

A Retrospective  
Look Into  
25 Years  
of MCAST

ISSUE 74

# MCAST LINK

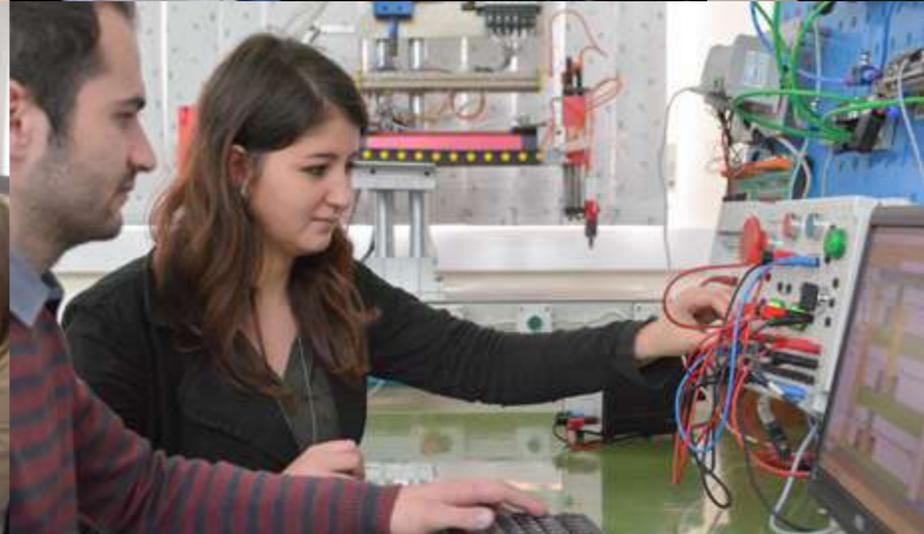
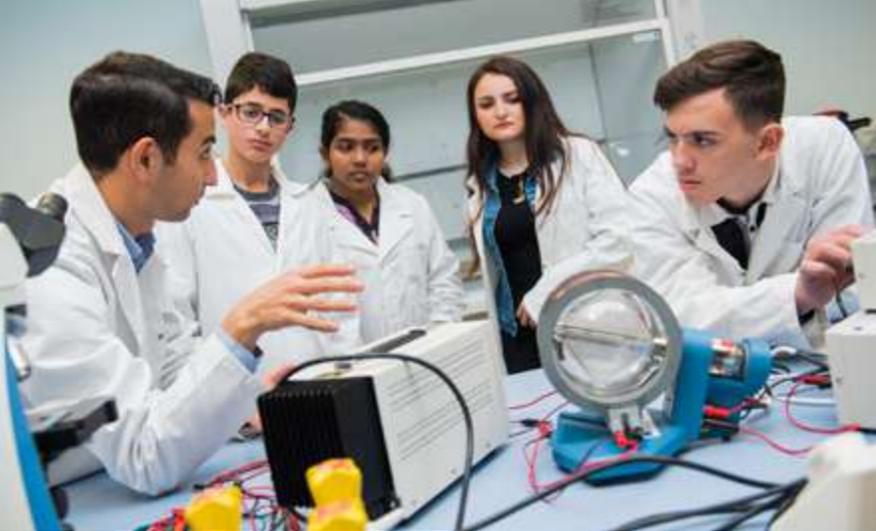
 25 YEARS  
SHAPING  
SUCCESS



**25 Years of MCAST**









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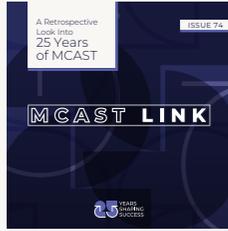
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MCASTlink is produced by the MCAST Communications Office

Editor & Producer  
Caroline Balzan

MCASTlink Editorial Team:  
Daniela Blagojevic  
Natalino Fenech  
David Kenely  
Nikita Pisani

Design  
Moose Design Studio

Print  
Government Printing Press

Proofreading  
Joyce Hill

Photography  
Jonathan Borg  
Mark Micallef

MCAST Communications Office  
Main Campus, Corradino Street,  
Paola PLA 9032, Malta.  
CALL +356 2398 7200

[MCAST.EDU.MT](http://MCAST.EDU.MT)



## Editorial

CAROLINE BALZAN

Putting together this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of MCASTlink has been very rewarding. It's been lovely reconnecting with past colleagues, those familiar faces from the early years who I've shared my years at MCAST with. Our conversations brought back a lot of memories. One thing every single colleague agreed on is how far we've come in just 25 years. The growth and development of this College fill us all with immense pride.

Student numbers have multiplied, both from Malta and beyond. Our staff has grown in parallel, with dedicated teams expanding to support this growth and innovation. New programmes across disciplines were created, levels were elevated to advanced qualifications, including bachelor's and master's degrees, and now even doctorates that position MCAST at the forefront of vocational and higher education. Physical campuses have expanded with new facilities. So many new departments and student services have been established, from career guidance to wellness support.

The heart of this edition lies in the personal stories inside. Hear directly from MCAST's founders about the vision that sparked it all. The first Principal reflects on the first years of the College. There's inspiration from a lecturer who once sat in our classrooms as a student, proving MCAST changes lives full circle. We spotlight 25 years of design at MCAST, the evolution of students support services, nursing and social care courses, the development and growth of our Gozo Campus and the Chaplaincy's quiet role in nurturing spirit and community, amongst other stories.

As we mark this milestone, let's honour the past while embracing the future. MCAST's next chapter promises even more innovation, inclusivity and impact for Malta. Thank you to every student, staff member and friend who's made these 25 years unforgettable.



## Principal and CEO Message

MR STEPHEN VELLA

As we commemorate 25 years since our founding in 2001, MCAST has undergone a great transformation, from a College initially focused on select vocational courses to an institution offering education at every level, from foundational programmes right through to doctoral qualifications.

When I joined MCAST in 2001, there was still a sense of the unknown about what the College would become. It was a new and ambitious project, filled with both uncertainty and excitement. We began with around 1,000 students, and at the time it was difficult to imagine how the institution would grow and evolve over the years. Yet, with determination, vision and collective effort, MCAST developed into the institution we know today.

I thank our predecessors who laid the foundations for the success of this College. Their foresight and commitment guided MCAST through its formative early years, turning ideas into the institution we celebrate today.

