

# MCAST LINK

Issue 56 // Q1 2021



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## FRONT COVER

*MCAST opens applications for engineering graduates seeking a warrant. From left Prof Joachim James Calleja, MCAST Principal and CEO; Ing Stephen Sammut, Director MCAST Institute of Engineering and Transport; Hon. Dr Justyne Caruana Minister for Education and Hon Dr Ian Borg, Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects.*

*Photo by Jonathan Borg*

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# Editorial

**Welcome** to another edition of MCASTlink which showcases the main activities and events that took place during the last few months within the College. Even though we are still in a pandemic the College has kept alive and active and kept on creating opportunities out of the many challenges we are all facing.

This edition proudly presents a major milestone and achievement for the College – namely the Engineering warrant that the MCAST Engineering graduates will now be able to receive. Thanks to the negotiations and discussions Engineering graduates would be able to apply for the warrant once they have successfully completed the Pre-Warrant Qualification Course (PWQC).

An interesting read on Entrepreneurship and the importance that MCAST gives to this area can be found inside the magazine. At MCAST, Entrepreneurship education is more than an academic subject as MCAST students and alumni are provided with the opportunity to transform their innovative ideas into profitable business ventures whilst being fully supported by the MCAST Entrepreneurship Centre (MEC).

Throughout the past two years MCAST has invested heavily in Research and is now seeing the results of this investment through the number of applied research studies currently undertaken by MCAST lecturers in various areas and disciplines. In December the College hosted the Research Expo through an innovative 3D virtual Expo environment whereby over two hundred fifty researchers and guests gathered within a virtual environment to discuss research.

Samira Cini presents her personal experience in an interesting article on her transition from a nursing student at MCAST to a graduate nurse working in a hospital. She carefully describes the challenges that crop up in the transition and how the MCAST Nursing course prepared her for them and more.

The College conducted a tracer study that yielded some interesting points, such as that the highest percentage of graduates in full-time employment hail from the MCAST Institutes of Engineering and Transport, ICT and Business and Management. More statistics and information about the tracer study results can be found inside the magazine.

We hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to further contributions from students and members of staff.

**We wish you a peaceful Easter and a well-deserved break!**

MCASTlink is produced by the  
MCAST Communications and PR Office

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# Message from the Principal

Prof Joachim James Calleja

**During** these difficult months, the challenges posed by the pandemic have been turned into opportunities by MCAST. A quick look at the activities reported in this edition show that the College has moved on with resilience, commitment and a forward-looking mentality. The launching of the Pre-Warrant Qualification Course by Ministers Justyne Caruana and Ian Borg is the result of years of negotiations, fine-tuning of the programmes of study and interaction with foreign reviewers to ensure that all students have now access to the engineering warranting process. The Research Expo organised in December is a good example of change and innovation in times of uncertainty. The Expo, a first of its kind in Malta, showed the leap of quality that MCAST has registered with over a hundred lecturers from all six Institutes engaged in 400 hours of research per week. This is a remarkable achievement considering that research has been formally organised across the College since Q1, 2019.

A further achievement which merits recognition is the results of the Tracer Study covering MCAST graduates in 2019. The study shows that over 90% of our graduates find jobs directly related to their education and training at MCAST. This shows the attention given by all managers and lecturers to the relevance of qualifications at the College. Our growing relationship with industry is yielding tangible results. The fact that industry has pledged even during these tough times, over 600 new apprenticeships is a sign of confidence in MCAST's work.



Finally, I am looking forward to the opening in summer of our state-of-the-art Resource Centre with an expenditure of over EUR7m. Our plans are to transform this building into a resource not just for students and staff of the College but for the Community 24/7. It is our determination to move the College from a strictly learning environment for enrolled students to a Community College which serves the larger segment of our population who may or may not belong to any formal learning environment. As tax payers, they ought to benefit

from the services that the College offers. A case in point is the setting up of the vaccination centre at MCAST which should serve the community of the south. We are also aiming at transforming the Mediterranean Garden now linked with a bridge to MCAST into a hub of activities for the Community which include a sport centre, a farm and a retail shop with products that the College produces through our students and staff members.

Over these last few weeks, colleagues have also been engaged in a consultation process to plan the next strategic goals for the years 2022-2027. These are challenging times for all but it also the time to have foresight and enable students and staff members to rise above conventional teaching and learning and look at other more attractive and innovative methods. In my view, COVID19 will end the medieval classroom set-up as we know it today. Young people will only be engaged in a learning process if theory is met with real or remote practice, relevancy to specific work environments and engagement with employers and workers. A College such as MCAST will have the chance to reach a potential wider spectrum of learners in the community. Mothers and others who do not work; the young elderly, people who wish to engage in a hobby or make their free-time more meaningful, re-skilling of workers, better use of technology and a million other opportunities. And this is not really in the future! As a result of COVID19, the future is tomorrow. A World Economic Forum report (2021) revealed that 50% of all employees will need reskilling in four years' time as adoption of technology increases and that the new soft skills will include leadership skills, critical thinking, resilience, active learning and analytical thinking among others.

Education has often been seen as a sector anchored to its traditions. Social distancing has made many realise that time and mobility are essential alternatives that can make or break organisations. Using time and mobility wisely can generate dividends beyond one's imagination. MCAST must take this opportunity of re-thinking its strategic goals for the next seven years by infusing in its systems, the infrastructure that technology provides and the structures that enable one-to-one interaction and be more meaningful for students and lecturing staff members in particular. Automation should also be looked into very carefully to free employees from sterile routine work and give them the opportunity for more creative thinking and efficiency in achieving their outputs.

My hopes are high for the immediate and long-term future of this College. When all staff members will be vaccinated, it is my wish to see the College get back to normal post-COVID as early as possible. We might need to revise protocols and new ways of interacting but management will leave no stone unturned to fulfil the wish of many students and lecturing staff who eagerly want to return to the library, to the lecture rooms, the canteen, to laboratories and workshops and to their work-places.

We are living abnormal times at the College. Every morning I see a buzzing construction site with tens of workers building MCAST's new buildings. Security and support service workers unflinching undertake their duties regularly and diligently keeping our campus, secure, safe and clean. Yet we strongly feel the absence of our key clients, the students. I can't wait to see the campus again with staff and students giving life to an area designed for interaction and learning.



**Interview with  
Hon. Dr Justyne Caruana**

**Minister for Education**

## What is your overall outlook on education in these challenging times of COVID-19?

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated immense disruption in various education systems. It has been incredibly disruptive to work-based learning programmes, including apprenticeships. While this presents serious challenges for VET teachers, trainers and learners alike, this could also result in more robust and more resilient VET systems if the right choices are made today. These times are making us push towards adopting new systems and technology innovations that will expand online learning and distance or alternative assessments.

Every decision we take carries enormous social and economic implications and will have lasting effects on educators, on children and youth, on their parents – especially women – and indeed on societies as a whole. We should seize the opportunity to find new ways to address the learning crisis and bring about a set of solutions.

As Education Minister, I fondly believe in primarily doubling our efforts to address learning losses and prevent drop outs, particularly of marginalized groups. We also need to offer employability skills, support the teaching profession and teachers' readiness, expand the definition of the right to education to include removing barriers to connectivity, strengthen data and ultimately improve the quality of learning across all levels of education and training.

## What are your priorities in VPET as Minister for Education?

Acting as Minister for Education in a post-COVID era is an unprecedented experience and therefore I cannot rely on past approaches. Now more than ever, my main priority in education is to ensure quality education at all levels, especially since we have now moved towards a more blended approach to teaching. This is an unexplored territory for many educators and policy makers. The sudden shift to virtual learning has created challenges that could exacerbate inequalities in access to high-quality education. I will make it my business to see that education helps individuals of all ages to recover lost ground and to acquire those skills that will help them adapt to a new reality in education institutions and in places of work.

## Following your visits to MCAST, what is your general impression of the College?

MCAST is a very unique educational institution in our country. It offers vocational and professional-oriented programmes that ensure relevance to the labour market. MCAST is what industry and today's labour market are looking for in terms of employees' skills and competences required by employers.

The College is also an expanding campus, investing in modern infrastructure that is fit for current and future staff and students. For instance, I have witnessed first-hand the works being carried out to complete the new Resource Centre: a new modern space for educators and students to develop creative and innovative work, a space that facilitates communication and collaboration beyond the classroom setting and a space for the community as it will be open 24/7.

MCAST plays a pivotal role in strengthening the skills base of Malta's economy and shares a substantial contribution to achieve some of the most critical national priorities: creating employable graduates, offering opportunities to the vulnerable, boosting work-based learning and delivering quality VPET programmes. The fact that over 50% of those who joined MCAST with qualifications lower than a SEC level achieved a Bachelor's degree, is MCAST's most remarkable success story.

## How do you describe the relationship between the world of education and that of employment?

In today's labour market, education and employment are more than just a conceptual merger. Employers today are seeking workers who can go beyond the sectoral skills they have acquired during their education and training. MCAST responds well to a rapidly evolving environment between the world of education and that of employment. This environment is characterized by changing skills requirements, increasing competition between education and training providers, advances in digital learning technologies and a stronger focus on higher-level skills. The scale and pace of change are set to continue and require any education institution like MCAST to continuously re-position itself strategically in this dynamic market. Learners need to be provided with a modern and revitalized approach to ensure relevance and to be able to meet the skills demand that the future holds.

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

Employability today requires skills that an education one-size-fits-all does not provide. MCAST provides a mixture of cognitive skills as well as a hands-on approach to learning. This is mainly acquired through all forms of work-based learning, particularly apprenticeships. MCAST is also an inclusive institution with a clear vision to provide inclusive and accessible services to address the required skills gaps to produce better outcomes for learners, businesses and communities. A College such as MCAST is the backbone of Malta's flourishing economy. The fact that even during the COVID-19 period unemployment remained amongst the lowest in Europe is evidence that young people possess skills and competences that are sustainable even during a tough economic climate such as the one we have today. A well-trained human capital is the guarantor of the future success of our country once the pandemic is behind us.

## So do you believe that the post COVID-19 period will be even more challenging than today?

I do not believe that education will pass through a more challenging time than this. On the contrary, the post COVID-19 period will bring in a new climate of change and innovation in education. While students and educators are eager to return to normality and to meet on campus and in lecture rooms, in laboratories and workshops, using methods they are confident with, they will also embrace the digital techniques adopted in the recent months. This is something positive, and I am willing to support this new digital push. Many are aware of the fact that technology saves time, money and unnecessary internal and overseas travelling. Many lessons have been learnt during these last twelve months and I am confident that, with more enhanced technology, more investment could be dedicated to other sustainable initiatives in education and training. In particular, I wish to see MCAST retaining students for as long as possible in lifelong learning.

### **As Minister responsible for VPET do you believe that the sector needs more resourcing and more prioritization?**

On a national level, VPET has become a significant sector. The government has already invested €12 million for state-of-the-art workshops in all state schools. Students who have opted for a VPET route at the secondary level need to continue their VPET journey in other state-of-the-art campuses. As Minister responsible for VPET, I strongly believe in further resourcing VET institutions to provide the necessary up-to-date tools and methods for our students to succeed. Since joining the EU, MCAST has benefited more than €100 million in ESF and ERDF projects as well as increased national funding both in terms of capital and recurrent expenditure.

### **What are, in your view, the implications of the fourth industrial revolution on vocational and professional education?**

The rapidly changing work patterns brought about by the fourth industrial revolution make it more challenging to design a more diversified and flexible curriculum. Nowadays, the focus should not be on how long an education lasts; the important thing is that graduates can suit the needs of the world of work. Hence, most jobs will require similar skills and sectoral skills that will change as technology impacts innovation. Vocational education should be flexible as much as possible so that it provides learners with the widest opportunity to receive education, training or retraining in accordance with the needs of the world of work.

### **Are there any specific targets that as Minister for Education you would wish MCAST to achieve during your tenure?**

VPET is a crucial learning experience for a flexible and competitive labour market and long-term economic reforms. I would like to see MCAST attract more students into the vocational route, and further establish stronger relationships with key employers, including SMEs, as well as increase work-based learning particularly apprenticeships as these can offer an abundance of work opportunities to students. MCAST should strive to create more partnerships with different stakeholders and invite industry to take a more prominent role in its governance and day-to-day operations. Aware of the fact that today MCAST has more than 780 regular international students and over 1,400 awaiting registration as soon as travelling restrictions are lifted, is remarkable. Increasing this number will further internationalize the College and inject a multi-cultural approach to all forms of teaching and learning.

