education services in Malta: historical events, current affairs, future challenges, *Early Years*, 38:4, 337-350, DOI: [10.1080/09575146.2018.1512561](https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2018.1512561)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2018.1512561>



Published online: 11 Sep 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 227



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



## Shaping early childhood education services in Malta: historical events, current affairs, future challenges

Valerie Sollars

Faculty of Education, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

### ABSTRACT

Despite the existence of early childhood education (ECE) settings since the mid 19th century and a substantial increase in the availability and accessibility of services over the last four decades, ECE in Malta still struggles to find its voice. Its introduction and development has been marked by erratic progress. The colonial heritage, the Roman Catholic Church, swings and roundabouts of successive administrations, conservative views about women's status and their roles in society have contributed to prevailing perceptions, provision and practices. The sector evolved in response to the demands of a labour-market economy and services became an adjunct to rather than an integral part of the education system. It has retained a low status which is reflected in the working conditions of the overwhelmingly female-dominated practitioners who are considered naturally predisposed to look after children and often recruited with minimal or no initial training. A culture of acquiescence towards decisions taken by superiors has stunted a critical, questioning attitude of practitioners who expect direction and guidance. Developing ECE services has faced an arduous journey but lessons can be drawn from its history to support strategic policies and promote quality praxis.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 January 2018  
Accepted 13 August 2018

### KEYWORDS

Early childhood education; history of early childhood education; development of early childhood education; legacy of early childhood education

### Introduction

The introduction and development of early childhood education (ECE) services in Malta has an under-researched history. Contextualised within a shifting political and social landscape, the aim of this article is to outline the humble beginnings and subsequent developments which have influenced contemporary affairs.

Over the span of some 150 years, ECE settings became available in response to economic demands and support for women's contributions to the workforce. Any discourse focusing on quality ECE services and its associated benefits for children has played second fiddle. The sector developed in the absence of any child-centred policy or strategy and in a context devoid of a pedagogical framework. Consequently, ECE still struggles to find a voice.

## A glimpse into Malta's history

Despite having a surface area of only 316 square kilometres, Malta became an important part of the British Empire at the beginning of the 19th century due to its strategic location at the centre of the Mediterranean. The islands gained independence in 1964, became a Republic in 1974 and a member of the European Union in 2004. Together with the history woven by successive administrations, the Roman Catholic Church and its various Religious Orders contributed significantly to the development of the islands and to education, especially in establishing crèches and kindergartens. Once considered to be a staunchly Roman Catholic country – to the extent that the Constitution of Malta (1964) still identifies Roman Catholicism as the religion of the islands – Malta is now a country where the Church has lost much of its power and influence. Society has become increasingly secular and family structures have changed significantly. Fewer women are having children before the age of 30 and the number of children per mother has decreased (National Statistics Office 2016a). Between 2005 and 2015 mothers in employment increased from 31% to 37% (NSO, 2016b) and in 2016, 61.8% of employed mothers were in full-time employment (NSO, 2018a). Such changes have been attributed to greater social acceptability of non-family child care, remunerated work for women and secularisation (Baldacchino 2014).

Accession to the EU, demands for a skilled workforce and political unrest in several parts of the world led to an increase of 31,000 people in Malta's population between 2013 and 2016 (NSO, 2018b). These changes are reflected within ECE settings: 24.2% of the pre-primary school population in Private (fee-paying) schools and 13% of the early years and primary school population in State schools are made up of children who were not born in Malta or have non-Maltese parents (DCRILL, 2017).

## Research methodology

Data for this article were collated from historical records and documentary analysis supplemented with oral history interviews. Research at the National Archives of Malta focused on Government Dispatches during the Colonial Rule<sup>1</sup> (1800–1913); documents pertaining to the Chief Secretary to Government (1831–1921) who, as the Head of the administrative office of the Civil Government was responsible, *inter alia*, for receiving petitions and granting licenses to individuals or entities seeking to establish crèches or infant schools; documents and circulars pertaining to the Education Department (1922–1981); and General Miscellaneous Reports (1800–1990). Other documentation (1975–) was retrieved from the Registry at the Ministry for Education.

Information about ECE services set up by Religious Orders was obtained through interviews. A letter of information with an invitation to participate was sent to seven Orders with long running kindergarten provision. Through their voluntary participation, seven nuns from four Orders participated in one of the four interviews. With one exception, all were octogenarians. During the interviews, the nuns' spoke about their recollections of working with young children and the charisma of their Order.

### Early childhood education in colonial times (1827–1964)

The introduction of infant schools faced challenges from the outset. Poverty was rife and education was not a priority for the colonisers when they took over the administration of the islands. The initial years of British rule were characterised by a deliberate *laissez-faire* disposition with no interest in advancing education. The prevalent local culture and customary social relations were not to be disturbed. The Catholic Church was supported heartily as it was not in the interest of the colonial power to foment unrest among the population (Chircop 2017 p. 148).