Over the years, MCAST has created life-changing opportunities for thousands of students, with over 50,000 graduates now contributing to Malta's industries as skilled workers and professionals across diverse fields. We have reshaped perceptions of vocational education, elevating it into a respected, high-quality pathway that is accessible to school leavers as well as adults pursuing lifelong learning.

Reflecting on this journey, my satisfaction comes from witnessing our alumni succeed and pursue careers with confidence. MCAST graduates excel across every sector, often rising to lead in their fields.

Looking ahead, we must continue to show the same foresight that guided our early years. The future will look different, particularly in an era driven by artificial intelligence. What will continue to make MCAST stand out is our commitment to collaboration, working closely with industry to create meaningful opportunities for students to excel across different sectors.

In this fast-changing environment, we will continue to prioritise human strengths such as adaptability and critical thinking. Our focuses remain preparing students for the digital economy, advancing research and innovation, expanding work-based learning opportunities, and nurturing traditional crafts and trades alongside lifelong education programmes for all.

# Laying the foundations: MCAST's formative years

CORYSE BORG

In this article, the first Principal ad-interim of MCAST Frederick Fearne reflects on the bold reforms that reshaped the country's technical and vocational landscape, while former Director of Further Studies and Education Joyce Pullicino speaks about the vision, challenges and determination that defined beginnings of MCAST.

In the late 1990s, Malta's vocational education system was fragmented - dispersed across several institutions - and inaccessible to many secondary school leavers.

When the first Principal ad-interim of MCAST Frederick Fearne looks back at the late 1990s, he recalls an education system that was ill-equipped to meet the demands of a rapidly changing labour market.

"At that time, there was little to no vocational education as such," Mr Fearne says. "You could say that it was the 'Cinderella' of the educational system. "There was a lacuna in between the people coming out of the trade schools and the University. MCAST filled that gap," he notes.

The decision to consolidate post-secondary vocational institutions under one umbrella was unprecedented. The result was the establishment of MCAST, designed as an inclusive, multi-entry institution.

Setting up MCAST was no small undertaking. Yet Mr Fearne describes the transition as largely constructive.

"I do not recall us having great obstacles or problems, to be honest. It was actually rather a smooth

transition. It was however a big change in mentality - we were no longer a Secondary School and were now an institution with its own set-up," he remembers.

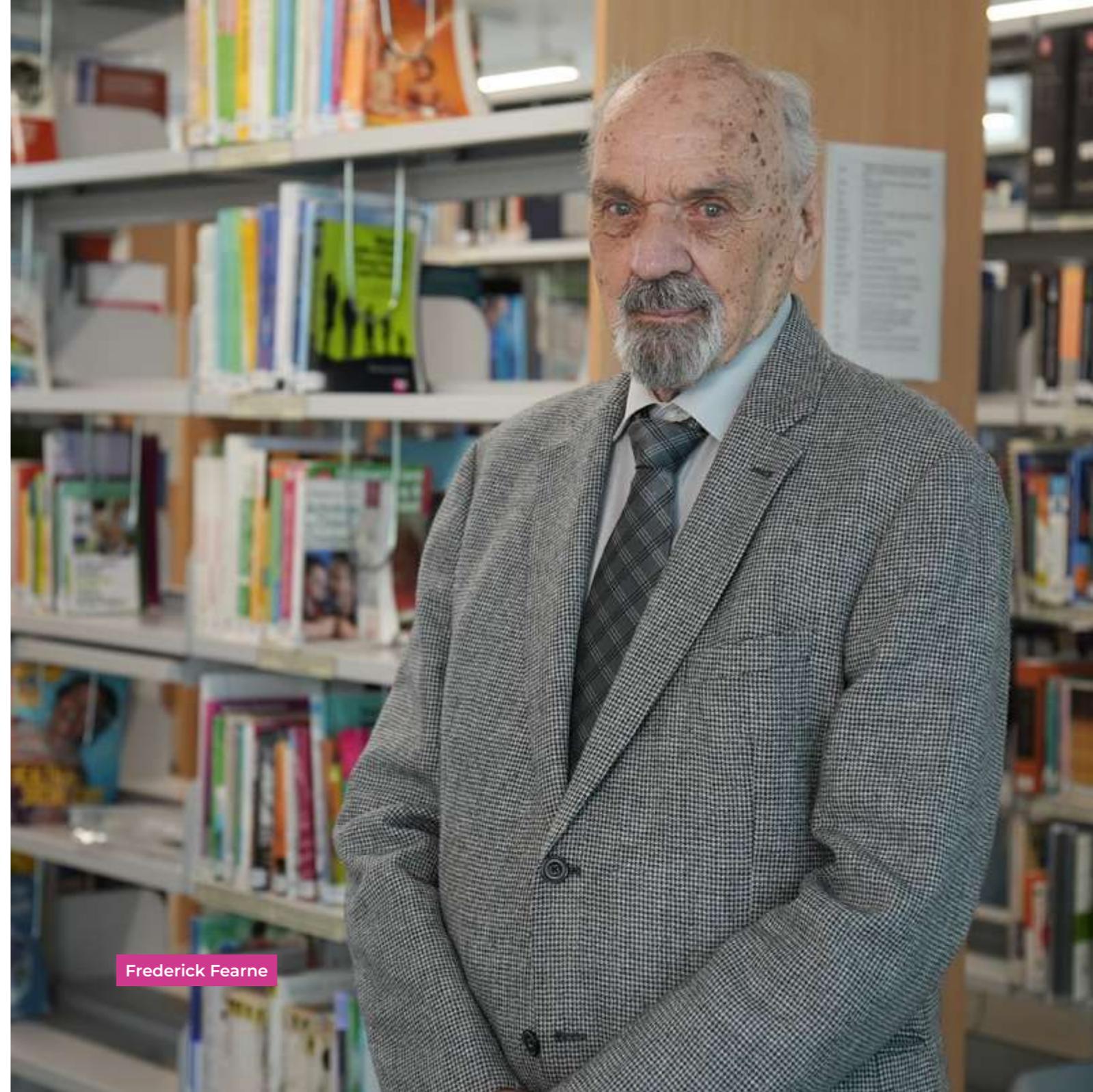
Adjustments to timetables and holiday structures were necessary. Seniority was retained and many lecturers joined on secondment.

Central to the College's ethos was inclusivity. The multi-entry point system opened doors to students regardless of academic background.