# MCAST Engineering Graduates will be able to receive Warrant

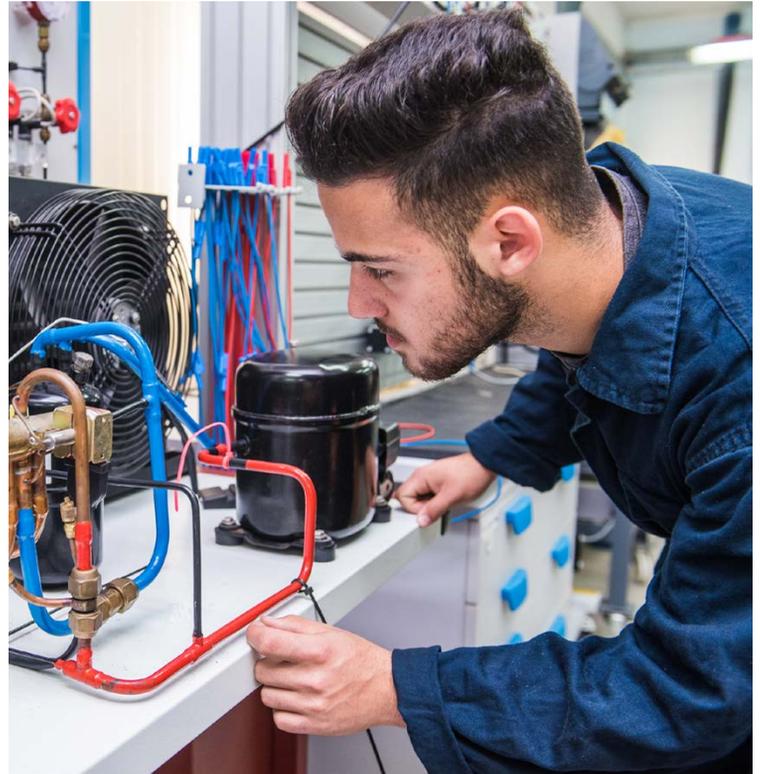
## Applications Open

**MCAST** has opened applications for the Pre-Warrant Qualification Course (PWQC), through which College graduates with a Bachelor of Engineering may obtain a warrant.

MCAST engineering graduates will be eligible to apply for a warrant once they have completed the Pre-Warrant Qualification Course. The Engineering Board approved the College's pre-warrant qualification course and around 200 MCAST graduates can now apply for a warrant following successful completion of the course. The German agency ASIIN, known in the sector for its evaluation of standards in engineering studies, recommended to the Board the course's approval after a rigorous evaluation process.

This is a decisive step as graduates of the Bachelor of Engineering course can now apply for a warrant to practise as professional engineers with all the rights conferred by law. As announced in a joint media release by the Ministry for Education and the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects, this decision will bring to a halt the injustice suffered by the students who have been graduating since 2013.

MCAST Principal and CEO, Professor Joachim James Calleja said: "The Board's decision based on recommendations made by an international company, confirms the College's professional standards. Our alumni hold leading engineering positions nationally and internationally. Many have successfully furthered their studies at local and foreign higher education institutions. No one benefits from withholding these graduates' right to apply for a warrant. The engineering degree is well received by industry, and we will continue to ensure international standards and excellence in vocational and professional education."



Ing Stephen Sammut, Director of the Institute of Engineering and Transport, said: "MCAST is home to over fifty engineers and highly qualified lecturing staff, many of whom are holders of doctoral degrees and are adamant on safeguarding our profession. We need to attract the younger generation and innovators towards this profession. We will now be launching two Pre-Warrant Qualification Courses – one in electrical engineering and another one in mechanical engineering. Applications will be opening in the coming weeks, and all those who have a B.Eng. qualification from MCAST can apply."

MCAST will be absorbing the courses' costs to further encourage students and lay an important foundation for the engineering profession.

# MCAST Graduates Register High Full-Time Employment

**A** tracer study conducted by MCAST revealed that the highest percentage of graduates in full-time employment are from engineering and transport, ICT and business and management. The researchers interviewed over 550 alumni out of 894 students who graduated in 2019.

The research shows that 91% of ICT graduates and 90% of graduates from the Institute of Engineering and Transport are in full-time employment. The highest percentage of MCAST graduates in part-time employment was registered by the Institute for the Creative Arts and the Institute of Community Services. Students following business administration, insurance and financial services form the largest group in employment. These are followed by students who pursue courses in both education and early years and retail.

The study also indicated the extent to which MCAST courses cater to the needs of industry. Around 90% of graduates from the Institute for the Creative Arts find jobs strongly related to their studies. Similar high numbers apply to graduates of applied sciences (83%), business management and commerce (92%), engineering and transport (92%) and ICT (92%). The study also showed that 72% of graduates from the Institute of Community Services find jobs directly related to their studies, while the rest opt for furthering their training in the sector.

For the alumni interviewed, the most useful skills learnt at MCAST were teamwork, communication skills and time management. Technical skills were

also an obvious choice for many respondents, while transversal skills were considered as important as sectoral skills. Furthermore, 55% of employed respondents were either in training or planned to continue their studies, while 68% of part-time employed respondents were more geared towards further training. Preferred areas for further training among MCAST alumni were business and administration studies, insurance, finance, hairdressing, beauty and mechanical engineering. Respondents expressed their satisfaction that Institutes were keeping courses relevant to industry's rapid developments across all sectors.

Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja commented, "We are making sure that all qualifications at all levels are relevant to the workplace and to the rapid developments in many economic sectors. The analysis shows that MCAST is moving closer to being a community College. Having almost all alumni in employment is an honourable achievement, particularly for lecturing staff and management. In today's world, particularly in the post COVID-19 period, a College which reflects a country's growing economic ambitions is valuing its vocation of a public sector institution that responds to flexibility and an open-door policy to education and learning."

The tracer study was conducted by John Bartolo, Director Student Affairs, and his team.

*The study is available on  
<https://www.mcast.edu.mt/wp-content/uploads/Tracer-study-Report.pdf>*

# MCAST supports fight against domestic violence



On the 10th December 2020 a live-streamed debate to mark International Human Rights Day was hosted by MCAST. The event provided an opportunity for lecturers and students from the College's Institute of Community Services to discuss the provision of specialised training for social care professionals on domestic violence.

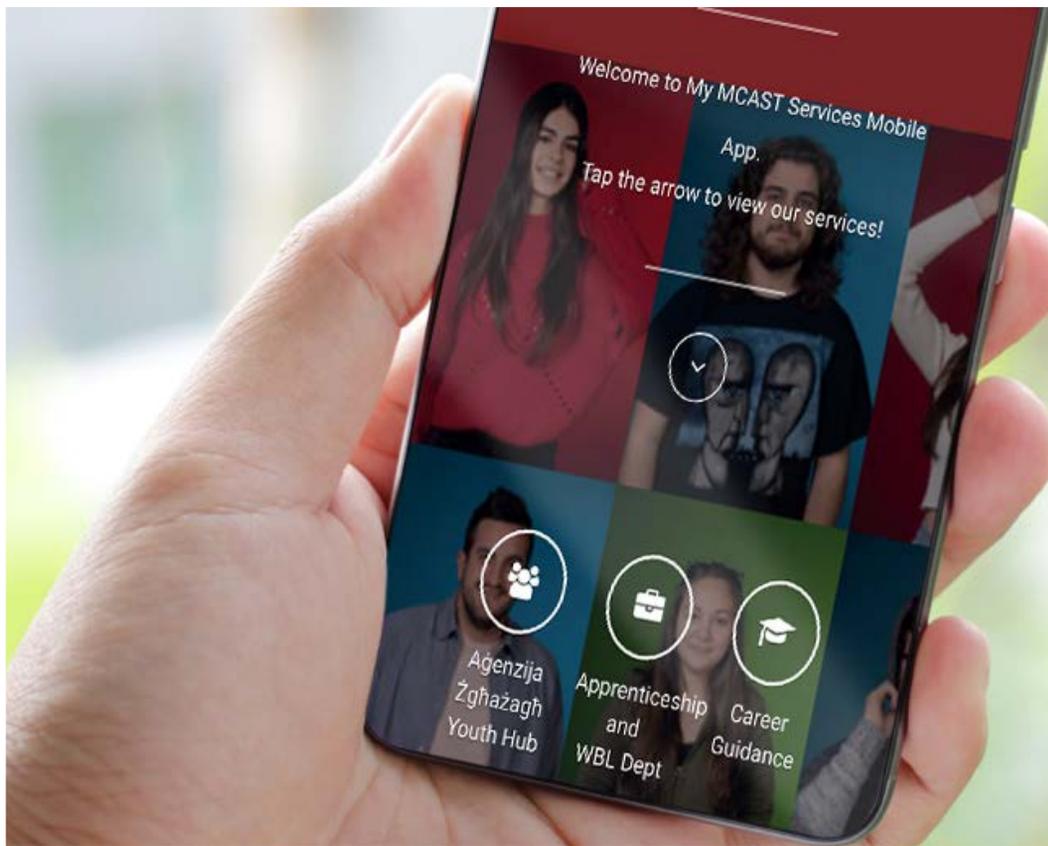
The event brought to a close the "16 Days of Activism" campaign against gender-based violence, the human rights campaign supported by the United Nations. The Institute of Community Services, in collaboration with the Commission for Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence, led this initiative through several social media messages expressing solidarity towards victims of all forms of violence. The Commission's chosen theme for this year was "Mhux kull dar toffri kenn – Hajja aħjar tibda minnek" (Not every home is a haven – Reach out for the life you deserve).

During the campaign, lecturers and social work professionals from the Institute came together to take a strong stand and send out messages to the community to fight physical, verbal and emotional violence, both online and offline.

The debate was opened by Ms Audrey Friggieri, Commissioner for Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence, who spoke about the vital role of education in promoting well-being and understanding.

Last semester the Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with MCAST to ensure ongoing collaboration between the two entities. The partnership is based on objectives that focus on the relationship between education and the social care sector.

In his address during the debate, MCAST Principal and CEO Prof Joachim James Calleja said that the College is committed to ensuring zero tolerance to violence within its community.



# My MCAST Services App provides various information about services across the College

MCAST is pleased to launch an app where one can find contacts to the MCAST Services provided.



**Services** at MCAST include Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, the Youth Hub, the Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning Department, Career Guidance, the Corporate and Social Responsibility Office, Counselling and the Wellbeing Hub, the Entrepreneurship Centre, the Fitness Centre, the Grievances Office, the Inclusive Education Unit, the International Office, the Learning Support Unit, the Library and Learning Resource Centre, the Integration Unit, the Salesian Chaplaincy, Research and Innovation, the Stipends Office, the Student Liaison Office, Student Mentors and Student Support Coordinators.

# MCAST new €32.8 million campus

The newly-built MCAST Resource Centre will open its doors to staff and students by the new academic year in October. This was announced during a site visit by Minister for Education, the Hon. Dr Justyne Caruana and the Minister for Research, Innovation and the Coordination of Post Covid-19 Strategy, the Hon. Dr Owen Bonnici.



**The** Resource Centre is part of a €32.8 million EU co-funded project and the College's strategic plan for vocational education, research and campus facilities that will continue to establish the College as a centre of excellence. The state-of-the-art Centre, which includes a new library, flexible learning spaces and an auditorium, will heighten the College's drive on research and innovation.

Minister Justyne Caruana stated that, "As the MCAST student population and the need for upskilling continue to grow, improving resources and accessibility is a high priority and the impetus for continued investment. We need to create dynamic learning spaces where lecturers and students can be inspired to collaborate and create. The aim is for strategic industry partners and the public to use the services offered by the College. With this openness, we will effectively create learning opportunities for all within the wider community."