A recommendation made by the British Home and Colonial Infant School Society to the Chief Secretary to the Government (CSG), to establish Infant schools was not considered 'practicable in this Island'. The CSG argued that:

no benefit would accrue at present from the scheme suggested by the society vs that of having a teacher sent from England at a Salary of from £80 to £100 per annum with an outfit of from £30 to £50 in order to form a Model or Pattern School, nor do I think it likely that the lessons and materials which the society would send here would be such as would suit the Catholic Infants of this Island.

The state of Education in Malta is generally at so very low an ebb, that its advantages are very little appreciated, the Poverty and the want of employment for the higher class appears to render them more indifferent to this subject

NAM, GOV 1/2/16, No. 25, 25 February 1837, p. 125–128

Reports about public education submitted to the British Government were bleak (Pullicino 1850; Keenan 1879). According to Pullicino – a clergyman who was appointed Director of Education in July 1850 – such was the abject poverty of the working class that they were unable to offer the necessary care and attention to very young children. By roaming the streets, children were bound to pick bad habits which would be 'difficult to eradicate from their souls'. Pullicino recommended setting up infant schools for 2–6-year-old children to 'educate the heart', inculcate virtues and offer a pious upbringing besides general instruction and skills matching their 'tender abilities' (Pullicino 1850, p. 10).

The Royal Commissioners of Inquiry into the Affairs of Malta (1838) described elementary education in Malta as 'small in quantity and bad in quality' (as cited in Keenan 1879, p. 2). Where school premises were 'utterly unsuitable', infants fared worst. Keenan (1879) reports seeing 'infants huddled together in a small stifling room' (p. 5). Widespread shortcomings included the absence of playgrounds and a 'serious evil in the prevailing organisation' where 'children are seated throughout the entire school day' (ibid. p. 8).

Private provision did not fare much better. Individuals interested in establishing infant schools or crèches were expected to submit a written request – known as a petition – to obtain a license to operate. Licenses were issued by the Office of the Chief Secretary to Government (NAM, OPU, MGG, 18 September 1827, No.866, p.239) following recommendations about the moral character of the petitioner and the suitability of the sanitary conditions of the premises.<sup>2</sup> These infant schools were akin to the dame schools widely available in England and where 'unqualified women taught the 3Rs in an unimaginative manner' (Graham 2009). They were locally referred to as '*tan-nuna*' with '*nuna*' being a title of respect children used for elderly women.

Some 375 petitions for infant schools were submitted between 1839 and 1944.<sup>3</sup> Almost all were written by or on behalf of women. Petitioners included girls under the age of 18 (NAM CSG02 D946, 1903; NAM CSG02 L1059, 1905), spinsters, married women and widows who were often facing dire times and who tried to eke a living by maintaining an infant school (NAM CSG02 L2680, 1866). Some petitioners were encouraged by neighbours to set up infant schools.<sup>4</sup> Others saw theirs as a mission to keep children in check. Ciantar (NAM CSG02 1354, 1908) implores the granting of a license, 'so much for her own wants, as for the necessity of an infant school ... where parents wish their little children to be kept, to avoid them from running all day long through the streets, giving trouble to others'. Petitions did not all specify the age of the children to be catered for but some purported to keep children as young as two years of age and 'babies in arms' (NAM CSG 02 D 472 1905).

Morals were held in high esteem and permits were withdrawn when an owner became pregnant (NAM EDU2 93, 1937) or refused where the applicant (NAM CSG02 C2093, 1908) or a relative (NAM CSG02 B916, 1910) was known to have had, or to be, in an illicit relationship.

Several illiterate women obtained a license to keep infant schools (NAM, CSG02 F262, 1904; NAM CSG02 C6581, 1905; NAM, CSG02 B474, 1906; NAM CSG02 C640, 1912). In the absence of a policy concerning qualifications, applicants' suitability to keep an infant school was determined on a case-by-case basis, as illustrated by Anna Farrugia's application (NAM, CSG02 F1954, 1914). Despite being a 55-year old illiterate widow, she was of good character, respectable and possessed 'a fair knowledge of Religious Instruction and Needlework'. Her application was approved as it was argued that decisions about petitions were taken on sanitary rather than educational grounds, in accordance with the published regulations and 'the children applicant will have charge of, will be babies too young to join the Govt. Schools, or from whom there is not room, and who will be cared for by applicant while their mothers are out working'.<sup>5</sup>

(NAM, CSG02 F1954, 1914)

The Lieutenant Governor opined that:

*"at the present juncture as a matter of policy it is very desirable not to discourage in any way private enterprises which are relieving the pressure on our inadequate school accommodation. Failing sufficient private infant school accommodation, the infants are likely to find themselves in the gutter – le mieux est l'ennemi du bien".*

(NAM, CSG02 F1954, 1914)

Justifying the employability of childcare workers without qualifications echoes a contemporary stance. Engaging childcare workers without the required qualification is still allowed where supply does not meet demand (personal communication, December 2017).