"This was one of the main aims - that we give the opportunity to everyone. To those young people who left school pretty much with no qualifications. Second chancers," Mr Fearne says, "Some students finished a course, say, in four years, others took five or six."

Today, MCAST stands as a first-choice institution for many school leavers. Mr Fearne views this cultural shift as one of its greatest achievements.

"The fact that many students are choosing MCAST as a first choice is a feather in our cap. It is something which everyone who has ever worked here is proud of," he reflects, "One of the reasons is that there is a vast choice of subjects. So, there is something for everyone."



Frederick Fearne

In the early 2000s, MCAST marked a structural shift in Malta's vocational and further education landscape. For Joyce Pullicino, who at the time served as Director of Further Studies and Education, the transition was both professional and deeply personal.

She had already been overseeing several of the institutions that would eventually form part of the new College.

"At the time, the institutions that used to exist on this campus fell under my remit," she explains, noting that these included a wide portfolio of evening courses. "There were many very enthusiastic lecturers who worked very hard to make a name for the institutions they were part of. Ex-students of these institutions were very much sought after by employers."

Transforming a collection of respected institutions into a unified national college came with significant hurdles.

Among the earliest was establishing the School of Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy. Securing appropriate premises proved complex, until government property in Sliema was identified.

Staffing posed an even greater challenge. "The greatest hurdle was to find a teacher of hairdressing," she recalls.

While the profession itself was thriving, attracting qualified practitioners to leave lucrative private careers for public service was far from straightforward.

A public call eventually yielded two successful candidates, one from Australia and another from Canada.

When it came to beauty therapy, the problem of finding teachers was even greater. In response, Ms

Pullicino created a training course for prospective educators and sought international expertise.

A visiting specialist connected the College with Professor William Arnold-Taylor, founder of International Therapy Examination Council (ITEC), who subsequently supported examinations in Malta and commended the high standard of student dissertations.

Financial constraints also threatened recruitment efforts. "At the very beginning we paid a 'teacher' rather than a 'lecturer' salary - so sometimes it was difficult to find somebody for many of the courses," she explains.

Determined to improve standards, she sought and obtained special permission from Castille to align salaries with university lecturer rates.

Beyond administrative problem-solving, Ms Pullicino attributes much of her contribution to personal ethos.

"I was happy in the field of education, but I am also a person who used to do a lot of voluntary work," she reflects.

That spirit of service and enthusiasm, she says, informed her governance approach and instilled pride in the institution's mission.

With programmes spanning engineering to creative industries, and pathways ranging from entry-level certificates to degrees and Doctorate qualifications, MCAST continues to embody its founding principles: different entries, different exits, and opportunity for all.



Joyce Pullicino



# First MCAST Principal

ROY SNELLING

I was appointed the first Principal of the newly created Malta College of Science and Technology (MCAST) in 2001. I had worked in vocational education and training in the U.K. for over 35 years Including 12 years as a Principal; and in 2000 my college was given a Beacon Award by the Minister of Education in recognition of the quality of its provision.



This placed it in the top 4% of colleges in England. I left that post in 2001 I was looking for a new challenge before retirement and the challenge that presented itself was being Principal of MCAST. I had no previous connection with Malta although coincidentally my wife's grandfather originated from Malta - her maiden name being Sammut.

There were a number of issues that had to be addressed with the creation of a new institution, most of which would not be resolved in a short period of time but a start had to be made. As MCAST was the bringing together of disparate institutes into one integrated coherent body but without the loss of their individual characteristics. On occasions each Institute would jealously defend its 'independence' and be reluctant to recognise the corporate, collective decision making process and systems or be fully aware of the distinctive contribution each could make to the success of the new college. The problem was not made easier by the geographical separation of each Institute but it was important that no matter to what Institute staff or

students might belong each had the same access to the full range of services and support that was on offer.

The development of central services such as a library and learning support centre, a student counseling service were essential as was a management information system and an effective quality assurance process.

Historically the vocational education and training sector in Malta as elsewhere in Europe was the 'cinderella' of the education system. The creation of MCAST was as opportunity for a major capital investment programme to partially address this problem of underfunding. Major building works of renovation and repurposing was put into effect to provide a more appropriate learning and teaching environment for the benefit of both staff and students.

Equally important were the courses and curriculum on offer. In some Institutes the programmes and methods of delivery assessment were antiquated and not always relevant to the needs of students, local

industry and commerce or the wider needs of the Maltese economy. There were significant gaps in what was being offered with a limited range of courses that were often outdated and not reflecting the changing and future needs of the Maltese economy or equipping or re-equipping students with the essential skills and knowledge required for the changing world. The means of delivery were also limited largely requiring full time attendance therefore denying those in work or other commitments the opportunity to acquiring new skills and qualifications. Attendance patterns were inflexible thereby restricting access to many would be students.

Some of the courses were UK based and although these links to UK and other European Institutions and examination bodies were beneficial in the short term they could not be seen as a permanent solution. Malta and MCAST needed to develop its own courses at all levels relevant to needs and future needs of the Maltese economy but also having international credibility and recognition as well as providing wider opportunities for successful careers for students.

These courses needed to be relevant, up to date, inclusive and providing clear routes of progression.

Alongside the need for curriculum development was the employment of staff, teaching and support, to deliver it effectively and efficiently. It was necessary to create an environment that would attract and retain the brightest and the best by making MCAST an equal opportunities employer with good working conditions and pay with clear pathways for career and professional development.

Over the past 25 years MCAST has successfully addressed these and other issues and in so doing has established itself as a dynamic, responsive college that provides excellent vocational education opportunities for all in a supportive and welcoming environment by putting students at the centre of its activities. I congratulate MCAST on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and salute all those people who have contributed to its success. I am confident that over the next 25 years it will continue to flourish and be a beacon of excellence in serving Malta and its citizens.

# Inside The Decisions That Shaped MCAST's Evolution

CORYSE BORG

The legacy of Ms Helga Ellul and Ms Antoinette Caruana is one of continuity, foresight and an unwavering commitment to national skills development.

According to business leader Ms Helga Ellul, one of the most important decisions taken during the inception of MCAST was the way the Board of Governors was set up.

“It was made up of a healthy match of business leaders on one side with experienced educational experts in the field of vocational/technical education on the other side,” she says.