Minister Owen Bonnici commented: "This investment will work to help place MCAST as a leader in international applied research. In the recent Research and Innovation Expo held in December 2020, we witnessed the varied vocational and applied research at the College, with over 90 researchers and professionals immersed in different specialisations. Creating an international hub will help researchers develop solutions for society's pressing problems and opportunities for industry. MCAST will continue to secure international collaboration with universities,

higher education providers, industry partners and research laboratories."

MCAST Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja concluded: "The College is participating in 19 international projects with an investment of over €2.5 million. With the new infrastructure, we can continue to grow internationally and establish MCAST as a centre of excellence in vocational education and training. The research and innovation hub is unique in that the College is well placed to encourage collaboration with industry and an interdisciplinary approach. Our success lies in having access to different areas of expertise and being able to share it. We will extend our cooperation beyond the campus while providing our students with opportunities to connect directly with potential employers."

The Resource Centre's building works have been completed and work on the mechanical and electrical installations is currently in progress. The building was designed and built to maximise efficiency and functionality, focusing on connectivity, lighting and ventilation design to ensure low energy consumption and conservation. The Centre will house an auditorium with seating and exhibition space of over 600 square metres and an additional exhibition and flexible learning space of around 500 square metres. The building design includes spaces that are conducive to both individual and group learning, including the use of the outdoor space as a reading area.



# Libyan Delegation Visits MCAST

The Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) welcomed a Libyan delegation to MCAST. The visit was part of a cooperation agreement within the education sector between Malta and Libya. Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja said that the College was committed to seeing this cooperation with Libya moving towards implementation. Deputy Principal Dr Mario Cardona, IET Director Ing Stephen Sammut and Deputy Director Eugenio Busuttil welcomed the delegation.



**They** introduced over 50 programmes offered by the Institute, focusing on maritime deck operations and maritime engineering. MCAST has been investing in equipment including a €7 million new state-of-the-art building for the Institute and more recently in a new simulation room for maritime studies students.

General Manager Stephen Vella spoke about MCAST's Gateway to Industry (MG2i) and the impetus on part-time course provision, offering thousands of people the opportunity to achieve accredited qualifications at various levels. Through its internationalisation strategy, the College is offering tailor-made provision for specific target groups. In recent years, it has continued to strengthen its international presence and network in higher education to benefit both staff and students.

This agreement resulted from a visit by Minister for Foreign and European Affairs Evarist Bartolo and Minister for Education Justyne Caruana to Libya. The Maltese Government offered cooperation by MCAST and other institutions designed to develop skills and build job creation in Libya.

# An agreement between IFE and MCAST further strengthens the teaching of vocational subjects



**MCAST** and the Institute for Education signed an agreement which will further strengthen the collaboration between the two entities so that lecturers from MCAST will collaborate with the Institute for Education in the development and the teaching of various vocational subjects.

“A priority for the Ministry for Education is the continuous training on a professional basis and the agreement reached today between the Institute for Education together with MCAST provides for the two entities to complement the training given to our educators. It is important that we support the talent that we have in our country, the training in academic subjects, but also training in vocational subjects and educational training”, said Minister for Education Justyne Caruana.

MCAST has always been at the forefront where vocational subjects are concerned, so the collaboration between the two entities was a natural choice for the Institute of Education. The agreement strengthens the first agreement that was signed three years ago so that MCAST collaborates with the Institute for Education to nurture educators in VET subjects through the development of courses and the training of educators leading to more educators having the necessary competencies in these subjects.

This enables educators to lead students towards a smooth transition from secondary to tertiary education and to prepare them for the employment sector responsibly by training them according to their skills and their competencies.

The agreement was signed by Joanne Grima, CEO Institute for Education, and Prof Joachim James Calleja for MCAST.

# MCAST and MaritimeMT to offer the highest quality training to students with a passion for maritime studies



Ministers Hon. Dr Ian Borg and Hon. Dr Justyne Caruana visited the MaritimeMT Training Centre where an agreement was signed between MCAST and MaritimeMT focusing on possible ways of cooperation and collaboration between the two. This agreement will serve both MCAST and MaritimeMT. They will work together in an honest way and offer the best experience and the highest quality of training to all those students with a passion for maritime studies.

**The** challenges today are not only related to the investment needed to maintain a training centre but also to the growing shortage of seafarers and people who want to start a maritime career. This is where the role of this agreement comes in, which will be incentivising more young people to start their studies for a career in the maritime industry.

Minister Ian Borg said, "This is another step that will continue to seal Malta's position as a centre of excellence in maritime education. This is a progressive government that is seeing that this sector continues to make huge advancements and reflects the international industry's standards. I would like to remind you that a week ago, at this same training centre, certificates were given to the first group of students who completed the first maritime training course offered by MaritimeMT. It is our priority as a government to incentivise more young people to take this line, be successful and continue to contribute to this country with a maritime industry of quality, reputation and reliability."

Minister for Education Justyne Caruana praised MCAST and MaritimeMT for the work done leading to this agreement with the aim of more collaboration to enhance maritime studies. This is a sector with a strong connection between our country and the sea that goes back years and has seen strong developments, such that today Malta is at the forefront in this sector. She announced an MCAST investment of more than half a million euros for a state-of-the-art Maritime Unit and also that from next academic year MCAST will start offering an Advanced Diploma in Deck Operations. "And that is why we are pleased to witness the signing of this agreement," said Minister Caruana, "which will further increase the collaboration between the two entities to give more insight to studies in the maritime sector, and together they will also work to give more visibility to maritime studies in our secondary schools."



# New Covid-19 Vaccination Centre at MCAST's Paola Campus



The COVID-19 Vaccination Centre at the MCAST Campus in Paola opened on 12 March, with vaccinations being given to priority groups identified by the health authority. The College is continuing to collaborate with the health authorities in the fight against Covid-19 and supporting the community by hosting the Vaccination Centre and providing space at its Paola Campus.



**MCAST** Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja said: "I am immensely proud of the staff and students of our Nursing Degree programme who have volunteered to work at the Vaccination Centre so that we can join the national efforts to ensure people in Malta benefit from the vaccine as soon as possible. The College needs to serve the wider Maltese community, and we will continue to help in every way we can at this difficult time."

MCAST is working closely with the health authorities to offer an efficient service over the coming months. The Foundation for Medical Services (FMS) equipped the venue with the necessary signage, 10 vaccination booths as well as a clinic and reconstitution area. The MCAST Campus Vaccination Centre is ideally located in the spacious Student House hall with easy access to parking facilities. Vaccinations at the Centre are strictly by appointment, with those eligible at this stage being contacted by the health department.



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



**MCAST**  
Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology

# MCAST celebrates International Women's Day

**To** mark International Women's day, MCAST launched a campaign to celebrate women's achievements across different sectors in arts, science and technology. Throughout March, the College will be sharing inspiring stories about women in the community and the diversity and creativity in their work.

This initiative coincides with the College's 20th anniversary. It will be sharing twenty stories with the theme 'owning our future'. It is an opportunity for the College to challenge and call out gender bias, stereotyping and discrimination. It is a message to students to pursue their passion and persevere in their learning journey.

A group of final year Creative Media students interviewed alumni and students who chose different career paths and shared stories about breaking barriers and overcoming challenges. The students created their video stories under the guidance of lecturers Rosemarie Dorekens and Christopher Francalanza.



*The videos are being shared on the MCAST's Youtube Channel.*

# New Member of Staff



## Ms. Mary Rose Mifsud

### Director Human Resources

**Ms. Mifsud** joined MCAST on 4 January 2021 as Director of Human Resources.

Ms. Mary Rose Mifsud earned a Master's Degree in Management with Human Resource Management from the University of Chester and a Diploma in Management Studies from the University of Malta.

Ms. Mifsud has more than fourteen years of experience in HR leadership and has operated in various Government entities and departments that ranged from 35 to 700 employees. She began her career with the Director for Finance and Administration at Mount Carmel Hospital within the Ministry of Health in 2006 and has held numerous positions in both the public service and the public sector.

She served as Manager II with the Director General at the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects, as Executive HR and Administration at Arts Council Malta and as Executive HR and Administration at NCFHE. She has also contributed her expertise to various government procurement departments as chairperson and evaluator of tenders for EU and non-EU projects within the Ministerial Procurement Unit of several ministries. She has held multiple roles in different fields in the private sector such as manufacturing. In one of her last roles, she also completed several leadership development programmes including HR programmes related to the implementation of payroll and finance systems.

During her spare time, Ms Mifsud enjoys reading and watching documentaries and biographies. She loves to collaborate with others and this has surely stood out as a passion of hers especially when collaborating with others through mentorship. She is highly interested in history and has attended many history courses. She also has a passion for learning and is always studying something different.

# MCAST lecturer amongst 2% of the world's working scientists!



Dr Mario Balzan, MCAST Senior Lecturer II at the Institute of Applied Sciences, has been named one of the two per cent of working scientists listed for 2019. Dr Balzan works in the field of entomology.

A comprehensive list recently released by Stanford University identified the top two per cent of the world's nearly 7 million working scientists. The study identifies the top scholars in their fields by considering how often their work has been cited.

The list includes nearly 160,000 scientists, and eleven of them work in research centres in Malta. Updated databases and codes are freely available in Mendeley.

# Interested in furthering your knowledge in Financial Accounting?



*Mr Simeon Spiteri*

**MCAST** lecturer Mr Simeon Spiteri has published a book entitled “Financial Accounting – from its basics to Financial Reporting and Analysis”. This book will appeal to individuals interested in developing their knowledge in financial accounting, including students sitting for the Edexcel London exams, entrepreneurs and managers.

It explains in depth the process of recording transactions by considering value-added tax. The book adopts a practical approach and highlights the main documents that lead to business transactions, while also describing accounting controls like bank reconciliation. In addition, the text addresses the main features and final accounts of different enterprises like sole traders, partnerships, clubs and companies. The form and key aspects of the annual report prepared by public companies is described in depth. The main techniques used to analyse an organisation are explained and examples are provided for illustration purposes. Questions are outlined at the end of each chapter to help the reader understand the main techniques shown in this book. Furthermore, model answers are given.

The author, Simeon Spiteri, has been operating as a Chartered Public Accountant for more than nineteen years. His area of specialisation is financial analysis and company valuation, and he provides financial consultancy services to business start-ups, small and medium-sized organisations. He works as a senior lecturer with MCAST, and has been lecturing accountancy, finance and management related subjects for more than fifteen years. He has worked as a reviewer for an academic journal, and his publications include a journal article.

# CoachED6 logo designed by Level 5 learners

**CoachEd6** is a Key Action 2 Erasmus+ project focusing on Coaching Education at degree level (Level 6). This project, which is the brainchild of sports lecturers from the Institute of Community Services, is the epitome of teamwork between departments, institutions and organizations. MCAST is the lead partner of CoachEd6 who, together with the University of Southern Denmark, Reykjavik University (Iceland), Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi (Turkey), and the International Council for Coaching Excellence as main partners, have joined forces with national sport governing bodies and with potential learners from every participating country.

Besides the strong collaboration with the MCAST International Office, CoachEd6 has lately collaborated with the Institute for the Creative Arts which, through the coordination of Mr Christopher Aquilina, was responsible for designing the logo for the project. Mr Aquilina, lecturer at the Institute for the Creative Arts, has provided his Level 5 graphic design students with a brief which was aimed at helping the learners communicate their ideas visually. Based on the provided brief, all the Level 5 graphic design learners at the Institute for the Creative Arts had to brainstorm, research, and finally sketch their ideas and transform them in a digital form for their client - CoachEd6.

The CoachEd6 coordinators from all the partner organizations were involved in the selection process, which led to the winning logo designed by Ms Martina Schembri.



# Facing the transition from student to graduate nurse

A personal reflection by Samira Cini



**Sadarangani** and Ahuja (2014) acknowledged that life is challenging and we have to be able to adapt to every life event and experience. Some of these challenges are major transitions and have life-changing consequences. Transition is defined as: “a passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another ... a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). At the age of sixteen I undertook an Advanced Diploma in Health Sciences at MCAST, a two-year full-time course. In 2018 I commenced a three-year BSc Nursing course, which is a joint programme offered by MCAST in collaboration with Northumbria University (UK). The transition from the Diploma to a Degree was hard. This entailed a new level of academic expectations for me and a steep learning curve too. My dream had always been to be a nurse, and after studying hard for around two and a half years I was determined to go for it!