### **Qualifications of 'nuna' licensees and curricular matters**

Reports about petitioners' qualifications were drawn by the Inspector of Elementary Schools (IES) and submitted to the Director of Public Instruction. Achievements in Religious Knowledge, Arithmetic, Maltese, English and Italian were key considerations.<sup>6</sup>

Considering the minimal or modest achievements of the 'educators', minding children was the priority. At the 'nuna' schools, time was spent learning prayers and teaching catechism together with folktales and nursery rhymes (Frendo 1970). Lace making, needlework and embroidery (NAM, CSG 02 5677 C/1861; NAM, CSG 02, 3870 A/1875) as well as cleaning, ironing, sewing and embroidery were considered essential skills for girls (Bonnici, 1991; Micallef 2008).

The challenge concerning staff training and qualifications still exists in contemporary practice. Minimal qualifications of prospective early years staff have always been expected and, as will be seen later, the one attempt at raising the basic qualification to a university degree has not been successful.

Instruction in the Government elementary schools was formalised in April 1899 (NAM, Education Circulars 1861–1899). The subjects for the Infant<sup>7</sup> and Preparatory class included Maltese, Arithmetic, weekly Object Lessons; Writing; Religious Instruction; Calisthenics; Needlework (for girls) and optional Drawing (kindergarten drawing).<sup>8</sup>

This increased formalisation within elementary school reflected the restructuring of the internal colonial infrastructure, necessitated by Malta's heightened importance with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Cultural colonisation through public schooling was boosted in 1870. Maltese became the language of instruction for children in the first two years of school and English replaced Italian<sup>9</sup> as the formal language of the classroom (Chircop 2017).

### **A split system? 'infant schools' or 'crèches' (1904–1907)**

A divide between 'infant schools' and 'crèches' was established at the beginning of the 20th century when the appropriateness of sanitation regulations was questioned. Requests to set up crèches appear to have triggered the split, resulting in amendments to sanitation regulations (NAM CSG02 T840 1906).<sup>10</sup>

An infant school was defined as 'a School or a department of a school to which only children who are not above the age of eight years are admitted' (Infant Schools Ordinance, Article 2 of Ordinance No II of 1904).<sup>11</sup> Following revision of these regulations, crèches were exempted from specific seating requirements<sup>12</sup> or the need for a playground/room for recreation. Crèche owners were required to keep 'cradles and their linen always clean and to renew daily the air in every room' (MGG, 14 June 1907).

### **The contributions of the Religious Orders during Colonial rule**

In the early years of British rule, the Catholic Church was guaranteed all its privileges and defended by the colonial authorities. Proselytisation by Protestant missionary societies was restricted or prohibited (Koster 1984). Thus, the Catholic Church and its Religious Orders had a greater and more permanent impact on the development of education than attempts made by Protestant missionaries (Zammit Mangion 1992). Many Church schools which exist today were established between the mid-19th to the early 20th centuries.<sup>13</sup>

Establishing educational institutions was the main purpose of several Orders. Crèches and infant schools were set up in and around the harbour. This was the hub of government activity and offered prospects of employment. Some Orders dedicated

their work to the care and education of the poorest children. However, the gentry too sought infant schools.

The first teaching nuns – Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition – started their work in 1845. Their first fee-paying school welcomed four- to five-year-old girls although the poor were taken in for free. The school had a good reputation for languages (Interview, 15 May 2017). The congregation of Franciscan nuns was set up in 1880, when nuns collected children to teach them catechism (Interview, 19 June 2017). The nuns of the third Order of St Dominic were granted permission to open an infant school for 15 children aged three to nine years in 1881. Although the nuns had no diplomas or certificates, a former primary school teacher living with them was considered qualified to look after the infant children of the gentry where the English language was to be the principal subject of instruction (NAM CSG 02, 3016 D1881). This convent was located in Rabat-Notabile, then considered an affluent part of the island. In contrast, the first crèche established by the Ursuline nuns in Valletta in 1887 welcomed babies and children of prisoners, and boys and girls were looked after, fed, washed and cared for by nuns trained in child care. Children born out of wedlock and scorned for fear of corrupting others were particularly welcomed. At the time, child beggars roamed the streets of the capital city whilst parents tried to find work (Micallef 1998).

The Catholic Church's control over infant education with a view to influencing the moral and religious upbringing of young children and the practice of engaging nuns who did not have teaching qualifications was not restricted to the local Church but echoes practices prevalent in neighbouring Italy between 1861 and 1918 (Hohnerlein 2015).

Despite the thorough archival search, no documentation associated to ECE was traced for the years between 1944 and 1975. In the post-war years, characterised by heavy emigration and the struggle for Malta's independence, there did not seem to be any milestones or achievements associated with ECE. This was set to change in the 70s with the introduction of non-compulsory but free kindergarten services.

### **The introduction of Government funded Kindergarten settings**

The Malta Labour Party's 1971 political manifesto included a proposal for the setting up of kindergartens through a pilot scheme. Kindergarten was perceived as a necessity 'in a modern industrial society where women are given an opportunity of working in factories' (p. 5). No government had entertained this possibility as nurseries and kindergartens were predominantly the remit of Catholic religious orders, especially nuns (Zammit Mangion 2000).

