

MCAST LINK

Issue 54 // Q3 2020



MCAST LINK

Issue 54 // Q3 2020



FRONT COVER

Minister for Education and Employment Hon Dr Owen Bonnici at a press conference, together with MCAST Principal and CEO Prof Joachim James Calleja and ACIA president Steve Azzopardi – a collaboration that will see to the development of qualified technical personnel in heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems.

- 3 Editor's Note
- 4 A challenging new normal
- 6 Interview with Dr Francis Fabri
- 10 Interview with Prof Ian Refalo
- 15 News
- 24 Institute for the Creative Arts
- 28 Institute of Applied Sciences
- 30 Institute of Community Services
- 33 Gozo Campus
- 34 International Office
- 38 Library and Learning Resource Centre
- 40 Research and Innovation
- 48 Support Services
- 49 COVID-19 Experiences at MCAST



Editorial

Adapting to Covid-19 is our new reality. The College is committed to providing high-quality vocational education and positive learning experiences during these challenging times. A list of comprehensive measures to protect students and members of staff is found within inside this magazine. This edition also features positive student and members of staff experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown during the past academic term.

This issue features two separate interviews with Dr Frank Fabri, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Education and Employment and Prof Ian Refalo, President of the MCAST Board of Governors. Both interviews provide us with clear insights into their strong vision for the College and vocational education in Malta.

Another milestone for the College is the final phase of construction of the MCAST Resource Centre situated on the Main Campus. This space which is on a footprint of 2300 square meters will house the MCAST Centre for Research and Innovation, the Learning Support Unit as well as the Learning Resource Centre and the Library.

The College is committed to support and develop and research at MCAST. It has recently launched the MCAST Journal of Applied Research and Practice (Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2020) which showcases the vocational and applied research that is carried out by MCAST researchers. This edition also proudly presents its newly recruited Senior Research Officers which support and promote research within the MCAST Institutes.

I hope you enjoy this issue and also wish you a good academic year despite the situation we are all faced with at the moment.

MCASTlink is produced by the
MCAST Communications and PR Office

PRODUCED & EDITED

Caroline Balzan
Communications & PR Manager

DESIGN

PRS Design Studio

PRINTING

Print It Printing Services

PROOFREADING

Joyce Hili

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES

caroline.balzan@MCAST.edu.mt



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK

Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission from the publisher is prohibited. All rights reserved. All reasonable care is taken to ensure truth and accuracy, but the editor cannot be held responsible for errors or omissions in articles, advertising, photographs or illustrations.

A Challenging new normal

Prof Joachim James Calleja
Principal and CEO

This edition of MCASTlink comes at a time when the College is gearing up to re-open its doors to students and lecturing staff members for the new academic year 2020-2021. Over the summer period lecturing staff have conducted the missing practical sessions and assessments and managers and administrative staff have well-prepared the College to meet the challenges of a recently new surge of COVID19 cases. We are prepared to face the new normal in our society. In the education and training sector a new normal implies that, if a vaccine is not available to protect us from coronavirus, then we would have to live with social distancing as defined from time to time by our health authorities. This notwithstanding, as educators we are obliged to give students their entitlement during the whole academic year; we are bound to ensure that their learning takes place whether at the College or remotely. This includes practical hands-on experiences which are at the heart of vocational education and training.

The challenges are not easy but the experience gained during the months of March to June should be enough to enable us to blend face-to-face learning with virtual learning. The positive experiences narrated by students in this edition illustrate that the College and its management and lecturers already met these challenges earlier in the year. Lessons learnt from this experience show that we need a more person-centred approach to online learning. Facing students on a screen or

directly in class is not the same. More effort needs to be embarked upon by Directors and Deputy Directors of Institute and lecturers to timetable lectures in such a way that, irrespective of whether these are online or not, they attract participation by students.

Through a detailed protocol designed as early as July, staff, students and visitors to MCAST will be protected while on campus. No matter how detailed such protocols are, it is up to each and every individual to assume the responsibility that: (i) on entrance on campus the body temperature is read by security; (ii) masks are worn at all times when moving around or during lectures; (iii) the hand-rubs available all over the campus are used whenever possible, and (iv) that we keep adequate social distancing is kept as instructed by the health authorities. The College will ensure that no meetings exceeding the numbers instructed by the health authorities are convened. This may imply that all social activities would have to be cancelled or postponed. But if these four basic guidelines are adhered to by everyone, then we can still work together, achieve the objectives set for the new academic year, and move from one learning experience to another.

As Principal I shall ensure that flexibility and adaptability will be applied across the College. Blending learning and working on campus and remotely will be seen to from time to time. More



Prof Joachim James Calleja

will be focused on how Institutes will manage this new normal on a day-to-day basis. We will ensure that the infrastructure is adequate to this new normal; that internet connectivity is up to speed, that all students studying remotely possess the hardware they require and that the platforms used earlier this year will continue to serve as the link between lecturers and students.

As a College we cannot shy away from challenges that we know we can overcome. With so much talent in lecturers and management, this is the time to shine and be counted. Before re-opening the second admissions call, I am informed that this year we had an overall increase of 20% of those wishing to continue their studies at MCAST and a 6% growth of new students. My appeal goes to all staff to meet the challenge of the new normal with smart solutions and strong commitment to serve our students and the taxpayers, our employer. We bank on our hierarchy and the Line Ministry to support our efforts and to provide the necessary provisions to start and finish the new academic year successfully.

I am happy to note in this edition the development

of research across the College. With new researchers joining MCAST and more lecturers embarking on research in vocational education and training, the future looks positive. The same could be said of the library resources and mobility which are increasing year after year. Hopefully, by next year we shall have a state-of-the-art resource centre and a new Institute for Information and Communication Technology. The interviews given by the Permanent Secretary and the new President of the College show that the institution is in good hands. Both bring different but synergised experiences of high quality. While Dr Frank Fabri's strong commitment towards VET is evident from his actions, Professor Ian Refalo has, in these last few months, given a first-hand prestigious dimension to the role of President of the College. Governance is in good hands and financing is equally being met by government's regular support to initiatives taken at the College.

I wish everyone a positive new academic year. With a more focused approach to work-based learning, research and the development of education and training programmes including doctoral degrees, MCAST is on the right track to warrant quality education and employability to our increasing number of students.



Interview with Dr Francis Fabri

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry
for Education and Employment

You have a range of experiences in voluntary work, schools and education and have served in a number of leadership roles at the Ministry for Education and Employment. Can you provide further information on your interesting background?

My career in the education sector started almost 25 years ago in the teaching profession. I then moved on to being among the first generation of College Principals, Director at the Research and Development Department, Acting Director at the Curriculum Management and eLearning Department, and Director General at the Operations Department and the Department for Curriculum, Research, Innovation and Lifelong Learning. Following my Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the University of Malta, I completed my doctorate at the Institute for Education, University of London. Throughout this professional experience, I have learnt that education is really for all irrespective of one's capacity, talent and social background. The role educators should play is to provide the platform for each individual to shine. This has been my mission throughout these years and in particular since being appointed Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Education and Employment.

What are your priorities for vocational education and training in Malta?

Foremost among my priorities in education is to facilitate the provision of more opportunities and flexibility in the schooling and education system. It was clear from the very start of my leadership roles that a one-size-fits-all model was letting down a considerable number of young people. In the last years, the education system has reached a massive milestone including in vocational education. The 'My Journey' reform introduced new vocational and applied programmes and different forms of assessment, based on the learning by doing concept. Today VET and Applied studies are equitably established with parity of esteem like all other 'traditional' subjects in our secondary schools. VET and Applied subjects in Malta are available to all our students and all under the same roof. Nowadays, students have the opportunity of either selecting a specific route or mixing different academic, vocational and applied subjects. This is a Maltese system, and definitely not simply a copy-paste system from other systems.

My goal is to continue pushing forward the VET sector by also prioritising digitalisation of work and technical methods and creating more easy access to and availability of a higher number of activities and resources adapted to e-learning, and by the implementation of tools and methods of teaching and evaluation and the re-activation of mobilities in virtual and blended modalities ensuring social inclusion.

How do you plan to support and improve vocational education and training in Malta?

VET requires investment to provide students with attractive learning environments, new programme content relevant to industry, and guidance and direction to achieve skills of independent learning. We also need to ensure that there are more European standards being met among the VET subjects. In real terms, Malta invested €12 million in almost 80 state-of-the-art VET and Applied Workshops in all our State secondary schools around the island. With the experience of COVID-19 we have realized that physical learning should not be taken for granted and hence investing in digital and online learning is increasingly important. I strongly believe that quality education is Applied education.

How do you see MCAST's role in addressing the skills gaps in the Maltese labour market?

We need to provide present and future generations with the necessary skills and talents for active citizenship and employability in the 21st century and beyond.

Addressing the skills gaps and skills mismatches in the Maltese labour market is vital for competitiveness and employability. MCAST offers flexible education solutions to enable learners to move within and across education, training and employment. However, I believe that MCAST has the potential to offer more flexibility in its programmes to enable young people to adapt their learning pathway as they go along, to suit their interests and abilities as well as the needs of industry. The collaboration that MCAST has with the industry helps to build better and relevant education and training programmes' content to address the required skills gaps.

Work-based learning is at the heart of MCAST's qualifications and the introduction of the apprenticeship degrees will continue to address the skills gaps in our country and enable companies to survive the skills shortage and continue to grow.

What are the challenges VET faces, locally and internationally?

There are three main challenges faced by all the VET sector institutions: relevance, finance and industry commitment. A VET route is not an inferior choice. The vocational and applied routes have an equivalent status with value added in terms of quality, delivery and accreditation of the subjects leading to further education, training and sustainable employment. Secondly, more investment is required in the VET sector. Over these last three years, government invested €12 million in upgrading and creating state-of-the-art workshops for vocational education and training in compulsory education. In addition, MCAST is investing in the further development of the College's physical environment. The aim is to create a space for educators and students to develop creative and innovative work, a space that facilitates communication and collaboration beyond the classroom setting. By its very nature, vocational education is costlier to deliver due to the need to have practical workshops, labs and simulation work environments for skilling students. VET requires proper financing and governance. VET also requires additional and qualified staff such as technicians, trainers and instructors, to supplement VET teachers. Additionally, without industry commitment and governance, the VET sector would not be able to function to its full potential. VET students need to have the opportunity to encounter the employer of their choice as part of their educational journey and have their full support. Industry also needs to invest in vocational education particularly through pledges for more apprenticeship programmes in places of work. This holds both for the private as well as for the public sector. Apprentices add value to workplaces and are the future of our workforce.

