



MCAST LINK

Issue 53 // Q2 2020

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FRONT COVER

MCAST Prospectus 2020-2021 designed by MCAST Creative Arts students on the cover page, the project represents the creativity of young talent in promoting the College for prospective learners.

3	Editor's Note
4	A new President for MCAST
4	More than meets the Eye
6	Interview with Hon. Dr. Owen Bonnici
14	MCAST adjusts during Covid-19
10	Webinars by the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) during COVID-19
12	MCAST Students in the Frontline of the COVID-19 Pandemic
14	MCAST explained
16	Colour the Future
18	Developing Vocational Identities at MCAST
20	MCAST's commitment to pedagogical excellence in FE and VET Contexts
22	Support Services for MCAST Students and Members of Staff
24	A quality culture at MCAST
26	Tourism and Hospitality courses at MCAST
28	Exploring Ghana
30	MCAST offering Nursing training opportunities to Third Country Nationals
32	EdTech at MCAST
34	Work-Based Learning
36	Corporate Social Responsibility at MCAST
38	MCAST ICA Festival 2020
40	International Experiences
44	MCAST Curriculum Department to develop Open Online Courses
45	Lab Week 2020
46	MCAST and FSWS sign MoU

MCAST Link

SPECIAL EDITION



Editorial

This Special Edition provides a snapshot of what MCAST is and what it stands for – a centre of excellence in vocational education and training. It includes articles on various important departments within MCAST that all contribute to the holistic learning experience of our students. The articles cover the new Corporate Social Responsibility programme, the Quality Assurance practices at MCAST, the College's successful Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning programmes, the International Office and the experiences it provides, the Support Services available to both students and members of staff, the Curriculum Department and MCAST's commitment to pedagogical excellence in FE and VET contexts. The new EdTech at MCAST is explored in this edition.

In an exclusive interview, Hon. Dr. Owen Bonnici, Minister for Education and Employment, gives us an insight into the government's priorities for vocational education and training, his view on digital literacy for VET and the implications of the fourth industrial revolution on vocational education amongst others.

This issue portrays how COVID-19 has forced us to reconsider how to deliver an engaging and holistic learning experience for our students. While COVID-19 presented its challenges, it was also an opportunity to create new, impactful, relevant models of learning making use of technology.

This edition presents the new College Prospectus 'Colour the Future', designed by our Creative Arts students. The Prospectus provides information on the College's courses for the new academic year 2020-2021 and includes information on the new courses in the areas of Robotics, Drone Technology, Automation, Aircraft Maintenance, Finance and Insurance, and Transportation and Logistics Management.

This year's Creative Arts festival, 'Blossom', has been cancelled due to COVID-19, yet it is featured in this issue where students' creativity and hard work are celebrated.

We hope you enjoy this Special Edition of MCASTLink.

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A New President for MCAST

Prof Ian Refalo

Prof. Refalo is a professor of public law and served for several years as Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Malta. He occupies the position of Ad Personam Jean Monnet Professor at the University of Malta.

He is highly regarded as an authority in administrative and public law and has practised as a lawyer for over 40 years. He has experience in various fields, notably those of human rights, civil law, commercial and administrative law, and he is a leading lawyer in a number of high-profile cases.

Prof. Refalo worked as a lawyer at the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice.

More than meets the Eye

Prof Joachim James Calleja
Principal and CEO

This special edition of MCASTlink is earmarked for a wider audience of readers who may or may not have experienced the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology. Set up by Public Deed in 2000, this year MCAST celebrates its first twenty years. Way back in 2001, when the College first opened its doors to students, the student population was in the region of 940. Today the College has grown into the largest public provider of vocational and professional qualifications with over 7,500 full-time and 4,800 part-time students.

The College web portal www.mcast.edu.mt provides a wide range of information on the activities of the College among which last month's launch of the new Prospectus for the next academic year by the Minister of Education and Employment, the Hon. Owen Bonnici. In 2020-2021 we offer over 191 programmes, of which 7 are new courses and 21 have been completely reviewed with the strong participation of industry in order to ensure relevancy in the teaching and learning environment to the dynamics of the workplace of Industry 4.0.

The College is in constant touch with the world of employment. New courses such as the Advanced Diploma in Robotics, Drone Technology, Automation and Artificial Intelligence and those in the areas of aircraft maintenance, finance and insurance, and transportation and logistics management show that MCAST is on the ball where new trends and technologies might lead to new employment or reskilling and upskilling of our workforce. We are constantly driven by the needs of industry as well as those that improve the quality of life of our citizens through better jobs and more career prospects. Special attention is

drawn to our corporate social responsibility, a value which the College has transformed into a compulsory learning experience for all students. Our Strategic Plan 2019-2021 opens with the concept of inclusion.

A vocational and professional College is not worth its salt unless it embraces the value of inclusion, giving every person the chance to climb up the ladder of development, independence and sustainability. Excellence is the second strategic direction that the College continuously aspires to achieve in all areas of learning and management. The third strategic concept that is shaping our programmes and the services we give to all students during their studies at MCAST is equity. The distribution of hardware to students during the COVID-19 period is only one out of many other examples where we ensure the well-being of our students and staff members.

While we are focusing on advanced technology and the changing nature of the workplace, we also ensure that students graduating from the College embrace the values of solidarity, commitment and love for their environment and their country. As a public funded institution we hold no barriers to learning. MCAST's Prospectus offers the widest possible range of qualifications any education institution can offer. In fact we are proud of those students who enrol in the College holding no qualifications and exit with a first degree. This is our moment of pride in any graduation ceremony.

Enrolling in one of the programmes at MCAST gives students the opportunity to experience many forms of work-based learning, in particular apprenticeship. Employers are our key stakeholders. They champion skills that are needed in industry but they also offer support to many of our programmes. Coming to MCAST means coming closer to workplaces, to innovation and to research that enables learners to explore the needs of industry and the community and propose actions that lead to a better quality of life, services and production. All programmes across the six main Institutes of the College offer different and exciting work and study experiences as can be seen from the different contributions to this special edition of MCASTlink.



Our course map (which is available online and at Local Councils and Maltapost branches) gives a comprehensive idea of how a student can progress from one level of qualification to another, find a career path and return to MCAST as an adult worker to improve skills and acquire new competences. This year's tagline for our new Prospectus Colour the Future sums up the spirit by which MCAST will re-open its doors when the Health Authorities are confident that social interaction is safe. After long weeks of social distancing we are keen to return to our lecture rooms, workshops and laboratories and continue to provide our young people with the future they deserve. Online learning has been a rewarding experience with several challenges that we feel that we have met. However, nothing substitutes human interaction.

I hope this magazine will give readers a taste of what MCAST stands for today. I also hope that it will entice more learners, especially those finishing secondary education, to continue their educational journey in vibrant and fulfilling learning and working environments.

A portrait of Hon. Dr. Owen Bonnici, Minister for Education & Employment. He is a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and blue tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

Interview with Hon. Dr. Owen Bonnici

Minister for Education & Employment

What will be your priorities for VET as Minister for Education and Employment?

As soon as Prime Minister Hon. Dr Robert Abela appointed me Minister of Education and Employment, I spelt out my key priorities for education among which is the need for education to serve as a platform for individuals to grow and be empowered with skills and competences to take on their working career. I have also stressed the need to enable teachers to work in an environment which is conducive to excellent working conditions. The VET sector is no exception to these priorities. As Minister of Education and Employment I intend to see our young learners and workers get their learning entitlement and be employable for as long as possible. It is everyone's duty to consider Malta's only asset, human capital, as an ongoing investment into education and training which is relevant to economic growth and active citizenship.

Will there be any capital projects in the pipeline for VET?

Successive governments have invested in MCAST's infrastructure. Since 2004, over €100m have been spent to ensure that our young people get the right education environment and teachers a place of work which supports their teaching and training. Last year the new Institute for Engineering and Transport was inaugurated by the Prime Minister and hopefully in early 2021 we will be able to give MCAST two new buildings: a new ICT Institute building and a state-of-the-art Resource Centre. Besides these investments through European and local funding, MCAST's capital budget has grown from just under €350,000 in 2017 to over €4m in 2020. My ambition is to enable MCAST to become a point of reference to education and training in the post-secondary and tertiary sectors.

How will you be promoting Digital Literacy for VET?

We all live in an age dominated by digital knowledge and application. Young generations have now grown into a digital culture since taking their first steps at home and informal schooling. Information and communication technology is a way of life. People communicate through their mobile phones, through apps and sites that provide knowledge, skills and competences anywhere and at any time. This silent revolution has had both positive and negative impacts on every sector in our life. Inevitably, all work environments are largely controlled by the ability of workers to master digital literacy. So it is my intention to continue supporting this development as early as possible in the education of every Maltese citizen. VET is now a focal point also in compulsory education through My Journey and therefore no efforts will be spared to ensure that all young learners can use digitalization as a means to sustain a better quality of life.

What are your views on supporting VET students to learn foreign languages?

One of the key features in an education journey today is mobility. The ERASMUS programme of the EU has helped millions of European citizens broaden their minds through learning or working experiences in foreign countries. It is therefore important that the teaching of languages in VET continues to attract the attention of our young generations. Although we are fortunate enough to have English as an official language, learning other languages is an added value when seeking working and learning experiences outside Malta. As a Ministry we will continue to encourage education institutions to support the teaching of foreign languages as part of their regular curriculum of studies. It is perhaps pertinent to recall the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein who said that "my world is my language and the limits of my world are the limits of my language."

Vocational education is an integral part of the national policy to address skills gaps in the Maltese labour market. How do you see MCAST's role in addressing this challenge?