In lieu of a pilot scheme, 61 KG centres opened across Malta and Gozo between October and November 1975 for children between the ages of three years nine months and five years (Notice, 26 November 1975). Classrooms within all state primary schools were taken over, facilitating access. Heads of schools informed parents about registration procedures (Circular, 30 September 1975; Circular, 13 October 1975) but had no further responsibilities or duties related to KG despite settings being located within the school premises. The lead ministry was the Ministry for Labour and Social Services.

State KG became immediately popular as the majority of Maltese families did not make use of private or church schools (Zammit Mangion 2000). Kindergarten was

offered as an opportunity for children to benefit from a social and educational service. Four aims justified the national roll out, including:

- providing remote preparation for entry into primary school;
- providing relief for working mothers;<sup>14</sup>
- giving children opportunities to socialise and develop their abilities under guidance;
- giving children from homes lacking suitable educational opportunities the opportunity to develop and catch up with others (Notice 26 November 1975).

In response to parental demand, what was originally meant to be a half-day service soon matched the primary school full day provision (Interview with first Education Officer, May 2005). Following a two-month UNESCO-supported visit to Malta, Muraldiharan (1976) reported that a 30 min television programme was aired to educate parents since they did not distinguish between primary and pre-primary education and expected their children to be taught reading and writing in kindergarten. Parents demanded homework and resented the idea of children playing (p. 6). Expectations about KG children's academic achievements and preparation for formal education are still prevalent (Sollars 2017a).

Admission to kindergartens was extended to three-year olds in October 1988. Although non-compulsory, nowadays close to 100% of 3–5-year-olds attend KG regularly (Schreyer and Oberhuemer 2017).

### **Mushrooming childcare services (1990s–2018)**

Unregulated, privately-run childcare services for under-threes appeared in the late 1980s in the absence of any legislation or governing authority. A report drawn up by a Child Care Task Force set up through the initiative of a Co-operatives Board, identified private childcare services as one of eight forms of child-minding arrangements (CCTF, 2001). Adverts in the printed media indicated 15 childcare settings were operating at the time. Mothers' responsibility towards caring for and raising children took priority over career or employment. They postponed employment, gave up or suspended career progression and sought family-friendly professions or part-time employment to balance work and family responsibilities (Child Care Task Force 2001). Grandparents and the extended family supported young families. However, changes in society and family structures, the increase of women in employment<sup>15</sup> and the reduction in the availability of grandparents led to the setting up of childcare facilities. Initiatives were taken to offer childcare close to work premises (NAO, 2010).

The increase in available settings has been unprecedented. With the exception of 13 State settings, all are privately owned and managed. Accessibility has been facilitated through tax deductions introduced in 2008 (Act IV of 2007, MGG) and the introduction of free childcare in April 2014 (Ministry for Education, 2017). Both initiatives were designed to support families, especially women in employment. Parents benefit from these incentives when using registered childcare settings.<sup>16</sup> This condition is particularly significant. Owners of childcare settings are not obliged to officially register their setting



with the authorities but registered settings are funded directly by the Government and receive €3.25 per hour per child (JobsPlus 2017).<sup>17</sup>

### **Staff issues in ECE in contemporary Malta**

Staff training, qualifications, recruitment and retention are current challenges within childcare and kindergarten (Sollars 2013, 2017b). The Establishments Secretary at the OPM identified practitioners as 'kindergarten assistants'(KGAs) (17 October 1975).<sup>18</sup> Although a misnomer – KGAs do not assist anyone – this was a reflection of their lower status in comparison to teachers. The first call for applicants was for females who were at least 18 years of age and in possession of 4 GCE 'O' level passes obtained at the end of compulsory secondary school.<sup>19</sup> Although teachers who had resigned upon marriage were invited to apply, priority was given to unmarried females (OPM, 14 October 1975). Recruits underwent a crash training programme aimed at helping children to learn through pre-arranged environments. A compulsory six-week training programme was delivered at the end of the scholastic year (Muraldiharan, 1976).

Pre-service training has a history of its own (Sollars, Borg, and Craus 2006; Sollars 2017b). Training towards an EQF Level 4 Diploma has been offered by the Education Directorate (1993–2001), Malta's vocational college (2001 -) or private entities. The latter deliver part-time courses predominantly targeting females seeking employment as childcare workers (Sollars 2017b).

An undergraduate degree leading to a teaching qualification for kindergarten staff was introduced at the University of Malta in 2009. This would have placed practitioners at par with teaching staff in primary and secondary school.<sup>20</sup> However, graduate ECE teachers were employed in primary school rather than at kindergarten. Raising the status of early years practitioners remains an elusive target and a consultation document for an updated Education Act (2016) proposed a two-year diploma as a sufficient qualification for prospective kindergarten educators (KGEs) (MEDE 2016).

A two-year Level 4 diploma (120ECTS) is also the required qualification for childcare workers but a shortage of qualified childcarers is being addressed by allowing managers of childcare settings to employ unqualified individuals (email communication, December 2017). Low qualifications impinge on working conditions with continual turnover of staff (Sollars 2017b).