How will you tackle the gaps in the education system to ensure that nobody is left out? What is being done to embrace inclusion within vocational education and training in Malta?

The current policy directions both at a national level and at College level, have inclusion at the heart of the strategies. I am a firm believer that students need to develop their personal and social

potential and acquire the appropriate knowledge, key skills, competences and attitudes through a value-oriented formation including equity, social justice, diversity and inclusivity.

'My Journey' supports a comprehensive and inclusive secondary school system that provides equitable quality learning programmes with parity of esteem and no dead ends. The journey continues at MCAST and at other VET institutions.

We need to depart from the idea of value added only to 'mainstream' education in the traditional sense of the word. VET is mainstream too as much as other sectors of education. We must continue moving towards different learning paths. We have to remain committed to high standards of learning which is relevant, useful and timely – to ensure that all children develop into young people and adults equipped with the necessary and right skills and attitudes to be active employable citizens and to give a valuable contribution in society and at work.

What major challenges has COVID-19 brought to the table for both education and employment?

COVID-19 is posing enormous challenges, thus providing opportunities to all educational institutions and businesses to undertake adjustments and reviews of ways of work, management approaches, and finances, including the suspension of all students and staff mobilities, as well as practical work experience placements and apprenticeships; cancellation of in-place events and transnational project meetings; suspension of classes and delivery of online training, using a large variety of digital platforms.

From a VET perspective, a significant challenge is the updating of VET curricula in terms of contents and skills: companies and society are experiencing a dramatic paradigm shift in terms of technologies, activities, and rules. Additionally, new, improved methods have to be implemented, including digital and blended classes. It is not just a change of 'environment' from a physical to a virtual one, because it implies new educational practices to keep fostering learners' interest, attention and participation in a virtual space.

Another challenge is focusing also on the importance of equity and well-being of the VET community (trainers, learners, staff) which are becoming a significant issue in the daily management of VET services to leave no one behind.

COVID-19 is teaching us the relevance of a new value proposition in education and training, where we have equity and well-being and not just employability. The great role of our educators, trainers and tutors is in updating methods and contents, but also the need of an ecosystemic approach where multiple actors have to play their responsibility. Importantly we must not forget to verify whether the learning environments at home are truly conducive to online learning.



Interview with Prof Ian Refalo

President, MCAST Board
of Governors

How will your extensive legal and educational background serve you in your new role as President of the MCAST Board of Governors?

As President of the MCAST Board of Governors, I am proud to be leading the College at this juncture of its short history. MCAST is reviewing its constitution, and I am keen to use my experience as a lawyer, lecturer and Dean at the University of Malta, to contribute towards improved governance, building on the already strong reputation of the College as Malta's leading vocational education and training institution.

The completion of the new constitution that enables a quality experience for students is one of the main priorities for the coming year. However, we also need to ensure that the revised legal framework translates into improved experiences for staff and students. I will make sure that MCAST keeps pursuing its vision of being a centre of excellence in vocational education and training.

What are the main objectives you would like to achieve?

As MCAST celebrates its first two decades, an overall objective is to see MCAST moving forward and becoming ever more relevant to today's labour market needs. MCAST's well-founded strategy is a step in the right direction. In trying times like these, the College is proving to be proactive in preparing young people and adults for the disruptive changes that are having a profound impact on the employment landscape. To do this, we need to invest in staff development and capacity building to ensure the right skills are in place to support this vision. Beyond the investment in state-of-the-art campus facilities, the focus on MCAST's people is what ultimately determines our success.

Over the years, MCAST has prepared students for careers in so many different sectors. It has contributed directly to the growth of industry. MCAST alumni are now leaders, entrepreneurs and skilled employees contributing to our economy. The main objective is to maintain and keep strengthening MCAST's relationship with industry. Preparing students for the world of employment and responding to the ever-changing needs of the world around us is at the very heart of what MCAST stands for. My role is to sustain relationships and achieve even stronger partnerships with all key players, including the Chamber of Commerce, the Malta Employers' Association, the Malta Enterprise and all other key players.

Another main objective is to ensure that MCAST is more visible and engages with the Maltese community as a leader in vocational education and a developer of future leaders. MCAST needs to continue to raise awareness of the value of vocational education. Over the past months since joining MCAST, I have observed how much work is being done for the benefit of students and how many great training opportunities are available for all. This deserves more visibility as prospective students can understand how they can improve their skills, change career paths or simply discover new areas of interest.

Can you please provide information on innovative technologies and AI strategy at MCAST?

It is exciting to see how MCAST is being transformed into an international hub for innovation in vocational education. The Applied Research and Innovation Centre within the College recently launched the AI strategy for 2020-2025. This publication is another clear sign of MCAST's proactive and forward-looking approach. Even international institutions have commended Malta for the fact that MCAST was one of the first VET institutions in publishing its own AI strategy.

We know that AI is changing every sector, and if we want to be leading, then we need to start with a clear strategy. The MCAST AI strategy has three main goals. Firstly, it looks at how we can prepare students in a world that includes technological innovation and AI. Secondly, it recognises the need to use AI to improve the teaching and learning experience for students. The third goal aims to support academic developments by using AI solutions in practice for the benefit of industry and society.

Apart from the strategy, MCAST is working to create an innovation culture which comes hand in hand with the vocational mindset. MCAST is made up of a community of makers and creators. Our role is to create networking opportunities within and outside the College to foster interdisciplinary and creative thought processes. As the Board of Governors, we need to work with management to promote an innovative frame of mind amongst the lecturing and student cohorts.

Work-based learning is at the heart of vocational education and training. How do you see the future of the collaboration between Industry and the College?

MCAST is all about work-based learning in particular apprenticeships. The centrality of work-based education permeates all the study programmes. Students are increasingly opting for MCAST as their first choice precisely because they want to experience hands-on learning and be more industry savvy.

When I joined MCAST, in May, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that MCAST has already partnered with more than 1,800 employers. MCAST also started six Degree Apprenticeship programmes in Biomedical Engineering, Construction Engineering, Software Development, Multimedia Software Development, Computer Systems and Networks, and Fashion. We need to keep working in this direction to empower students and prepare them for the world of work in their chosen career path.

Beyond post-secondary formation, we also need to reach out to the workforce and to adult learners. Reskilling and upskilling of the Maltese workforce is an important national priority. So when we speak of work-based learning, we are also looking at the upskilling of the current workforce. Through the 'Gateway to Industry' arm, MCAST also offers part-time courses to meet industry needs and to provide flexible, tailor-made solutions.

MCAST embraces the value of inclusivity. What are your intentions with regards to inclusion at MCAST?

My appointment coincided with the start of the pandemic and I was immediately struck by MCAST's approach during this difficult time. The College increased its outreach efforts and ensured that all students within its community had access to laptops and technology to ensure that no one was left out when it transitioned to online provision. I could immediately see the MCAST community coming together and using all of its resources to make sure that everyone was included.

We need to be sensitive to the needs of today's student. Each year the College welcomes 12,000 full-time and part-time students. Each student has individual needs and aspirations.

My intention is to champion all initiatives that support students with particular needs or disabilities to reach their academic goals while developing independence skills to be better

equipped for employment. I want to see a vibrant and diverse campus where all staff and students find a sense of belonging.

What solutions seem to work best in getting remedial students on the right path to academic success and ultimately towards College completion, and how can educational technologies help in this area?

There are no easy answers and quick-fix solutions. MCAST is well aware that efforts need to be ongoing to enhance student success and to develop a holistic, learner-centred strategy across all dimensions of the student experience. The work of the Learning Support Unit at MCAST is unique in that students can access one-to-one support. Students can get easily discouraged and offering an individualised plan, particularly in dealing with basic skills needs, is proving to be beneficial to many students.

Our professionals at MCAST are also focusing on developing innovative and effective strategies for improving student success. Educators are combining elements of traditional teaching with digital technology to adapt the curriculum to individual learners. MCAST also seeks to maintain a multi-level approach to student support involving everyone from policy level to staff to parents and various stakeholders.

How do you see the adoption of educational technologies, including the implementation of fully online and blended courses and programmes developing at MCAST today?

The pandemic has made us reflect on many aspects of using education technologies. Internationally many higher educational institutions are opting for full online provision. Technology provides many solutions and helps to enhance the student learning process. However, we cannot underestimate the value of in-person communication. In the vocational context, the practical work carried out in workshops and labs is an integral part of the learning experience. This is why blended learning offers a balanced solution – we can exploit the potential of online learning as well as the advantages of working together in workshop settings. Technology is re-shaping MCAST's teaching and learning. Continuous professional development of staff is key to success. In the end, it is about people embracing technology and using it to their advantage.

Do you have any plans to expand MCAST internationally?

MCAST's internationalisation strategy is another area of importance. Our students need to receive an education that will make their career relevant not only in Malta but also at international level. Thankfully today's young people are aspiring towards international careers, and we need to ensure that they are prepared to take on mobility opportunities. We need to keep encouraging more participation in ERASMUS+ programmes while developing strong partnerships with international colleges. MCAST staff are also participating in several high-level European projects. Not only is MCAST participating, but the College is also leading the way in several research and innovation programmes.

MCAST Gateway to Industry will continue to promote MCAST internationally and develop more partnership agreements. As MCAST continues to build its reputation as an international centre of excellence, we expect to see more international students and exchanges.

MCAST is investing in research programmes. Can you provide more information on the way forward?