MCAST was set up with a clear vision to move away from the image of “trade schools” and, modelled on the Fellenberg centre, into the image of modern training into technology, she explains. “I think it was a most important decision of the Board of Governors to involve industry leaders in the decision-making processes,” Ms Ellul adds. “At the time, we were far ahead in technology, and knowing about future trends and needs, than the academic experts. So, this drive by businesses for the academic partners to embrace new technologies and work together to model and design the right curricula created the relevance MCAST needed to place the students in the right work environments.”

Senior HR professional Ms Antoinette Caruana starts off by acknowledging that the growth and development of MCAST over the past 25 years is truly remarkable.

Starting from more traditional vocational areas, building on the legacy of the previous Polytechnic, and armed with the commitment and determination of key stakeholders both within MCAST and externally, this recognised vocational institution has earned a positive reputation both locally and internationally for the provision of vocational education across various sectors and at different levels.

Key milestones have been the setting up of Institutes within MCAST and the provision of critical programmes which were a lifeline for various industries in Malta.

“A notable one was the setting up of the aircraft maintenance programmes, as well as continuous training programmes for adult learners. Having also been involved in heritage, I can say that the conservation programmes offer exciting opportunities in this sector,” she says.

Ms Caruana says that she has also witnessed at first-hand various family members and colleagues who



Ms Antoinette Caruana



Ms Helga Ellul

have also taken advantage of MCAST's part-time and evening programmes.

Furthermore, the opportunity for MCAST students to grow from foundation studies to higher diploma and tertiary studies is also very significant.

“Of course, we need always to ensure that standards are maintained and that content remains relevant,” she says. “Working closely with key players in the various sectors contributes to this, and adhering to the highest quality standards in vocational education is another indisputable priority.”

“The new buildings and resources are also a reflection of the focus on vocational education in Malta, providing students with an attractive place to learn and grow in their studies, as well as socially,” she adds.

“The need to be closely connected to industry and society is particularly important,” she continues.

“Industry is crying out for employees who want to grow and who can help the business, whatever that may be, to continue to be relevant and successful,” Ms Caruana says. “Inviting industry, whichever sector that may be, to truly be a stakeholder is essential. It is happening and needs to continue and evolve further.”

Ms Ellul adds: “It is clear that today, MCAST has established itself as an important educational partner to industry. Seeing the wide range of subjects also shows that MCAST is catering and evolving to the needs of all the economic players of our country.”

The realisation and commitment to work-based learning and industry collaboration is fundamental to vocational education, says Ms Caruana.

“Learning to learn and developing a “love” to learn are critical. In today's world and even more in tomorrow's, careers will grow and change and if we do not change, we will be left behind. To ensure that students remain employable, and can update their skills and reskill,

the link with industry, and work-based learning, the provision of apprenticeships, industry visits, industry tutors, are all critical.”

The growing number of students and the increase in the number of programmes on offer in so many areas and at different levels have had a significant impact on the workforce in Malta.

Students entering the workforce are better placed to take on their responsibilities because, in a number of cases, they have been able to undertake the necessary practical experience or, at least, learn from experienced people in the industry.

They are also able to return to their studies, grow their portfolio and enhance their skills as time passes.

For willing students who want to continue to grow and develop, MCAST provides opportunities, sometimes also with international placements, to meet their ambitions.

In the past, Ms Caruana has been involved in various discussions, preparation of standards (through the MPVQAC and the Employment and Training Corporation at the time), organisation of programmes, training of MCAST tutors, enabling industry professionals to share their knowledge at MCAST in technical and heritage related sectors, amongst other initiatives.

“The work-based learning and ongoing collaboration with industry which truly works in practice are what make MCAST different and attractive to employers, young students and employees who wish to pursue further vocational learning,” she states.

As for the future of MCAST, Ms Ellul says that, with the strong influence and changes AI is bringing, it is essential that the institution is at the forefront to

embrace AI in education and effect the necessary changes fast, as well as to do this together with the economic players and with the business leaders.

“It is only then that we can remain relevant,” she stresses. “Technology is changing so rapidly and fast that even the next five years are difficult to predict. What is important is to network internationally with other similar and relevant education set-ups and business organisations to stay informed.”

Ms Caruana agrees that the world of work is changing rapidly.

“Technology in all areas knows no bounds. The world of tomorrow will be very different and MCAST students also need to be aware of this, to be prepared for it, to contribute to it and to continue developing themselves,” she says.

Another important change which should be implemented in the future is that the services provided by MCAST in addition to the study programmes, such as counselling, career services, apprenticeship programmes, international placements, need to be enhanced, Ms Caruana adds.

“I also believe strongly that MCAST, together with employers, can offer opportunities for people in employment to continue learning, skilling and reskilling so that they too can be relevant as the workplace changes and opportunities appear. MCAST has a role to play here, and I believe it can be expanded further.”

**“Finally,” says Ms Ellul, “it is important to listen to our students, to our young generation, to give them a say on the way forward. It is their future... and we should let them be part of the decision makers.”**