I had the pleasure to visit MCAST in February to officially launch over 300 part-time courses in various sectors. These accredited courses aim at upskilling and reskilling our workforce or simply to enable people to engage in a hobby of their choice. Whatever the course and the objective behind it, MCAST is the ideal place

for lifelong learning. You may start at age sixteen and keep on learning at MCAST for the rest of your life. In an institution in which programmes are flexible enough to cater for an individual's time, capacity and resources, the College is today in the forefront to close skills gaps in industry and in sectors where foreign and local investments have and are still creating jobs. Besides these part-time courses, MCAST has also over 191 full-time programmes at all levels. The new prospectus of these programmes opens to our secondary school students many learning and working opportunities.

How important do you feel is innovative research and Artificial Intelligence?

As many are aware, last year MCAST embarked on two very important initiatives which can take the College to higher levels of excellence. The first is the setting up of a College-wide framework for research and innovation and the second, a policy for the use of artificial intelligence as a pedagogical tool across all training programmes. MCAST's draft AI policy is today part of the National AI Policy for Malta. Such developments are not only noteworthy but also visionary for MCAST. The use of applied research and AI in enhancing learning and in enabling employability for its thousands of students is a step in the right direction. With over 2,600 graduates at Bachelor's and Master's level, research has become really and truly an integral part of education and training at MCAST. Innovative (and applied) research, which is engaging more students and lecturers across the College, as well as the College's EU project promoting AI in lower qualifications, will add value to learning. Students choosing MCAST are guaranteed an education and training experience which will certainly attract employers to their skills.

What are the challenges VET faces, locally and internationally?

The success of VET both locally and internationally has been largely due to the direct commitment of employers in the process of learning. Employers in countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, Singapore, Hong Kong and most of the Scandinavian countries have made it their task to act as shareholders in vocational education and training. This mindset has been the platform not only for ongoing economic success in these countries but also for a change in the way people recognize VET. Statistically speaking, where VET is strong, youth unemployment is always kept low. Having parity of esteem in the award of qualifications from Colleges or Universities of Applied Sciences and traditional Universities is a formula for a country's enhanced quality of life. Over these last twenty years, VET in Malta has grown exponentially. Malta's recent success story in achieving full employment and becoming an attraction to foreign workers can only be sustained if we continue to invest in VET and make VET a natural choice for our students. Employers in Malta must play a shareholder's role in this approach. It is my Government's intention to continue investing in VET in secondary, post-secondary and tertiary sector. Investment in this sector is an investment in the future of our workforce and the sustainability of our achieved high quality of life.

What are the implications of the fourth industrial revolution on vocational education?

One of the key lessons learnt from the impact of the fourth industrial revolution on education has been that the world of employment and the world of education cannot exist independently. The link between the two is the bridge between learning and employability. Countries, including Malta, have valued this development by promoting forms of work-based learning and in particular apprenticeships. A country such as Switzerland generates more apprenticeship posts than the supply of learners/workers. In Malta MCAST generates over 1,450 apprenticeships from over 1,800 partnerships with employers. While this is significant, more needs to be done to create more apprenticeships. It is a person's experience at the workplace that defines his or her employability. The fourth industrial revolution has once more revalued the process of learning by doing. I am pleased to learn that MCAST has placed work-based learning as one of its strategic goals for the period 2019-2021. Work-based learning is an excellent tool to retain students in lifelong learning and engage lecturers in a continuous dialogue with industry and other work environments. Bridging the worlds of education and employment is the new paradigm shift in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences.



MCAST adjusts during Covid-19

With COVID-19 changing the educational landscape, MCAST management worked to reorganise towards an online solution that continued to deliver high-quality programmes.

Once the government announced the closure of schools on the 12 March 2020, the College and the Malta Union of Teachers discussed the best ways to reach out to the students and make sure that they continued to receive the same education online. After several meetings of consultation, a number of IT learning platforms were launched through which students could virtually interact with their lecturers and continue learning.

The MCAST web portal and the College's social media were constantly updated throughout these weeks with important circulars and other news items for all members of staff and students. The new Helpline 2398 7100 was created to act as a channel of communication to reach out to anyone who wished to communicate with MCAST. The College continued to provide student support services by reaching out to students and members of staff to ensure the well-being of the MCAST community. The Counselling and Support Services also offered assistance through contact numbers which were communicated to all students.

The College also provided extra support to students in order for them to be able to pursue their studies remotely. It distributed IT equipment to students in need of this support and thus enabled them to engage with their class and their lecturers and continue with their studies. Nathaniel Fenech, a Level 2 student at the MCAST Institute of ICT stated, "As soon as the announcement was made that all schools and educational institutions will be closing because of the COVID-19, I felt lost as to how I was going to follow the online lectures. Everything I was used to changed as it was hard for me to complete the academic year due to my lack of resources. I was then contacted by Mr Neil Zammit, my student mentor. He asked me whether I had any problems accessing the online lectures. As I explained my situation to him, I felt relieved that he understood me, encouraged me and offered me support. Following this, MCAST lent me a laptop with which I am able to continue my studies up to the end of the academic year. Today, I can say that I can follow my online lectures and carry on with my studies as intended."

In a letter to the MCAST community, Principal Joachim James Calleja announced: "We are confident that our lecturing staff and students will welcome these online learning measures as an opportunity to keep sharing knowledge and information. We all miss the vibrant campus life and in-person lectures. Yet, technology allows us to stay in touch. Our connected MCAST community matters in challenging times like this."

Webinars by the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) during COVID-19

**Dr Ronald Aquilina, Master's Programme Co-ordinator
at the Applied Research and Innovation Centre**

Following the closure of MCAST to reduce the spread of COVID-19, lecturers and students were requested to stay safe at home. The Deputy Principal for Applied Research and Innovation Centre communicated that meetings and any future lecture sessions were to be conducted on line using Microsoft Teams. Each lecturer was provided with the Microsoft Teams application which was subsequently installed in their respective laptops.

A webinar is an online meeting or presentation held via the Internet in real time. To put it simply, it is an online event, which connects individuals with viewers across the world. The main feature of live webinars is interactivity, or

the ability to discuss, send and receive information in real time. Features of the webinar comprise primarily sharing of videos and presentations, chats, desktop sharing and recording of the session. Webinars are convenient for both presenters and attendees. Webinars make holding lectures and meetings possible at any time and place. Anyone can participate in a webinar while staying at home.

Prior to COVID-19, ARIC was delivering regular lecturing sessions to MCAST lecturers pursuing the PgCert and the PGDip in Research Methods. Occasionally, Institutes such as the Institute for Business Management and Commerce also requested ARIC to provide specialised information sessions. During the COVID-19 partial lockdown, ARIC took the initiative to conduct a number of webinars on the use of MAXQDA 2020 to a number of teams, namely, IBMC lecturers, participants in the PgCert and the PGDip in Research Methods, and members of the Grounded Theory Research Hub.

MAXQDA, a world-leading software package for qualitative and mixed methods research, is MCAST's licensed research platform and tool for qualitative and mixed methods researchers. It is one of the most comprehensive programmes in the field of Data Analysis and is used by thousands of researchers worldwide for any type of qualitative research – including but not limited to grounded theory, literature reviews, qualitative text analysis, and mixed methods approaches.

Dr Alex Rizzo and Dr Ronald Aquilina were tasked to deliver these first sets of webinars. The paradigm shift to deliver a live lecture session in real time on the web rather than addressing a lecture physically in front of students posed a number of challenges. In particular, lecturers would have to prepare course material that is conducive to a live transmission, as well as simulate most of the live session. Lecturers have to become accustomed to face students in virtual mode and interact with them as much as possible. There is also the added benefit that a lecture session can be recorded so that students can refer to that session at their convenience.

Participants are enjoying these type of webinars. The number of positive comments at the end of each webinar is overwhelming. It seems that participants are not only managing to focus more on what is being delivered but are also interacting effectively by asking questions or seeking clarifications as if they were in a physical class. At the end of each webinar, the recorded session is uploaded onto Microsoft Teams, providing students the opportunity to access the recorded session at any time.

MCAST students in the Frontline of the COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Yanis Christopher Buttigieg
Advanced Diploma in Health Sciences

"I am proud to say that I have worked as a paramedic with a private ambulance company called Private Ambulance during the COVID-19 pandemic. My duties included responding to medical emergencies as well as COVID Response alongside Mater Dei's ambulance crews.

I started out as a Basic First Aider and made my way up the ranks, gaining a great amount of experience from simple bandaging to a vast majority of Advanced Life Support techniques. I also carried out my duties on a 12-14 hour shift while responding to 112 calls and helped those who also needed urgent care.

It hasn't been easy being away from home due to this pandemic. A message I would like to convey to my fellow students is that Malta is deemed as one of the best countries to be taking precautions. The WHO has also commended Malta for its efforts. Stay indoors, wash your hands frequently with soap and water, and do not forget to use hand sanitizer after using door handles and other surfaces used by many people."



Malissa Da Silva

ex MCAST student currently
working at Mater Dei Hospital

"I have successfully completed a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Health Sciences (Physiological Measurements) degree in 2018 at the MCAST Institute of Applied Sciences. I am now employed at Mater Dei Hospital as a Cardiac Technician. I have worked both at the Catheterisation Suite as well as at the Accident and Emergency Department for a year now.

My overall experience as a healthcare professional has been a very fulfilling and rewarding one so far, despite the difficult and challenging situation we are facing at present due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, my colleagues and I are exposed to various situations as we meet patients who might test positive to the virus. For this reason, many of us have decided to temporarily move out of our homes to prevent the possibility of spreading the disease to our family members."



