
A Brief History of Malta's Educational Broadcasting

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The year 1948 was a milestone in the history of Maltese broadcasting. A special wing, known as the School Broadcasting Unit, was established within the Education Department.¹ It had the specific aim of introducing radio broadcasts for primary and secondary school students, utilising the Rediffusion services. The reader must bear in mind that in the mentioned period, responsible government had been re-introduced in Malta and women acquired the right to vote in future electoral appointments. The new Labour Government elected in 1947 also introduced compulsory education, and in due course this would radically upgrade Malta's literacy and numeracy skills.² Reforms were also undertaken by the University of Malta which changed the major course structures. "This abolished the existing preparatory courses and... substituted them by admission courses leading to the various faculties."³ The BA (Honours) course was also introduced. In 1948, more than 40,000 Maltese and Gozitan pupils attended primary school.⁴ Since 1949, the Colonial Office began to issue the publication *Sound and Television Broadcasting in the Overseas Territories*, demonstrating a vibrant broadcasting scenario in the British Empire.⁵ Malta was no exception to this development as this paper will reveal.

Over the years, the Maltese school broadcasting unit fell under different government agencies or departments. The list of responsible authorities included the Central Office of Information, the Department of Information, Xandir Malta and the Ministry of Education. According to a report drawn by UNESCO in 1981, these "constant changes have led to a high wastage rate and turnover of staff which in turn has weakened the capacity of the Unit to produce material of an acceptably high standard."⁶

Although this report looked at this venture with gloom, it is fair to add that the analysis was drawn in a period when the unit seemed to be moving fast to closure and most probably it was losing its *raison d'être*. In fact, the mentioned report indicated that the responsible committee for school broadcasting had not met for two whole years (1979-1981) and Education Minister Philip Muscat was eager "to extend the scope of educational broadcasting in Malta."⁷

The birth of radio broadcasting

Radio broadcasts were commenced on a regular basis in Malta by the Rediffusion company in 1935. It was a political initiative taken by the British colonisers to counteract Italian fascist propaganda at a time when war was brewing. During the Second World War, this broadcasting service played a strong role "in keeping morale at a high level".⁸ The service was

not free of charge and was tied to a membership scheme. The Rediffusion subscription cost two and a half pence daily. "It had two channels, the BBC link in English used channel A, while channel B transmitted mostly locally produced programmes in the Maltese language. The (mentioned) broadcasting venture started with some 2,200 subscribers of which only 594 were Maltese, a figure that was well below expectations."⁹

It was the era of broadcasters Effie Ciantar, Ġużè Chetcuti and George Zarb. Over the years, thanks to Effie Ciantar, the Rediffusion developed a local channel promoting culture and education for the different communities of listeners. In fact, in 1946, "broadcasts in the Maltese language started to be transmitted on a more organised and regular basis".¹⁰ Ciantar introduced the reading of novels, literary programmes, religious programmes, classic music programmes, magazine programmes intended for women, and so on. Mr Effie Ciantar was appointed Head of Programmes in 1947.¹¹ Ciantar's efforts raised the number of subscribers. The company also set up its first studio depot in il-Ħamrun.¹² One should also add that Mr Ciantar was an actor. He took part, for example, in *Il-Buraxxa* written by Nikol Biancardi and staged at the Orpheum Theatre in il-Ġżira.¹³ Effie's father, Karmenu, was also involved in theatre with one of his abilities being that of adapting operas into plays.

A very active broadcaster in this same period was Baron Kellin Vella Haber from in-Nadur, Gozo. Vella Haber founded the *Moviment tal-Malti*, which soon became a national movement that promoted the use of the Maltese language and its literature. Radio was one of the means which this group employed to promote the language.¹⁴ The *Moviment* also encouraged schoolchildren to participate actively in such broadcasts. According to Vella Haber, his movement's programmes were 'killed' by *Il-Ġabra Letterarja*, which was produced by Ġużè Aquilina, the head of the Department of Maltese at the Royal University of Malta.¹⁵

The role of teachers at the Rediffusion

Irrespective of the School Broadcasting Unit (SBU) venture, Rediffusion had a limited number of teachers amongst its broadcasting lists who worked with the entity on a part-time basis producing cultural radio programmes. For instance, the frontliners for children's programmes were Salvinu Tellus, Frans Said and Ġużi Mallia. They adopted a more familiar name to communicate with their young listeners: iz-Ziju Salv, iz-Ziju Frans and in-Nannu Peppu, respectively.¹⁶ Tellus "eventually became executive producer of Rediffusion's programmes for children, commissioning others to produce individual programmes..."¹⁷

Various sorts of programmes were created by this exceptional trio. As Sant notices, “children’s programmes were never produced by full-time Rediffusion employees.”¹⁸ But undeniably, Rediffusion invested thoroughly in radio for children. In fact, irrespective of the SBU schedule, “by the end of the 1960s, the children’s hour had become a daily programme, and it went on until the early 1970s.”¹⁹ Mallia was very keen on adapting foreign literary texts for children’s radio series, the most famous being *The Find Outers* based on Enid Blyton’s stories.²⁰