## The Making Of Malta’s Next Generation Of Engineers

CORYSE BORG

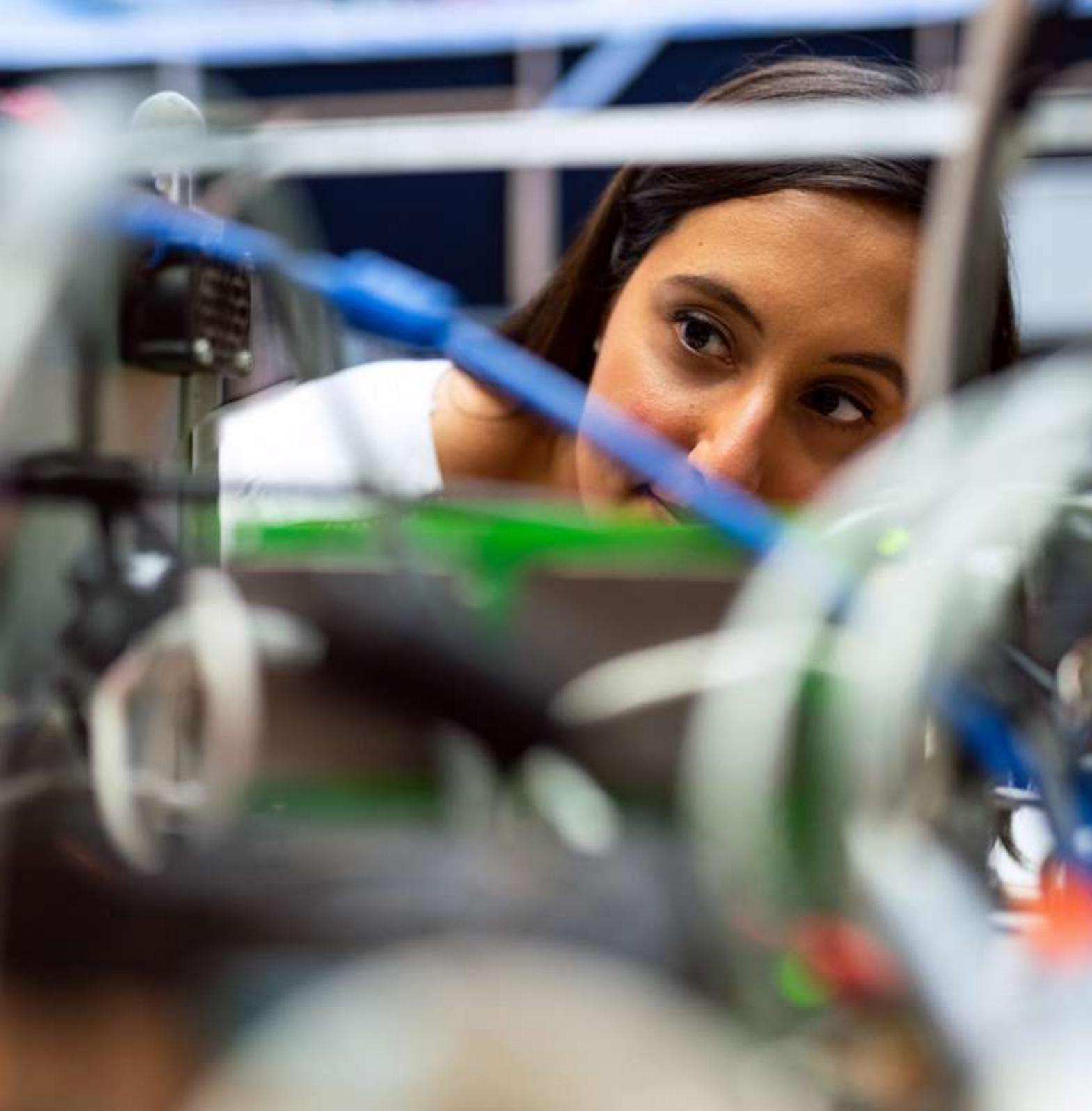
**As Malta’s engineering education reaches a historic turning point, a decade of curriculum reform, external scrutiny and cultural shift culminates in a first-of-its-kind achievement and signals a broader rethinking of what professional engineering looks like in a modern, applied economy.**

In February 2026, two graduates of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) crossed a threshold that had, until recently, remained closed. At the official warrant ceremony organised by the Bord tal-Ingjiniera at the Mediterranean Conference Centre, they became the first MCAST engineering graduates to be awarded the professional engineering warrant.

Speaking after the ceremony, Mr Stephen Vella, Principal and Chief Executive Officer of MCAST, said, “This milestone reflects years of structured development, quality assurance and sustained collaboration with national and international stakeholders. It confirms the standing of MCAST’s engineering programmes and the ability of our graduates to meet professional standards. Industry has long recognised the value of our graduates, who today play leading roles across manufacturing, research, technology and beyond.”

Dr Ing. Stephen Sammut, Director of the Institute of Engineering and Transport at MCAST, said the development marked an important step for engineering education in Malta. “The recognition of our graduates for warranting is the result of rigorous course design, external evaluation and continuous engagement with the profession. It reinforces the role of applied engineering education in responding to national skills needs,” he said.

For Mr Adrian Zahra, one of the first two MCAST graduates to be awarded the engineering warrant, the moment carried both personal and professional weight. “Being awarded the engineering warrant was a very proud moment for me personally, as it represents the culmination of years of study, practical experience and professional development,” he says. “Being part of this milestone also brings a sense of responsibility to uphold the standards of the



Dr Ing Stephen Sammut



Dr Misha Filip



Prof Dr Drazan Kozak

profession and to encourage future students who choose the same career path.”

He notes that achieving it as an MCAST graduate affirms that the education he received meets national professional standards.

His sense of preparedness, Mr Zahra explains, was shaped by MCAST’s strong emphasis on applied learning, adding that the balance between academic grounding and hands-on experience helped to build not only technical competence, but also confidence, problem-solving ability and a professional mindset. Delivered by experienced tutors with industry insight, the blend of theory and practice ensured that learning was both rigorous and directly relevant, he adds.

All MCAST courses are fully accredited within Malta’s national education framework, with structured entry routes designed to ensure strong academic and technical foundations before degree-level study. Engineering students may progress through ‘A’ Levels, an Advanced Diploma at MQF Level 4, or

MCAST’s Undergraduate Diploma in Foundations of Engineering at MQF Level 5. Internships and work-based learning are integral to the programmes, equipping graduates with practical competence and professional confidence. In this way, parity of esteem in education is anchored in clear standards, defined pathways and proven outcomes. What were once largely vocational, practice-led routes have evolved into fully integrated degree programmes, combining applied training with research, theory and critical thinking.

Dr Misha Filip, Principal Lecturer at the Faculty of Technology at the University of Portsmouth, who has served as External Examiner for the Electrical and Electronics Engineering degrees, describes this transition as pivotal. “I have directly witnessed the transition in MCAST from providing a top-up delivery model for students to graduate with a bachelor’s degree to a fully integrated degree programme-based delivery,” he explains.



Crucially, the shift did not erase MCAST's applied identity. The option to upskill later in life, Dr Filip notes, remains "a very valuable societal and industrial contribution." "With the integrated degree delivery, it is more evident that MCAST's quality is perfectly comparable to the sector as a whole," he says. "It just became very obvious to potential employers as to what MCAST engineering graduates have achieved and in what manner."

For engineering students, the ability to apply for a professional warrant is not merely procedural. It is aspirational. As Dr Filip puts it plainly, "To be recognised and registered as a professional engineer... is the ultimate ambition of every young engineer." Warrant eligibility opens doors to senior roles, international mobility and higher earning potential, and reshapes how graduates are perceived in the labour market. "Employers look upon MCAST graduates as an asset worth investing in, as their future registration further enhances their own standing and reputation. This, in turn, encourages students to apply for an engineering course in MCAST." Dr Filip adds, "In the end, literally, everyone wins."