This level of study required a lot of commitment – in time, energy and motivation. However, as I am writing this, I am just a few months away from graduating – the end is in sight. But this next transition is also going to have its own challenges. It is an issue that has been addressed in nursing literature.

Transition from theoretical study to real-life practice is often emotionally exhausting, challenging and stressful for nurses (Alghamdi and Baker, 2020). Alshawsh, Hallett and Jones (2020) explained that new graduate nurses tend to experience difficulties while adapting to their new jobs and transitioning to practice in a complex and stressful work environment. This can be due to their lack of self-confidence and clinical knowledge. Furthermore, Alshawsh, Hallett and Jones (2020) highlighted that new graduate nurses start to deal with issues such as nursing shortages, high patient numbers and complex patient care. Another issue which might impact a newly graduated nurse is lack of support from managers and from colleagues (Laschinger and Grau, 2012). Samnick (2015) explained that new graduate nurses are more vulnerable to experiencing violence and bullying within nursing professions.

Despite these acknowledged challenges, I

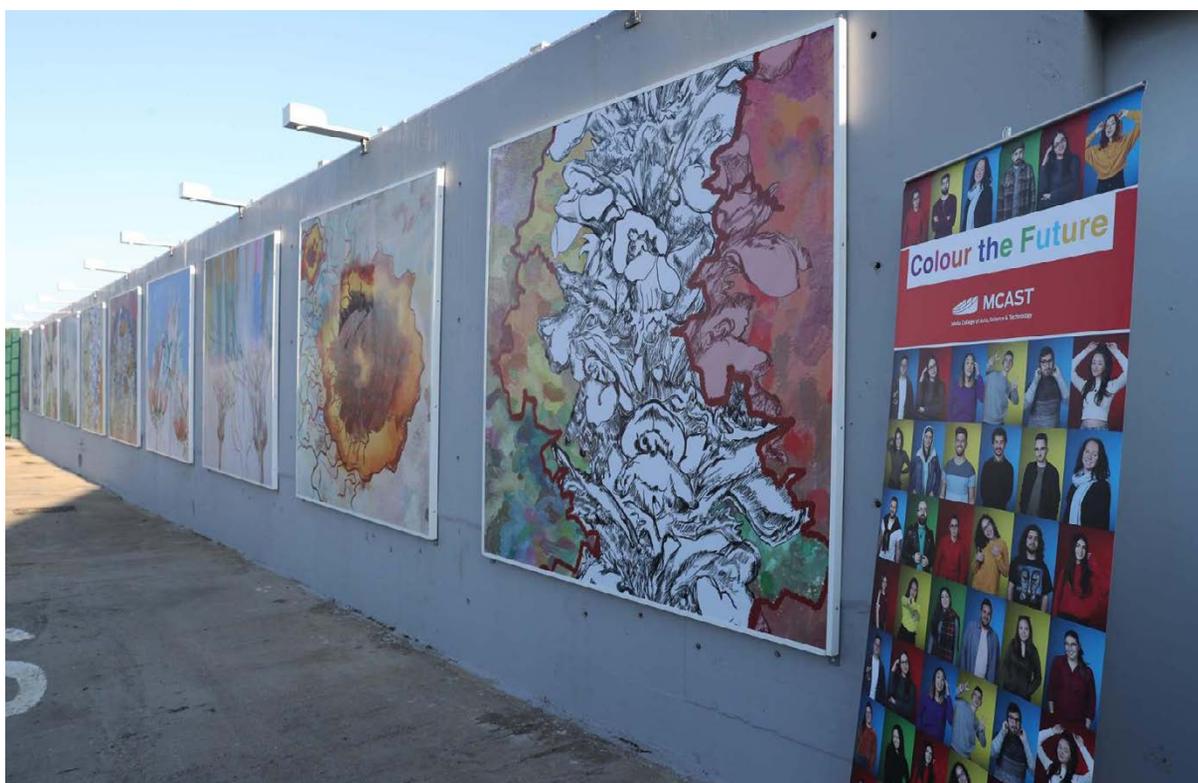
personally feel ready to leave behind my full-time education and move into the career I have chosen. Literature is divided as to whether undergraduate nurses are prepared for their role upon completing their degree (Batch-Wilson, 2016). Batch-Wilson (2016) noted that it is the role of nurse educators to ensure that graduate or novice nurses are prepared to function in clinical practice. I feel that due to the joint efforts of our lecturers and clinical mentors we are being adequately prepared to embark upon our new roles. We have been fortunate to form a relatively small group or cohort of students (approximately 20 students in my group) which has enabled us to form close lecturer-student working relationships. I feel that this has given us an advantage over other students who may be in much larger classes and therefore do not receive the same amount of individualized attention.

The literature shows the reality of a new graduate nurse. Masso et al. (2019) tell us that the transition has been described as a reality shock. Rather than being put off, I am looking forward to meet these challenges. I am sure that I will experience the same experiences and emotions that were mentioned previously. Soon I will not be seen as a student but as a staff nurse and this brings with it certain expectations from colleagues, patients and the public. For example, this means that for the clinical staff, I will be one of them and will be required to function as a fully competent staff nurse. For the patient, I will be their nurse and this means that if they ask me something I must know the answer, or at least know where to find it. According to Masso et al. (2019), nursing is one of the few areas where new graduates are expected to be the “finished product” immediately after finishing their studies and are faced with the possibility of making life or death decisions early in their career. This thought certainly brings with it a lot of pressure. However, I am reassured that I have been provided with all the knowledge and skills I need to be a safe and competent practitioner.

In conclusion, I feel fortunate to be following my dream. I would strongly recommend this course to anyone considering nursing as a career. MCAST has provided me with the opportunity to reach my goals.

# MCAST students create Artworks on the Marsa-Hamrun bypass





## A new art space at a lay-by on the Marsa-Hamrun bypass was inaugurated on Wednesday 23 December 2020, featuring artwork created by MCAST students and staff.

**The** area is Malta's first outdoor exhibition space and follows along the recently installed 350-metre vertical garden covering the retaining walls of the southbound carriageway on the seven-lane bypass.

It features ten large square frames which currently hold works created by students and lecturers at the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts and will be changed every six months, with the plan being to eventually open the space up to other local and foreign artists for exhibition as well.

The first collection for the gallery was steered forward by art lecturers Carmen Aquilina, Pierre Mifsud and Darren Tanti, who developed the concept with Infrastructure Malta.

Inspired by the adjacent green walls surrounding the space, the artists were inspired by the effort to re-introduce nature to an urban environment.

The artworks feature local endemic flowers such as the Maltese rock centaury (*widnet il-baħar*) and the Maltese spider orchid (*brimba sewda*) and was created through photography, painting and digital manipulation.

The outdoor art gallery was inaugurated by Education Minister Justyne Caruana and Transport Minister Ian Borg.



# MCAST Creative Arts students engaging in Street Photography

**Students** following Industrial Photography and Photojournalism at the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts had the opportunity to work with Infrastructure Malta on a hands-on experience in Street Photography. Their task was to capture the light of Christmastime. The students went around the Maltese islands during December to capture the colourful lights that brought cheer to many localities at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic year.

These images were shared on Infrastructure Malta's social media channels, through the hashtag #12DaysofChristmasStreets.



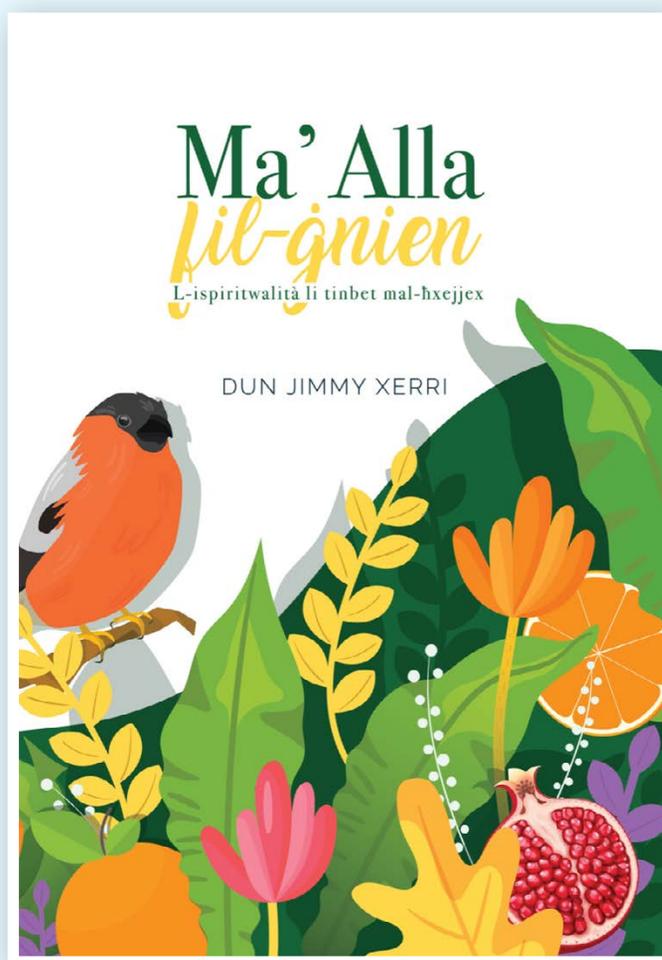
# MCAST student designs cover and graphics of book

## In the Garden with God

**During** the current Covid-19 pandemic, especially in the first months of 2020, many had the opportunity to enjoy walks in the countryside and appreciate nature. Nadur archpriest Jimmy Xerri found inspiration in the marvels of nature within the four walls of the parish garden.

The variety of flora and fauna induced the author to an awareness and to a spiritual discernment which he expressed in words in his book *Ma' Alla fil-Ġnien* (In the Garden with God). Fr Xerri's short essays lead readers to enjoy the rich material for reflection provided by shrubs, trees, flowers, birds and insects found in the garden.

*Ma' Alla fil-Ġnien* is on sale at the Nadur Pastoral Youth Centre. Proceeds will go towards the completion of the project at the Centre which, together with Radju Luminaria, promotes the social and spiritual education of young people.



*The book's cover and graphics were executed by Maria Camilleri who studied interactive media at MCAST's Institute for the Creative Arts.*

# Health studies at the MCAST Gozo Campus

**The** number of Health Sciences students studying at the MCAST Gozo Campus registered a significant increase this academic year. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, society at large has recognized the contribution of doctors and nurses and their relentless efforts. However, doctors and nurses are just part of the medical personnel who collectively form the frontliners who put their own lives on the line to take care of the sick and help others during the pandemic. These unsung heroes have silently become an inspiration to many. Presumably, such frontliners are likely to have inspired more students to enrol in the Health Sciences programme.

The pandemic has brought drastic changes in our lives. Back in March 2020, our Health Sciences students were about to start their vocational placements in health settings, when all educational institutions were abruptly closed by health authorities and all placements and apprenticeships suspended. In the summer months, as MCAST began to adapt to the 'new normality', our Health Sciences students were among the first student groups to resume their vocational placements. Needless to say, there was a general concern about their well-being. However, the stringent infection prevention and control protocols in place at Steward Healthcare Gozo General Hospital and other health institutions effectively meant that the students completed successfully an eight week placement in hospital settings, with minimal risks during the most extraordinary of times. The

Health Sciences students can pride themselves in being among the country's health frontliners in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, in the coming months, the Health Sciences students will once again participate in another vocational block placement, in line with their course requirements.