The creation of the School Broadcasting Unit



Dr Godwin Ganado

The initiative to set up the school broadcasting wing was taken by the Department of Education. The Minister at the time was Dr Godwin Ganado whilst the Director of Education was Mr J.P. Vassallo. According to Cutajar, some months before the foundation of the School Broadcasting Unit (SBU), Vassallo had appointed teacher Romeo Micallef to host a weekly half-hour broadcast for schools. The Director wanted Mr Micallef to broadcast stories with musical interludes.²¹

During the same period, the Ministry of Education was seriously assessing the quality of education in Malta, and it was decided to put more emphasis on the teaching of Arithmetic and English. The SBU was also an outcome of that report.

The scheme of the SBU was inaugurated by Archbishop Michael Gonzi on 1 April 1949 at 9:30 a.m.²²

This Unit was to produce the programmes while Rediffusion would relay them. For this reason, Rediffusion sets were installed in all schools. New textbooks for English were also published by the Department during this period. The radio broadcasts continued for the next thirty-nine years and ended when the state station concluded its cable activities.²³

The target of these broadcasts was that of “supplementing the work of the classroom teacher”.²⁴ For the inauguration ceremony Prime Minister Paul Boffa and Education Minister Godwin Ganado were among the special guests who addressed the teachers and pupils who were present for the

event. The inauguration speeches were followed by an explanation of the Gospel at 10:20 by Mgr Mikiel Azzopardi.²⁵

The SBU's base was in St Christopher Street, Valletta. Its philosophy was that the programmes were to be tailored for the different categories of students. The target audiences were three: the infants, the pupils from Standard I to Standard III, and those from Standard IV to Standard VI.²⁶ It was a period when illiteracy or semi-illiteracy was still quite high at 38 per cent.²⁷

The SBU employed teachers, not broadcasters. Their communication and broadcasting skills were of course examined through a meticulous process of selection. Interviews were conducted by Ms Margaret Mortimer and Mr Toni Pellegrini. Others were handpicked by Pellegrini himself after observing them acting in plays produced by the Malta Union of Teachers. This was the case of Manni Spiteri.²⁸



Mgr Mikiel Azzopardi.

The initial staff of the unit consisted of the head of the wing, a secretary and ten teachers. Four teachers were employed on a full-time basis, and thus seconded to the Unit. A further six full-time teachers were employed on a part-time basis.²⁹ The latter taught in schools in the mornings and wrote scripts and participated in live broadcasts in the afternoons.



Manni Spiteri

At first Lawrence Mizzi was a part-time broadcaster, teaching in the morning at Tarxien Primary and joining in broadcasts in the afternoon.³⁰ When Mizzi joined SBU, the team consisted of Manni Spiteri, Lewis Portelli (who joined in 1941), Karmen Azzopardi, Turu Pace, Charles Micallef, Pauline Psaila, Joe Sammut, Eddie Sammut, Tony Parnis, George Agius, Victor Mercieca, Inez Carbone, Ġużi Mallia, Joe Muscat Drago, John Curmi, Karmenu Vassallo, Pawlu Aquilina, Carmelina Xerri, Rina Falzon and Rose Abela.³¹ Later on Mizzi was engaged on a full-time employment with SBU.

The SBU, as indicated above, was under the direction of Toni Pellegrini. In the early 1960s, Pellegrini joined the political fray when he occupied the post of Secretary-General of the Malta Labour Party. In 1961, he founded the Christian Workers' Party with the help of the Capuchin Friar Feliċjan Bilocca. Pellegrini was initially a teacher in the primary school sector,³² and then studied radio production at the BBC. Other SBU contributors included Ganni A. Cilia, Anthony Valletta and Mgr Mikiel Azzopardi.³³ Valletta was known for his keen interest in nature studies and this dedication was vividly evident in the publication of his *Nature Study Series*.³⁴

The role of teachers within the School Broadcasting Unit

Director of Education Vassallo explained to the teacher corps that in its first months the SBU was aiming "to train children to listen."³⁵ He stressed that the service was not there to replace the teacher in class but "to assist the process of education by arousing the interest of pupils and stimulating mental activity."³⁶ The SBU was to create a product that "will widen the interest of the curriculum".³⁷ The producers intended to utilise the techniques of interviews, stories, semi-dramatizations and dramatizations in their broadcasting operations.