That sense of professional legitimacy is echoed by Prof. Dr Dražan Kozak, who has served as an external evaluator of MCAST engineering degree programmes and dissertations across production, plant and marine engineering disciplines.

From his vantage point, the warrant pathway reflects a natural progression. "MCAST engineering programmes are largely delivered by lecturers with extensive industrial experience, enabling them to transfer practical, first-hand knowledge to students. Dissertations frequently address real-world industrial challenges, which aligns with the core purpose of educating future engineers. There are also

dissertations that deal with the state-of-the art in engineering and answer research questions," he says.

He also notes that the introduction of the PWQC course represented a logical continuation of MCAST's efforts to prepare successful graduates for applying for an engineering warrant. Importantly, Prof. Dr Kozak stresses that professional recognition also carries responsibility. "It is important to remember that rights come with responsibilities, and a warrant does not mark the end of the journey, but rather the beginning of a process of lifelong learning."

Although all study programmes are accredited by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA), MCAST's decision to pursue an independent external evaluation of its engineering programmes by the German Accreditation Agency ASIIN, one of the leading international accreditation bodies, significantly adds value and credibility.

For Prof. Dr Kozak, who was personally involved in the process through an interview with ASIIN representatives, this step was transformative. He stated that during the process, he confirmed that the output competencies of MCAST graduates, most clearly demonstrated through their dissertations, meet the required standards. Prof. Dr Kozak says that he also observed improvements in infrastructure, laboratory equipment, and curriculum development, as well as the continuous professional development of the teaching staff, all in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

"I therefore consider the ASIIN external audit to be a significant step forward for MCAST in ensuring quality engineering education and validating the value of its degrees," he says.

Public debate around engineering warrants has, at times, exposed deeper tensions, particularly around

perceptions of vocational versus university academic education. Both Dr Filip and Prof. Dr Kozak respond to these concerns with evidence drawn from practice rather than ideology.

Dr Filip, who is an accreditor for the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) in the UK, and who regularly goes on (and chairs) accreditation visits to UK universities' engineering departments, says that he has every confidence that the level, standards and quality of the MCAST engineering courses are comparable to other international engineering degrees.

"MCAST engineering courses equal most and exceed the quality of some of the accredited UK institutions," he says.

Having served on international accreditation panels for numerous European universities and colleges, Prof. Dr Kozak also confidently states that MCAST's study programmes and the competencies of its graduates are of a high standard and internationally recognised.

**"The labour market is ultimately the most authoritative measure of graduates' competencies," he says. "Based on my knowledge and experience, MCAST graduates are professional and responsible engineers who demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous learning. Many have successfully established themselves in companies abroad, further confirming the quality of their education."**

The debate, Prof. Dr Kozak suggests, often reflects outdated hierarchies. "University and vocational education are equally important for society and

should not be viewed hierarchically. Each serves a distinct and essential role. While innovation, research, and science drive development, professional and applied knowledge remain fundamental and form the backbone of a country's global competitiveness," he states. Invoking the German concept of Wissenschaft für die Praxis, he underscores a simple truth: knowledge must work in the real world.

With warrant eligibility now established, attention turns to what comes next. Both Dr Filip and Prof. Dr Kozak emphasise that engineering education must remain dynamic. "The engineering curriculum is a "living thing" - it should never become stagnant, and regular benchmarking to the employers' needs, students' aspirations and international standards of general and engineering education, are the way of life for all." They both point out that a logical next step would be pursuing EUR-ACE accreditation for MCAST's engineering programmes. "While only a limited number of European institutions hold this accreditation, achieving it would position MCAST as a forward-looking and reputable institution," Prof. Dr Kozak says.

Taken together, these perspectives frame the 2026 warrant milestone not as an endpoint, but as confirmation that applied engineering education, when held to international standards, can produce professionals fully equipped for both local responsibility and global opportunity.



## MCAST Leadership

STELA VLADIMIROVA-IVANOVA, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

Since MCAST opened its doors in 2001, the College has evolved dramatically, thanks to visionary leadership that has driven innovation. These leaders left indelible marks through their unique visions, inspiring us as we celebrate the College's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary by revisiting their achievements.

In 2001, Mr Frederick Fearne was appointed Principal, with Mr Victor Scicluna as President of the Board of Governors. Together, they laid the foundations for the new College. Mr Fearne also mentored his successor, Mr Roy Snelling, who became Principal and CEO in 2002 and served until 2004. Under Mr Snelling's stewardship and with Mr Fearne's unfailing collaboration, MCAST expanded rapidly with the opening of the Gozo Campus and the launch of three new Institutes. Mr Snelling took pride in the role, declaring, "It is anticipated that MCAST will become a centre of excellence in vocational education and training."

In 2004, Mr Frank Edwards assumed the role of Principal and CEO, emphasising, "I feel it is critically important for the College to play its part in meeting the country's need for a vibrant economy and education system." He spearheaded major initiatives,

such as MCAST becoming the first college in Europe to receive the Edexcel International Centre of Excellence Award. In 2006, Mr Paul A. Attard became President of the Board of Governors, playing a pivotal role in advancing vocational education and training (VET). He affirmed, "MCAST's mission is to deliver universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with an international dimension ... [and] we are delivering this mission."

In 2008, Prof. Ing. Maurice Grech took over as Principal and CEO, expanding the College's accreditations. Key milestones included launching MCAST's first Level 6 bachelor's degree courses in September 2010 and the first vocational degrees in December of that year, alongside the newly appointed President, Mr Joseph Farrugia. Between 2012 and 2013, leadership transitioned to Mr Stephen Cachia as Principal and CEO and Dr Silvio De Bono as President. MCAST

**MCAST  
PRESIDENTS  
OF THE BOARD  
OF GOVERNORS  
2001-2026**



2001-2006  
Mr Victor Scicluna



2006-2010  
Mr Paul A Attard



2010-2013  
Mr Joseph Farrugia



2013-2018  
Dr Silvio De Bono



2018-2020  
Mr Frederick Schembri



2020-2024  
Prof Ian Refalo



2024-  
Mr Horace Laudi

**MCAST  
PRINCIPALS  
2001-2026**



2001  
Mr Frederick Fearn



2002-2004  
Mr Roy Snelling



2004-2007  
Mr Frank Edwards



2008-2012  
Prof Maurice Grech



2012-2018  
Mr Stephen Cachia



2018-2024  
Prof Joachim James Calleja



2024-  
Mr Stephen Vella

flourished with developments like a state-of-the-art digital TV studio at the Mosta Campus, the inauguration of the Institute of Applied Sciences, and a new professional gym at the Paola Main Campus. Growth continued: the Gozo Campus expanded in September 2014, and in October 2017, MCAST introduced its first master's programmes at MQF Level 7.

