

A Vision for the National Archives of Malta

Charles J. Farrugia, National Archivist - Malta

The National Archives has been striving to build its identity as the main organisation responsible for Malta's archival heritage. Substantial progress has been made in this direction with the main achievement being the new Archives Act which came into force on 1 September 2005. As a direct result of this reform I was appointed as Malta's first National Archivist.



The Hon. Minister of Education Dr Louis Galea (centre) presenting the Leonardo project contract to National Archivist Charles Farrugia (left) in the presence of Permanent Secretary Frans Borg

We are now in the process of developing the structure of our National Archives in order to make it possible to implement the wide-ranging obligations the legislation placed on us. Our main priority is human resources followed by the setting up of an effective records management system in government.

Human resources and professional development

No institution can be successful without a strong investment in its human resources. A sector which is so extensive and complex such as archives has to be manned by professionally trained people.

A great leap forward in this area was made with the offering of a

Diploma/Degree course in Archives and Records Management at the University of Malta. This was developed in conjunction with the present Diploma in Librarianship. The first intake of students was in October 2005. The first 16 students have now finished their first year of studies. It was my privilege to lecture almost the whole load of lectures during year one to a

group of students who are taking their course as a great challenge in their professional development.

Concurrently, we are training our personnel who are already employed with the archives. In a situation of complete lack of financial resource for training we managed to obtain funds under a Leonardo Mobility project measure. Ten persons will during 2006 visit Italy, Hungary or Bulgaria to have first hand experience in microfilming and digitization of documents.

Records Management in Government Departments

Another area of importance is that of records management in public offices. The new legislation imposes on all heads of public offices to appoint Records Officers. However, this on its own is not enough. The National Archives will provide initial and periodic training to R.O.s. Another measure will be the appointment of a liaison officer to act as a desk officer at the National Archives and co-ordinate/monitor the R.O.s.

An interesting development in the legislation is that the National Archives is now authorised to inspect record officers. The National Archives will employ inspectors of records with the task of visiting record repositories to see whether their record keeping practices are in line with the standards issued by the authorities. This it is hoped will provide the necessary guarantee that good records management practices are actually in place.

The National Archives Council

On 29th May 2006 the Hon Minister of Education Dr Louis Galea announced the setting up of the National Archives Council in line with the National Archives Act. The council is headed by Mr Joe Izzo, a retired Permanent Secretary who is also serving as an Advisor to the Prime Minister on human resources. The other members on the Archives Council are a combination of ex officio members and other appointed members. The ex officio members are the Superintendent of Cultural

Heritage, the Chairperson of Heritage Malta (Malta's institution responsible for Museums and cultural heritage), the National Librarian, and the Permanent Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister.

The appointed members are a representative from the Friends of the National Archives, the Curator of



Charles Farrugia (left) showing around Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi (right). Also present Archives consultant Michael Ellul (centre)

an ecclesiastical archive, and the person in charge of the Division of Librarianship and Archives studies at the University of Malta.

Speaking at the inaugural press conference the Minister said that we have the challenge of safeguarding the collective memory of the Maltese nation. The Council has advisory and not executive powers. The sister island of Gozo is also represented on the council. The National Archivist and the Assistant National Archivist for Gozo (which is also a new post set up under the

Archives Act) have the right to attend meetings but without voting powers.



The First meeting of the National Archives Council on 6th July 2006

However the recent changes in legislation and administrative structures gave the right message that the government is willing to take this sector seriously and also to invest in it. It is now up to us, employees of the new agency to see that we give our utmost for the system to function effectively.

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The first meeting of the National Archives Council was held at the head office of the National Archives on 6th July 2006. The Council is in the process of formulating a three-year work plan. Concurrently the National Archives is also formulating its business plan for the first three years of its operation.

Re-branding

The first steps that the National Archives has taken as a new government agency is to re-brand its services to the public. A competitive logo competition was launched and now the submissions are being adjudicated. HSBC Malta plc will be sponsoring the newsletter of the National Archives with the first issue planned to reach the public in late August.

These are exciting times for the National Archives of Malta. It is not an easy task for a small country with limited resources such as Malta to preserve its vast cultural treasures.