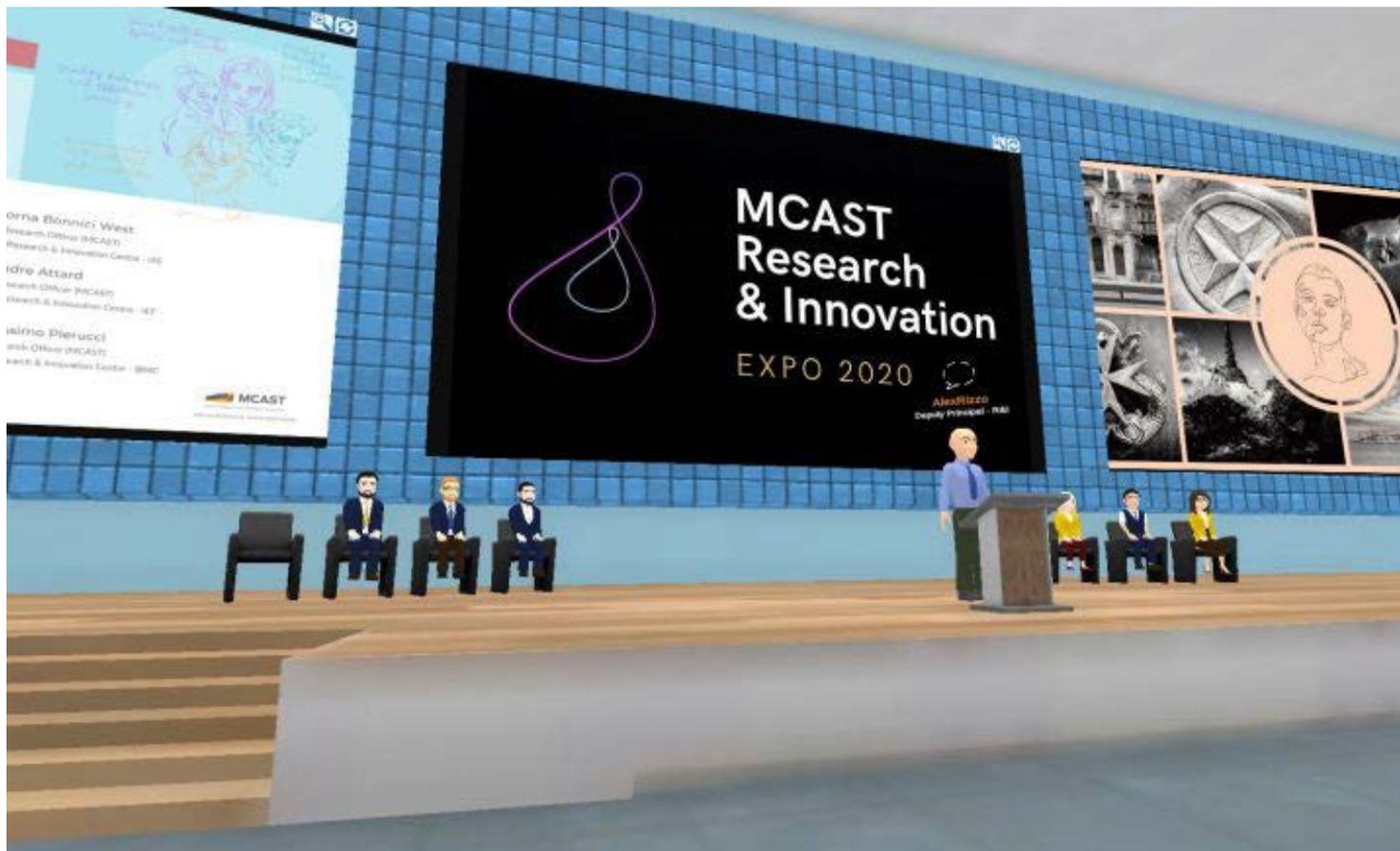
The Advanced Diploma in Health Sciences course is an MQF Level 4 programme, developed to prepare individuals for health related careers. Apart from an exhaustive range of study units related to various aspects of human health, the programme of studies involves a number of health vocational work placements, through which students can apply in practice the theory covered in class as well as develop the skills and competences required to work in the health sector. Students are normally assigned to different health departments/units for their different block placements in an effort to maximize their exposure to different settings.

Prospective students can enrol directly in this Level 4 programme if they possess the required entry requirements, or progress internally from the Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care, also offered at the Gozo Campus. On completing the course successfully, students can seek employment as paramedic aids, allied health assistants or health administrators or, better still, further their studies at degree level, including the Bachelor of Science in Nursing Studies offered by MCAST Institute of Applied Sciences, Paola, in collaboration with Northumbria University.





# MCAST Research and Innovation Expo



Research at MCAST has been gaining significant momentum and the last few months have been an exciting time for our institution, which saw a boom in applied research projects spanning across a variety of research areas and disciplines.

**With** the establishment of the MCAST Research Framework, including the engagement of a new research management team, MCAST lecturers are receiving continuous support to develop their research ideas into fully-fledged projects. This has resulted in a significant number of publications in international peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, collaboration with international partners and local stakeholders, as well as engagement in externally funded research projects. Coinciding with the 20th anniversary since the establishment of MCAST, it was fit to celebrate this



ongoing achievement through a two-day Research and Innovation Expo on the 14th and 15th December 2020.

In spite of the limitations imposed by Covid-19, which made it impossible to bring together a hundred researchers together in a live event, the College rose to the challenge through its innovation drive by hosting the Expo within a novel immersive 3D virtual campus environment. This platform brought together all researchers and a total of two hundred and fifty guests within a virtual environment, allowing each individual to interact digitally with colleagues whilst being represented by a customizable avatar. Researchers were able to present their work on a virtual stage and to address their seated audience, and guests could choose to attend different parallel sessions taking place within four different halls, while also engaging in an active question and answer session and discussion with the presenter and fellow participants.

One of the most engaging areas of this virtual

campus was the Expo Hall, which exhibited projects by students who have just completed their undergraduate degree dissertation, together with internal initiatives at MCAST in relation to Artificial Intelligence, EdTech and MCAST's involvement in EIT (European Institute of Innovation and Technology). This virtual environment presented the possibility of having customizable exhibition stands for each of the students, where they showcased their research posters and related prototype or artwork that the Expo participants engaged with. Dedicated Poster Session time was allocated for the Expo participants to engage in a discussion with the students in the respective exhibition booths.

Minister for Research, Innovation and the Co-ordination of Post Covid-19 Strategy, the Hon. Dr Owen Bonnici, opened the event. "This Expo shows the significant research and innovation work being carried out by MCAST researchers. It is exciting to see the variety in research and innovation practices which reflect the College's diversity and specialist

areas. MCAST is at the forefront of innovation, and it was one of the first institutions to launch its Artificial Intelligence Strategy and establish an Educational Technology Framework.”

The Research and Innovation Expo presented a variety of research and innovation projects taking place within all MCAST Institutes. Ongoing projects at MCAST span across a variety of areas, from applied science to engineering, from business and management to community services and education, from ICT to the creative arts. With research being so versatile within the College, the most ideal way to bring all researchers and all Institutes together was to create four different overarching themes that could host this wealth of variety, whilst providing an opportunity for cross-discipline knowledge sharing. The four thematic areas, all of which address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, were the following:

- Emerging Technology and Creative Innovation
- Social Well-being, Sports and Health
- Quality Pedagogy and Effective Learning
- Environmental and Cultural Sustainability.

The above themes show how the variety of research happening at MCAST can easily blend together towards specific aims.

The “Emerging Technology and Creative Innovation” research theme brought together projects from various Institutes, with the main objective addressing research and innovation in technology and the creative arts. Current applied research projects focus on Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, 3D Printing, Distributed Ledger Technologies, Cyber Security and Games Research, and span from the development of augmented reality platforms, to the development of wearable sensor technology, while also hosting creative projects leading to the development of new methodologies in the performing arts, photography and graphic language. Innovative research in the creative arts finds its focus in practice-based research, whereby MCAST researchers use their artistic practice

to develop innovative methods that contribute to enriching artistic detail, enhancing audience experience, while also leading to new methodologies that expand the repertoire of international artistic practices.

The “Social Well-being, Sports and Health” research theme presented projects whose development impacts both the academic audience and society at large. The Health and Social Care department looks at the sociological aspect, and current research is being undertaken in collaboration with various entities working in the community, including a parish community and the Healthcare Standards Directorate. Another project is putting focus on mental health. Research under the health sphere is contributing to areas of public health interventions, investigation of aspects of health practices and exploration of the concept of nursing outreach in Malta, while also extending to the educational realm. This research theme also delved into Sports research with a special focus on the relation to health aspects, and is strengthened through active collaboration with the Malta Football Association and the Special Olympics Committee.

“Quality Pedagogy and Effective Learning” brought together all research projects that lie at the heart of the remit of the College in striving for the development of quality education and new pedagogical tools that lead to effective learning. While all Institutes have been carrying out area-specific pedagogical projects, including engineering, ICT, business and management and the creative arts, the Institute of Community Services presents a focus on Early Years research and Inclusive Education. The Learning Technologies research theme also provides a setting for the sharing of the latest theories, applications and services related to planning, developing, managing, using and evaluating information technologies in academic and vocational education, multimedia learning, as well as other innovative educational technologies like Intelligent Systems, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality.



The research theme dedicated to “Environmental and Cultural Sustainability” addresses one of the main United Nations Sustainability Development Goals of sustainability, from both an environmental and a cultural perspective. Extensive research at MCAST has contributed to nature-based solutions, biodiversity, ecosystems, animal husbandry, fisheries and other food production areas. This thematic area also covers research on the identification of a number of polymers and surfaces with photocatalytic potential, as well as areas such as water efficiency, water quality, water meter research and apparent water losses, and water treatment. Another most essential research strand

is the sustainability of cultural heritage. Research, currently being carried out at MCAST within the Institute for the Creative Arts, addresses cultural heritage issues along with scientific studies in restoration that support research in the aesthetic value of Maltese artefacts. Current research focuses on the restoration of Maltese wood balconies, Maltese embroidery and the history of theatrical hubs in Maltese religious institutions.

Minister for Education, the Hon. Dr Justyne Caruana closed the two-day event by thanking all the researchers for their contribution and encouraging the College to keep leading in innovation.

# MCAST leads innovation workshop on reviving post Covid-19 economies

On 6 November 2020, MCAST organised a workshop for policy makers and researchers in collaboration with the Chamber of SMEs to discuss solutions for reviving economies following the pandemic crisis. The event is part of a project funded by the Climate Knowledge and Innovation Community (Climate-KIC) which is supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). MCAST is the Maltese representative for Climate-KIC which works to accelerate the transition to a zero-carbon, climate-resilient society.

**The** project brings together ten participatory countries, including Malta, from the Southern European Region. The aim of the project is to create a knowledge-based management service tool to support Southern European regions in reviving their economies through a systematic approach. The workshop brought together over 20 stakeholders, including policy makers, representatives of regulatory bodies, and SMEs operating in the different Maltese economic sectors.

MCAST researcher Carmela Frendo said, "Policy makers and planners are facing unprecedented challenges brought by the coronavirus pandemic. We are collecting data so that we can then offer practical solutions through a methodology called system mapping. The tools created will be tailored to the needs and economic situation of each participating country. As countries are set towards speeding up post COVID-19 recovery, our work to facilitate the transition to a more resilient economy becomes ever more relevant."



Clifford De Raffaele



# MCAST

## an added value to industry

By Ramon Mangion

*Director, Education and Training Programmes and Learning Support*

**Vocational** Education and Training (VET) has been an essential ingredient within the Maltese educational system for several years. VET provides the economy with a solid foundation of professional and skilled employees in different sectors. The value of VET is recognised by national initiatives such as the My Journey project which introduced applied and vocational subjects as a learning route alongside traditional academic routes in compulsory secondary education.

As the island's largest VET institution, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) is at the forefront in providing high-quality programmes that cater to the needs of students, industry and the country. Vocational Education and Training programmes cover practically the whole spectrum of the Malta Qualifications Framework with programmes ranging from Introductory Level A and reaching up to Master's level.

Learners need to have meaningful experiences that provide apt learning opportunities. Such experiences need to be pertinent and receptive to current times. Following an MCAST programme does not only entail learning specific sectoral skills and related underpinning knowledge. Holistic education is an all-inclusive approach whereby educators seek to address learners' educational and life requirements. Emphasis is placed on a learner's growth, focusing on values, ethics and emotional and social development.

Education and training programmes in a vocational

and professional context include all the students' learning experiences at the College, including the design and development of relevant programmes, key skills, entrepreneurship, inclusive education and learning support.