MCAST explained

by Ms Edel Cassar, Director Strategy and Implementation

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology is a prominent player in the education arena in Malta and it is home to six vocational Institutes offering quality study programmes in distinct vocational sectors. Qualifications offered by the College start from a basic skills level, up to Master programmes for its 12,000 full-time and part-time learners. In keeping with its mission statement, MCAST seeks to mirror industry developments to ensure continued relevance of its courses in all sectors and at all levels. The College's obligation is not only to educate, but also to deliver a highly-trained workforce to meet industry needs.

MCAST is synonymous with work-based learning in various forms, in particular apprenticeships. The centrality of work-based learning permeates all study programmes offered by the College. For this reason, MCAST seeks to reach out to industry stakeholders to involve them in the education process. MCAST has already partnered with more than 1,700 employers in Malta. A milestone achievement in 2019 was the launch of six Degree Apprenticeship programmes in Biomedical Engineering, Construction Engineering, Software Development, Multimedia Software Development, Computer Systems and

Networks, and Fashion. Similarly, at Master level, MCAST focuses on delivering programmes in key sectors, such as Environmental Engineering, Water Resource Management, High Performance Buildings, Mechatronics, Product Design and Exercise and Sports Science.

The Arts and Social Sciences vocational sectors at the College have grown to include courses in Security, Enforcement and Protection, Sport Exercise and Health, Inclusive Education, and Performing Arts. On the other hand, the Technology and Applied Sciences arms have widened their portfolio of delivery to reflect the vibrant developments in the Maritime and Aviation sectors, and the Nursing profession and Health Sciences.

The Institute for the Creative Arts offers a growing portfolio of courses, ranging from Art and Design to Graphic Design and Interactive Media, Creative Media Production, Photography and Journalism, Fashion Design and Performing Arts as well as Cultural Heritage Skills. The Institute works closely with industry to provide students with realistic assignment briefs and experiences. On the other hand, the Institute of Business Management and Commerce offers courses ranging from Financial Services and Insurance to Marketing and Procurement. At the lower levels, courses are of a generic nature and offer a taster of different sectors. Across the spectrum of studies, course content becomes more specific, helping learners attain a better focus on their career path. The Institute of Community Services equips learners with the required holistic skills in Sports, Health and Social Care, Early Years, Beauty, Hairdressing, Inclusive Education, and Protection, Security and Enforcement. This Institute is equipped with a number of resources to enable this approach to learning, such as a fully-functional hair salon, a beauty salon and a care room.

At the Institute of Applied Sciences, learners are prepared for technological careers within the Health, Pharmaceutical, Environmental and Food and Beverage sectors. Students learn to appreciate the fundamental principles of science related to technological operations at the workplace, while developing the skills to work in laboratories, hospitals and farms, and with environmental technologies and methodologies. The Institute also caters for students that study Agriculture, Aquatics and Animal Sciences.

The Institute of Engineering and Transport is organised into a number of Centres and Departments to reflect different vocational sectors, namely: Aviation Maintenance and Training, Building and Construction, Electrical and Electronics, Mechanical Engineering and Maritime Studies. Learners interested in embarking on a career in these areas, can start off their studies at an entry level, progressing towards the achievement of prestigious exit level qualifications. The Institute of Information and Communication Technology is the natural choice for qualifications serving the ICT industry. The Institute offers various entry points to successfully obtain the required qualification with the possibility to continue furthering one's studies at higher levels. Qualifications focus on Networking, Software Development and Business Analytics.

To cater for our Gozo-based learners, the MCAST Gozo Campus offers a selection of full-time day courses ranging from MQF Levels 1 to 6 and covering a broad spectrum of vocational disciplines. Some of these programmes lead learners directly to employment, whilst others lead to higher level studies in Gozo and/or Malta. MCAST training programmes delivered at the Gozo Campus fulfil the same quality assurance standards that are applicable to the same programmes delivered at the respective Institutes in Malta, ensuring that Gozo-based students benefit from the same quality of service on their home ground.

Through its 'Gateway to Industry' arm, the College has been the catalyst for a wide variety of MCAST tailor-made and accredited level rated part-time courses. It is a leading provider of bespoke courses and insists on being a key partner in the development of employees at the place of work, by specifically upskilling employees to meet industry demands. The practical and hands-on method of teaching allows part-time learners to experience a different learning process which can be immediately applied to the place of work.

Studies have shown that employers are keen to see more transversal skills in their workforce. MCAST is creating a productive environment for students to develop their entrepreneurial, creative and innovative ideas and hone their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, as well as fostering their community spirit through CSR initiatives.

COLOUR THE FUTURE

The new MCAST Prospectus 2020-2021 addresses Industry needs



On May 6th 2020 MCAST launched its new Prospectus 2020-2021. This Prospectus includes 191 programmes of study, 7 of which are new. These 7 new courses, which have been created out of ongoing consultation with industry, include Robotics, Drone Technology, Automation, Aircraft Maintenance, Finance and Insurance, and Transportation and Logistics Management.

The Advanced Diploma in Robotics, Drone Technology, Automation and Artificial Intelligence is an example of how MCAST is taking full advantage of the opportunities created by advanced technology. The programme will include practical work that will guide students develop skills and gain knowledge of machine learning techniques. Through this vocational programme, the College aims to promote greater inclusivity in rewarding tech-based careers.

The MCAST publication is also refreshingly different. This is not a run-of-the-mill publication but one created and


designed with much passion by a group of photography and graphic design students together with their lecturers at the College's Institute for the Creative Arts. It features bold colours, vibrant photos and no less than 317 pages packed with choices.

Beyond its colourful design, the MCAST Prospectus is a reminder that the new normal needs to be one where opportunities and experiences for learners are created. This is a world where flexibility and adaptability are essential requirements.

Challenges faced by industry affect the role of higher education institutions and how they prepare students for the workforce. It is not just about meeting the needs of the sector but also about developing future proof student experiences. This is MCAST's approach in preparing its course offer for the 21st century.

Just like the design of the Prospectus was a live case-study for design students, all of the MCAST programmes offer real-life work experience. They provide students with an opportunity to work, train and interact with future colleagues. Over the past year, MCAST's Curriculum Office has worked on reviewing over 21 programmes in constant consultation with industry stakeholders to upgrade the quality of its courses.

The colourful design of the MCAST Prospectus is not just a design preference. It is an encouraging message in itself to all those currently reflecting on their learning needs and career choices for the future in uncertain times. This message to embark on learning experiences is well articulated in the MCAST's students chosen tagline Colour the Future.



Developing Vocational Identities at MCAST

by Dr Tatjana Chircop,
Deputy Principal,
Arts and Social Sciences (VPET)

As individuals, we all form various identities throughout our lives in various aspects and transitions of our lives. This is particularly true for adolescents and young people who are at a stage when they are forming career objectives, goals, aspirations and plans. Having a clear and secure understanding of one's career goals, abilities, educational interests and values, can be encompassed in what is called a vocational identity (Holland, Gottfredson, & Power, 1980). For adolescents and young people, vocational identity formation is a pivotal stage which symbolizes their attempts to actualize their emerging self-concepts while integrating past experiences to the world of work. Vocational identity, of course, develops throughout our lives and changes substantially for many individuals over the years, depending on age, experience, occupational development and the like.

Research shows that individuals with strong vocational identities have more confidence in career decision-making

processes and therefore will have more satisfaction related to their career goals. Vocational identity is a complex multidimensional developmental construct and can be perceived as having three domains: how an individual negotiates the world of work; how an individual relates on both a social and emotional level; how an individual behaves and lives experiences in which vocational identity is involved.

When young people transition from secondary education to post-secondary education, a career identity is already being formed and it is a time when for most, a vocational identity is starting to develop. When students enrol at MCAST, they are opting for a vocational education which is not only about knowledge and procedures but also about vocational identity being a key aspect as well as an outcome of such an education.

Transitioning from school to post-secondary education is a

challenge in itself, which many of the young people take into their stride. However, this transition can also be quite daunting for others. Leaving the familiarity of secondary school and starting a new experience in a post-secondary institution, making new friends, tackling new subjects, can be quite a challenge. For some students, this transition is a seamless one which they can take on board with little effort, while for others, this change can be accompanied by a myriad of emotions including excitement, expectations, but also fear. For many young people, this transition comes at a time when they are at their most vulnerable and need all the support they can get to settle in. This also comes at a time when self-doubt might set in, both academically and socially, when one's social status and social constructs, including identities, are challenged and possibly reshaped. This is all a very important part of growing up, of becoming a young adult with aspirations, career and employment prospects.

For a number of students, the transition to post-secondary education comes as a result of success in achieving desired results, while for others, it comes at a time of disappointment when grades aspired for might not have been achieved. MCAST is an institution where students are not only given the opportunity to study for their aspired career, but they are also given the possibility to start at any level for which they are eligible and progress gradually through the levels, gradually developing self-esteem and a strong sense of who they want to be.

This transition is also characterised by a new found freedom of choice. Students in a post-secondary institution are now presented with more everyday choices which help them grow into responsible citizens. The secondary school protected environment is replaced by an environment of choice which the students are expected to navigate through. Adulthood and employment are looming much more closely at this stage and students are given the opportunities to develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning.

As a post-secondary vocational college, MCAST is very much aware of the challenges which students face at this time in their lives. It is also aware of the need to provide opportunities and support to students to enable them to develop a strong vocational identity. Over the years the College has built strong services which support the students throughout their journey in developing within the three domains mentioned earlier, through the various challenges they face at this time.