J.P. Vassallo evidenced the project's three pillars: the preparation for the broadcast, the actual broadcast, and the follow-up. Schools were going to receive "monthly circulars in advance giving details of school broadcasts".³⁸ Teachers were expected to prepare the students for the broadcast but had to refrain from giving too much information in order not to "dilute the interest during the actual broadcasts".³⁹

Teachers were expected to ensure that the broadcasting set was adequately positioned to ensure that every single pupil in the classroom could follow. Each broadcast lasted fifteen minutes. The teacher was also expected not to disrupt the broadcast at any stage. During these broadcasts, nobody was allowed to enter or leave the classroom. The teacher "should manifest interest and not do any other work during the broadcast".⁴⁰ For the follow-up session, teachers were instructed to discuss the programme while taking care not to kill the pleasure of radio listening by "excessive or tiring follow-up routine".⁴¹

The management of the SBU's programmes

SBU's broadcasts were held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, whilst Tuesday and Thursday were reserved for the writing of scripts. Broadcast schedules for the whole month were published prior to the broadcasts.

Broadcasting would take place in the mornings between 9:00 and 11:00. "Later on, it was changed to the afternoons and remained at three to four o'clock".⁴² In the late 1950s, programmes for the infant classes, and for Standards I to III were broadcast at 3:00 p.m. The sessions for Standards IV to VI were broadcast at 3:30 p.m. The explanation of the Gospels remained on Friday mornings.⁴³

In 1958 there were 196 schools following the SBU programmes.⁴⁴ Three years earlier, Rediffusion had moved to its new building in Gwardamanga.⁴⁵ During the scholastic year 1962-1963, "subjects which many primary school teachers were not specialised in, were introduced."⁴⁶ Topics varied. "Subjects treated in these first years were Maltese, Literature, History, Civics, Music, famous people and others".⁴⁷ Originally the intention was to provide broadcasts for both primary and secondary level but the latter was dropped after the initial months of service due to the "crowded state of the timetable, the difficulty of procuring suitable scripts and the fact that the secondary schools functioned only in the morning".⁴⁸

Broadcasts were also monitored, and their quality was assessed. Members of the Broadcasting Board made it a point to listen to broadcasts with classes in different schools, "whenever possible and thus to see for themselves to what extent children follow and profit...".⁴⁹ The Unit also received programmes from the School Broadcasting branch of the BBC. Such programmes were not relayed on Rediffusion but provided the SBU with ideas, material and content.⁵⁰ Before 1951, SBU broadcasts aired live.⁵¹ The same applied to Rediffusion programmes as the concept of recording was non-existent before 1951. At times, this created odd and funny moments. Sound effects were also invented by the producers themselves.

SBU shifted from the Education Division to the Department of Information

It was in 1955 that a major overhaul relating to the School Broadcasting Unit took place as it was decided that the Unit should no longer remain under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. That year marked Mr Mintoff's landslide victory in the general elections with Integration being the main target of his government. Gozo also saw the introduction of the broadcasting services in 1955.⁵²

The agency responsible for SBU was now the Central Office of Information (COI), which would later become the Department of Information (DOI). All members of staff were now employed on a full-time basis. The transfer

of the SBU to the COI also meant more staff than before. Besides the head of the section and the secretary, the Unit now employed three full-time typists and sixteen teachers.⁵³ These teachers were employed as scriptwriters and were obliged to work under Civil Service conditions.⁵⁴ Six more teachers joined on secondment.⁵⁵ "The subjects treated were very much the same as those which had been covered during the previous years."⁵⁶ The COI pushed the government's Integration philosophy and Pellegrini had a strong role in presenting the government's take on the theme.⁵⁷ Radio service offered a good propaganda tool in this case.

Beside the SBU programmes, the COI produced a considerable number of other programmes that were aired on Rediffusion. In fact, Mizzi noted that the COI produced more radio programmes than the Rediffusion company itself.⁵⁸ *Radio College* was one of COI's programmes, which offered, for example, French and Italian lessons. Notes and handouts were also published so that the audience could follow the lessons. Listeners could subscribe to the service and the sheets were promptly posted to them before the programme was aired. The series was known as *Language by Radio*, where lessons began at 7:15 p.m.; one Italian course was concluded on 29 September 1959.⁵⁹

The COI also translated news bulletins from the BBC, and these were broadcast at 2:00 p.m. and at 6:00 p.m.⁶⁰ Professor Ġużè Aquilina was a regular broadcaster with the COI. In fact, from 1947 to 1960, Aquilina estimated that he had delivered 455 talks, which he later published in several books. He also moderated 138 discussion programmes and presented 93 editions of the programme *Brains Trust*.⁶¹

The first ever Maltese participation in an International Radio Conference

In 1959, Malta participated in a conference on *Radio in Education* that was held in London between 21 and 28 July.⁶² The conference was supported by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and the respective colonies were encouraged to send their delegates. Malta did not have a Maltese government at the time since the 1947 Constitution had been suspended following the 1958 riots and Prime Minister Dominic Mintoff's resignation. The event was being hosted by the BBC, and delegates were expected to fill out a questionnaire on the "use of radio in education" in their country. The conference welcomed participants who were "concerned with broadcasting, those concerned with the administration and supervision of education, and those concerned with the teaching in schools and training colleges".⁶³

The Assistant Director of the DOI suggested that two scriptwriters should attend the conference, with the Assistant Director of Education Mr S. Gatt agreeing that this would be "of great help to the Department".⁶⁴ The questionnaire was compiled by mid-November 1956 and revealed interesting data on the status of school broadcasting in Malta at that juncture.⁶⁵

From the questionnaire, several details emerged.