Through its programmes, MCAST adds value and prepares students for a dynamic world of work, whilst providing the necessary skills for learners to prepare for their future both as citizens and as potential entrepreneurs of the future. The College ensures that its programmes are relevant and responsive to the continually changing needs of different stakeholders. It also fulfils such needs if stakeholders are directly involved in the design, development, implementation and review of MCAST's programmes. As part of the development or cyclical review of any programme, input from industry, students (current or alumni) and lecturers is crucial. This is not just for the sake of procedural compliance.

On the contrary, MCAST is continuously strengthening such links to provide a valuable and relevant learning experience. Relations with industry are further enhanced through work-based learning. The latter is at the heart of vocational education and training programmes and can take different forms such as placements, apprenticeships, internships and live cases. This educational strategy provides learners with real-life work experiences to apply what they learn at the College. Employability is enhanced through such work experiences that also contribute to the holistic



development of learners.

Two other critical initiatives within the College's portfolio include the recently launched Bachelor in Vocational Education and Training (Honours) and the Master in Vocational Education Applied Research 4.0. Both programmes provide key pedagogical competences whilst addressing the challenges posed by the fourth industrial revolution, which brings a series of social, political, cultural and economic impacts, presented by recent advances in technology. Both courses will also provide a new job in industry: a person who can assist apprentices and ensures that the learning process continues at the place of work.

Vocational Education and Training is not an alternative to traditional academic programmes. In today's educational scenario, vocational and professional education and training (VET) enjoy the same parity of esteem. Through MCAST, VET is one of the many choices

available for learners who wish to pursue further and higher education opportunities both following their time in compulsory education or as part of a wide-ranging personal plan for lifelong learning.

The Malta Qualifications Framework presents VET programmes side by side with other academic programmes. Learners must be reassured that choosing to pursue a Vocational Education and Training route does not mean that they are not up to standard or that they receive a second-class form of education. The value of VET lies in the provision of relevant real-world job skills and learning experiences whilst focusing on ensuring learners are employable. In Europe and in many other parts of the world employers are putting VET graduates on top of their job offers. VET learners possess hands-on experience coupled with a sound theoretical foundation – a perfect combination for today's dynamic labour market.

# Community College for the Third Age

The unprecedented COVID-19 brought on much turmoil over the last year, especially on vulnerable groups, including the elderly. Literature has been published on the psychological and mental health consequences among the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic due to isolation. The social seclusion has taken a toll on many, generating feelings of anxiety, insomnia, depression, panic and stress (Hao et al., 2020). However, the elderly are more prone to be affected by these severe health problems as they are vulnerable (Brooks et al., 2020).

**The** Community College for the Third Age, previously known as *Ibqa' Attiv Magħna*, offers a social support network through a voluntary outreach programme by delivering weekly lessons on a vast range of topics. The aim of this programme is to actively engage with the elderly in the community to prevent isolation and to promote lifelong learning.

Last October, the Community College for the Third Age offered a course focusing on health and wellness. Many health practitioners including doctors, pharmacists, nurses, physiotherapists, laboratory scientists and student nurses offered their time and knowledge on a range of health-related topics. Currently, the Community College for the Third Age is in its fourth edition. This programme offers a broader range of topics including cultural, recreational, academic and sports education. The courses are offered at MCAST Main Campus in Paola, and all precautions are taken to maintain a safe environment for the guest speakers and elderly cohort.

This year, due to the spread of COVID-19, the Community College for the Third Age received an understandingly lower response owing to pandemic induced stress and self-isolation. Still, those attending benefit physically, emotionally and psychologically, as studies indicate that participation in social meetings increases self-esteem, sensory and physical stimulation (Sepúlveda-Loyola, et al., 2020; SepulvedaTomioka, Kurumatani & Hosoi, 2015).

Mr Tonio Barbara, a current attendee at the Community College for the Third Age had this to say about his experience at MCAST:

“I have always been eager to experience new challenges and further increase my general knowledge. However, during my life’s “work” phase this endeavour had its time limitations; thus, after retiring, I was on the lookout to garner further knowledge on topics that I have never had the time to explore. When this course of the Community

College for the Third Age came to my knowledge, I felt like a dream had come true. Now I have been following the course for over a year (with an interruption during spring/summer) and do not regret one single moment. Lectures are delivered in a down-to-earth manner and can be practically followed by anyone irrespective of one’s level of education. Moreover, the lectures cover a wide spectrum - from practical health and well-being to legal and historical aspects.”

This course strives to reach elderly persons seeking a socially stimulating experience to enhance their quality of life by optimizing physical, social and mental well-being through inclusive, informal education.



# MCAST students carry out Erasmus+ Mobility in Iceland



For the fifth year MCAST has once again collaborated in the Reykjavík International Film Festival (RIFF) in Iceland. Reykjavík International Film Festival (RIFF) is one of the biggest and most diverse cultural events in Iceland. RIFF is run by an independent non-profit organization. The RIFF staff work all year round to organize the festival with the help of volunteers from all over the world.

**This** summer, MCAST students, namely Mawadda Fawzi Abdel Samad (Advanced Diploma in Business Administration), Nadine Hazzouri (Advanced Diploma in Business Administration), Aaron Borda (Advanced Diploma in Creative Media) and Kurt Polidano (BA (Hons) Business Management and Commerce) carried out a placement at RIFF to help with the preparations, marketing and the logistics of the festival.

Reykjavík International Film Festival took place between 24 September and 4 October 2020. During their Erasmus+ mobility, Mawadda, Nadine and Kurt supported RIFF administratively by using a programme for events named Eventival database, a website creation tool (Wordpress) and also through work on Microsoft Office. During the festival the

students also welcomed guests to the movies and scanned the tickets of guests in the cinemas. Aaron Borda supported the promotional side of the RIFF festival. RIFF organized a series of screenings around Iceland through a modified bus which could project films. Aaron filmed and edited videos to promote this bus tour.

During the festival the students had the chance to meet very interesting people such as directors and teachers and they also made new friends. In the weekends they had the chance to explore the beautiful Icelandic nature and scenery.

*This mobility was funded through the Erasmus+ project: Vocational Education and Training into the Future, Grant Agreement No.2019-1-MT01-KA116-051167 and through the Higher Education project Grant Agreement: 2019-1-MT01-KA103-051056.*



## KURT POLIDANO

**“My experience in Iceland has been a very positive one overall and I recommend it to anyone willing to explore and do something different. The Erasmus+ mobility has given me the opportunity to experience living independently in a foreign country. I got to experience the Icelandic work and life culture. Working with the Reykjavik International Film Festival has given me the opportunity to learn some new skills and develop knowledge on different tools.”**

## NADINE HAZZOURI

**“On my Erasmus+ mobility I experienced how to integrate with people from different countries. I managed to improve my communication skills and learned to work in a team.”**



# MCAST students' placement in Finland

**During** the Autumn semester MCAST students from different Institutes spent a semester abroad in Finland on an Erasmus+ Student Mobility for Studies. These students were given funding to study in partner institutions across Europe.

In spite of the pandemic and unusual circumstances, MCAST students have returned from abroad with fond memories and praise for the Erasmus+ programme.

Timothy J. Xuereb, a BA (Hons) in Interactive Media student, spent a semester at XAMK, a Finnish University with campuses across the spectacular Northern Country. He described it as "an amazing experience that I would fully encourage fellow students to participate in." Timothy tells us that while "most of [his] lectures took place online," he made the best of his time in Finland and the pandemic "didn't discourage [him] from exploring the country (whilst obeying safety measures)."

Apart from experiencing the extreme weather of Finland, his stay in Kouvola meant he got very little sun for most of his mobility. Amongst other activities, during his mobility Timothy enjoyed a trip to Lapland, the northernmost region of Finland and well within the Arctic Circle, where he got to see snow for the first time.

Reflecting on the mobility, Timothy would like to tell fellow students that, "Undergoing this mobility will give you a feeling of independence. Knowing you're far from home and fending for yourself can prepare you easily for future work, especially if you aim to live abroad."



# An experience in an IT company in Tenerife



**Miguel** Azzopardi, an MCAST student reading for a Bachelor of Science in Multimedia Software Development, carried out an Erasmus+ mobility placement in a company in Tenerife, Spain. The placement was held between July and September 2020. This company specifically focuses on e-learning methods delivering services, content and tools for production and quality assurance.

Miguel expressed self-doubts prior to starting this placement mobility. Yet these were soon overcome. He highlighted that this experience contributed to both his professional and his personal improvement and development.

“I was quite hesitant and worried at the start, as I thought I might fail to produce good content or fail to succeed in the tasks given. After a week, I quickly began to work more efficiently, leading to more productive and better days.”

Miguel’s Erasmus+ adventure also offered him the

opportunity to practise one of his hobbies in a foreign country.

“Whilst in Tenerife I also decided to go Scuba Diving a few times, as I had my PADI licence. This helped me improve my social skills in general!”

Miguel’s Erasmus+ mobility was a great success as he was also provided a job with the placement company.

**“It was a good experience, and I learnt a great deal in these past two months. I feel as if I gave it my all, which is reflected in the fact that at the end of the placement, I was offered a job with the company.”**

For more information about [Erasmus+ Student Mobility for Studies](#) contact

**Ms Jodie Bonnici**

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**OPENSEL**

OPENSEL is an innovative EU Funded Project under Erasmus+ created by 4 participating partners: 2 partners from Hungary, 1 partner from the Netherlands and MCAST. OPENSEL focuses on developing some soft skills which will be taught to students while aiming for them to utilise and develop them further in their future employment.

These soft skills regulate one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour. In a vastly developing employment market, employees are highly encouraged to continuously work on personal skills to better improve professional skills resulting in better production of work.

This project aims at fulfilling real needs for both training and industry.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE INTELLECTUAL OUTPUTS (IOs)

OPENSEL participating partners will produce three Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). These are: presentation skills, teamwork skills and stress management skills. All three skills are very important for students' future employability.

### 1.

#### **Presentation skills MOOC will cover topics such as:**

- Creating a presentation about a generalised topic (including: ways of creating an interesting, convincing script about the topic, structuring and designing slides, interacting with the audience, delivery of presentations of different lengths)
- Ways of presenting oneself during job interviews.

### 2.

#### **Teamwork skills development MOOC will cover topics such as:**

- Basic listening skills, where a person listens to another person to understand perspectives
- Communication that is holistic, effective and assertive
- Ability to follow group regulations
- Conflict resolution techniques and approaches.

### 3.

#### **Stress management skills development MOOC will cover topics such as:**

- Understanding own emotions, and the effects these will have on you
- Identifying and understanding own needs and motivations
- Identifying and understanding the process of changing negative thoughts
- Exploring different techniques to manage stress and to build resilience.

## THE ROLE OF EACH PARTICIPATING ORGANISATION IN OPENSEL

### **Képes Alapítvány (Hungary)**

Képes Alapítvány is an NGO focused on the field of soft skills development. It supports different target groups to develop their social emotional learning (SEL) competencies. This is done by exploring, adapting/developing, evaluating and promoting SEL programmes and initiatives.

In this OPENSEL project, Képes Alapítvány will act as the general coordinator administering all the content development of all 3 MOOCs. It will also organise the multiplier events for IO1 and IO3; as well as lead the content development of IO3 MOOC. It will finally share responsibility of organising local multipliers with Óbudai Egyetem.

### **The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology – MCAST**

MCAST's mission statement clearly emphasises the international dimension of the education and training to be provided to all its students.

In this OPENSEL project MCAST will lead the development of IO1 MOOC; and will lead the project's dissemination activities. MCAST is also responsible for setting up a project website and for developing the visual elements/templates for the project.

### **Óbudai Egyetem (Hungary)**

Óbudai Egyetem is a prominent technical university in Hungary that provides practice-oriented education which also includes dual, cooperative and internship programmes, and higher-level vocational training. In this OPENSEL project, Óbudai Egyetem is responsible for the technical development of IO3; and will organise the multiplier for IO2. It is responsible for the shooting/editing of videos for IO2 and will be sharing responsibility of organising local multipliers with Képes Alapítvány.