Since 2018, MCAST, through the ESF 02.058 project entitled Adding Value: Nurturing Learning Journeys at the MCAST Foundation College, introduced the service of student mentors who follow students registered on study programmes up to

MQF Level 3. The role of a student mentor at MCAST is that of supporting students to gradually form and shape their own individual vocational identity. Student mentors support students during the transition period to post-secondary college by helping students familiarise themselves with MCAST and settle in during the first few weeks. Each student mentor follows a number of students, so that all students up to Level 3 are followed throughout the year by a student mentor. Currently MCAST has 23 student mentors across all Institutes including the Gozo Campus. The professional relationship between student mentors and students is built on trust, effective communication and mutual respect. The student mentor is there to support and guide the student on individual needs, entice the student's motivation, give emotional support, besides being a role model for the student. Depending on the needs of the student, the student mentor takes on different roles. At times the role could be that of a listener, a source of encouragement, someone to act as a sounding board to discuss options before important decisions are taken, someone to discuss aspirations and career prospects with. Mentoring is much more than passing on experiences. It is about empowering students to identify their own issues and goals and helping them find ways of resolving or reaching them. This is done by encouraging them to build on the positives and creating opportunities for the students to be able to resolve issues themselves.

Being a vocational college, MCAST courses are characterized by work-based learning and this is an opportunity for students to experience the world of work in the sector relevant to their area of studies. This is another transition which the students go through and an opportunity to confirm whether their future truly lies within their chosen sector. Moreover, this is a unique opportunity which empowers the students to negotiate past experience, their behaviour and the way they relate within the workplace, gradually enabling them to develop a strong vocational identity while being supported by professionals, including the student mentors, in negotiating a new world of work linked to their career aspirations.

The student mentors support the students' initial stages of vocational identity formation on various levels and at a very crucial time, so that the students are then able to keep on shaping their individual vocational identities throughout their lives. According to Skorikov and Vondracek (2011), vocational identity is believed to be a defining feature particularly in adolescents and young people and it appears to be the central element of identity of one's overall sense of identity. Thus post-secondary education is a very important step for young people and MCAST embraces the challenges that students face and turns them into supported opportunities for their growth.

Industry 4.0 and Pedagogy

MCAST's commitment to pedagogical excellence in FE and VET Contexts

by Dr Nadia Maria Vassallo,
Deputy Principal, Curriculum and Student Affairs



Traditionally, employees were often considered competent in the workplace when they were thought to have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to consistently perform a particular job or task well. Although this may have been true in the past, the notion of 'competency' has now acquired a new dimension, which not only relates to the knowledge one holds, but also to one's ability and initiative in seeking opportunities to develop adequate ongoing 'knowing' as to answer to the constant new on-the-job demands. Versatility and adaptability to working situations, which are constantly changing, are amongst the top transversal skills required of employees today (Economicgraph, 2017).

The need of ongoing 'knowing' must be mirrored in the educators who are also expected to remain not only abreast of changes in industry and in the world, but necessarily a step ahead to ensure that the learning processes they propose remain a relevant experience for the learners of today, who are the workforce of tomorrow. MCAST recognises this significant shift and, as a result, included as part of its strategic plan the



setting up of a Centre for Professional Development (CPD). The main objective of the CPD is the mission to equip VET educators, internally and externally, with the necessary qualities that ensure professional growth, as well as facilitate the holistic learning trajectories of individuals to meet the expectations of the future societal and labour market demands. That was the spirit in which the Master's in Vocational Education Applied Research 4.0 (MVEAR4.0) came to life, and that continues to be the spirit through which the MVEAR4.0 is being implemented.

MCAST pedagogy 2019 - An update

With the intention of changing cultures through the experiential engagement of participants in the Master itself, the design of the programme of study embraced the reality that lifelong learning has become central to the individual, and that new forms of pursuing one's learning path must be made available so as to provide the educators with updated and flexible learning opportunities. Hence the use of a blended learning approach focusing on an interactive strategy which combines online and face-to-face instruction in the form of weekend schools proved to be a winning formula offering the required accessibility and flexibility for 56 educators to engage and register for the Post Graduate Certificate in MVEAR4.0 in 2019. From that cohort, 50 participants (89%) have closed off the first year and achieved the PG Cert in MVEAR4.0, while 2 participants (4%) requested an extension and are continuing with the new cohort.

Truly, with a retention rate of 93%, MCAST takes pride in the success of this Master programme and its outcomes which include not only the professional empowerment of lecturing

staff and educators, but also the generation of a myriad of applied research studies in context that are creating new knowledge and informing VET pedagogy and policy. During the first year, over the 3 weekend schools, 132 applied research studies were generated tapping into all areas of VET education taking place within MCAST, the ITS and other institutions external to MCAST.

In February 2020, the CPD team welcomed the second cohort of 43 newly enrolled participants on the PG Cert, and another 15 participants who enrolled on the second year and are now reading for a Post Graduate Diploma in MVEAR4.0. The CPD team is constantly adopting an Action Research Attitude to make the feedback received an indispensable tool to continue improving the programme in process. This is an experience of professional growth for us all and the CPD team and the participants are mutually accompanying and stimulating one another throughout this experiential journey. An important outcome of this whole process is the opportunity of developing a stronger community of practice.

MCAST pedagogy - Upcoming in 2020-2021

In 2020, the College will be launching a new programme of studies intended for all individuals who are interested in embarking on a Vocational Education and Training teaching or mentoring career. The three-year full-time programme of study at Bachelor's level aims to provide practitioners or intending practitioners in Vocational Education and Training (VET) settings with the knowledge, skills and competences to work effectively, efficiently and confidently as professional teachers, supervisors, mentors, educational designers and agents of change in the fast changing reality of Industry 4.0. Participants on the programme will have the opportunity to build upon their existing disciplinary knowledge, while integrating it with the educational learning that is the core of the programme. It includes a balance between Vocational

Education and Training Pedagogies; Technical Specialised Area modules; Psychology, Sociology and Philosophy of Vocational Education and Training; Personal, Transversal and Professional Development; as well as Teaching and Industry Practice. The programme will be of particular interest to those who wish to mentor apprentices in real work environments.

It is important to point out that this Bachelor in Vocational Education and Training 4.0 is approved by the Council of the Teaching Profession, therefore learners who successfully complete this programme of studies shall be awarded a permanent warrant in terms of Article 24 of the Education Act after having successfully practised the teaching profession for a period of no less than two years in full-time employment.

2020 and beyond

The CPD is a dynamic centre and, in addition to the above, the next initiative in the pipeline is the setting up of a Hub for practitioners and researchers focusing on educational research in VET and beyond. The rationale behind this new initiative is:

1. to continue investing in the Community of Practice by creating a Home for Upcoming Researchers. This Hub will be the safe space where new researchers/practitioners can

discuss new ideas, seek assistance and support exploring international collaboration and funding;

2. to disseminate through conferences, symposia and workshops the research findings that are resulting from the MVEAR4.0, the eventual BVET4.0 and other individual research experiences taken up by professional colleagues at MCAST who delve into vocational and professional education and training.

Support Services for MCAST Students and Members of Staff



The Wellbeing Hub

The Wellbeing Hub consists of several services available for students as well as staff members. Most of the services offered take place through collaboration between MCAST and other entities. Below is a list of the services offered and the contact details for the respective service.

Addiction Related Issues

Drugs, alcohol, gambling and gaming addictions often have serious consequences on a person's life. Sedqa and MCAST are collaborating to offer individual and group prevention sessions to support students and members of staff who are facing such issues.

✉ substanceissues@mcast.edu.mt ☎ +356 2398 7188

Counselling and Therapy Services

Through the Counselling or Therapy services MCAST students and members of staff are provided with a space to explore options for problems that are causing distress or preventing positive life experiences. Having someone who is trained to listen and who is non-judgemental, can support students and members of staff in dealing with their issues in a safe and confidential space. Therapy services are offered at the Paola Campus and at all satellite Institutes.

✉ counsellors@mcast.edu.mt ☎ +356 2398 7188

Mental Health Services

To ensure the mental wellbeing of students and members of staff, the Wellbeing Hub is providing the services of psychiatrists, a psychiatric nurse and counsellors.

✉ counsellors@mcast.edu.mt ☎ +356 2398 7188

Nutritional Advice

The Wellbeing Hub teamed up with the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate to provide the service of a nutritionist to both students and members of staff. The nutritionist offers individual sessions and advice on improved food choices, nutritional facts, BMI as well as weight loss.

✉ nutrition@mcast.edu.mt ☎ +356 2398 7188

Tobacco Cessation Support

Through the Wellbeing Hub, the Health Promotion and Disease Directorate is giving students and staff the opportunity to benefit from free confidential individual smoking cessation services at the MCAST Main Campus. The tobacco cessation adviser will address smoking trends and help stop smoking in a planned manner for a better and healthier lifestyle.

✉ tobaccocessation@mcast.edu.mt ☎ +356 2398 7188

Sexual Health Services

The Wellbeing Hub provides discreet and confidential advice to students and staff about sexual health, treatment available, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, vaccines, as well as referral to the Genitourinary Clinic for testing. Group prevention sessions are also provided for students and staff with the aim of increasing awareness about such issues.

✉ sexualhealth@mcast.edu.mt ☎ +356 2398 7188

The MCAST Grievance Office

The main objective of the MCAST Grievance Office is to provide all MCAST full-time and part-time students and members of staff with structured support and a point of reference when they encounter situations involving disagreements, disputes or when they feel that they are not treated fairly. The Grievance Office seeks to support students and staff to be the major beneficiaries of a more harmonious and authentic community spirit.

MCAST students and staff may contact the Deputy Principal responsible for the Grievance Office on any one of the following contacts:

✉ anthony.saliba@mcast.edu.mt ☎ +356 2398 7105

A Quality Culture at MCAST

by Ing. Pierre Dalmas, Director Quality Assurance

Defining Quality Culture

The introduction of an effective and efficient quality culture is not easy to realise, especially since it is not always possible to agree on the definition of 'quality culture'.