1. The Department of Information (Broadcasting Section) planned broadcasting for schools.
2. There was a School Broadcasting Advisory Board comprising the Director of Education, Schools Inspectors and representatives from the DOI.
3. Broadcasts were relayed through the Rediffusion company.
4. 535 hours per month of SBU broadcasts were in English.
5. 485 hours per month of broadcasts were in Maltese.
6. 10% of the SBU broadcasts were of a musical nature.
7. 20% were talks.
8. 35% of the broadcasts were drama plays.
9. 20% of the programmes were of a features nature.
10. Other programmes amounted to 15%.
11. The BBC transcript service was used.
12. 54,000 primary students followed the SBU service.
13. 4,500 secondary students listened to the programmes produced by SBU.
14. The Maltese government was spending 4,000 pounds sterling to maintain the Unit.

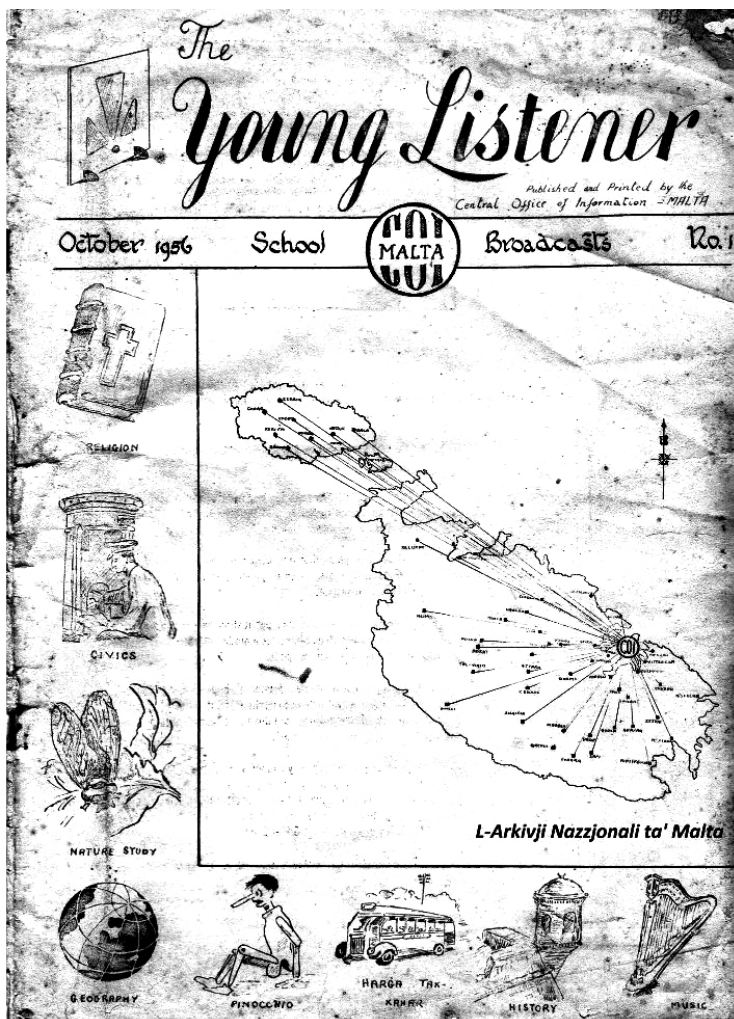
The Maltese representatives at the conference were Carmelo A. Micallef, Publicity Officer at the DOI, and Saviour Gatt from the Education Department. The conference tackled issues such as direct teaching by radio; radio as a supplement to the curriculum; and the use of radio in the teaching of English. A total of thirty-four delegates participated in this conference.

A year after the conference a report regarding the conference was sent to the Administrative Secretary by the Director of the DOI. Two key points emerge from this communication.

1. Although the teacher in class cannot be replaced, "the additional element of the reality of vividness and of drama which they bring into the classroom fully justify the expenditure of time, effort and money in their preparation".⁶⁶
2. The Maltese delegates noted that the Maltese service of the SBU was quite high when compared to that of many other countries.⁶⁷

The Young Listener initiative

An interesting activity coordinated by the SBU production team was the monthly magazine, *The Young Listener*. This publication was to be used in conjunction with the broadcasts. Every broadcast was accompanied by the content in the magazine. *The Young Listener* was usually printed in two-colour and was bilingual, following the languages employed in schools. Subjects included Religion, Nature Study, English, History, and Geography.