MCAST's research unit and programmes may be a lesser known part of the College's work. In all fairness, this is also a relatively new area. The College has been working on recruiting researchers over the past months. The way forward is to keep investing in applied research, and in fact, one of the two new buildings, the Resource Centre, will also host our research hub. We recognise the significance of preparing learners to be specialised in vocational areas while also being in touch with industry needs. In the vocational context, research is about achieving tangible results, collaborating with other educational and industrial stakeholders and embracing an innovative approach. Even just by looking at the MCAST website, one can see the relevance and variety in the research areas chosen. These range from research on water technology to artificial intelligence to machine learning and more. I expect to see some very intriguing work and results in the coming years. I am looking forward to the launch in autumn this year of a proposal to award professional doctorates at Level 8 of Malta's Qualification Framework.

Please explain what you think are the most pressing issues and challenges being faced by MCAST today and what you think the future will look like five years from now.

The challenges presented this year are somewhat unprecedented as we continue to navigate the uncertainty created by the global pandemic. The extraordinary situation has also made us hyper-aware of future challenges. These include adapting to technological changes while also ensuring that students at all levels remain immersed and engaged in their learning.

In a way, this year has highlighted the issue of how we manage change in particular vocational education settings. It has been a constant reminder that we need to invest in vocational training as a flexible means of preparing students for a changing world of work. We need to continue investing in learning to be better prepared to solve the pandemics, crises and challenges of the future.

In less than five years, the campus will undoubtedly look different, with the new Resource Centre and IICT building in place. But it is not only about a changed environment and new buildings. Above all, I believe in a changed mindset. MCAST will lead the way in creating a culture of lifelong learning and in preparing tomorrow's leaders and change-makers.

MCAST students to benefit from a three-year collaboration agreement in HVAC systems



Minister for Education and Employment Hon Dr Owen Bonnici announced at a press conference, together with MCAST Principal and CEO Prof Joachim James Calleja and ACIA president Steve Azzopardi, a collaboration that will see to the development of qualified technical personnel in heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems.

Minister Owen Bonnici said, "I am very pleased to see that we are ensuring that students gain qualifications in important sectors of our economy and that lead to employment opportunities. We need to work with stakeholders to create opportunities and experiences for learners in the field of vocational learning."

"As a government, we are committed to continuing with our efforts to ensure that the education being offered is relevant to the world of employment. In designing its courses for the new academic year, we can see that we prioritised ongoing consultation with industry. I thank everyone involved because as a result of their efforts we have seen the setting up of a new, specialised workshop at the Paola MCAST Campus that is equipped to industry standards in order to

be used for training in heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems," Dr Bonnici added.

The new facilities are funded by the Air Conditioning Importers Association (ACIA) as part of a three-year collaboration agreement with MCAST.

MCAST Principal and CEO Prof Joachim James Calleja explained, "The main aim of this collaboration is to contribute towards the development of qualified technical personnel. ACIA will sponsor students enrolled in the Diploma in Heating, Ventilation and Air-Conditioning and will top up the stipend of students enrolled in this Level 3 course offered by MCAST's Institute of Engineering and Transport. This collaboration will allow students to develop a strong rapport with their sponsor, who eventually will become their future employer."

ACIA president Steve Azzopardi added, "As importers, we are working together on this initiative as we believe that vocational education is crucial to prepare students for employment. We need qualified employees if we want to keep strengthening this sector and offer clients an efficient service."

The construction of the MCAST Resource Centre is in its Final Phase



The construction of the MCAST Resource Centre (MRC), which has a footprint of approximately 2,300 square metres and is spread over four floors, is in its final phase, Minister for Education and Employment Owen Bonnici said during a site visit at the Paola Campus.

Hon Dr Owen Bonnici said: "This significant investment is very important as it will further develop the College's physical environment. More importantly, we want to invest in our students and educators. This Centre is an example of building

learning spaces with the latest technology for the benefit of today's students and future generations. This is not simply an investment in buildings. We want to create a space for educators and students to develop creative and innovative work, a space that facilitates communication and collaboration beyond the classroom setting. As time passes, we are seeing that more students are choosing vocational subjects as their main studies, and I am pleased to see that MCAST is taking the necessary steps forward for such an institution to grow."



MCAST Principal and CEO Joachim James Calleja said, "Our strategy is to continue to create investment opportunities in vocational education to focus on developing skills for employment. We believe that this investment should be enjoyed by both full-time students and those learners who attend part-time courses. MCAST will continue developing the concept of a 24-hour campus and industry on campus. We need to create a dynamic learning space where knowledge and innovation thrive."

MCAST head of capital projects Ing. Jesmond Zammit explained how the building will house a number of the College's activities, including the MCAST Centre for Research and Innovation, the Learning Support Unit, as well as the Learning Resource Centre and the Library.

The building is located on an underground car park that forms part of the central campus square.

The design also includes the latest in energy-saving technology and features measures to lower maintenance and operational costs, the government statement read. The emphasis on surrounding areas will be on green spaces and landscaping.

"There will be various facilities and services within the MRC for students, including: 2 exhibition spaces, 1 auditorium, 14 offices for directors and managers, 2 boardrooms, 16 lecture rooms and tutorial rooms, 1 cafeteria, a library on two floors, and also a working area, a study area, outside seating, a project room and a games room."

"In the MRC, which is a multi-purpose building, there will be adequate facilities for students who are specializing in specific vocational fields as required by the industry. The Library and Learning Resource Centre (LLRC) in the building will offer a variety of useful informative resources and technologies for students and educators."

The Teaching Assistance Unit will also be in this building in order to work closely with the Institutes of MCAST so as to ensure that students receive the necessary academic support to acquire their academic skills and become independent in their studies, the statement continued.

The project, with an investment of €10 million, is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) 2014-2020.

MCAST and SCSA sign MOU



Minister for Education and Employment Hon Dr Owen Bonnici, together with Minister for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity Hon Dr Michael Falzon, presided over the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA).

This MOU is based on objectives that focus on the relationship between education and the social welfare sector. These three objectives are:

- 1 Developing and improving the curricula related to social welfare provision and regulation in order to directly give due attention to the upcoming professionals who will be working in the field;
- 2 Inducing the evolution of the courses to reflect the current and future needs in the social welfare sector as is indicated in the trends being noted;
- 3 Providing the opportunity for students currently following related courses to gain valuable hands-on experiences in the field of their study by participating in apprenticeships at SCSA's three directorates the Operations Directorate, the Strategy and Social Intelligence Directorate, and the Governance and Assurance Directorate.

Minister Owen Bonnici said that, "Thanks to this MOU, we are celebrating the vast types of courses offered by MCAST. We are always looking at the current and future needs in the employment sector and seeing that the educational choices being provided to our students match these needs. Apart from offering the opportunity to study in different fields, as in this case, we have also seen that our students gain valuable hands-on experience related to their studies. These apprenticeships will be carried out in three SCSA Directorates. Our Ministry has always been committed to develop and improve the curricula depending on the country's and our students' needs, as we are doing today."

The Minister for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity Michael Falzon praised the cooperation between the two Ministries, and emphasised the need for more students to follow social courses, as society constantly needs more professionals in the area. Minister Falzon spoke about the importance of an effective social welfare state,

which vulnerable people can always feel comfortable to rely on. The Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity continually invests in training and new courses, so as to strengthen professionals' ability in the area. Additionally, the final aim is to engage more social workers to join agencies which work directly with people needing social services.

MCAST Principal and CEO Prof Joachim James Calleja remarked, "Since 2018, MCAST has signed over 25 partnership agreements. We have continued to expand our network of contacts with the local and international industry. This agreement, in particular, is important to us, as MCAST's Institute for Community Services (ICS) has worked very closely with SCSA since its inception. Last year, we held a seminar for ICS students at Level 4 and Level 6, which led to a sound discussion on the standards and current practices within the social care sector. The centrality of work-based education is present in all MCAST study programmes. Students are increasingly opting for MCAST as their first choice precisely because they are looking for hands-on learning and industry experience."

SCSA CEO Matthew Vella stated that, in the past months, there was a very positive collaboration with MCAST students being hosted on placements. Such students had the opportunity to participate in current tasks and projects, getting a hands-on experience of the Authority's operations. As part of this agreement, students shall have the opportunity to have apprenticeships at the Authority and work in innovative areas such as blockchain. Through such projects and other digital initiatives, the Social Care Standards Authority is aiming to enhance quality service provision in social welfare, especially with regards to the digitalisation of the adoption process.

By achieving the above aims, the government will continue to strengthen the future of the social welfare sector and of the valuable professionals working in this sector.

MCAST Students Restoring St Catherine's Chapel in Gudja

MCAST students following courses in masonry heritage skills are working on the restoration of several sites around Malta including St Catherine's Chapel in Gudja.



MCAST offers courses in construction and heritage skills at various levels ensuring that young people are trained in the maintenance, protection and preservation of heritage sites. One of the ongoing projects is the restoration of the Chapel of St Catherine's in Gudja, which was built in 1631. The present chapel replaced an older one which was built in 1562. Minister of Education and Employment Owen Bonnici visited the site to observe the students' ongoing work.

Minister Owen Bonnici said: "If we want to keep preserving our rich cultural heritage through careful restoration of historical sites, we also need to make sure that we have skilled persons to do this important work. Safeguarding heritage sites is also about safeguarding trades and ensuring that skills and techniques are learned by young people through hands-on learning. This is why we will keep investing in quality vocational education and training. Education plays an important role in raising

awareness about the importance of the preservation of cultural sites so that they can be enjoyed by generations to come."

MCAST Principal and CEO Joachim James Calleja explained: "All our vocational courses offer students the opportunity to gain both practical and theoretical skills. The Construction Department within the Institute for Engineering and Transport offers courses that enable learners to take up a career in stone restoration. Lecturers guide our learners to participate in stone restoration interventions. Past projects included restoration work at St Philip's Chapel in Senglea, at St Augustine Convent in Rabat and at the station in Birkirkara. This year's projects include the stone restoration of iconic niches in several villages in collaboration with parishes and local councils. Students following these heritage skills courses can progress to the next level while learning recording techniques as well as cleaning and testing procedures."





Appointment of Registrar

Maria Pace, Director Registrar

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) has appointed Ms Maria Pace as Director Registrar.