### **Policy documentation (2006–2013)**

The last decade has been characterised by the publication of four major documents which suggest that ECE is finally drawing attention to itself and finding a voice. The first ever policy document identified shortcomings in initial training, qualifications and continuous professional development of practitioners. It also proposed recommendations for the management, operation and financing of settings (Sollars, Borg, and Craus 2006). The largely under-qualified practitioners had been working in isolation, with minimal support and in the absence of internal or external monitoring.

The publication of the National Standards for child day-care settings (MFSS, 2006), released at the time of the first policy document, sought to ensure that, 'safe and developmentally appropriate children's services are available to promote the holistic

development and well-being of children and their families'. (Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity 2006, p. ii). The 10 standards are still used as the yardstick for service providers to gain a provisional license to operate a childcare setting.<sup>21</sup>

In the first overhaul to the national curriculum since Malta joined the EU, ECE was officially acknowledged as a cycle in its own right, distinct from the primary and secondary cycles (NCF, 2012). The Early Years cycle proposed a vision for a more unified system, rather than a split system of services with different lead ministries, with a view to facilitating transitions for children and their families as they progress through the cycle. It put forward principles and objectives which acknowledge children's agency, their personal and social growth through engaging relationships and experiences on their journey to becoming confident and competent learners. This implied changes to pedagogical practices which would require practitioners to move away from spoon-feeding, handholding and planning decontextualised activities to address short-term objectives.

A white paper about the state of ECE (Sollars 2013) reiterated concerns about staffing, professional development and quality of services while emphasising the need for a (re) conceptualisation of ECE. At the time as free childcare was being introduced it seemed imperative to launch a national debate about ECE to openly discuss the expectations of stakeholders and carve a rational, developmental path for the sector. Established pedagogical practices across KG settings promoted formal literacy and numeracy sessions, albeit interpreted as playful activities. A strategy document commissioned by the Ministry, seeking to realise the demands of the NCF, bring together kindergarten and childcare sectors, and educate all stakeholders about pedagogical approaches appropriate for the 21st century remains unpublished (Sollars 2014). Developments continue to occur sporadically, driven by demands external to the sector, thus contributing to the struggle for ECE to develop its voice.

### **Lessons and legacy**

Successful ECE development, policies and outcomes must embrace historical and on-going societal changes while addressing 'intervening influences which include cultural beliefs, values and norms; socio-political and economic ideologies; national wealth; social welfare approach; racial, cultural, and/or religious diversity; family policies and institutional complexity' (Cochran 2011, p. 67). In order to strengthen ECE and its identity, it is wise to look to the past but also keep an eye on the future to realise the social obligations towards young children (Kagan & Roth, 2017).

ECE developed from a need to facilitate women's employability. Society and cultural perceptions about women in paid employment have changed but perspectives and expectations about young children's potential achievements as a result of good quality early years settings have not developed substantially.

ECE has retained a low-status. The minimal qualifications and the low salaries reflect the poor regard in which ECE has been held. Child-minding and preparation for school are key priorities for parents and practitioners. The benefits associated with high quality provision which can be offered by highly qualified practitioners are not at the forefront of any strategic vision.

Individuals taking responsibility for policy need to have a thorough understanding of ECE and be informed about current research, pedagogies and practices. Children need

to be acknowledged as capable individuals contributing actively to their own learning. Despite the commitment and dedication of many practitioners, progress registered over time and some evidence of good practice, addressing and adapting to new insights about young children's development, learning and participation, remains a challenge. Questioning traditions, shaking cultural beliefs and modifying practices requires a concerted effort of many informed, like-minded stakeholders. Decisions and directions are taken by policy makers with minimal experience about ECE. Practitioners with a modest degree of preparation can do very little to rebut or challenge policy.

ECE in Malta has no deep-rooted tradition built on the influence of an ideology. Throughout its history, there has never been an entity to focus, drive, monitor and support an ECE agenda, its development or the education of the primary stakeholders. It was only as recently as April 2016 that the Early Childhood Development Association, Malta (ECDAM) was launched to 'strengthen the knowledge, skills and abilities of all those involved in the early childhood education and care, to ensure a high quality programme for young children' (Article 3, Statute).

ECE in Malta has come a long way, but the struggle for it to find a voice and address 21st century challenges is just beginning to gain momentum.