In 2018, Mr Frederick Schembri and Prof. Joachim James Calleja stepped in as President and Principal/CEO respectively. They advanced MCAST's inclusive mission through the Masterplan 2018, which emphasized a socialised, student-centred, and community-focused campus. The challenging years of 2020 and 2021 saw Prof. Ian Refalo appointed President amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In a joint statement for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary MCASTlink issue, Principal Prof. Joachim James Calleja and President Prof. Ian Refalo noted, "Twenty years into the life of an educational institution, and having experienced a pandemic, technology is re-prioritised as the new platform for education and training." This underscored the College's resilience in delivering quality education amid technological shifts.

Most recently, in 2024, Mr Stephen Vella and Mr Horace Laudi became Principal/CEO and President respectively, navigating tensions from ongoing MUT directives. The signing of a new collective agreement in 2025 resolved these issues, with Mr Vella stating, "This milestone reaffirms our commitment to valuing our educators and staff, whose well-being is essential to the success and growth of our entire College community."

Over 25 years, MCAST has overcome challenges and embraced transformative growth, all thanks to the steadfast leadership of those who guided it. As we reflect on their legacies, let us draw inspiration from their achievements and commitment to excellence.





First group of ICT students



First group of ICT Lecturing staff with Institute Director Mr Juan Borg Manduca



## Interview With Mr Conrad Vassallo, Director Of The Institute of Information and Communication Technology

MAVERICK SPITERI, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

Since joining the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) in 2001, the Director of the Institute of Information and Communication Technology, Mr Conrad Vassallo, has played a crucial role in shaping the MCAST approach to ICT education and innovation.

His journey reflects the transformation of MCAST, from its early days as a newly established institution to its current role as a leading provider of higher education with strong industry alignment.

Mr Vassallo joined MCAST on 1 September 2001 as an Assistant Lecturer, shortly after graduating from the University of Malta with a Bachelor of Education (Hons) in Computing. He was among the first lecturers at the newly founded Institute of ICT, which was created in response to significant national investment in the ICT sector and a government strategy that was aimed to strengthening Malta's digital workforce.

Originally located within St Joseph Junior Lyceum, the Institute started with a small group of students and minimal infrastructure, meaning a clear vision was needed to build its foundations. A pivotal influence during these years was the Institute's first director, Mr Juan Borg Manduca. His leadership experience within the IT industry was crucial for introducing structured

operational practices, at a time when formal educational rules were still emerging. His use of ISO 9000 standards helped to initiate clear procedures and governance frameworks, many of which continue to inform MCAST's operations today. Together with Deputy Directors Mr Krassimir Andreinski and Mr Mario Pace, this leadership team provided strong role models that significantly influenced Mr Vassallo's professional development.

The Institute's initial academic offering was based on BTEC qualifications from Edexcel, providing international recognition to vocational programmes and a solid quality assurance framework. Mr Vassallo's appointment as BTEC Programme Manager, coordinating programmes from Level 2 to Level 4, marked a significant step in his career. This role involved curriculum development, assessment design, internal verification and student support for external reviews, while keeping up with lecturing responsibilities. The experience equipped him with



# 25 Years Of MCAST In Gozo ... Well Almost ...

ING. GODWIN GRECH, DIRECTOR MCAST GOZO CAMPUS

The year 2026 marks MCAST's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, although MCAST Gozo is technically a year younger. In 2001 MCAST offered its first course in Gozo through the Education Division at the Sir M. A. Refalo Centre for Further Studies (now Sir M. A. Refalo Sixth Form) in Victoria.

deep understanding of academic leadership and programme management.

His growth in leadership duties led to his appointment as Deputy Director, working with Mr Mark Anthony Farrugia. In 2013, the Institute came under the temporary leadership of Deputy Principal Mr Anthony Saliba, whose experience and people-focused style of leadership had a huge impact. In 2014, Mr Vassallo was formally appointed Director of the Institute of ICT, a role which he continues today, guiding the Institute direction.

Throughout his time in office, Mr Vassallo has consistently mastered the use of digital tools to enhance teaching, learning and administration. As early as 2005, he started the use of Moodle with his students, an initiative that later expanded across MCAST. In 2008, he developed an online feedback system that generated personalized reports for students and lecturers, while in 2017, he created a platform to manage participant assessment for the MCAST Skills Challenge. These developments reflected a longstanding belief that technology should serve as an enabler of educational quality.

While the Institute of ICT is not directly responsible for the College's IT infrastructure, collaborating with the IT Department has been essential in meeting the Institute's evolving needs. General upgrades to computing resources, internet and support for academic requirements have been achieved

through cooperation with the Director of IT, Mr Daniel Zammit. Strong industry partnerships and funded projects gave the Institute the opportunity to secure equipment donations, ensuring students practice on technologies that meet the industry's expectations.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the resilience of MCAST's digital systems. The transition to online learning was handled effectively, largely due to the familiarity with Moodle and the adaptation of Microsoft Teams. This period also shifted towards paperless processes, mainly in assignment submission and academic administration, changes that have since become embedded in daily practice.

Today, the Institute of ICT serves approximately 1,450 students and 90 lecturers. Mr Conrad Vassallo's leadership emphasizes empathy, communication, trust and development, recognising that sustainable innovation depends on people as much as technology. The Institute's academic profile has expanded, including degree programmes in Cybersecurity, Applied Data Science and Digital Games Development, reflecting both local and international demand.

Mr Vassallo's key lessons of his journey are clear: the importance of adaptability, the value of investing in people and the need for a clear strategic plan. His experience is an important example of the impact educational leadership has.

The first dedicated MCAST Gozo Centre was officially opened in Xagħra by the then Minister for Gozo, Ms Giovanna Debono, in October 2002.

In the 2002-2003 academic year, the MCAST Gozo Centre enrolled 63 full-time (day) students across seven courses. At that time Malta did not yet have a national qualifications framework; MCAST had been recently established to overhaul and modernise the country's vocational education and training to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. Just a year later, in October 2003, MCAST opened a second Gozo Centre in Xewkija to increase physical capacity and add specialised training facilities required by the expanding programme offerings.