Maria has extensive experience in the educational sphere spanning around thirty-five years. These include teaching at primary and post-secondary levels as well as various leadership positions, namely as Head of School at St Nicholas College, Rabat Girls' Secondary, and at St Theresa College, Mrieħel Girls' Secondary. Before joining MCAST, she was the Principal at St Ignatius College for seven years. She is regularly invited to give lectures on various aspects of educational leadership at the University of Malta and the Institute for Education.

Commenting on the appointment, Professor Joachim James Calleja, Principal and CEO of MCAST, said: "I am delighted that Maria Pace has been appointed. She brings with her a wealth of experience in education and will play an important

role in building on MCAST's reputation as an international centre of excellence in vocational education and training."

Maria said: "This is an exciting time for MCAST as the College approaches its 20th anniversary. I am very much looking forward to working with MCAST's senior management in providing quality education and training to all students."

As Director Registrar she will report to Deputy Principal Mr Ronald Curmi and will be responsible for the administration of academic, educational and training courses for students.

Ms Pace holds a Bachelor's Degree in Education, a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management and a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and Management from the University of Malta.

Appointment of Director Communications

Daniela Blagojevic

Daniela Blagojevic joined MCAST in March 2020 as Director Communications. Daniela is responsible for coordinating communications in support of the College's strategic priorities. Her role includes internal communications and engagement across the institution as well as external promotion and media relations.

Daniela held managerial positions within public administration and has worked in the areas of public policy, project management, communications and public relations for the past 20 years. In her previous role of Assistant Director at the Ministry for Education and Employment, she was responsible for policy and provision initiatives in lifelong learning. She was the National Coordinator for the implementation of the EU Agenda for Adult Learning, focusing on awareness-raising campaigns and promotional activities.

Daniela headed the Malta MEDIA Desk, an information office of the European Union's funding programme MEDIA, hosted by the Ministry for



Culture for 7 years. She was responsible for the development of national funds for the creative industries and organised industry training fostering international collaboration. Before this, she worked on the national communications campaign addressing environment and sustainable development issues.

Daniela graduated in Communications from the University of Malta and completed a Master's in International Media Innovation Management (Berlin).

Virtual Transmedia Storytelling Masterclass by U.S. Film Expert

On June 26 2020, the U.S. Embassy partnered with MCAST's Institute for the Creative Arts to host a virtual masterclass on Transmedia Storytelling delivered by U.S. film expert Sangita Shresthova. Dr. Shresthova is the Director of Henry Jenkins' Civic Paths Group at the University of Southern California, and her work focuses on media, activism and participatory politics.

During her masterclass, Dr. Shresthova shared her years of creative transmedia storytelling experience with MCAST students and lecturers, focusing primarily on civic participation, cross-cultural dialogue and social change.

This collaborative virtual programme between the U.S.

Embassy and MCAST was made possible through the American Film Showcase (AFS) at a time when international travel is limited due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and produced by the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, AFS highlights the value of film in fostering understanding, cooperation, dialogue and debate.

The U.S. Embassy continues to engage with students and academics in Malta to share expertise and skills and to promote the role of independent media in an effective democracy.

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Spatial Design





Amidst the infamous coronavirus pandemic, most have been trying to carry on with their daily obligations and find ways to deliver alternatives to the norm. In VET education the situation has had its positive moments. Students were challenged and succeeded in finding solutions to tasks that seemed daunting, resulting in the delivery of exceptional alternatives.

The Spatial Design and Product Design Departments at the Institute for the Creative Arts, Mosta, reacted maturely and promptly to the impossibility of exhibiting their work to the public as their predecessors had done for over a decade. It had always been a moment to show off their skills in networking, project management, IT skills and Design; a kind of ‘final exam’, where the scenario was set by anonymous examiners in the oddest and most unimaginable ways. All twenty-three students managed to overcome this situation successfully,

showing that a degree student’s life is not only about exams, marks and projects done, but also about how resourceful they are when the situation calls for extreme measures. With the help of two good Samaritans, Jean Pantalleresco and Lee Gauci, who helped as web design professionals, the students were able to realise their intentions.

Reading for a degree is no walk in the park and I am sure that students were often stressed and annoyed. There are certain skills which require even further professional development after they graduate, yet if our students remember this collaboration and kindness, and adopt such in their own professional ethos, MCAST can be even prouder of this success story and the graduates involved.

We invite you to have a look at their online exhibition through their website <http://ica-spatial-product-2020.com>.



ACTION

at the Institute for the Creative Arts!

Int Min Int is MCAST Institute for the Creative Art's own in-house produced TV programme that gives an opportunity to younger professionals to have a voice in the culture and arts industry. 'Int Min Int' is a current affairs programme that features local and foreign experts, industry professionals, interviews and various discussions about current events. 'Int Min Int' is a creative catalyst that brings together education and media professionalism. Our

BA (Hons) Creative Media Production students use high-end broadcast technology to produce a series of unique programmes and to explore new learning experiences into the world of professional TV broadcast. This project also brings together students with various creative and artistic skills to collaborate, develop and produce the television series for Malta's national TV broadcaster PBS. 'Int Min Int' has been a flagship project since the very beginning of the



Institute's Media courses in 2009 and has offered real-life professional broadcast work experience for all Creative Media Production students.

As in previous years, this year, 'Int Min Int' has also made it on TVM's prime time schedule. Our students collaborated for the second year running with well-renowned TV and Radio personality Frank Zammit who moderated and presented various eye-opening discussions on several topics with local personalities and other experts. He describes what motivates him to collaborate with our students:

"As an ex MCAST ICA student myself, I really do try to make myself available to the TV producers of the future. I genuinely believe that what you learn by working with people who already have experience in the industry cannot be taught in a classroom. It is always encouraging to see the energy and enthusiasm students bring to the table, and I do hope they maintain that drive even once they are done studying and actually get to work in the wonderful world of media!"

This year's 'Int Min Int' comprised of five programmes focusing on different aspects of internet culture. Topics included social media phenomena: memes, Likes, YouTube monetisation, Google ads and viral videos to name a few. 'Int Min Int' also roped in some local personalities that have migrated from TV sensations to social media personalities and those who can now make a living off social media! Each programme was originated by students and curated from concept to screen by ICA's Media lecturers and specialists Nicky Aquilina and David Tanti who in their own words explained that:



"Our generation Z media students who largely believe in the Web with quasi religious fervour) were able to reflect on the vast opportunities television presents."

"IMI was a vehicle used by students to explore digital phenomena that have become a neurological extension of ourselves and package it in a creative way to reach consumers by more traditional means."

We are now looking forward and working towards 2021. We have already generated ideas for our next production of 'Int Min Int'. Next year 'Int Min Int' will be special as we are celebrating its tenth anniversary. Our objective is to once again provide students with a unique work experience while creating new and fresh broadcast content of high standard, creative, insightful, entertaining, ethical and fun to watch.

To find out more about what we do and how we do it, visit our social media platform and YouTube channel.



MCAST trains Water Professionals

In many countries, especially in Europe, we take our clean drinking water for granted. The process of water production is a complex one which requires a skilled workforce to operate. Several European countries are struggling with a shortage of young people interested in water-related education. This is the main reason why European colleges and professionals from the water industry have joined forces to train water professionals at Vocational Training and Education (VET) level.

The webinar of the European Platform of Vocational Excellence Water was held online in May. In this meeting, five European regions, including Malta, discussed the future skilled vocational practitioner in the field of water technology.

Dutch partners, Learning Hub Friesland, Vitens, Katapult and CIV Water, shared their knowledge and experience on how to achieve good cooperation

between VET education and the water industry. During the online meeting knowledge and insights were shared about how to stimulate collaboration and how to strengthen regional networks.

The outcomes of the webinar showed that there are still significant differences between the various European regions. Nicola Murray from Glasgow College, Scotland confirmed: "It was surprising to see that we all have a different starting point."

All project partners operate within a particular context with different challenges and opportunities. Speaking about the Maltese context, Edwin Zammit, Deputy Director for Innovation at MCAST, said, "One of our biggest challenges and common factor that unites us in Malta is the high freshwater scarcity on the island. It is vital to invest in the right talent and education to provide good and safe water for all."

PoVE Water

PoVE Water is a transnational project that draws on existing and emerging vocational competences and skills needs in the water sector, translating them into an approach of vocational excellence. The project kicked off in January 2020 in Brussels. The project brings together VET institutions, the water industry, research centres, Higher Education governmental institutions and water sector representatives from the Netherlands, Scotland, Latvia, Malta and the Czech Republic. These partners share a common interest in developing the full potential of VET institutions to play a proactive role in support of growth, competitiveness and innovation of the water sector.

Water Research and Training Centre

Malta has the lowest water resources index and the highest water competition index in the whole of the Mediterranean basin. Challenges are placed for the nation to be at the forefront of both water technology and in the skilling of water operations and management while operating within challenging socio-economic conditions. It is within this setting that the MCAST Water Research and Training Centre holds strong potential. The Centre focuses on water enterprise, as it aims to embody the application of creative ideas and innovations to practical situations in the water field, as well as solving the challenges that are encountered locally. Three main themes characterise the Centre, these being: Water Quality, Water Systems Control and Water Efficiency and Innovation.