It is however recognised that quality culture is characterised and influenced by two distinct elements: on the one hand, an element of personal beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality (hence, the individual) and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that are aimed to enhance quality and coordinating individual efforts (hence, the Institution) (EUA, 2006).

In the words of W. Edwards Deming, "Quality is everyone's responsibility". Our "individual culture" contributes to the MCAST quality culture - in one way or another, from one extent to another. The corollary to this is that the MCAST organisational culture is (also) a reflection of our individual cultures. Hence, the quality of teaching, learning, assessment

and student support at MCAST stems from the individual but also from a broader organisational culture perspective.

At an institutional level, MCAST provides a vision, mission, strategy, policy and planning with a clear reference to quality and quality culture. Indeed, the MCAST Strategic Plan 2019-2021 "Inclusion-Excellence-Equity" refers to "quality" and "culture" in twenty-six instances (MCAST, 2019).

It is therefore important that the MCAST Internal Quality Assurance policy does not (only) serve as a mechanistic or codified facilitator of "quality culture", but as a policy that addresses and facilitates the ownership of administrative and academic quality processes by all the stakeholders that collectively contribute to the student experience.

The Context

The discourse on quality culture also focuses on the context of the complexity and diversity of an organisation.

During the first External Quality Assurance (EQA) audit by

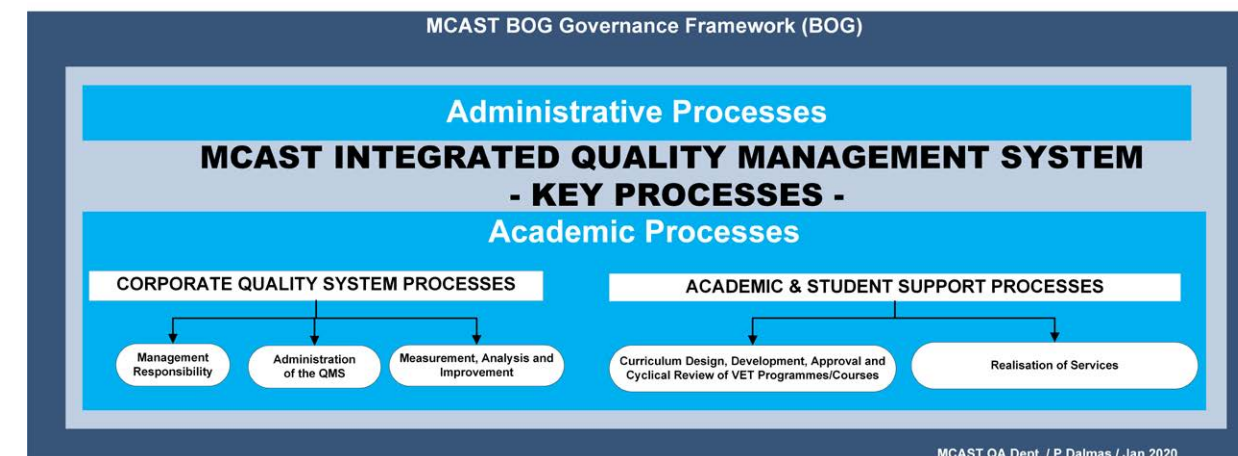


Figure 1 MCAST Integrated Quality Management System - Schematic illustrating the interaction between the MCAST Board of Governors Framework, Administrative and Academic domains

the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) at MCAST, the panel members remarked that they had never, in their long experience of conducting institutional accreditation, conducted an audit at an academic (or vocational) institution that was even close to the prevailing diversity at MCAST (NCFHE, 2015). The panel also included two foreign members from the German independent accreditation company ASIIN.

The horizontal diversity at MCAST is expressed in the educational mission that leads to a broad range of subjects covered in differently structured education offers from vocational certification courses from pre-MQF 1 to MQF 7 Levels, to continuous education training offers, as well as full and part-time solutions. The vertical diversity at MCAST is expressed in terms of the student population with regards to age and corresponding maturity, the sensitivity and complexity of special needs, preparation for the respective studies chosen, the entry and progression pathways and also the broad range of subject disciplines. All this demands a wide variety of lecturer reactions in terms of personal interaction styles, didactics and different qualification levels as well as other human and structural requirements.

Facilitating the MCAST Quality Culture

Such complex diversity at MCAST cannot be effectively and efficiently handled with a "one size fits all" approach when structuring quality management for MCAST, designing (quality) procedures and communicating with the different groups of stakeholders. Thus, the challenge of the MCAST (quality) management is to balance the need for coherent and rigorous internal processes all over the Institution producing comparable results, with the need to addressing and involving highly diverse internal stakeholders (mainly students, lecturers, support staff, management and the Board of Governors) and external stakeholders (mainly potential

employers of MCAST graduates).

The Quality Culture at MCAST marks a gradual but structured shift from the traditional periodic assessment of teaching, learning, assessment and support processes to the development of quality assurance implicitly in the day-to-day work of the Institution.

Sustaining the Quality Culture

Quality culture is the result of all the daily conversations and negotiations between the MCAST stakeholders. The various fora (Council of Institutes, Administrative Bureau, Board of Studies, Institute staff meetings and other) provide academics, students and management the opportunity to discuss and agree (explicitly or tacitly) about the "proper" way to do things. What emerges is an improved way of doing things at a higher level in the system which can feedback down to influence further development. These decisions are (need to be) captured in the integrated quality management system that now incorporates the key academic and administrative domains (Figure 1), thus creating a new plan, do, check and act cycle for continuous improvement.

I have tried to cover in this mini-article (within the entitled word count) the key characteristics and aspects of the quality culture at MCAST; however, there is much more to say or do. We are all privileged to be change agents within the MCAST "system". The best approach is, possibly, an ongoing cycle of building new and better connections and relationships so that the process of self and organisational improvement influences our quality culture, with the ultimate focus being student-centred learning.

If the MCAST quality culture is a culture in the making, then this culture must necessarily be a lived, learned experience moulded via a constructive and critical attitude that is focused on the need for student-centred teaching, learning, assessment and support.

Tourism and Hospitality courses at MCAST

In November 2018, MG2i (MCAST Gateway to Industry) launched an undergraduate Diploma in Hotel and Hospitality Management exclusively for international students. This was a first for MCAST. This bespoke Level 5 programme has grown from strength to strength since then. The first cohort of students graduated in December 2019 and the students in the second cohort have recently completed their studies. Who knows, maybe these shall be the very first MCAST students to graduate online rather than procrastinate and wait for COVID-19 to pass, which in all probability shall not be before September 2020.



Tourism and Hospitality Students attending the Mediterranean Forum, an annual event organized by the MHRA

It is pertinent to mention that since the launch, 5 cohorts, 125 students in total, have been following this undergraduate programme and earlier on this year, a new postgraduate programme was also launched. The Postgraduate Diploma in Tourism and Events Management is a Level 7 qualification in its own right leading to a Master's degree. At the moment there are 14 students following this programme.

When COVID-19 hit us in early March 2020, MG2i immediately embarked on shifting all modules online. Within one week all lectures were being delivered live online. All lecturers teaching on our programmes, were very receptive to the idea and although time-tables had to be changed completely, this did not deter us from weathering the storm and turning the situation into "riding the wave". Not only did we change the timing of delivery

but we also changed the lesson content in a manner to make it more contemporary and tackle issues which industry is facing today. Whilst the tourism and hospitality industry is at a standstill, we are challenging our students to think outside the box and come up with possible solutions as to how to get out of the present impasse. We strongly believe that every dark cloud has a silver lining and that after the storm comes a rainbow. Maybe the industry has temporarily suspended all activity. So are our lecture rooms on Campus. But the transfer of knowledge did not stop and we shall continue delivering and remain faithful to the MCAST mission: "To provide universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with an international dimension, responsive to the needs of the individual and the economy".

Exploring Ghana

by Stephen Vella, General Manager, MCAST Gateway to Industry



One of the main roles of the MCAST commercial arm, MCAST Gateway to Industry, is to explore possible collaborations with international institutions and to recruit international students, apart from offering part-time courses and bespoke courses to industry. During the past few years, MCAST was successful in signing MoUs with several distinguished international universities and the number of international students has now surpassed 800, which is equivalent to 12% of the total student population attending the College. MCAST strategic direction is presently being revisited in order to focus more on developing further our collaboration with other international institutions and to make provision to support the recruitment of international students



The visit to Ghana ventured on the same idea, that of exploring possibilities of collaboration with vocational training institutions and governmental institutions. Mr Philip Vella, Deputy Principal and Mr Stephen Vella, General Manager, MG2i, joined the Maltese delegation to Ghana organized by Trade Malta, led by the Minister for Economic Investment and Small Businesses, the Hon. Silvio Schembri, between the 2nd and 5th of March 2020. During this visit, MCAST representatives held meetings with the Ghana Education Trust Fund, the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority and the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

Another important meeting was with Prof Samuel Nii Odai, Vice Chancellor of Accra Technical University, and Faculty members. During the visit to Ghana, MCAST signed an MoU with Accra Technical University. Prof Samuel Nii Odai provided a brief introduction about Accra Technical University highlighting that the university follows the British educational framework and transitioned from a polytechnic school to a higher education facility offering Bachelor's degrees. Business and Management are the most popular courses at the university, however they are now looking into expanding and focusing more on STEM programmes. He believes that the partnership with MCAST could lead to greater collaboration between both institutions especially in offering possibilities to Ghanaian students to obtain an EU-recognized qualification, which will open possibilities to gain entrepreneurial skills and to further their studies in Ghana and also in Europe.