### **Stichting BVE Zuid-Limburg & ROC Leeuwenborgh (Netherlands)**

Stichting BVE Zuid-Limburg was formed by two regional training centres, ROC Leeuwenborgh and Arcus College, merging together. Thus Stichting BVE Zuid-Limburg is a regional centre for vocational training and adult education.

In this OPENSEL project, Stichting BVE Zuid-Limburg will be leading the development of IO2 MOOC; as well as leading evaluation activities.

In addition to the separate coordinating duties linked to specific Intellectual Outputs (IOs), all partners will actively participate and contribute to each IO development, as well as to all phases of the project.

## BENEFITS OF THE OBJECTIVES

### 1. Students' Benefits

All three training courses will expand the general portfolio of all the participating partners' institutions. This then leads to students getting more useful and valuable knowledge; and prospective companies having employees with broader competences.

These competences can be applied both in the corporate environment as a unit and also amongst employees in achieving a better balance between working and family life.

The long-term impact is that curricula developed in this project will eventually become an integral part of the education system at all levels. This will then contribute to better employability chances for students.

### 2. Companies' Benefits

In a labour market that is continuously changing, growing and developing, these 'soft' skills are key requisites for companies to be able to compete holistically.

Employers frequently list 'teamwork, collaboration and communication skills' as highly valuable yet hard to find qualities in potential new hires. This is the reason why training in such skill sets requires proficient training, consistency and supervision.

Besides the desk research, this project will carry out a 'Needs Analysis' in the participating countries to find out how representatives of companies in Hungary, Malta and the Netherlands value all three soft skills. Based on the interviews, companies in each country valued these very skills highly and assessed their presence/absence during job interviews.

### 3. General Benefits

The solution to achieving long-term employment results is by finding the balance between employers' demands and general cognitive skills and where the employment relationship and employment productivity correspond in parallel with the process of organisational growth and personal development.

Thus, employers providing training solely focusing on competencies specific to the organisation's immediate needs will fail in the long run if cognitive skills are ignored; whereas cognitive skills need to be accompanied by social and emotional skills in order to achieve and promote holistic positive life outcomes.

## TARGET GROUPS

This project primarily aims at targeting higher education learners, teachers, trainers and mentors. These courses will also be made available to other entities such as: secondary school students (via ROC); companies; and any other interested parties. Hence, anyone is free to join these free of charge courses upon registration.

OPENSEL is an innovative project which fulfils the needs of both the training field and the industry. Currently there are no available MOOCs similar to these being developed by OPENSEL which are available for students of the participating partners and the general public, free of charge. Once developed, these MOOCs will include dialogues between trainers, interviews with experts on the topics, visual demonstrations, as well as role plays.

## CONCLUSION

It has been reported that many students lack certain social, emotional and moral skills, and therefore struggle to cope in a range of day-to-day situations, including work placements outside of school (Education Counsel, 2011; OECD, 2009). Lack of training options was further reported by our interviewees in all three participating countries where:

- Presentation Skills - are present at ROC, but absent in Óbudai Egyetem and at MCAST
- Teamwork Skills and Stress Management Skills - are not explicitly taught in any of the partner institutions.

# More than just Theory

What is Entrepreneurship at MCAST all about?

Entrepreneurship is one of the eight key competences identified by the European Commission. At MCAST, Entrepreneurship education means more than just learning how to start one's own business. The process of teaching is planned so as to foster an entrepreneurial mindset that will help students be prepared for a variety of employment and self-employment opportunities once they graduate. Entrepreneurship-related units at MCAST have for the past few years been taught at MQF Level 4 (Advanced Diploma Programmes) and Level 6 (Degree Programmes), and these fall under the Key Skills section of the Education and Training Programmes Department. There are currently sixteen lecturers contributing towards the delivery of the units across different MCAST Institutes in Malta and Gozo.

**The** academic aspect of Entrepreneurship at MCAST is further enhanced through the MCAST Entrepreneurship Centre (MEC). The MEC aims at providing MCAST students and alumni with the opportunity of transforming their creative and innovative ideas into profitable and sustainable business ventures. MEC is the Centre where one learns: how to be decisive, how to lead, how to take risks, how to gain confidence in one's business, how to develop the zeal for a business venture and how to be innovative.

There are currently six companies making use of the facilities at MEC which is hosted at the Korrardino Business Incubation Centre (KBIC). These companies hail from various sectors such as fashion, marine product design, personalised real leather accessories, digital art, hand-made candle/wax accessories, studio photography, electronic lockers as well as engineering and automation. Other service-oriented companies such as those in construction, restoration works and architectural services are also considered under the MEC umbrella. Due to the nature of the services, such companies do not occupy a space at KBIC. However, they still benefit from services offered by MEC, including mentoring.

During the past few months, MCAST has worked on increasing the collaboration between the academic side of Entrepreneurship and the services offered at MEC. MCAST is striving to increase the number of spaces and offer new opportunities for more tenants to be able to join the MEC.

## **Employability and Entrepreneurial Skills at Level 4**

The Level 4 unit entitled *Employability and Entrepreneurial Skills* supports students to understand better what additional skills they need to focus upon in order to be in a better position to enter the world of employment or self-employment. Here the focus is not just on the skills acquired through the vocational subjects within the various MCAST courses, but more importantly on the transversal skills that are crucial in Industry 4.0.

The unit still offers the opportunity for students to explore and test their innovative ideas through a business proposal that is carried out within a team environment. Students are assessed through the application of theoretical concepts to a hypothetical business idea. In order to enhance the learning experience, during the first semester of the 2020-2021 academic year, Mr. Ray Vella, MEC coordinator, has delivered in total around 30 one-hour sessions to various Level 4 groups taking the Employability and Entrepreneurial Skills unit. These sessions introduced students to the MEC, through a structured session enhanced by real-life start-up examples. Our target is that more Level 4 students are encouraged to take the step to start their own business, while availing themselves of the opportunities offered by MCAST at the MEC. Following these sessions, several students have approached MEC with their ideas.





## Entrepreneurship at Level 6

At Level 6, students' learning is mainly threefold: Theory, Mentoring, Supervision and Application. This unit's lecturing sessions are used to deliver the necessary theoretical aspects of the subject. However, the more interesting part for students is the application of this theory within a multi-disciplinary team environment. Students are grouped in teams of maximum seven students from different MCAST Institutes. Each team would eventually work to come up with a business idea, develop a business plan to commercialise the idea and produce a concept prototype.

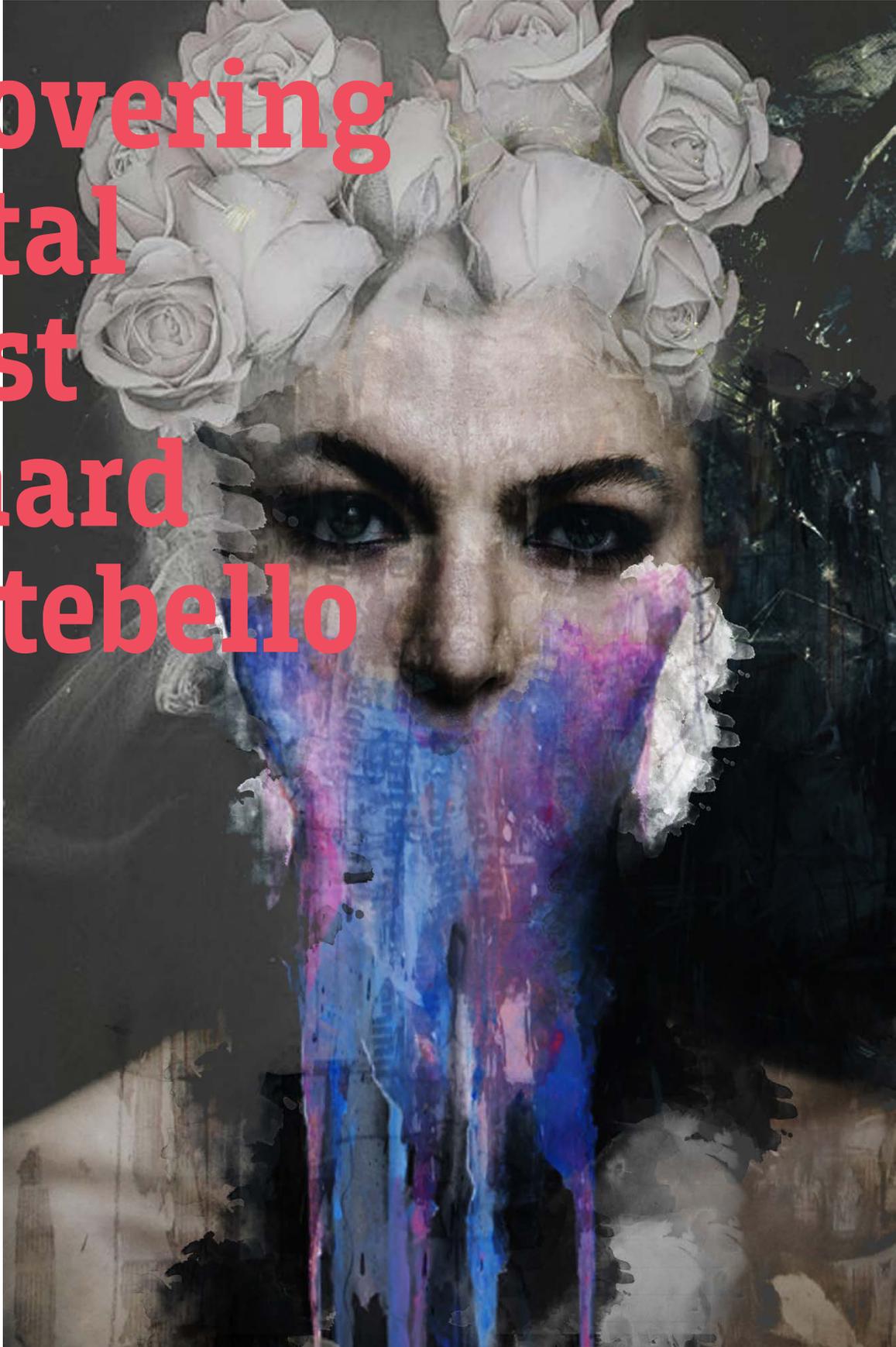
It is during this team experience that students are tasked to foster independent learning skills, team working and time management skills amongst others, which they will surely find useful once they graduate. Students will, at the end of the unit, showcase their product or service during a sales pitch event, which normally sees the participation of key individuals from industry acting as judges.