Adopting System Innovation to Deliver Change

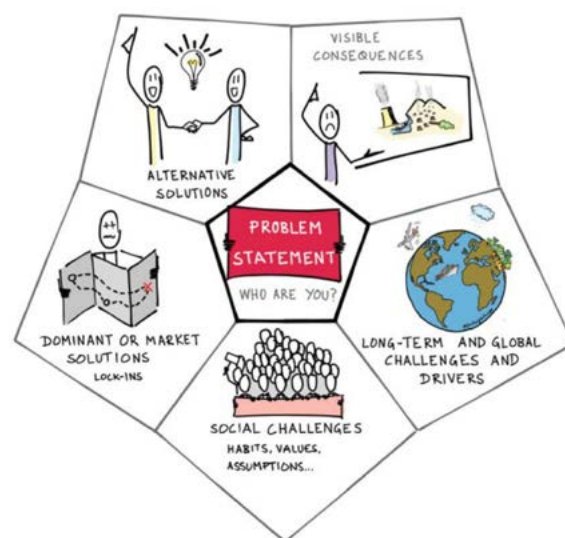
by Edwin Zammit, Gonca Kara and Eleni Tsitsirigou

Finding solutions to complex problems requires non-conventional methodologies. System innovation helps out the mapping of complex processes and addresses the particular system through innovation. System innovation is defined as a transition from one socio-technical system to another. System innovation requires active learning and continual evolution, but innovation and learning are two sides of the same coin; when leveraged together they are the most effective means to catalyse transformation. Some historical examples are the transition from sailing to steam ships, the transition from horse and carriage to automobiles, and the transition from piston engine aircrafts to jetliners in aviation. System innovation brings radical wider-reaching changes which redesign entire systems such as transport, food or housing. With much broader reach, the sustainability gains can be much higher.

Climate change is complicated. Adopting system innovation practices is revolutionary. MCAST has recently affiliated with EIT Climate-KIC in the response to climate emergency through research and innovation. EIT Climate-KIC is Europe's largest public-private partnership addressing climate change through innovation to build a net zero carbon economy.

MCAST's first endeavour as an EIT partner was through the Pioneers into Practice (PIP) programme. The objective of the programme is to train professionals from a range of backgrounds about the different facets of climate change and systems innovation. Furthermore, it aims to build an internationally connected community of experts who are integrated into the local low carbon innovation ecosystems.

The PIP programme kicked off locally through a virtual introductory workshop which was held between 8 and 12 June, 2020 by local coach Mr Edwin Zammit and supported by Ms Gonca Kara and Ms



Eleni Tsitsirigou. Through a series of online modules, participants (aka Pioneers) had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the programme, understand and learn new approaches, apply systems innovation tools and put these into practice through hands-on activities in a virtual setting.

The group project is closely linked to the regional context of climate change and during the months of June to September 2020 the Pioneers will learn how to apply system innovation tools to a local real case. Pioneers have been provided with three diverse cases that possess a climate change challenge. Each case is represented by a Challenge Owner. The teams will structure challenges, identify and apply appropriate tools to develop their projects or ideas further, and draw up a project management plan.

The culmination of the Pioneers' learning journey will be achieved through a local or international work placement. This experience will give Pioneers the opportunity to leave their comfort zone, exchange good and best practices, and network with national and international stakeholders.

Institute of Community Services



The MCAST Institute of Community Services offers courses in the following areas – Health and Social Care, Sports, Early Years, Hairdressing, Beauty, Inclusive Education as well as Security, Enforcement and Protection. The courses within each sector all carry the responsibility of ensuring the quality of the lives of the vulnerable members of society addressed by our courses; which constitute children, the elderly, service users and so on, is enhanced and valued. This is further reinforced by the values of inclusion and equity within each sector.

ICS prides itself in collaborating closely with industry. One of the main pillars of the MCAST strategy 2019-2021 clearly validates this need – one of the strategic goals ascertains the need for course providers to respond to the needs of industry. This mantra permeates the planning and delivery of courses at the Institute of Community Services. The lecturers who deliver the courses hail from industry, a number of lecturers still work within industry, thereby ensuring a close link to understanding and determining the requirements to perform within a specific role. This dipping in and out of industry ensures lectures reflect the needs and requirements leading to a student making the leap into employment seamlessly.

Two strong sectors for which we provide courses from MQF level 1 to level 6 are the Sports, Exercise and Health sector as well as Health and Social Care. The two are woven together, in our endeavour to seek a better quality of life for vulnerable sectors of society mainly the elderly, children and people with a disability. The focus of our courses permeate the essential daily routine of people through services provided by industry. Our endeavour is to ensure that each educational programme offers opportunities for students to work with these sectors through placement experiences and insights offered by the lecturers themselves.

Close collaboration between the Malta Football Association (MFA) and MCAST sports lecturers and researchers has led to two prominent studies which were conceived during undergrad studies carried out by two MCAST students, Marc Ciangura and Felicienne Mercieca, to being further researched on a larger scale. In their undergrad dissertations, Marc explored the compliance of football teams' warm up to the 11+ protocol while Felicienne researched injuries in women's football.

The two students presented their respective studies to MFA during a meeting organised by MCAST course coordinator, lecturer and researcher Dr Renzo Kerr Cumbo flanked by Dr Matthew Muscat Inglott and Mr Johann Zarb, also MCAST lecturers and researchers. MFA was represented by Chief Officer Football Mr Kurt Formosa, Strategy officer Dr Dawn Aquilina and National Team Doctor Dr Daniel McKeon. Both studies will be

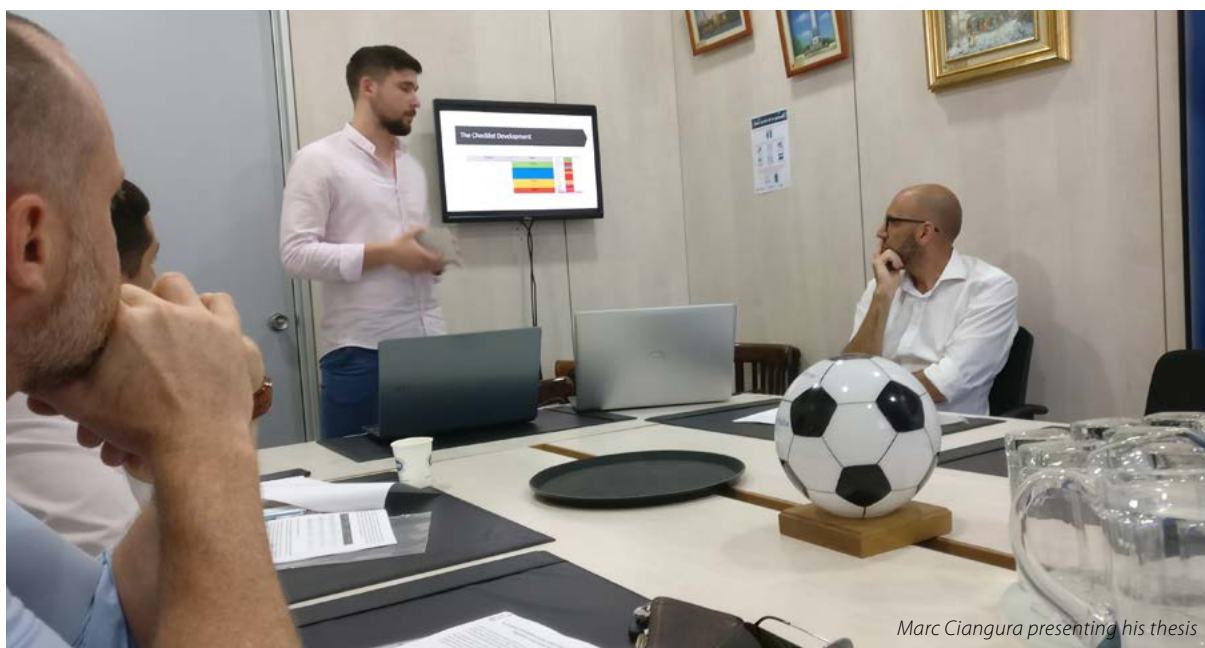
further researched and explored by the students under tutorage of MCAST lecturers guided by MFA. This close collaboration is indicative of the relevance of MCAST courses within industry and the arduous work carried out by MCAST lecturers to urge students to soar higher in their endeavour to leave a mark within the sports sector.

Collaborative work within the Health and Social Care sector which will leave an indelible mark in the local service provided has been reinforced by two Memoranda of Understanding with major stakeholders within Health and Social Care, namely The Social Care Standards Authority and The Commission on Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence.

Since its inception, the MCAST Health and Social Care team, led by course coordinators Mr Christopher Bonnici and Ms Antonella Brincat, has worked closely with the CEO of the Social Care Standards Authority Mr Matthew Vella, to ensure students are equipped to work within the social care remit according to the standards set by the authority. MCAST Health and social care lecturers have attended workshops to allow for exploration of the established social care standards. This culminated in a one-day seminar organised at MCAST by the Social Care Standards Authority with MCAST lecturers and students enrolled in the MCAST BA Hons in Health and Social Care (Management) which allowed for a thorough exploration of the standards followed by a debate on current practice. This experience resonated in that it exemplified the close ties ICS has with industry and the role of MCAST as course provider at the epicentre of meaningful debates in industry. Mr Christopher Bonnici and Ms Janice Fenech Scicluna, two senior lecturers and researchers at MCAST, will be delving deeper into the social care standards to better understand how current practice and policies impact children in alternative care by conducting research in collaboration with the Social Care Standards Authority.

It is our mission to identify further collaborations to ensure MCAST courses remain at the forefront of industry by identifying the tools required within the workforce. This consolidates the position MCAST holds in shaping the workforce at the heart of community services.

Sports students present dissertations to Malta Football Association



Marc Ciangura presenting his thesis

Students Marc Ciangura and Felicienne Mercieca, enrolled in the MCAST BSc (Hons) in Sport Exercise and Health programme, have presented their undergrad studies to the Malta Football Association with the intention of expanding these studies further to develop applied research as needed by the football industry.

Marc's dissertation explored the compliance of football teams' warm up to the 11+ protocol, while Felicienne obtained a snapshot of the number of injuries and the reasons behind these injuries in women's football during season 2018-2019.

Present for this meeting were Mr Kurt Formosa – Chief Officer Football, Dr Dawn Aquilina – Strategy Officer and Dr Daniel McKean – the National Team Doctor at the MFA. Representing the MCAST Institute of Community Services were Ms Ann Marie Cassar – Director, Dr Renzo Kerr Cumbo – Senior Lecturer and Coordinator, Dr Matthew Muscat Inglott – Senior Lecturer and Researcher, and Mr Johann Zarb – Lecturer and Researcher.

This meeting augurs well for further collaboration between the Malta Football Association and MCAST to explore research in the respective fields.