MCAST offering Nursing training opportunities to Third Country Nationals

The MCAST Undergraduate Certificate in Nursing programme, also known as the Nursing Bridging Programme, has been running at the Institute of Applied Science for the last 18 months and has already seen graduates who have subsequently found immediate employment on our island. The programme has been approved by the Council of Nurses and Midwives of Malta (CNM) and it enables qualified Nursing graduates from non-EU countries who do not meet the requirements for registration under Chapter 464 of the Laws of Malta, and in line with EU Directives 2005/36 and 2013/55, to upskill themselves to meet these requirements. This is achieved by bridging the knowledge gap, allowing the applicants to further their studies and practise in the necessary areas. Applicants are always encouraged to contact the Council prior to registering on the programme to ensure that their current qualifications and experience, together with successful completion of the Bridging course, are all that the candidates need to fulfil the registration requirements. The programme consists of a series of modules which the students follow over a number of weeks, along with a placement which gives the students the opportunity to work in areas which involve both the theoretical and the practical components of the course. Practical sessions are held in the Nursing Skills Centre allocated on the Paola Campus.

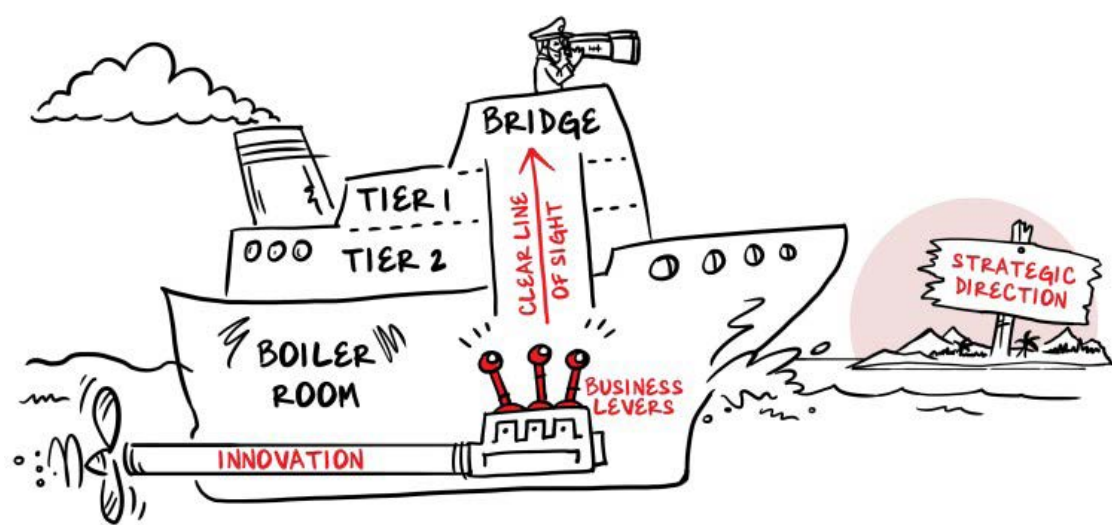
Students who have to date registered on this programme come mainly from India and Pakistan, and travel to Malta even though they may never have been out of their home country before, leaving behind them their loved ones, young and old, to achieve this qualification and subsequently have a better chance of finding employment as nurses within our local health sector or even beyond our shores.

To date, around forty students graduated from the MCAST Undergraduate Certificate in Nursing. The majority of these graduates are rendering their services in hospitals and old people's homes in Malta.

COMING SOON

EdTech at MCAST

by Dr Ing. Alex Rizzo, Deputy Principal, Research and Innovation

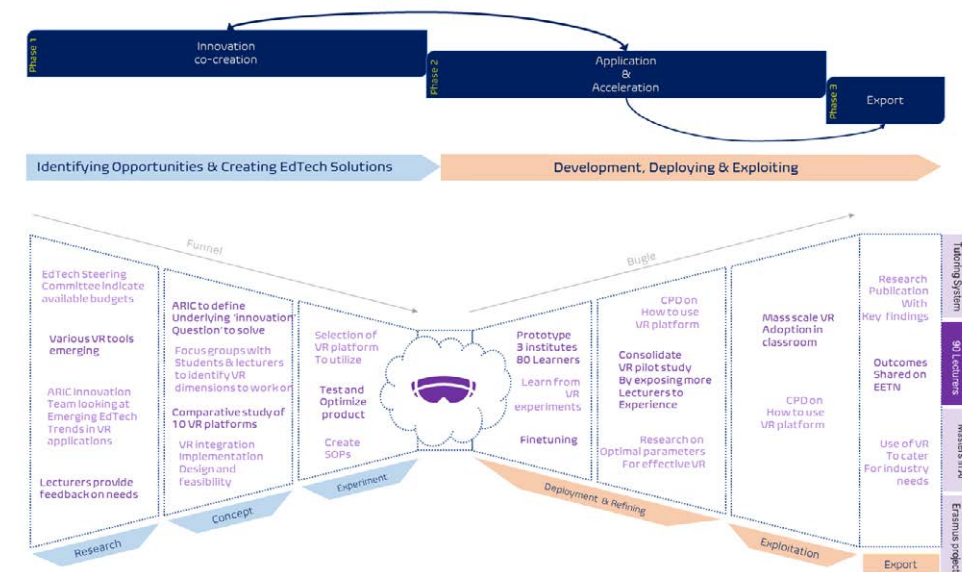


Education has remained broadly the same for decades. This scenario is gradually changing with the advancement of technologies that are being specifically developed for use in educational settings. EdTech encompasses all forms of technology - digital learning platforms, digital resources, software and hardware that are available for the modern learning environment. Most of these technologies tend to be perceived as disruptive in nature and have the potential to revolutionize education as we know it. As we pass into the Fourth Education Revolution, EdTech upgrades education with 21st century technological solutions.

The primary function of EdTech is to act as a support tool to meet the needs and demands of educational institutions in their teaching and day-to-day management. EdTech solutions can sustain and enhance communication, experiential learning, information management, curricula development, personalized learning, omni-synchronous learning amongst various

other functions.

Globally the education and learning technology ecosystem has grown rapidly. Investment in this sector is predicted to reach \$342B by 2025. This encouraging outlook is generating an upward spiralling effect in the development of innovative EdTech solutions.



Setting MCAST's vision for EdTech

The innovation model adopted by the MCAST Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) is one which sees innovation as a pivotal driver thus pushing MCAST closer to its strategic objectives. Innovation will support MCAST in its aim to enhance the student learning process and advance in new directions and with new methodologies.

EdTech is fundamental in reshaping MCAST's educational landscape to meet the demands of current and future learners. In tandem, it supports the organization across

its operations to reach a hybrid campus state in which online education is merged with offline education in an omni-synchronous mode of teaching and learning. The EdTech framework addresses MCAST's three overarching challenges: Retention, Progression and Automation. This framework contributes towards MCAST's Strategic Plan 2019-2021, specifically to the following directions, and implemented intelligently through a convergence-divergence methodology visualized above.

Visualization of the EdTech Adoption Process at MCAST

- Upgrade IT infrastructure to enhance the teaching and learning. (SD 01)
- Provide students with a richer experience that enables all our students to reach their full potential. (SD 02)
- Widen the availability of work-based learning to more students. (SD 03)
- Establish a leading Applied Research and Innovation Hub at College level providing expertise to other research teams within and outside the college system. (SD 07)
- Stimulate and develop applied research at College level leading to business development, transfer of knowledge and prototypes. (SD 08)

Potential areas of EdTech focus within MCAST

The following broad opportunities have been identified as focus:

- **Work-based learning** – providing robust digital work-based experiences through tools such as virtual and augmented reality.
- **Experiential learning** – supporting learning through enhanced experiences. Artificial intelligence will be used to customise and strengthen this learning experience.
- **Skills and Competences Development** – innovative EdTech solutions to address the lacuna in technological solutions for students' digital skills and competences development.
- **Teaching practices** – support access, inclusion and improved education outcomes.
- **EdTech development and teaching** – provision of select in-house solutions and a centre of excellence in EdTech programmes delivery.
- **Specific VET applications** – support very specific EdTech needs in VET e.g. bridge simulations (Maritime Simulator Training).

Work-Based Learning

by **Martin Borg, Director Work-Based Learning**

Work-based learning is at the heart of vocational and professional education and training. The mission statement of the College places a specific emphasis on the need to provide universally accessible education and training that is responsive to the needs of the individual and of the economy.

Over the past four years, significant milestones in the reform of Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning in Malta have been achieved. Following an extensive analysis carried out by CEDEFOP in 2014, MCAST has effectively steered an important reform that resulted into a significant increase of apprenticeships. The MCAST Work-Based Learning Department (WBL) has been restructured in order to effectively engage with local industry and simultaneously provide the necessary support to learners to carry out WBL while developing their competences throughout the learning process.

The facilitation between the world of education and the world of employment requires effective and efficient structures to be in place. Based on the principles of lean

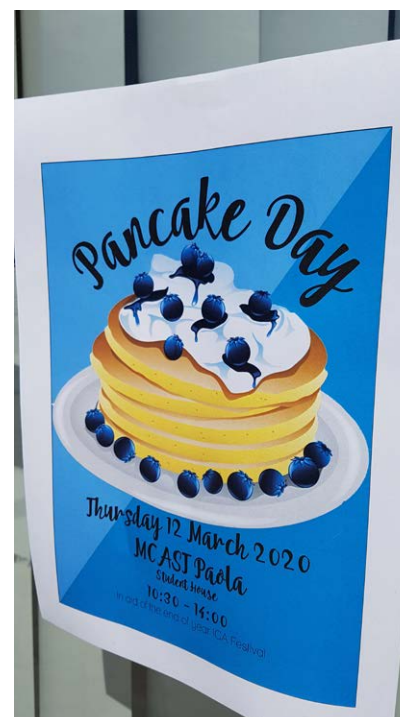
management, MCAST has managed to engage 1,800 industry partners across all fields of economic activity in Malta. Learning by doing is the main philosophical praxis of professional and vocational education. This is the main distinctive characteristic of VET Institutions.