## Notes

1. Dispatches from Downing Street constituted official correspondence. Dispatches between Malta and Great Britain include correspondence to the Chief Secretary Governor, Consuls, naval and military personnel.
2. Recommendations for each petition were sought from the Commissioner of Police, the Chief Government Medical Officer and the Public Health Department.
3. With the exception of five files with requests and correspondence dated 1927, no trace of requests, petitions or licenses for infant schools was found at the National Archives for the period 1922–1933.
4. Alice Waters, aged 28, wife of Ugo Bruno, claimed that she had been 'frequently requested by many of the gentry to instruct their little children' and thus requested 'permission to open a private Infant school at her house' (NAM CSG 02 3210, 1886).
5. Farrugia's file documentation details the exchange of opinion between the Director of Elementary Schools (DES), the Lieutenant Governor and the Crown Advocate (C.A).
6. The assessment of the IES about Margherita Bartolo (NAM, CSG02, B233 of 1905) read as follows: *Applicant has a very satisfactory knowledge of Italian. She can also read Maltese very fluently, but has no knowledge of English. Her knowledge of Arithmetic is confined to the four simple rules and compound addition. She states she has kept the above school for about 23 years.* The assessment of 18-year-old Paolina Busuttill (NAM, CSG02, B774 of 1921) was recorded on a template: *English – satisfactory; Italian – poor; Arithmetic – fair; Religious Instruction – satisfactory; Maltese – Good; Needlework – Fair.*
7. School attendance was not compulsory. Infants were admitted to the elementary school at the age of five. Infants were organised in two classes: Stage 1 and Stage 2 and followed a timetable. From time to time, directives were issued by the DES about subjects and pedagogy, notably arithmetic and reading. (Ref Circular 3 July 1915 – Scheme for teaching arithmetic).
8. *Maltese* (the alphabet and an introduction to reading), *Arithmetic* (numeration and notation), weekly *Object Lessons* (including shape and form; colour; simple properties of bodies; organs of sensation; or kindergarten and varied occupations); *Writing* (strokes and easy letters; round hand, on board and slates); *Religious Instruction* (the first lesson being 'Our Father' and 'Hail Mary' to be followed by 'The Creed' and 'Hail Holy Queen'); *Calisthenics*

- (squad in single rank; standing at ease; marching and dismissing); *Needlework* (for girls) including needle position drill; fixing the hem; knitting pin drill and knitting plain stitch and optional Drawing (kindergarten drawing).
9. Italian was considered to be the language of the educated class, predominantly represented by the Church and at the law courts.
  10. Ludgarda Chetcuti's request for a crèche was met favourably. The illiterate applicant had already kept a school for 10 years for pupils aged 1½ to 4. (NAM CSG 02 C238, 1905).
  11. The Head of Government was responsible for establishing, revoking or modifying regulations with respect to buildings, accommodation, lights, ventilation, cleaning, drainage and water supply (Government Notice, No. 29; Malta Government Gazette, No. 4787, 27 January 1905e).
  12. According to regulations, seating in infant schools were required to be 'benches having the seats wide 10' and high 13" and furnished with back supports'
  13. Augustinian Nuns (NAM CSG 02, S1324, 1906); St Francis Institute Sisters of Charity (NAM CSG02 S974 1906); Sisters of Charity (EDU2 102, 1935a and EDU2 235, 1935b; EDU2 141 of 1938).
  14. This was a rather odd justification considering that until the end of 1980, women working in the public sector were expected to resign upon marriage. But industrialisation was a pillar of the economy in the 70s and many women were employed in textile factories. Hence, the drive to get more females in employment necessitated setting up KG services which were free, thus considered a social service.
  15. Until December 1980, women employed in the public sector were required to sign a contract agreeing to vacate their post at the workplace upon marriage (Camilleri Cassar 1997). The 'marriage bar' was removed at the end of 1980 (OPM Circular No 103/80, of 31 December 1980). For women working in the private sector, The Conditions of Employment (Regulation) Act 1952 was amended in 1981 (Act XI of 1981: CERA Sec. 34:14).
  16. 44 settings were registered with the Dept of Social Welfare Standards in 2008 (NSO, 2010). 80 settings registered when free childcare was introduced in 2014. Records for 93 registered childcare centres were held at the Accreditation Unit in August 2016 (Sollars 2017b). By March 2017 there were 106 childcare centres operating across the islands (PQ31899, 20 March 2017). Records for 119 registered childcare centres are held at the Accreditation Unit (Ministry for Education, June 2018). Over 3800 children are benefitting from free childcare (PQ3349, 16 January 2018).
  17. Details about Childcare registration and the free scheme are available at <https://education.gov.mt/en/childcareservices/Pages/Registration.aspx>.
  18. The term 'kindergarten educators' (KGEs) was introduced recently (Govt-MUT Agreement, Dec 2017).
  19. Until 1993, the school-leaving examinations for 16-year-old Maltese students consisted of exams prepared by Oxford and London University Examination Boards, better known as the GCE (General Certificate of Education).
  20. Until 2016, prospective primary and secondary school teachers were expected to have a B. Ed.(Hons.) as their entry qualification into the profession. Pay parity exists for qualified teachers working in compulsory education – 5–11-year olds for primary and 11–16 year olds for middle and secondary school.
  21. The Standards define suitable persons; physical environment and equipment; management and organisation; health and safety issues; care, learning and play; working in partnership with parents; behaviour management; child protection; food and drink; equal opportunities and children with special needs.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## References