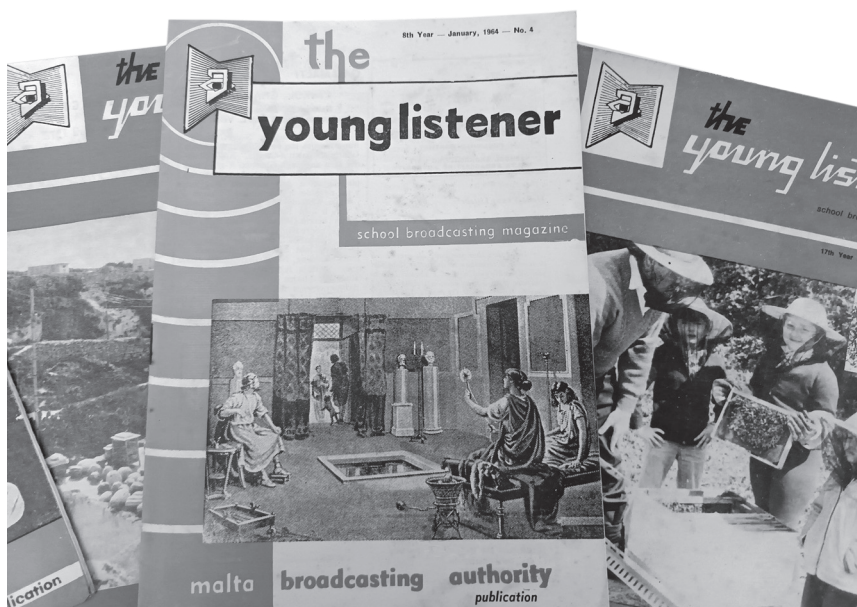


The Young Listener – issue no.1

The first issue of *The Young Listener* was published in October 1956, with the front cover featuring a map of Malta and Gozo, emphasising that school broadcasts covered both islands thanks to COI.⁶⁸ A short message from J.P. Vassallo, the Director of Education, was included in this issue.⁶⁹ The contributors were all teachers.⁷⁰

Readers had to pay one penny to obtain a copy of the magazine. Ten thousand copies of the first edition were sold.⁷¹ For the December 1956 edition, 15,000 copies were printed.⁷² The magazine's publication continued when the SBU was taken over by the Malta Broadcasting Authority (MBA), and its presentation improved when it passed under the latter.⁷³ While the design already was in two-colour, now the layout improved with better spacing and the larger fonts which made it easier to read.

By means of *The Young Listener* magazine a quiz was organised among schools following the SBU broadcasts. Children found questions tailored on the broadcast which were to "be on the Question Master's card."⁷⁴ The students were also encouraged to keep a notebook in which to record the answers. Thirty-two schools were set to participate in the quiz, with each team comprising eight members.



More recent issues of *The Young Listener*

Headteachers were to submit the names of three pupils from every class (IV, V and VI) in their school. "An ad-hoc sub-committee of the School Broadcasting Advisory Board will make the selection of the representative team of four boys and four girls by lot. The same procedure will be adopted for round two, and for the quarter-finals and semi-finals.... For the final, both teams will be selected by the head teacher of their respective schools."⁷⁵

Only the quarterfinals, semifinals and finals were to be broadcast. The method used was that each question was to be allotted ten points. Also, "Each question will be directed at one particular pupil. If that pupil fails to answer it, the team loses four points out of ten. The remaining... may be obtained if one of the pupils' teammates volunteers to answer it. If the second pupil fails, another three points are deducted, and a last try may be attempted by another teammate". A silver shield and a silver cup were presented to the winning team, with the shield having to be returned to the COI after ten months.

During the scholastic year 1968/1969, an edition of *The Young Listener* magazine for the junior classes was launched.⁷⁶ During this period, the *Moviment Qawmien Letterarju* started to publish *Sagħtar*, a popular magazine for school children. Later, this magazine was taken over by the Malta Union of Teachers due to friction among the Movement's committee members. In the 1980s, Trevor Żahra spent nearly a year drawing pictures for this popular school magazine.⁷⁷ *The Young Listener* was subsequently replaced by another loved magazine *Il-Merżuq*.

Two international broadcasting initiatives

The SBU followed closely two international initiatives – the Colonial School Transcription Unit and the Centre for Educational Television Overseas.

The Colonial School Transcription Unit was set up in 1953 and was based in London. It had two objectives: to bring to classrooms the experience of radio education and "to help build up local school broadcasting services in the colonies and overseas territories".⁷⁸ It was a BBC initiative. The programmes were aimed at the primary and secondary school levels. The programmes produced were fourteen-and-a-half minutes long. "These are processed on disks and dispatched together with scripts, publicity and notes for teachers to colonial overseas territories".⁷⁹

Malta was not on the distribution list of the Colonial School Transcription Unit. Amongst beneficiary countries were the Bahamas, Barbados, Fiji,

Jamaica, Trinidad, Uganda and Zanzibar. However, in the report for 1959 it was noted that the Maltese side intended "to supplement our own scripts by BBC Transcription services".⁸⁰ This report referred to two Maltese contributors: Miss L. Pace from Valletta and Mr A.J.B. Soler.