Adapting to COVID-19

Our gates were shut and our lecture rooms and offices empty but much learning still took place – the experience of students and lecturers attending the MCAST Gozo Campus.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of educational institutions brought in a new reality, with lecturers and students having to adapt to these extraordinary circumstances in a relatively short period of time. The adoption of online teaching and learning was challenging but overall the experience was a very positive one. In this article, we are sharing the positive online learning experiences by our lecturers and students attending the Gozo Campus.

Michela Saliba, the student representative on the Gozo Campus Board of Studies, currently reading for the Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years, claims that students enjoyed the participation in online lectures and adapted quite easily to this new form of learning. In fact, it took very little time for everyone to adapt to this new reality and within a few days lecturing resumed using online platforms. Undoubtedly, students missed the simple things which formed part of their routine, such as daily contact with their classmates, going out between lectures and the direct interaction with their lecturers. However, the students were particularly appreciative of the lecturers' and MCAST's efforts to keep the learning process going with minimal disruptions.

Kristle Jo Xerri, a student following the

Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development programme, together with the other students in her group, expressed similar views. The group expressed sincere gratitude and appreciation for the incessant support that was given throughout this difficult time. In Kristle Jo's own words: "Unfortunately, in the past months COVID-19 forced us to stay at home instead of attending MCAST lectures. However, all of you have done your very best to go on providing us with lectures, work and corrections. It was inspiring to have people like you teaching me. You deserve a warm thank you for your dedication and professionalism."

From the lecturers' point of view, this was an exceptional new reality which needed a few days to sink in. Turning lectures to online platforms was a challenge: class material had to be adapted, assessments had to be modified. But the lecturers rose to the occasion, re-organising and adapting their delivery in a very effective manner. Online lecturing has proved to have its benefits as well. In some cases, particularly at higher levels, attendance even improved and students seemed to be more focused. Additionally, the increased use of digital platforms and the MCAST Management Information System had some environmental benefits as well, with a significant reduction of printed assignments. Lecturers were receiving the assignments and correcting them in digital format.

Needless to say, some practical components of our vocational programmes, including placements and practical sessions that can only be carried out in our workshops, had to be postponed to a later stage, but otherwise our activity continued at a steady rate.

Ultimately, the physical aspect of relationships can never be replaced. The direct human interaction between lecturers and students is invaluable and irreplaceable in enriching our social lives. Yet, we can be proud of what we have managed to achieve.



Erasmus+

Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Programmes

The Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Programmes offer the opportunity of funding for staff members wishing to conduct a mobility outside of the European Union and Programme countries.

Participating institutions must first identify areas of collaboration and establish a partnership agreement. As the partner in a Programme country, MCAST's International Office applies for funding under KA107, allowing for a limited number of outgoing and incoming staff mobility for teaching or training.

There are mobility opportunities to Armenia and Kazakhstan, in the fields of Theatrical and Creative Arts, Business and Economics, Agriculture and Animal Science, and Renewable Energy. The upcoming academic year 2020-2021 will see MCAST collaborate

with a further two countries: China and Russia. MCAST staff will have the chance to travel to either one of these countries, and welcome to Malta experts in the fields of AI, Robotics, Automation, Environmental Engineering and Geodesy.

These mobilities offer great opportunities for MCAST staff to expand their network and initiate research projects with fellow academics. Erasmus+ is a great way for staff members to exchange methodology and good practices, acquire skills from international cooperation, and expand their academic portfolio.



For more information about
Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Programmes
and opportunities at MCAST, contact

Ms Jodie Bonnici

International Programmes Coordinator

✉ jodie.bonnici@mcast.edu.mt ☎ +356 2398 7308

An experience within the film industry



Peter Pullicino is an MCAST student who last year finished reading for an Advanced Diploma in Photography. Peter carried out an Erasmus+ traineeship in Italy between 4 and 30 November 2019. This mobility was funded through the Erasmus+ Project: Vocational Education and Training into the Future.

Peter carried out his placement in Rome with Groenlandia, a production company focused on creating quality audio-visual products of international appeal. Through this Erasmus+ traineeship Peter has gained experience as a member of staff with the Photography Department.

"This trip has exposed me to new ways of life, new food, new music, new architecture and new cultures. I can safely say that this experience has taught me a lot."

Through this mobility Peter worked alongside professionals who were willing to teach him. At times the work became quite stressful but still he got first-hand advice from people who are serious about their profession. This experience has helped Peter grow and become more independent.

"I feel that I have grown in many different ways through this experience. It has helped me grow in my profession. It has also helped me grow personally, and it has helped me see and realize what I want to do in the future."

STAFF MOBILITY

Frankfurt School of Economics



Franco Farrugia, MCAST lecturer within the Institute of Information and Communication Technology, travelled to Germany on an Erasmus+ staff training mobility between the 9 and 13 March 2020. This mobility was funded through the Erasmus+ Project: Incrementing the Expertise of VET Learners and Educators.

This training and work experience was tailor-made to focus on the current MCAST Institute of Information and Communication Technology training needs, which are Software Development and Computer Security. Throughout these five days of training and networking Franco gathered knowledge in several areas in which the Institute intends to expand. Franco also got the chance to collaborate with other researchers on Distributed Ledger Technologies (DLT).

The lectures that Franco followed were of a very good quality. At the Frankfurt School of Economics Franco experienced a system built for the students. The whole school is generally quiet and Franco experienced students in class at times without a lecturer. Students work collaboratively without the need of traditional instruction. At the Frankfurt School of Economics, the lecturer decides if sessions are done remotely or in class; the important aim is that of accommodating students' needs and aspirations.

“For me this mobility was a huge accomplishment. I feel that the research that I have put in meeting with industry stakeholders, professors, researchers and coordinators has provided me with information that could be useful to MCAST, the ICT Institute and myself. I am now more aware of the opportunities that exist in this realm.”



The companies that the university works with hold conferences inside the premises and students in their final projects are not given an academic mentor but a business mentor. Students have to really provide a project that is tangible and that can be measured and is also scalable.

“I was impressed with the culture and the ecosystem that they have built. I thank the International Office for giving me this exquisite experience. I am looking forward to further collaboration with the new partners that MCAST and myself have made. I am very happy with the outcome of this project.”

XAMK University of Finland



Luke Vella is a lecturer at the Institute of MCAST Business Management and Commerce. He participated in an Erasmus+ Staff Mobility for Placement from 10 to 14 February, 2020.

Luke was provided with a set programme prior to his mobility. This mobility was a very successful and positive one for Luke.

"It was a great pleasure to realise that the teaching techniques I adopt in my classroom are also utilised by lecturers forming part of the leading educational system in the EU."

The main aim of Luke's Erasmus+ Mobility was to observe, and eventually adapt different lecturing styles by pointing out how lecturers at XAMK encouraged student participation and initiative.

"The students will be given a peer assessment form and assess each other. The role of the lecturer in all this is monitoring the process, ensuring that the research and presentation being done are correct.

This experience has also given me the opportunity to further include students during my own lectures, changing the classroom dynamics to a more student-centred approach."

Luke was full of praise towards our partner institution, XAMK, whilst comparing their quality of lecturing, professionalism and the work ethic with those adopted at MCAST.

" The experiance provided me with much appreciation for our own organisation, MCAST, on viewing that our practices and work ethics are practised in a university whose education system is outstanding. We have also discussed some other projects we will be working on together in the near future. "

Every cloud has a silver lining!

The COVID-19 outbreak was the first pandemic that hit the entire nation since Independence and the cholera outbreaks of the 19th century. Our health authorities imposed nationwide measures aimed at containing and eventually defeating the outbreak.

A distant rumble

Despite several conflicting claims, the COVID-19 outbreak was officially detected in early 2020. As international and local authorities scrambled to take stock of the situation our institution followed the directions as advised by local authorities. On 13 March 2020, it was decided that the Library's premises be closed and that all staff was to start working from home.

A New Experience

Working from home was a new experience with new challenges and problems. But it was also a learning experience, which in time helped the staff adapt and learn new ways of working. These are some of the changes and improvements which took place during this period:

One of the first challenges was not having work laptops for the staff, as desktops are used at work and not laptops. Having only one laptop at home often created some issues with members of staff, as the kids and the spouse needed the laptop too. Coordinating the Library services from home was also a challenge as the use of emails was not enough. A direct channel of communication was needed.

As the Greek philosopher Plato reportedly said, "necessity is the mother of invention". The Library started

exploring new technologies. Thanks to Microsoft for MS Teams the staff were able to hold regular meetings to better coordinate work, plan the services and also participate in webinars and other activities organized online. In some cases, students who needed services also made contact through Microsoft Teams, though Outlook was the preferred medium. They were happy to use the chat facilities of MS Teams and the share screen option which helped them to solve the login issues.

Many students sought the services of the Library through the use of MCAST's Outlook email. They asked for help with regards to electronic resources as well as book renewals. In order to assist the students during this difficult situation, the Library started renewing books manually well before the due date and also waived the overdue fines.

The Library also increased the strength of our current online resources. As part of our constant efforts to provide quality resources to students and staff, the Library started the free trials for databases like IEEE and ProQuest. The Library team also attended webinars aimed at training the staff in the use of these resources. Proper online marketing also helped.

IEEE Xplore digital library is a powerful resource for high-impact factor scientific and technical



content published by the IEEE and its partners. It provides full text access to the world's highest quality technical literature in Aerospace, Artificial Intelligence, Automotive, Biomedical Engineering, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Electronics, Mechanical, Power and Energy, Industrial Engineering, Robotics, Transportation, and other related technology disciplines.

Students and members of staff were very satisfied with the ProQuest eBooks Database due to its vast collection of over 165,000 eBooks and user-friendly features. It offers multi-disciplinary eBooks with unlimited multi-user access, powerful research tools and free chapter downloads.

Another important work that could be of service to the students was the setting up of a YouTube channel, as well as the revamping of the Library's Facebook and web page. The staff also undertook research on how AI could be of help to the Library, something which will definitely bear fruit in the not so distant future.

Working from home enabled staff to participate in exercises of formation through webinars, participating in formative programmes online, which in turn enabled the staff to improve the services.

This lockdown period has highlighted the many strengths of the Library team especially the commitment and the energy throughout these challenging times.