- Baldacchino, G. 2014. Presentation at the *Conference on Women – Building Blocks of Our Society*. Conference organised by the National Council of Women, April 2014. *Il-Mara*, July/September 2014, p. 7.
- Bonnici, A. 1991. *Mons. Sidor Formosa (1851–1931). Fundatur ta' l-Orsolini Maltin ta' Sant' Angela Merici*. Malta: Imprint.
- Camilleri Cassar, F. 1997. *Women in the Labour Market: A Maltese Perspective*. Malta: Mireva.
- Child Care Task Force. 2001. *Il-qasam tal-kura u z-zamma tat-tfal f'pajjizna: Analizi u azzjoni*. Malta: CCTF.
- Chircop, J. 2017. "Shifting the Colonial Frontier: The Colonial State, Elementary Schooling and Maltese Society 1814–1914". In *Yesterday's Schools. Readings in Maltese Educational History* edited by R. Sultana, 147–159. Malta: Xiroc.
- Cochran, M. 2011. "International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education". *Educational Policy*, 25 (1): 65–91. doi: 10.1177/0895904810387789
- Constitution of Malta, (1964). <http://justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8566>
- Department for Curriculum, Research and Life Long Learning [DCRILL]. 2017. *A Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta 2014*. Malta: Early School Leaving Unit, MEDE.
- Frendo, H. 1970. *Dimechianism: its setting and fruition*. B.A.(Hons.) Unpublished History dissertation submitted to the Royal University of Malta.
- Graham, P. 2009. *Susan Isaacs: A Life Freeing the Minds of Children*. London: Karnac
- Hohnerlein, E. M. 2015. "Development and Diffusion of Early Childhood Education in Italy: Reflections on the Role of the Church from a Historical Perspective (1830–2010)". In *The Development of Early Childhood Education in Europe and North America. Historical and Comparative Perspectives* edited by H. Willekens, K. Scheiwe, and K. Nawrotzki, 71–91. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- JobsPlus. 2017. *Terms and conditions for free childcare scheme - childcare service providers* Updated version 18.10.17. Ministry for Education & Employment: JobsPlus.
- Kagan, S. L., and R. Jessica. 2017. Transforming Early Childhood Systems for Future Generations: Obligations and Opportunities. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 49 (2), 137–154. doi: 10.1007/s13158-017-0194-4
- Keenan, P. J. 1879. *Report upon the Educational System of Malta*. Dublin: Alexander Thom.
- Koster, A. 1984. *Prelates and Politicians in Malta. Changing Power-Balances between Church and State in a Mediterranean Island Fortress (1800–1976)*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Malta Government Gazette. 1907. Regulations Concerning Sanitation in Infant Schools. MGG, 14th June 1907, No. 5002, Notice no. 110, p. 639–640.
- Malta Government Gazette. 2007. "ACT No IV of 2007 to Implement Budget Measures for the Financial Year 2007". *Supplement to the Malta Government Gazette*, 16th March 2007, No.18,052, p. 162, Part II, paragraph 10.
- Malta Labour Party. (1971). *Malta Labour Party Electoral Program 1971. Malta for the Maltese: in Peace and Progress*. <https://www.um.edu.mt/electionsdata/maltesepolitics/politicalparties/manifestos>
- Malta, N. A., 1914. Petition by Anna Farrugia. CSG02 F1954.
- Micallef, D. 1998. "Child Beggars in Late Victorian Valletta". *The Sunday Times*, 22 November, p. 50–51.
- Micallef, D. 2008. "L-Orsolini f'Haz-Zabbar 1923". *Il-Mument*, Sunday, 8 June, p. 20–21.
- Ministry for Education and Employment. 2012. *A National Curriculum Framework for All*. Floriana: MEDE.
- Ministry for Education and Employment. 2016. *Bringing Education into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Professions in Education Act*. <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/News/Pages/News%20items/Bringing-Education-Into-the-21st-Century.aspx>