With the development of an innovative project entitled Achieving Vocational Excellence through Enhanced Work-Based Learning, the Department is working towards a series of strategic action measures. One of the project deliverables includes the training of 400 trainers that will be guided to facilitate the learning process at the place of work. This will be conducted by primarily building up the human capital of key experts, who in return will develop and implement a train the trainer accredited programme.

Corporate Social Responsibility at MCAST

by Mr Richard Curmi, Director Corporate Social Responsibility

Student life is not only about obtaining grades and passing examinations. It is much more than that. Students need to be socially responsible and learn how to be involved, committed and serve society.



NGOS in their daily work by caring for abandoned animals, among others. Furthermore, students have also come up with ideas of their own to help their fellow students or the community. There are plans to embark on various CSR projects both within MCAST and also within the local community. The MCAST CSR and Events Department is working closely with various organisations on different projects to help its student and staff population better understand the importance of giving something back to society.

Apart from the benefits already mentioned, the MCAST CSR programme has provided a framework for all MCAST learners to have the knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal settings recognised and accredited.

In February 2019, the College launched its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme with the aim of providing MCAST learners the opportunity to enhance their studies with life-enriching experiences that add value to their holistic knowledge base.

The main objectives of the CSR programme are to equip MCAST

students with the necessary skills, attitudes and values in order to engage in meaningful social relations and actively contribute to enhanced social well-being. In this context, MCAST CSR contributes towards the fostering of a responsible and active citizenship.

As of academic year 2019-2020, the implementation of the CSR initiative

has primarily encouraged personal development among students at MCAST while having a positive impact in the local community. The initiative has enhanced relationships with the CSR partners, in supporting public value outcomes. As part of their training programme, all MCAST students have the opportunity to carry out community work at either non-governmental organisations or

sports associations, care homes for the elderly, and local councils.

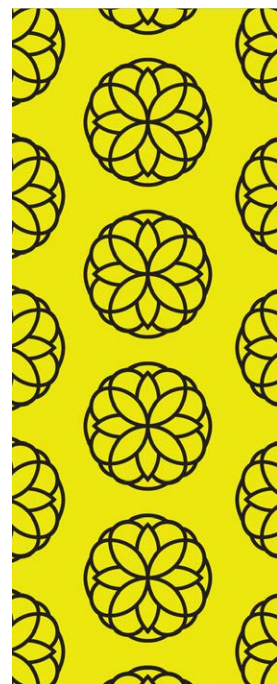
Learners participating in the MCAST CSR programme can enhance their educational experience during their study period at MCAST through a diverse range of opportunities provided by the College in collaboration with interested stakeholders. MCAST students have

so far had the opportunity to carry out community work in various areas such as the environment, culture, education, sports and social care, among others. The activities have been various and include administration work, coaching in different sport disciplines, helping out in homes for children and the elderly, maintaining websites and social media platforms, and helping

MCAST CSR training initiative has gone beyond broadcasting a message of awareness. It has become a platform where the MCAST population has taken action. The initiative has helped in changing students' mindset through the activities they conduct. It has made them aware that if they want to grow in life, being a responsible citizen is a must.

MCAST ICA FESTIVAL 2020

BLOSSOM



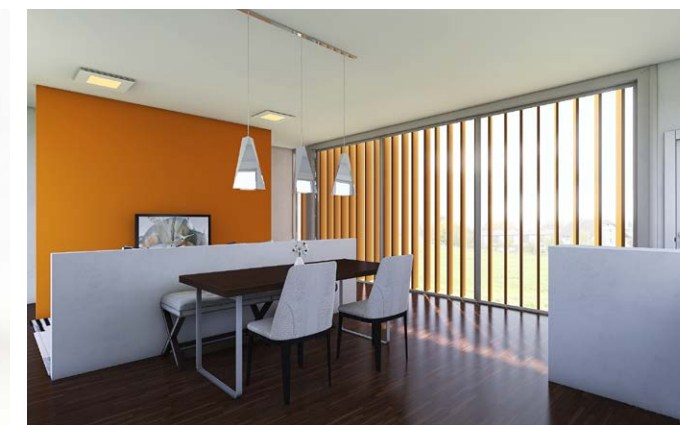
Every year, the staff and students of MCAST's Institute for the Creative Arts look forward to celebrating students' achievements and connecting with the local and international creative community at the ICA Festival. But, due to COVID-19 concerns and restrictions, we have had to cancel the 2020 edition of the event.

This was a tough call to make as it is an important event for the Institute and especially the students. As creative practitioners, we must not produce our work in a vacuum, and the ICA festival is a valuable opportunity to showcase our work and engage with audiences, effectively bridging the gap between education and industry. Without such platforms, our growth as creatives may stagnate.

Growth was actually set as the central theme for this ICA Festival's brand, BLOSSOM. Featuring an underground aesthetic influenced by contemporary graphic design trends, the brand's imagery included several references to flowering plants, a widely acknowledged and accepted symbol for growth.

But aside from the more overt references to this theme in the brand's name and logo, BLOSSOM would have placed emphasis on the students' growth as creative practitioners, shaped by their tutors and role models, together with invaluable work-based learning experiences supported by industry partners.

In addition to showcasing how our students have developed, we also wanted to help our audience grow. Much of the content we planned to produce and later release was aimed at sharing the knowledge and skills of students and ICA alumni from a variety of creative fields taught at the Institute. This would have included creative media productions, cultural heritage, fine arts, fashion



and retail, game art, graphic design, interactive media, journalism, product and spatial design, photography and the performing arts. Such sharing would have also engaged prospective students interested in embarking on studies leading to a career in one of these many areas.

Unfortunately, this simply was not meant to be.

Nevertheless, we would still like to thank Spazju Kreattiv and the Malta Arts Council for their invaluable support. Without the

help of such organisations, the event would not be possible, neither would much of the learning associated with it.

In place of a physical exhibition, we have decided to produce a catalogue so that the excellent work produced by a number of our students may still be shared with our community and audiences.

The ICA Festival 2020 Catalogue is available on the ICA Festival Facebook and Instagram pages.



International Experiences

The EU has declared that studying or working abroad is a fundamental experience for youth who seek employment in the international market. Studying abroad significantly improves students' prospective employment possibilities and enables them to experience a foreign culture, while gaining vital soft skills such as working independently in a multicultural environment and networking.



Angele Aquilina studied at Opole University in Poland. She stated: "I can confidently say that it was the best experience of my life. The fact that we had five months together living alone in an apartment on the other side of Europe, was an adventure in itself! This experience has made me grow into a different and better person."



Gabriela Todorova, who spent a semester studying at the Latvian University of Life Sciences and Technologies, also thinks it "was the best experience of [her] life." Besides admiring Latvian food, culture and architecture, Gabriela travelled to seven other countries during her mobility. She also had the opportunity to visit natural parks, museums and other Latvian cities, and to go skateboarding, clubbing, shooting and also play paintball. Gabriela said that, "Erasmus + programmes are not to be missed and are a great opportunity for anyone who wants to experience new ways of studying, new cultures and make friends with people from all over the world."



An Experience in a Kindergarten

Wendy Ciantar, a second year MCAST student reading for a Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in Early Years, carried out an eight-week Erasmus+ mobility course placement in Vaasa, Finland.

Wendy was placed in a kindergarten working with kids aged 3 to 6 years. She was highly impressed by the warm welcome and by the high quality standards in the way the kindergarten operates. She appreciated the differences in how the Finn kindergartens operate in comparison to those in Malta. She also admired how the Finns teach their kids to be independent at such a young age.

"The carers, and especially the manager, were very open about the curriculum and asked me questions about our methods of teaching in Malta. They even decided to apply some of our methods to their everyday teaching. I observed that children are not at all pressured into schooling. They spend most of their day, either free playing or outside. When the children are outside they are left free. They used the

swings, the slide, and played in the slope when it was full of snow. Even though they are small, the children are very careful because they are extremely independent. They know how to dress themselves, drink from a proper glass, as well as use a metal fork and knife.