This crisis reminded us to be grateful for and appreciate little moments of happiness like hugging our mother and other loved ones, walking freely without masks, time with our friends etc., that we took for granted all these years!

Our Library is ready with all the safety precautions and we are waiting impatiently to welcome you on Campus when the College re-opens!

Looking forward to meeting you all...

MCAST launches the Journal of Applied Research and Practice

The aim of the MCAST Journal of Applied Research and Practice is to serve as a platform for showcasing vocational and applied research that is carried out either by researchers and professionals working within MCAST, or with its collaborative partners. The nature of the research and innovative practice that is published is varied in nature to reflect the various aspects of vocational specialization that MCAST is focused upon. It is aimed at researchers, academics and practitioners.

The MCAST Journal of Applied Research and Practice (Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2020) features articles on research conducted on the following topics:

-
- Research Traffic Congestion in Malta: An Analysis of the Attributes, Attitudes and Solutions by Karl Camilleri
-
- A Preliminary Conceptual Model of the Assessment Design Process utilized by MCAST Science Subjects Lecturers by Richard Zahra
-
- Measuring the Loss of Arable and Rural Land on the Maltese Islands through Satellite Images by Steve Zerafa
-
- The Influence of English Language Skills on Students' Performance in Vocational Education by Marilyn Cefai
-
- Misuse of Antibiotics and the Dissemination of Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria in the Community by Cassandra Sturgeon Delia
-
- The Effects of Scent on Consumer Behaviour in Maltese Mid-Range Restaurants by Rebecca Camilleri and Melvin Mizzi
-
- Obtaining Multiple Order Statistics using Quickselect by Andrew Cortis, Frankie Inguanez and Chris Farrugia
-
- Pour Homme: Men's Grooming Attitudes and Motivations. What is Driving the Male Grooming Consumption Habits in Malta? by Roderick Tabone
-
- Addressing the Industry's Expectations from Educators in a Professional Higher Educational Institution by Stephen Gauci
-
- A Study of the Factors that Influence the Employment Potential of MCAST Level 4 Graduates by Candy Azzopardi, Alex Rizzo and Mario Cardona.
-



Pick up a hard copy from the reception area at
MCAST main campus library.



Download a soft copy from
<https://moodle.mcast.edu.mt/course/view.php?id=3647>

Introducing MCAST's Senior Research Officers



DR ING CLIFFORD
DE RAFFAELE

Research Director

Dr. Ing. Clifford De Raffaele was conferred an electrical engineering degree from the University of Malta, a Masters in ICT from the department of Computer and Communications Engineering and a Ph.D. in Computer Science from Middlesex University. Throughout his studies, he was employed in the embedded systems industry as a research and development engineer for four years. Subsequently, he commenced work on a €27 million European FP7 Research project modelling the Electromagnetic Interference on aircraft. He furthered diversified his academic and professional career by working in Biomedical Engineering Research at University of Malta and subsequently was employed at Middlesex University Malta for seven years whereby he held tenure as a Senior Lecturer and the role of Associate Director for Academia and Research.

Dr. Ing. De Raffaele has participated in numerous national and EU funded research projects in the capacity of collaborating partner, lead researcher and principal investigator. He serves on various strategic boards at national level on academia and research and is currently an executive member of the IEEE Malta Section. He has authored and published over 40 academic papers in peer-reviewed professional journals, international conferences, and books within a variety of areas of research in relation to his expertise. His current research interests include Biomedical Devices, Innovative User Interfaces, Image/Video Processing and Emerging Technologies.

DR MARIA CARDONA



Dr Maria Cardona is a Senior Research Officer within the Applied Research and Innovation Centre at MCAST. She is responsible for supporting research at the Institute of Community Services.

Maria graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Biology and Chemistry from the University of Malta in 2009. She was subsequently employed for three years with a leading pharmaceutical company, where she was mostly involved in chemical analysis of raw materials. She then won a STEPS scholarship to read for a MSc in Chemistry at the University of Malta (2014) where she designed fluorescent and UV-active chemosensors for detecting metal ions. During this time she was also involved in various teaching positions on a part-time basis. These included

a number of study units at MCAST at Levels 3-5. This interest in teaching led her to read for a PGCE in Science (2015). Later she was awarded a Marie-Sklodowska Curie ITN (Innovative Training Network) fellowship to read for a PhD in Molecular Sciences in Padova, Italy (2018). Upon returning to Malta, Maria taught Integrated Science and Biology in a local independent school before joining MCAST as a Senior Research Officer in January 2020. Her research interests include chemical synthesis and analysis, especially the design of chemical sensors for environmental monitoring and the design of catalytic and signal-generating systems inspired by natural processes. She presented her work in conferences across Europe and published in international peer-reviewed journals including Chemical Science, Tetrahedron Letters, RSC Advances and ACS Omega.

Apart from her professional experience, Maria has a keen interest in voluntary work. She was highly active in pastoral work with children and adolescents with a local group and carried out a number of voluntary work experiences abroad. She also read for a Higher Education Certificate in Adolescent and Youth Ministry and is currently reading for a Diploma in Spiritual Accompaniment. Presently she is a member of the Commission of Peace and Justice which aims to work for a more just society by advocating for human rights and a good quality of life. She is particularly interested in how scientific advances can contribute to the common good in a sustainable manner.

GONCA KARA DEMIR



Areas of research interest: ICT, Future and Emerging Technologies, Environment, Urban Mobility, Knowledge and Innovation Management, Climate Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Gonca Kara is a Senior Research Officer at MCAST. She has studied Law and holds an LLM degree from University of Sussex on EU and International Trade Law Programme. During that time, she gained experience and knowledge in EU focused ICT and Intellectual Property Rights Law. She has over 10 years of experience working on EU and National Funding Programmes in particular related to ICT, Smart Cities, Environment, and Digital Skills. She helped scientists and innovators scaling up with International and EU Grants and offered tailor-made coaching in preparing successful grant proposals and winning business pitches. Her specialities include project management in EU funding programmes (Horizon 2020, EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities, SME Instrument, Eurostars, EU Procurement, Int'l R&D and Innovation Grants, Venture Capital, etc.), Dissemination of EU-funded projects, Market Analysis, Business Planning and Coaching on Grant Identification.

DR CHRISTINE ZERAFA

Dr Christine Zerafa is a professionally trained concert pianist, educator and artistic researcher. She recently moved to Malta to join MCAST as the Senior Research Officer dedicated to the Institute for the Creative Arts.



Christine has appeared as a piano soloist and chamber musician in various internationally renowned venues and festivals in Europe and the USA. Performances have taken her to the Royal Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall, amongst others. She has performed in distinguished festivals including Oxford Lieder Festival, Cheltenham Festival, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Malta Arts Festival and has also played live on BBC TV and BBC Radio 3.

Christine gained a Master of Music in solo piano performance from the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) in Manchester. Having a passion for collaboration with singers and instrumentalists, she then read for a Master of Music degree in piano accompaniment, which she completed with distinction at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) in London. Christine is currently in her final stages of her PhD at the RAM, and her research focuses on the role of the pianist in the art of song and duo chamber music, and specifically her artistic role in the duo rehearsal process.

Throughout her performance career Christine has been the recipient of various awards including the

Bice Mizzi National Competition, the RNCM Clifton Helliwell Prize, the RAM Scott Huxley prize for piano accompaniment, the Schumann song pianist prize, as well as the Eric Brough Prize and the John B McEwen Prize. Christine was twice selected as a Park Lane Group Artist and she was also selected on the Tunnell Trust Artist Chamber Music Scheme.

Christine is in high demand as an educator, having years of experience in piano teaching and instrumental and vocal coaching. She is an examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and has also been frequently invited as a visiting staff pianist at the Royal College of Music, where she worked with undergraduate and postgraduate students in preparation for final exams, competitions and master classes.

Besides her artistic activities, Christine has also published in peer-reviewed journals and presented in international conferences dedicated to materials sciences. She read for a BSc (Hons) in Chemistry and Biology as well as a PhD in Chemistry, where her research focused on liquid crystalline polymers and related materials with negative Poisson's ratio.

DR MASSIMO PIERUCCI

Dr Massimo Pierucci graduated in 2000 in Biological Sciences at the University of Ancona (Italy) with a specialization in Marine Biology. Following graduation, he spent a year as a biologist trainee in two different laboratories at the University of Bologna and the University of Ancona, in order to obtain his professional qualification as a biologist.

The following year, he joined the Laboratory of Neurophysiology led by Dr Ennio Esposito at the Institute of Pharmacological Research 'Mario Negri Sud'. The research activity focused on Dopamine, a neurotransmitter which plays a major role in the motivational component of reward-motivated behaviour, mediates the effects of addictive drugs and affects the pathophysiology of depression and schizophrenia. This experience led him to the post of Research Associate at the University of Manchester (UK) where he worked in the field of chronobiology, investigating the physiology of the brain 'master clock' that regulates the circadian rhythm of the human body.

In 2010, he moved to the University of Malta, where he obtained his PhD in 2015. During this period, he was appointed Research Support Officer by the Department of Physiology and Biochemistry



at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery and worked on projects focusing on the physiology of brain reward networks and their involvement in the neurobiology of nicotine addiction and depression. During this period at the University of Malta, he had the opportunity to supervise and co-supervise undergraduate, master and PhD students, offering both experimental and theoretical guidance. He also gained teaching experience by running tutorials for medical students and lecturing biological subjects at the Department of Psychology. He was appointed Visiting Lecturer in 2019.

Throughout his academic career, Massimo published a number of research and review papers. During the past few years he has been an editorial board member of the *Frontiers in Cellular Neuroscience and Behavioural Neuroscience* (Review Editor), as well as an invited reviewer for the research journal 'Neuroscience'.

Currently, Massimo is the MCAST Senior Research Officer supporting research initiatives within the Institute of Business Management and Commerce.