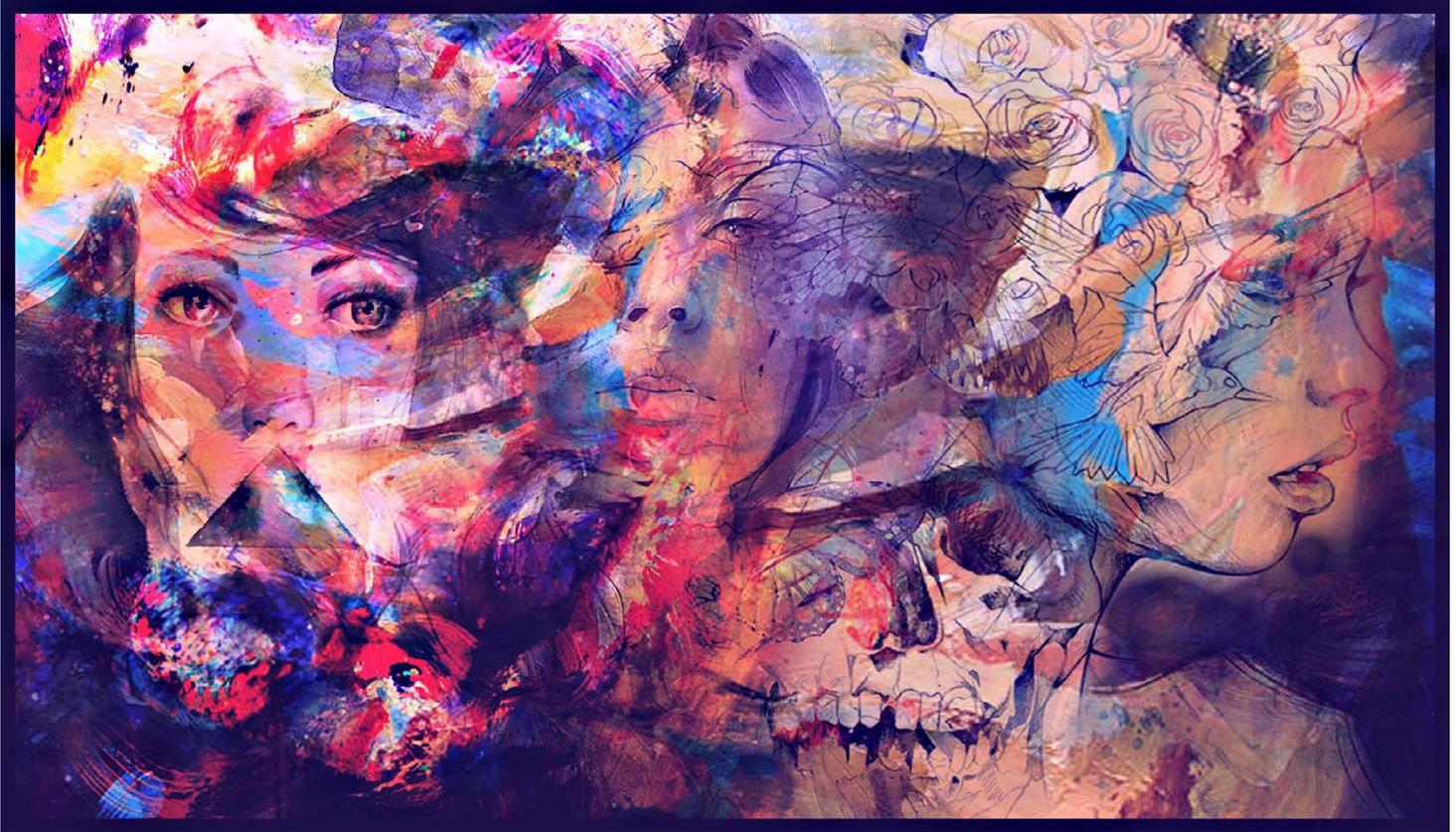
A supervisor and a mentor are assigned to each team to offer guidance and support in the business planning process, both from an academic point of view and from an industry point of view. Mentors' backgrounds vary from those having industry experience, to others having own business ventures. The mentoring system also serves to enhance the strong ties that MCAST has with industry.

Students will have the opportunity to attend webinars organised by the Entrepreneurship team at MCAST that will focus on several aspects related both to their business plan assignment and to real world start-up opportunities and support available. Amongst others, the MEC will be delivering a webinar which includes an overview of MEC, insights to the real business world, and an experience of an MCAST alumna that benefited from the services offered by MEC in the past few years.

The Entrepreneurship-related units at MCAST are focused on encouraging students to engage in independent learning and develop essential 21st century skills to prepare themselves for life. Moreover, through the MEC MCAST offers an opportunity to help those students who aspire in opening up their own business in the near future.

# Discovering Digital Artist Bernard Montebello





**Aged** just 27, Bernard Montebello is one of Malta's leading young entrepreneurs, and one of the top five ranking red bull artists on the island. He is a resident artist at Valletta Waterfront, Pintinio, Coogies and at The Plaza Malta. Moreover, he was featured as an artist at Aldabra Gallery, Allura Open Studio, the Tuscany Gallery in Italy and at other renowned international galleries.

Bernard received numerous awards including the best young entrepreneur award and the winner of a World Intellectual Property Award (WIPO) as an Emerging Innovator. He was even awarded a WIPO medal for creativity, a prestigious recognition of outstanding efforts in the field of innovation and creativity, and also received recognition within the entrepreneurship field.

Bernard's wide-ranging success incorporates multiple start-up ventures including Montebello Digital Art - a digital art platform offering over 700 unique individual artworks; Orca Art - a platform for light prints and graphic design; and Candle Crate - a company focusing on fresh handmade cosmetics and hand poured candles. These said ventures have amassed 500,000 followers from across the globe, and the number continues to grow every day.

The above successes were achieved with the help of the MCAST Entrepreneurship Centre through the numerous and various services and support system it provides. This Centre works in partnership with non-profit, public, and private sector organisations, supporting start-ups to grow into enterprises.

# Gliding through the pandemic...

The last year has been one of many challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. From families, businesses, education and the economy... everyone has been affected in one way or another. Some were more affected than others: some decided to give up and others thought outside the box and were creative in how they addressed these challenges.

**The Library and Learning Resource Centre rose to the challenges like a phoenix!**

**With** the closing of schools, the Library had to shift from physical service to electronic service. The Library acted quickly to resolve the issues of not having enough e-resources for students to study from home during the lockdown period and started immediately with the research on the best suitable databases for MCAST. The databases were identified and selected through rigorous research. Thus, renowned databases like IEEE and ProQuest were added to the existing EBSCO, Emerald and Weblink databases. One of the world's best databases for Engineers, IEEE, with its 5 million articles, served the purpose of providing quality teaching and learning to MCAST staff, students and researchers. ProQuest, with its user-friendly platform, was a boon to all and had a vast selection of 165,000 e-books to read through.

The new YouTube channel, MCAST LLRC, had also started during this period with short "How to" guideline videos.

The Library has taken every safety measure to ensure that all the students and members of staff are safe. With the help of MCAST management, sanitizer dispensers were fixed everywhere, desks and computers were arranged to adhere to the required distances, excess furniture was removed, a quarantine room was set up for returned books, and the library sessions were shifted to online training sessions. The Library registration forms were available in downloadable word format which can be filled and sent back to the Library by email. Online library accounts were created by library staff.

The long awaited academic year began in October 2020 amidst the fears and uncertainties of reopening during the pandemic. But the Library team was ready with the safety precautions and was excited to welcome the returning as well as new students. The Library looked very pretty with beautiful decorations.

The Library turned Pink on Breast Cancer Awareness Day with posters and books related

to breast cancer. Soon after that, on Halloween, ghosts and bones crept into the Library even though they failed to scare students!

Besides the electronic resources, one cannot forget books, magazines and the dissertations available at the Library. There needs to be a balance between the physical and the electronic to meet the different preferences of the users. The reasons for the purchase of physical books is -

- **Not every book has a digital version.**
- **Digital versions need special licensing to have them shared with a large community.**
- **In some cases, the digital version is more expensive.**
- **Formats are not always compatible with our technological infrastructure.**
- **If the Library stops subscription to a particular e-resource, then access will no longer be available.**

The Library has a treasure trove of information in physical books, on every topic under the sun. Even though in the midst of a pandemic, books are still being purchased. When it comes to research, one has to exhaust all possibilities from where to get the information. It is true that because of the pandemic, browsing between the shelves is at the moment not possible, but one can easily find out what the collection holds from the online catalogue. It lists all the books found in all MCAST libraries. One just needs to know how to search! This is where the online library training sessions come in!

Regular training sessions are conducted to help one locate resources in the Library, to find articles online, to access e-books and to improve searching skills! The tailor-made sessions are conducted for individuals and for groups.

# New Educational Psychology Services offered at MCAST

**MCAST** is now offering the service of an Educational Psychologist on MCAST Campus. The service is provided as part of the Wellbeing Hub. The role of the Educational Psychologist is to support lecturers and other staff working in the field of student support. Staff can liaise with the Educational Psychologist to discuss concerns that they have on any of their students and identify how they can be supported. The Educational Psychologist also supports students who are experiencing difficulties in their academic learning, social and emotional difficulties, and mental health issues. Identification of the students' needs is carried out and the appropriate support is provided either at individual or at group level. Assessments are carried out to identify any underlying conditions that are impacting the student's development. These conditions include: Autism, ADHD and Dyslexia amongst others.

In collaboration with the Inclusive Education Unit and the Learning Support Unit, interventions are provided to help students develop skills such as: social skills, study skills and organisational skills. Literacy and attention interventions can also be provided. Educational Psychologist can be contacted at [merilyn.muscat@mcast.edu.mt](mailto:merilyn.muscat@mcast.edu.mt).

## #Let'sTalk

You're invited to attend a support group to

## discuss better ways of dealing with anxiety

This will be delivered in small groups.  
If interested fill in the attached application.



Mind Full, or Mindful?

If you have any questions you can contact us on,  
[marilyn.muscat@mcast.edu.mt](mailto:marilyn.muscat@mcast.edu.mt) and [maria.lisa.gilson@mcast.edu.mt](mailto:maria.lisa.gilson@mcast.edu.mt)

 **MCAST**  
Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology

# Feeling Anxious? You are not alone! MCAST can help.

In liaison with the Learning Support Unit, a support group will be created to assist students and staff who have difficulties related to anxiety.

## You are not alone!

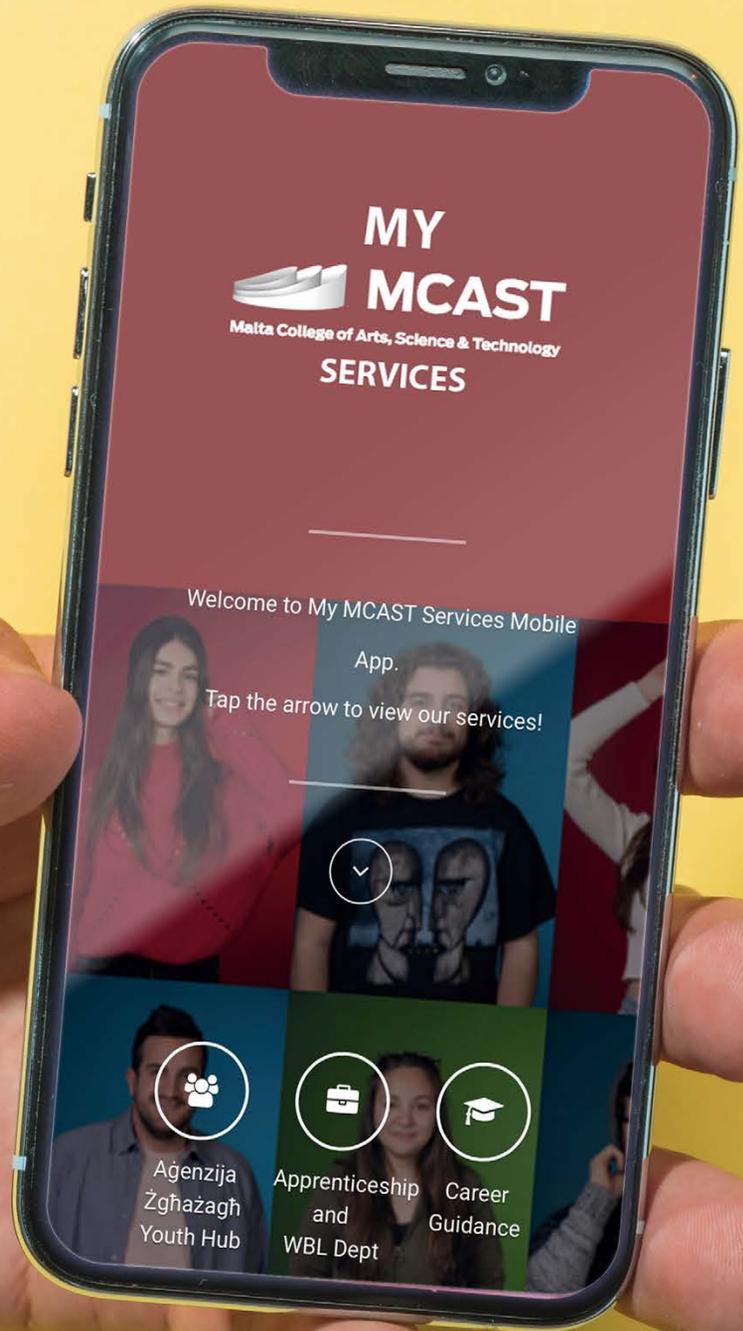
Feel free to contact us should you experience any anxiety issues and professionals will help you.

The Wellbeing Hub also provides the following services:

- Therapy Services
- Nutritional Advice
- Addiction Related Services
- Tobacco Cessation Support
- Mental Health Services
- Sexual Health Services

Outreach talks and individual sessions are conducted by all the above services.

# MCAST Services App



GET IT NOW