Meanwhile, Great Britain was also experiencing the Centre for Educational Television Overseas. According to a press statement issued by this entity, "its policy will be to provide the educational material the overseas services want". Later, the Centre would provide programmes for the MBA's educational scheme employing the television service. This was launched in 1966.⁸¹ In fact, on 10 January 1966, Minister Dr Antonio Paris inaugurated the Malta Educational Television. The British Council assisted the Maltese authorities by bringing over a television expert in the field.

The launching of a national television station for Malta

By 1960, the Colonial Government in Malta was adamant about opening a television station on the island. It was also decided to set up an independent authority to control and monitor broadcasting in an era when the sector was dominated by monopolies. By December of the same year, the government was negotiating with the Rediffusion company to provide a television service and to continue with its commitments in the sound broadcasting field. Meanwhile, especially after 1947, Rediffusion was offering its services in most of the colonial territories. Furthermore, Italy's national network, Radiotelevisione italiana (RAI), relayed from Sicily and was much followed in Malta.

By 1961, the Malta Broadcasting Authority (MBA) was established. Sant argues that because of this new authority, "the government could no longer produce its own broadcasts as had been done for some years through the DOI".⁸² The novel authority took under its wings the SBU.⁸³ The MBA was legally enshrined by Ordinance No. XX of 1961.⁸⁴ At this juncture the SBU staff list was decreased to become "one Head who was seconded from D.O.I., two Typists and four Seconded teachers, transferred from D.O.I."⁸⁵ Later, the staff was increased by a seconded teacher from the school sector. In fact, Manni Spiteri was "transferred to the MBA along with six other DOI employees to work on the schools' broadcasts."⁸⁶ Spiteri commissioned other scriptwriters apart from his staff to produce broadcasts for children.⁸⁷ Television, apart from radio, was to be used as a vehicle to air educational programmes, and this was a challenging feat as the two media were completely different.

Aims of the Malta Broadcasting Authority

John Manduca, the first Chief Executive of the Malta Broadcasting Authority, summed up the MBA's rules as follows:⁸⁸

1. To provide sound and television services in Malta and Gozo
2. To prescribe, produce and pay for a limited number of programmes of its own, with the majority of the programmes being provided by commercial contractors (Rediffusion and the Malta Television Service).⁸⁹
3. To supervise and regulate programmes and advertisements, ensure objectivity and fair play between contending parties and interests, and maintain, and whenever possible improve, standards.⁹⁰

It thus transpires, as Manduca had noted elsewhere, that Malta's Broadcasting Authority differed from its counterpart in the United Kingdom. The local authority organised school and political broadcasts,



Students on an educational visit to the Offices of the Broadcasting Authority and to Radju Ta' Malta at Blata l-Bajda – Mr Laurence Mizzi, Head of Radju Malta is standing first from the right (Source: <https://ba.org.mt/about-us>)

besides other sound and television productions.⁹¹ MBA and SBU were producing "over 210 sound broadcasts a year directed at 112 government primary schools".⁹² The drastic change was here. The DOI stopped producing broadcasting material and several employees with the DOI were shifted to MBA.⁹³ As Mizzi had noted, "the 1962 Borg Olivier-led government could not now exploit the airwaves through the DOI the way the Labour government, and up to a certain extent, the colonial administration, did".⁹⁴

So, besides radio, television now provided another avenue and challenge for broadcasts of an educational nature. The emphasis in the television sector seemed to be correctly on the scientific bent. The medium was perfect for illustrating scientific experiments and for explaining abstract concepts. In fact, SBU, as stated, commenced using television in 1966. Programmes from the Centre for Educational Television Overseas were also broadcast.⁹⁵ Thanks to this development, it now inaugurated broadcasts for secondary schools. According to Vassallo, "for the scholastic year 1962/1963, the school broadcasting programme consisted of 221 scheduled broadcasts made up of 39 Friday morning broadcasts, 25 programmes for children in Stages I-II and Class I, 49 programmes for pupils in Classes II-III; 61 programmes for students in Classes IV-V; and 47 programmes for children in Class VI and school leavers."⁹⁶

An instrument to gauge teachers' feedback

A year later Manni Spiteri joined MTV and was replaced by Lawrence Mizzi who became the new head of the Unit and held this post until 1982.⁹⁷ In 1965, Mizzi introduced the card system. "These cards were sent to teachers to be filled, by giving their comments and suggestions on programmes transmitted to schools. Moreover, during this year, progress has been made in the school transcription service."⁹⁸ Mizzi would also visit schools to note the pupils' reactions to the broadcasts.⁹⁹ In 1966, MBA was budgeting 7,000 pounds sterling for the SBU programming, which was a considerable sum.¹⁰⁰ Just a year earlier the MBA had been complaining about the lack of funds, pointing out that "only 43.7% of the licence fees are being used by the government for broadcasting purposes".¹⁰¹ MBA received no funds from the Education Ministry.¹⁰²

More developments in educational broadcasting

It was during the scholastic year 1969-1970 that sound broadcasting was introduced for private schools.¹⁰³ During 1970-1971 an experiment was tested in that parallel radio and television broadcasts were introduced.