**DR LORNA MARIE
BONNICI WEST**

Dr Lorna Marie Bonnici West graduated in Pharmacy from the University of Malta in 2000. She read for a Master of Science degree in Clinical Pharmacy at the Robert Gordon University, Scotland, and graduated in 2006. Dr Bonnici West was awarded a scholarship by the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme to read for a PhD at the Robert Gordon University and graduated in 2015. In 2016 she was awarded a postdoctoral grant under the Reach-High Scholars Programme Scheme part-financed by the European Union, Operational Programme II – Cohesion Policy 2014–2020 ‘Investing in Human Capital to Create more Opportunities and Promote the Well-being of Society’ – European Social Fund. Her research focused on behaviours and practices in relation to medication wastage and medication wastage minimisation strategies, as well as the effects of quality improvement measures in relation to enhanced value and wastage minimisation in pharmacy processes. Dr Bonnici West’s research has been published in diverse international peer-reviewed scientific journals, as well as presented at several national and international conferences. Her research interests revolve around medication wastage, medication adherence, beliefs about medications, respiratory, oncology and Lean methods.



Dr Bonnici West worked as a clinical pharmacist at Mater Dei Hospital within the respiratory field till June 2013, after which she was appointed Principal Pharmacist of the oncology hospital section. She was first appointed Visiting Assistant Lecturer with the University of Malta in 2005 and in 2019 she was appointed Visiting Senior Lecturer. She is also the vice-president of the Malta Association of Hospital Pharmacists. Dr Bonnici West was appointed Senior Research Officer with the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) at MCAST and is the focal point for applied research within the Institute of Applied Sciences, and the liaison person for research between the Institute and ARIC.



DR ANDRE ATTARD

Dr Andre Attard is a Biomedical Engineer by profession, specialising in lower-limb biomechanics. He has established himself as an academic and research professional, locally and abroad. Recently he joined MCAST as a Senior Research Officer under the Applied Research and Innovation Centre, where he is responsible for supporting and driving research within the Institute of Engineering and Transport.

Andre carried out his undergraduate studies at the University of Malta, where he read for a Mechanical Engineering degree. Then he started working at Baxter as a Research and Development engineer on medical delivery administration and renal set development. Following his industrial experience, Andre moved to Glasgow (Scotland), where he pursued and obtained a Masters in Biomedical Engineering at the University of

Strathclyde. He researched lower-limb biomechanics, which has since been his research focus.

After the completion of his Masters, he read for a doctorate with the same University, focusing on advanced knee biomechanics. He developed a novel clinical tool for analysing healthy and replaced knee biomechanics to provide Total Knee Arthroplasty patients with improved preoperative diagnosis and postoperative rehabilitation. As part of his PhD, he also participated in a full-scale Randomised Control Trial in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and Medacta, a medical device company specialising in the design and production of innovative orthopaedic implants and the accompanying surgical tools required for accurate joint replacement. The study, which consisted of 172 patient participants, investigated a novel knee implant design from a functional perspective, via an advanced kinematic knee study. Furthermore, he led a health-economic study which evaluated the impact of novel patient-specific surgical tools and corresponding surgical instrumentation in a surgical setting. The research results were disseminated in a high profile journal and several international conferences.

Following his arrival back to Malta, Andre worked at the University of Malta, where he lectured Biomechanics to undergraduate mechanical engineering students. Then he returned to Baxter, where he worked as a Senior R&D Engineer on several medical delivery projects. Since January he has moved to MCAST. During his research career, Andre was invited to deliver presentations and chair sessions at renowned conferences such as the International Society of Biomechanics (ISB), the European Society of Biomechanics (ESB) and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE). He was also on the organisational committee of the 25th Congress of the ISB conference which was held in Glasgow.



Navigating your Career in 2020

From its onset, MCAST's Career Guidance Service provided its clients three key elements: the hope to progress in life, an opportunity to improve employment capabilities, and a direction to gain autonomy over life choices. The said service provision is a resource that addresses many needs. Notable mentions include:

A first step to establish a more secure foothold in an unstable labour market

A key decision factor in choosing the right vocational education option

A periscope look at the many adult education or further learning opportunities

Access to labour market information or experiences not available at home.

During the College closure period in March 2020, the Career Guidance services went 'virtual'. We were available through phone and online meeting software namely Zoom and Microsoft Teams. This practice was kept even now that the College is adapting to 'new normal' operations whilst practising all the social distancing requirements.

clients, one can safely conclude that using an online platform as a professional meeting place has proved particularly effective. Through these elements, coupled with its high level of quality, the service is enabling a myriad of people to make better career decisions that would not otherwise be possible.

In hindsight, through its quick adaptation by our

✉ career.guidance@mcast.edu.mt

☎ +356 2398 7135/7136

My experience

BY SHAWN CASSAR

during the COVID-19 pandemic



During the COVID-19 pandemic several departments and businesses were affected, although as a student attending MCAST I did not feel at all that this pandemic was an issue.

The transition from one daily life cycle to another was straightforward, this being from going to College on a daily basis to participating in online lectures through my computer.

The migration of systems to platforms and the contact methods that were to be used during these times required a lot of thinking. It is also worth mentioning the lecturers' total dedication and responsibility. No lecturer ever missed a lecture and they all did their best to support the students through the difficult times and assisted them when necessary.

Lessons were delivered with the same effectiveness as is usual in class. I was impressed by the sheer commitment, helpfulness and dedication of our lecturers and also of our directors.

My positive experience during COVID-19

BY ZVETLANA BAJADA



Living through a pandemic was not an easy experience considering that many people, including myself, have lost their job. People were feeling more anxious and stressed every day due to the ongoing spread of the virus and due to the whole population having to adapt to the constantly changing regulations. Nevertheless, my experience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was, in fact, quite positive. I have managed to take the opportunity to stay at home due to social distancing regulations and have managed my time in a manner that enabled me to focus on my studies, my mental health and my family.

All lectures were successfully hosted online. This decision brought with it several advantages, some of which included lectures being recorded; thus students could easily refer back to a specific lecture in order to understand better a specific topic even during assignments. Because my only medium to do school-related work has become my computer, I have been able to manage my time better to work on my assignments. This advantage resulted in fewer distractions and less waste of time travelling from school to work. Lecturers were more present throughout the day since their means of communication was through their computer too. MCAST has opted for making use of Microsoft Teams which was a great tool to communicate, deliver lectures, record sessions and share files.

Making use of such great tools such as Microsoft Teams and Google Drive made the experience of having lectures online much better. Traffic and being late to class were not an issue anymore since my computer was available at all times and this was reflected in the students' performance and marks. I have noted that results for TCAs and home assignments showed a very good understanding of the subjects resulting in high average marks.

Considering that I did not have to commute to school and work every day, I have also been spending more responsibly. I have not been spending as much on fuel for my car as before the pandemic, and I have also not been spending on lunch every day as I started cooking my meals at home.

Nonetheless, just like other people who were under social distancing regulations, not being able to be physically present in an environment with other people, affected my mental health. The void of my classmates in my everyday life has been very stressful, although we made sure to keep contact every day through chats and video calls.

I can now appreciate the things that before I took for granted. I have learnt to manage my time better and to focus on my mental and physical health.

COVID-19 and its effects from the students' perspective

BY NATHANIEL PORTELLI



As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has now been with us for quite a number of months and it has affected lifestyles on a global scale. But how has this pandemic affected students' lifestyles and their method of learning? This article is about the students' perspective of the shift in learning methodologies.

The Shift in Learning Methods

The pandemic forced students and lecturers to shift the learning process into one in which students were no longer physically present at College. Online platforms were used for learning purposes, where students and lecturers were virtually present together at pre-defined times. Moreover, lectures were delivered and presented with the help of screen sharing functionality, which enabled lecturers to display the content on their screens for students' perusal.

The Challenges

There were multiple challenges which students and lecturers faced and still face during this pandemic. Firstly, both parties were unaware of the immediate shift and thus, the new methods had to be implemented immediately, unknowing of the end result. Secondly, during online lectures, the network quality challenge often presented itself, resulting in miscommunications or misunderstandings between students and lecturers. Finally, from the students' perspective, it was very hard to learn and study from the same place, whilst limiting the amount of time one could use to go outside, relax and have a break. These were all challenges that students

had to face, although there were some opportunities for improvement and to continue learning, no matter the circumstances.

The Opportunities

The shift in learning brought some challenges, however students and lecturers continued to work as a team together to achieve the main aim. Improvements were made as time went by, although no one thought that the shift would last until the end of the academic year. Nevertheless, all material was still covered by lecturers and assignments were completed in the same time frame as usual. Furthermore, these circumstances served to make us aware that we could still communicate and achieve together in spite of being unable to be physically present in the same place. Finally, going forward, this should be an opportunity to enhance our methods of teaching and learning by using online platforms to deliver and record lectures and thus, if an individual is unable to be physically present in class, content will not be missed.

Credits

From my point of view, I would like to thank all staff at MCAST who made it possible for us to continue learning during these hard times. In addition, the work carried out by MCAST personnel was outstanding in that they immediately shifted methodologies to proceed with delivering content and to be available to all students whenever required. May God be with us all during these hard times and I would like to take this opportunity to urge for safety and compliance with the authorities' rules.

Protocol for College Safety under COVID-19

UPDATE: 18.09.2020

Arriving at MCAST:

- If you have any COVID-related symptoms, stay home
- Temperature control is obligatory upon arrival on campus
- Clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water regularly
- Wear a mask/visor
- Cough or sneeze into your tissue or if not in your elbow
- Adequate social distancing is required (minimum 1.5m)



Teaching and Learning at MCAST:



- As many lectures as possible will be held on campus
- Online or face-to-face lectures, where needed use available platforms, primarily MS teams or as directed
- Priority must be given to face-to-face lectures
- Maximum efforts to be made to the retention of small groups/classes
- Wear a mask/visor during all in-house lectures, laboratory, workshop sessions, in the library, and on entering the canteen and any other building unless otherwise instructed

Working at MCAST:

- Depending on the size of the room, staff rooms should be reduced to a minimum number of educators, also considering a 2m distance, where possible.
- Use a roster basis when working in large groups
- Perspex shields are installed as necessary
- Meetings should be held online, where possible
- All measures directed by the Public Health Authorities apply