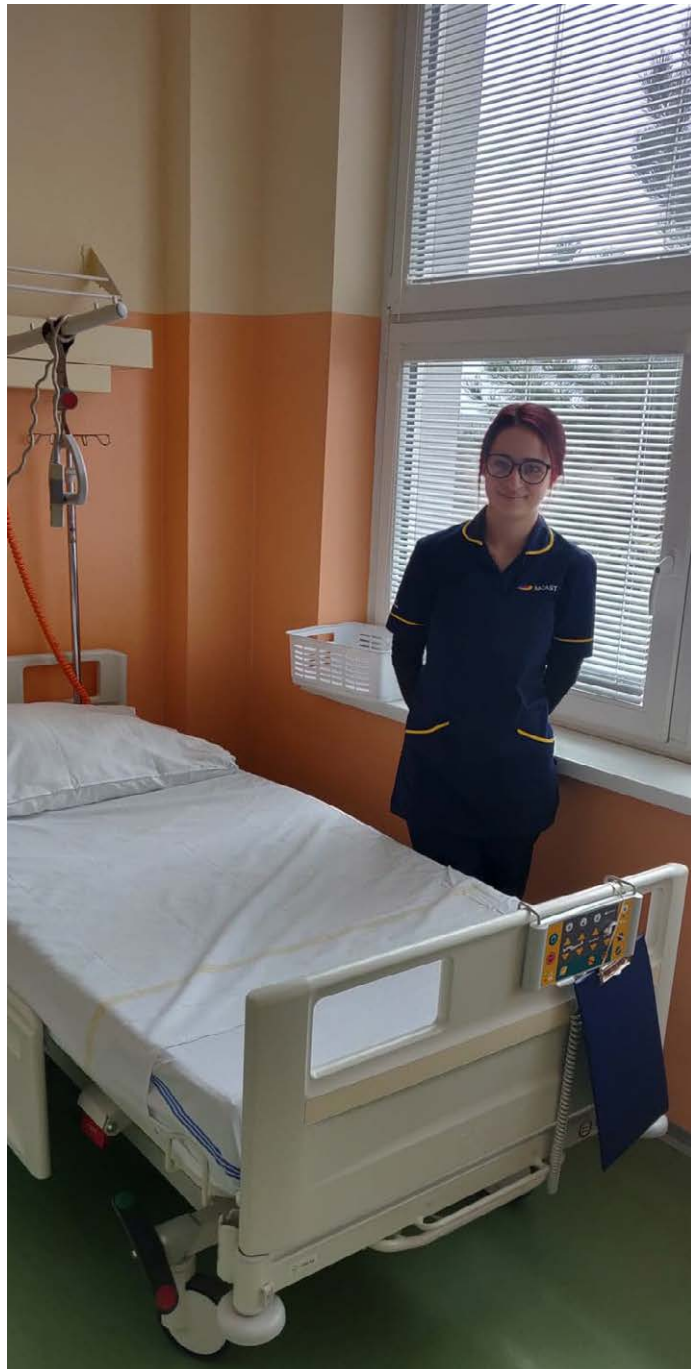
I also observed that the children are left free to decide whether to participate in activities or not. If the children are doing a craft, and one child is unwilling to participate, they are not made to do the craft, and are simply left to free play around the room.

The children are allowed to play with very small toys and even electrical sockets are reachable and not covered. Children are just taught not to touch them or to put toys in their mouths, and they are mature enough not to do so."

Wendy said that she loved this experience and stated that it has strengthened her interpersonal and employability skills. This will be beneficial in her future profession.



An Experience in the Health Care Sector



Rezmanelle Fenech during her Erasmus+ mobility course placement in the Czech Republic.

Rezmanelle Fenech is a second year student currently reading for an Advanced Diploma in Health Sciences at MCAST. In February 2020 Rezmanelle participated in a three-week Erasmus+ mobility course placement in the Czech Republic.

During these three weeks Rezmanelle was placed in three different locations in order to gain as much exposure as possible in the health care settings. She was first placed at the local hospital. Here she was introduced to two different departments, Urology and Internal Medicine. Even though these two departments are in the same hospital, they had a different daily routine. In this hospital she got the chance to remove cannulas from patients as well as supporting with the preparation and administration of antibiotics. Rezmanelle added, "Erasmus was an all positive experience for me and I would totally recommend students who are thinking this over, to just go for it."

Rezmanelle also got the chance to work at the local hospice where she mostly looked after the patients' daily needs such as hygiene and meals, while her last placement location was at a children's institute. The children's age range varied from newborn to three years of age. Here she took the children out for walks and played with them inside. She even had the chance to feed and bathe some of them. The nurse at the institute also showed her how to administer some medications to the children.

This mobility was made possible through an agreement that exists between MCAST and VOŠ, a vocational college in Most, Czech Republic. It was funded through the Erasmus+ project: Incrementing the Expertise of VET Learners and Educators.

A Sewing Experience in the Wedding Industry



Jazmyn El-Gadi Pace at Pronovias workshop in Cáceres, Spain.

Jazmyn El-Gadi Pace is a student that successfully completed the Advanced Diploma in Fashion and Retail at the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts. Jazmyn carried out her Erasmus+ mobility programme in Cáceres, Spain. Once her colleagues noticed that Jazmyn was becoming more confident in her work, she was allowed to hand sew the inside of the dresses, by using the blind stitch method. She was also allowed to do beading, which was her favourite part. Sometimes she had to remove lace from items which were not sold. This is because the lace could be reused on other dresses, and the material left would be used for testing the machinery.

Jazmyn worked in the workshop of a wedding dress retail outlet named Pronovias. During

her mobility she learnt that at Pronovias all the seamstresses were also sales assistants and their job was also to fix the dresses to make them perfect for the client.

"This has been an amazing experience. I have met new people, learnt the basics of a new language and gained new skills. I thank my colleagues at Pronovias for this wonderful experience and for all the new skills they taught me. This will help me a lot in the future," stated Jazmyn.

This mobility was made possible through an agreement that exists between the MCAST and Universidad Laboral in Spain. It was funded through the Erasmus+ Project: Vocational Education and Training into the Future.



MCAST Curriculum Department to develop Open Online Courses



Staff from the Curriculum Department during the 1st transnational meeting of the Erasmus+ OPENSEL project held in Budapest, Hungary

The MCAST Curriculum Department is constantly on the lookout to participate in Erasmus+ projects which can make a difference in the students' learning experience.

MCAST started working on the OPENSEL project which aims to develop Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on Presentation Skills, Teamwork and Stress Management. The themes of the MOOCs were chosen following feedback received from employers who identified the lack of important transversal skills as a key issue, even though recruits may have completed further or higher education. Once developed, these MOOCs will be available to students attending the partner organisations of the project, as well as to the general public.

Members of staff within the Curriculum Department attended a transnational meeting and a training event in Budapest, Hungary. Both activities were hosted by Obuda

University.

In the coming months MCAST will be taking the lead for the development of the first MOOC on Presentation Skills. The first stage is to conduct a research study whereby literature on presentation skills will be reviewed and students, staff and experts will be interviewed on the challenges faced. Following the analysis of the data collected, MCAST will be developing engaging material for the MOOC. Partner organisations will provide feedback along the way to ensure that the outcome is of high quality.

MCAST Partners on this project include Obuda University and KEPES Foundation from Hungary, and VISTA College from the Netherlands.

Lab Week 2020



MCAST academic members of staff, Christopher Gauci, Ing. David Mifsud, Dorothy Gauci, Elaine Zarb Giorgio and Vanessa Titley, have recently participated in an Erasmus+ Mobility programme at Esslingen University of Applied Sciences in Germany. They attended International Lab Week from 2nd March till 6th March 2020.

They were provided a set programme prior to their mobility. The common objective gathered through feedback had all to do with the individual's CPD, pedagogy skills and the holistic nature of such an experience.

"I noticed the use of simulation software and automation to test plumbing systems and fuel cell systems." – Dorothy Gauci

"The programme included workshops, company visits, an intercultural learning experience, the possibility for networking, an exchange of know-how and best practices, and a social and cultural programme." – Vanessa Titley

"Educators from different higher educational institutions met from all over the world and we shared teaching ideas and networked accordingly. This has opened up multiple possibilities for future collaboration between the various institutions as well as given an

increased impetus to suggest that a Lab Week event might be organised by the International Office at MCAST in the future." – Ing. David Mifsud

"We participated in a number of activities mainly, drinking water hygiene and heat transfer, metal forming technology and laser material processing, hydrogen, fuel cells and new mobility." – Elaine Zarb Giorgio

"The main highlights of this mobility were the tours. We visited Audi in Neckarsulm, Porsche in Stuttgart, Mahle in Stuttgart and the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart." – Chris Gauci

This mobility was a very successful and fruitful one. Members of staff are encouraged to apply for Erasmus+ mobilities in order to experience similar great opportunities.

Esslingen University of Applied Sciences is a partner institution with MCAST.

MCAST and FSWS sign a MoU aimed at facilitating the education progress of vulnerable young people

MCAST and the Foundation of Social Welfare Standards signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the College's premises in Paola on the 30th January 2020.

The purpose of this memorandum is to develop and strengthen their collaborative relationship to develop the improved well-being of young persons, aged between 16 and 25, at high risk of social exclusion. The FSWS's remit is to provide social welfare services, in particular in relation to alcohol and substance abuse and in relation to other social welfare problems prevalent in the country, especially those related to family welfare; to further and promote social and related studies and scholarship, through research, publications and education; to collaborate with other similar entities, especially, though not exclusively, on a regional and international basis.

The collaboration envisaged through this memorandum is intended to facilitate the assistance and guidance provided to young people within the Opportunity Knocks (OK) project, the Embark for Life (E4L) Adolescent Day

Programme (ADP) and other similar initiatives/services undertaken by FSWS. This collaboration includes access to MCAST's educational and professional programmes, thus ensuring their inclusion and possibility to success in life. MCAST will integrate the referred cohort into courses which it runs on a full-time and part-time basis while FSWS will maintain its commitment to follow up and ensure full compliance with MCAST procedures and requirements.

MCAST Principal and CEO, Prof Joachim James Calleja welcomed this partnership with FSWS. Prof Calleja outlined the strategic direction of the College and the centrality of broadening the local partner network with key stakeholders. He also referred to the continued efforts to reinforce the image and build the esteem of vocational education and training, even by bringing to the forefront the achievements and success stories

of its alumni. The College works to make more visible the alternative learning pedagogies that it adopts, the resources and the progression routes which it makes available to all students.

Mr Alfred Grixti, CEO of FSWS, reiterated the need for networking specifically focused upon the myriad of requirements of vulnerable young people to succeed in life. Whilst the provision of education and training is pivotal for such a cohort, there are other basic needs and services that are required. Mr Grixti enlisted the various services the Foundation offers to ensure that a holistic approach supports young people at risk of social exclusion to integrate fully. He also confirmed the need that major stakeholders closely collaborate and support each other's initiatives in line with government policies and direction. This will ensure networking and operational complementarity with higher probability of reaching collective targets.



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