- Ministry for Education and Employment. 2017. *What is the free childcare scheme?* <https://education.gov.mt/en/Pages/Free-Childcare.aspx>
- Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. 2006. *National Standards for Child Day Care Facilities*. Valletta: MFSS.
- Muralidharen, R. 1976. *Malta: Pre-School Education Training*, Reports, No. 3532 UNESCO. NAM: General Miscellaneous.
- National Archives Malta. *Education Circulars, 1861–1899*, Folder 1.
- National Archives Malta. 1827. "Government Notice Re Licences for Public Schools". *Malta Government Gazette*, 18 September, No.866, p.239.
- National Archives Malta. 1861. Petition of Margherita and Elisabetta, Mother and Daughter Critien. CSG 02 C5677
- National Archives Malta. 1866. Petition of Giovanna, Widow of Physician Dr Saverio Locano. CSG02, L2680.
- National Archives Malta. 1875. Petition of Carmela Agius. CSG02, A3870.
- National Archives Malta. 1881. Petition of Rev. Vincent Borg, Prior of Dominican Convent on Behalf of Nuns to Open an Infant School. CSG02, D3016.
- National Archives Malta. 1886. Petition by Alice Waters. CSG 02, 3210.
- National Archives Malta. 1903. Petition by Elisa Davison. CSG02, D946.
- National Archives Malta. 1904a. Petition by Maria Farrugia. CSG02, F262.
- National Archives Malta. 1904b. Ordinance No.II, 1904 "To Provide for the Regulation and Control of Infant Schools". *Supplement to the Malta Government Gazette*, 25 February, N. 4688, p. I - II.
- National Archives Malta. 1905a. Petition by Ludgarda Chetcuti. CSG02 C238.
- National Archives Malta. 1905b. Petition by Fr David Catania on Behalf of Mrs Giovanna Grech. CSG02 C6581
- National Archives Malta. 1905c. Petition by Maria Licari. CSG02, L1059.
- National Archives Malta. 1905d. Petition by Maria Dalli. CSG02, D472.
- National Archives Malta. 1905e. "Government Notice and Regulations Concerning Sanitation in Infant Schools". *Malta Government Gazette*, 27 January, N. 4787, Notice No. 29, p. 69.
- National Archives Malta. 1906a. Petition by Ludgarda Buontempo. CSG02 B474
- National Archives Malta. 1906b. Petition by Giovanna Tortell. CSG02 T840
- National Archives Malta. 1906c. Petition by Suor Filomena Dello Spirito Santo for Permission to Keep an Infant School. CSG02 S974
- National Archives Malta. 1906d. Petition by Sister Maria Paulina Debrincat for Permission to Open an Infant School. CSG02, S1324.
- National Archives Malta. 1907. "Government Notice and Regulations Concerning Sanitation in Infant Schools". *Malta Government Gazette*, 14 June, N. 5002, Notice No. 110, p. 639–640.
- National Archives Malta. 1908a. Petition by Elvira Alberini Ciccarelli. CSG02 C2093
- National Archives Malta. 1908b. Petition by Filomena Ciantar. CSG02, 1354.
- National Archives Malta 1910. Petition by Concetta Borg. CSG02, B916.
- National Archives Malta 1912. Petition by Filomena Compagno. CSG02 C640
- National Archives Malta, 1921. Paolina Busuttill. CSB02,B774.
- National Archives Malta. 1935a. Letter from the Revd. Geltrude Rosa Vicari Requesting Permission to Open an Infant School. EDU2 102.
- National Archives Malta. 1935b. Letter from the Revd. Mother Geltrude Rosa Vicari Requesting Permission to Open an Infant School. EDU2 235
- National Archives Malta. 1937. Petition by Miss Anette Gauci. EDU2, 93
- National Archives Malta. 1938. The Revd. Mother Provincial of the Sisters of Charity Requests Permission to Open an Infant School. EDU2 141.
- National Archives Malta. 1905. Petition by Margherita Bartolo CSG02, B233.
- National Audit Office. 2010. *Performance Audit: Child Care Arrangements or Public Employees*. Floriana: NAO. July. <http://www.nao.gov.mt>
- National Statistics Office. 2010. *Children 2010*. Valletta: National Statistics Office.
- National Statistics Office. 2016a. *Trends in Malta 2016*. Valletta: National Statistics Office
- National Statistics Office. 2016b. *Demographic Review 2014*. Valletta: National Statistics Office.

- National Statistics Office, 2018a. *International Day of Families 2018*. News Release 075/2018, 14th May 2018. Valletta: NSO.
- National Statistics Office, 2018b. *Population Statistics (Revisions): 2012–2016*. News Release 022/2018, 12th February 2018. Valletta: NSO.
- Pullicino, P. 1850. *Rapporto sulla educazione primaria nelle isole di Malta e Gozo*. Malta. Available at NAM, General Miscellaneous Reports, Report No. 35.
- Schreyer, I., and P. Oberhuemer. 2017. "Malta – Key Contextual Data". In *Workforce Profiles in Systems of Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*, edited by P. Oberhuemer and I. Schreyer. [www.seeepro.eu/English/Country\\_Reports.htm](http://www.seeepro.eu/English/Country_Reports.htm)
- Sollars, V. 2013. *Early Childhood Education and Care in Malta: The Way Forward*. Floriana: Ministry for Education & Employment
- Sollars, V. 2014. *The early years learning outcomes. An implementation strategy*. Unpublished manuscript submitted to the Ministry for Education and Employment, September 2014.
- Sollars, V. 2017a. Parents' Expectations about Early Years Services. *Early Years*, 37(3), 285–299. doi: 10.1080/09575146.2016.1154507
- Sollars, V. 2017b. "Malta – ECEC Workforce Profile." In *Workforce Profiles in Systems of Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*, edited by P. Oberhuemer and I. Schreyer. [www.seeepro.eu/English/Country\\_Reports.htm](http://www.seeepro.eu/English/Country_Reports.htm)
- Sollars, V. M., A. C. Borg, and B. Craus. 2006. *Early Childhood Education and Care. A National Policy*. Malta: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.
- Zammit Mangion, J. 1992. *Education in Malta*. Malta: Studia Editions.
- Zammit Mangion, J. 2000. *L-istorja ta' l-Edukazzjoni f'Malta*. Malta: Publikazzjonijiet Indipendenza.