This meant that radio broadcasts would be used to consolidate the teaching points that would be raised during television programmes.¹⁰⁴ However this experiment failed to achieve what was intended. This was also the time when Malta changed to decimal currency and strong winds were blowing in favour of republicanism.

Charles Xerri was responsible for the series *Physics Now*. It was intended for students sitting for the GCE Physics. Another educational programme transmitted on television was *English for Today*.¹⁰⁵ In 1967-1968 a biology series of programmes was broadcast under the name of *Biology for Schools*.¹⁰⁶ During scholastic year 1969-1970, English language programmes utilised native English speakers.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, a basic change was introduced in educational broadcasting, with the process moving away from the scripted to the on-the-field presentation.¹⁰⁸

By 1970, the SBU Staff consisted of a Head who was directly employed by the MBA, an Assistant for Radio, another Assistant for TV, one sound officer, two seconded teachers (later increased to three) and two clerk-typists (from the MBA).¹⁰⁹ A further development was seen in 1972, when the SBU introduced religious programmes for secondary schools.¹¹⁰ The year after, TV programmes were launched for primary schools. In 1973, then, the MBA opened the radio station Radio Malta, followed later by Radio Malta 2 and Radio Malta International. During the early 1970s, trade schools were set up and the School Broadcasting Unit prepared programmes for this sector during the scholastic year 1977-1978.¹¹¹

Meanwhile, another service was maturing by which a library of taped programmes was put at the disposal of schools. This material would serve to complement classroom activities. It was possible to use these tapes according to each teacher's discretion and which would not thus interfere with the school timetable. It was noted that this transcription service had a very encouraging start.¹¹²

The Labour government takes over broadcasting

In 1975, the Labour government took broadcasting under its control although the MBA continued to exist. As shown by Grech, Mintoff had realised from the outset the importance of the broadcasting media in politics.¹¹³ The government took control of the three channels owned by the MBA, and the radio and television services owned by Rediffusion. Telemalta, which was set up by the Labour government, incorporated these services under its responsibility.¹¹⁴

This move meant that the School Broadcasting Unit was transferred to Xandir Malta with the staff compliment being the Head, one Assistant for Radio, a producer (later increased by two Xandir Malta producers) and a typist.¹¹⁵ In January 1978 the English Service on Cable Radio Two was discontinued with Radio Malta One filling the vacant frequency with its programmes. This was a period when the defence agreement that had been signed in 1972 was nearing its end. Malta would soon close the British military base. In 1979, Radio Malta Two, which was essentially a music station, closed and Radio Malta International shifted to the VHF/FM band.

In February 1980, School Broadcasting transferred back to the Education Department, its staff consisting of a Head (MBA), an Assistant for Radio (MBA), one producer (MBA), two producers (Xandir Malta), and a typist (Xandir Malta).¹¹⁶

In April 1980, television programmes for secondary schools were stopped to be replaced by evening programmes. SBU staff at this stage included the Head, 1 Assistant (Radio), 1 producer, 4 producers (seconded teachers), a graphic artist (seconded teacher) and a typist (student worker).¹¹⁷ A major development took place in 1981 when TVM began broadcasting in colour. Meanwhile, Toni Pellegrini quit politics and Prime Minister Mintoff chose him to direct the national broadcasting.

The effects of the 1981 Elections

Things became quite difficult following the 1981 general elections. The Nationalist Party insisted that the polling results were perverse and that these did not reflect the electorate's mandate. In fact, the Nationalist Party had received most votes but did not have enough parliamentary seats to reflect that result and were thus precluded from forming a government. The Labour government was accused of gerrymandering. Be that as it may, the circumstance led to five years dominated by political strife. The Nationalist Party directed one of its members, Richard Muscat, to open a clandestine radio station in Sicily to broadcast its messages.¹¹⁸

The period 1984-1985 was marked by a teachers' strike ordered by the Malta Union of Teachers, and this lasted nine months. The teachers forming part of the SBU decided to join their colleagues, with the government's response being that of transferring them to the schools after these having been many years away from the classroom.

In 1985, the Director General of the Education Department entrusted teacher Charles Xuereb to run *Taqsim Xandir Edukattiv* (which replaced



Dr Charles Xuereb

SBU). The mentioned appointment was approved by the Minister of Education, Dr Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, who was also Malta's Prime Minister in that period. Xuereb at this stage reformed the Unit which led to the creation of the Media Education and Broadcasting Centre.

Meanwhile, the school radio broadcasts were stopped in 1986. Arthur Pace, the Director of Information, himself one of the past broadcasters, explained that these had stopped because "schools were facing reception problems" and the "cable sets available in schools were of no further use".¹¹⁹ MEBC, under Xuereb, coordinated with the Education Department for the installation of a video player and a 28-inch monitor in all the primary schools. MEBC started "to build a video library with imported foreign educational titles" but also produced "local TV series in Maltese on various interesting subjects".¹²⁰ Private schools too used this library, which also included audio cassettes.

Following the 1987 elections, the Nationalist Party was returned to government after an absence of sixteen years. By this time the educational broadcasting unit, "had developed into a fully-fledged educational broadcasting and media centre, and, after pluralism in broadcasting was introduced in Malta in the early 1990s, it launched its own education channel, known as Education 22 in 1996".¹²¹

A revolution in the field of broadcasting was taking place at this stage. Cable television was introduced in Malta and furthermore, private individuals / companies could also apply for a radio and later, for a television, licence.¹²² The national broadcaster now had to face competition not only to win audiences but also to secure advertising slots.

The Minister of Education, Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, had decided to relocate MEBC to Bighi with a new head, as Xuereb was promoted to EO Media. The new Minister of Education, Michael Falzon, decided to revisit his predecessor's decision and moved the Centre from Bighi to Blata l-Bajda, while the number of staff was increased to sixteen.

An Educational TV Channel for Malta

The Education Ministry launched Education 22, a television channel directed by Charles Xuereb, on 18 October 1996. It was inaugurated by then Minister of Education Michael Falzon with a live transmission from the National Library in Valletta.¹²³ Since the Media Education & Broadcasting Centre had also introduced media education as an interdisciplinary subject in primary schools, several teachers had hands-on training in TV production with a special emphasis on the connection between the academic curriculum and the art of edutainment. Media advisors from the UN and Council of Europe were engaged to give guidance regarding this new approach.¹²⁴



Logo of *Education 22*

Within eleven years of such courses more than 300 educational broadcasts were produced.¹²⁵ For instance, in October 1991, forty teachers and many B.Ed. students completed a week's induction course in Multimedia and Education in Broadcasting which was organised by the Multimedia Education and Broadcasting Centre. This course consisted of about 30 hours of workshop experience in the production of sample programmes, which were then screened and analysed on the last day of the course. The course was co-ordinated by Charles Xuereb, who was head of MEBC and ran Education 22. These were regular courses with 1991 being the eleventh year, with successful candidates contributing to educational broadcasts and involving themselves on other commercial broadcasting stations.¹²⁶

When, in 1996, Labour won the general elections, Prime Minister Dr Alfred Sant wanted to dissolve MEBC. However, these plans were abandoned when the PN won the 1998 elections. Minister of Education Dr Louis Galea was supportive of Education 22, but funds remained limited. Still, Xuereb disagreed with the policies and the decisions taken in this period by the Education Department regarding the restricted future of educational broadcasting and thus decided to leave. Xuereb was succeeded by Stephen Florian in 2000, while in 2005, the latter was replaced by Stephen Azzopardi.

Irrespective of the limited resources, a good number of programmes were produced in that period. Innovative approaches to educational games (*Teżor*), new ways of teaching literacy (*Bum Bum il-Ktieb*), grand celebrations of children's abilities and talents (*Hu Ċans*, *Hames Ċagħkiet*,

Scooters, Ara x'Sibt) were the order of the day. TV series included appetising shots at history with a location trip *Minn Żmien għall-leħor*. Media education itself was a common tool to combine critical analysis with analytical criticism (*Cicero, Ulisse, Newstory*), the backbone of educational programming as different from encyclopaedic information.¹²⁷

A staggering 30% of the broadcasts were BBC productions.¹²⁸ An innovative first was the broadcast of a live marathon transmission from the Naxxar Fair Grounds during *Eduka 96*.¹²⁹ *Galileo*, a series of programmes dealing with science, won the Broadcasting Award for Children's Programmes.¹³⁰ The station was placed under the responsibility of the Department of Adult Education and Further Studies of the Division of Education. At the end of the day, financial constraints seem to have led to the closure of the station.

Conclusion

In this brief history of educational broadcasting in Malta one notes how much the broadcasting experience was affected by politics and politicians. Yet, the contribution to the people's education was considerable, especially during the period when illiteracy was the order of the day. New broadcasting media and advances in the field of technology made radio broadcasts gradually more ineffective and ultimately obsolete. On the other hand, producing television programmes involved considerable sums of money which local governments were not always ready to grant.

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