In the following years, the Xagħra Centre hosted a range of business courses (including accounting and financial services) alongside ICT programmes (Levels 2 to 4, leading to specialisation in software development or hardware/networking support). The Xewkija Centre offered mechanical, electrical, building and construction engineering courses including carpentry, welding, fabrication and draughtsmanship, as well as community services programmes in health and social care, and hairdressing.

Through these two centres, the College provided Gozitan school-leavers with alternative VET pathways within its remit as a further and higher education institution. It also fulfilled its role as a community college by supporting re-skilling and up-skilling for the Gozitan population in general. Notably, during this period, MCAST still delivered programmes developed and regulated by foreign awarding bodies, including City and Guilds and BTEC (Edexcel).

Over the years, the MCAST Gozo Centres went through a steady expansion in terms of programmes, courses (at different levels), resources, facilities and training opportunities. Important investments were made, particularly at the Xewkija Centre, to develop and equip high quality training facilities in different sectors. In particular, in 2008, new workshops, co-funded from the 2004-2006 European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), were inaugurated. This was undoubtedly a significant upgrade in our technical training facilities and the result of the relentless drive and effort by key officials, including Mr Frederick Fearne - at the time, MCAST Projects Director and member of the MCAST Board of Governors. In the following years, the Xagħra and Xewkija Centres benefitted from significant investments in training equipment co-funded from the 2007-2013 ERDF funding, through

which MCAST acquired new PCs and a range of high-level equipment for its mechanical engineering and woodwork workshops.

These investments, carried out in the 2007-2013 EU funding period, were in excess of €700,000. Concurrently, other investments from College/national funds made it possible to offer new training programmes in additional areas. In fact, over a number of years, the College expanded its course provision at the Xewkija Centre, including health and social courses at Level 4, hairdressing programmes at Foundation and Level 3 diploma levels, and subsequently early childhood education at Level 4.

For twelve years, MCAST delivered its programmes in Gozo through these two centres. Needless to say, operating from a split-site meant coping with several administrative, logistic and efficiency problems. Consequently, for many years, a long-term infrastructural objective was the development

of the Xewkija Centre to be able to host all MCAST Gozo courses and students under one roof, an idea originally spearheaded by Mr Frederick Fearne and subsequently developed by Mr Manuel Attard, MCAST CAO and myself as MCAST Gozo Director. This led to a proposed masterplan for one MCAST Campus in Xewkija. However, this proposal did not materialise.

In summer 2014, under the ministerial direction of Minister Evarist Bartolo, the two MCAST Gozo Centres were relocated to our present site in Ġhajnsielem – formerly housing the Wistin Camilleri School of Arts and Craft. This marked yet another important milestone. In fact, as from the start of academic year 2014-2015, all MCAST operations in Gozo have been conducted from one site, the new MCAST Gozo Campus. The new campus not only solved the logistic problems emanating from operating from a split-site but also represented a considerable improvement in facilities and in the students' learning environment. The improved facilities and

setup put MCAST in a better position to accomplish its role of further and higher educational college as well as to fulfil its role of community college for re-skilling and up-skilling the Gozitan community in general. Over the past years, the location of the campus also attracted a number of Malta-resident students hailing from northern localities in Malta to pursue their vocational and professional education and training at the Gozo Campus rather than at Paola.

Despite its relatively small size in comparison to the MCAST Malta-based Institutes, the MCAST Gozo Campus has often been an important contributor or even a protagonist in College-wide and even wider-scale initiatives. Today, students at secondary level are able to choose from a wide range of vocational and applied vocational subjects at SEC/SEAC level, the assessment of which reflects the assessment structures and methodologies developed by MCAST over the years.

Few people perhaps remember that the very first vocational subjects in a secondary school in recent years were actually the result of a pilot project led by the Ministry for Education, and conducted between MCAST Gozo and the Gozo College Secondary School. This pilot project, which started in 2013, saw the introduction of a number of engineering units in the Secondary School Core Curriculum Programme. Students who participated in this project, starting from their Year 9, were awarded an MQF Level 1 certificate at the end of their secondary school phase. This pilot project initiative served as a testbed and contributed to the wider reforms which saw the introduction of vocational subjects in secondary schools at a national level and related initiatives, including the MCAST Partner School Project with many college networks across Malta and Gozo.

The past years have seen yet a further increase in the number of courses offered at the Gozo Campus, particularly at higher levels and in sync with the



country's economic and labour market developments. In 2013-2014, in sync with the government's free childcare initiatives, we launched the MCAST-BTEC National Diploma in Children's Play, Learning and Development. In 2015-2016, the Gozo Campus had the first intake of foreign students taking vocational training in Gozo. Two groups of Ukrainian and Kazakh students started training programmes at the Gozo Campus in February 2016. One of the groups was enrolled in the Diploma in Electrical Installations (Buildings and Structures), while the other group started an intensive English language training programme as an essential pre-requisite for subsequent technical training at MCAST Paola. In 2016-2017, a new (Level 5) Higher Diploma for Accounting Technicians was launched at the Gozo Campus, concurrently with the MCAST IBMC. In 2017-2018, to complement the developments in the health sector taking place in Gozo, the Advanced Diploma in Health Sciences was launched, offering a career pathway for prospective students wishing to pursue a career in health, including in nursing.

The academic year 2018-2019 marked another first for the MCAST Gozo Campus. In fact, in October 2018 the College launched the first MCAST degree programme ever running on a full-time basis at the Gozo Campus – the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Inclusive Education - with an initial intake of 10 full-time students. The first two years of this degree programme, equivalent to the Level 5 Higher Diploma part, were offered in Gozo, while for the last year the students joined their peers at the Institute of Community Services at Paola.

Concurrently, the same degree programme, in its entirety, was also launched on a part-time basis for Learning Support Educators already in employment. 81 LSEs were enrolled in this degree part-time programme in Gozo in its first intake. A year later, in October 2019, the MCAST Gozo Campus launched two other prestigious courses - the ACCA qualification, an

internationally recognised qualification which leads to the acquisition of the accountancy warrant to practice as a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) in Malta, and the Level 5 Higher Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Early Years, at the end of which, successful students could optionally do a top-up year at the University of Malta to obtain a degree. Eventually, the latter was elevated to a bachelor's degree in Early Years, delivered entirely at the MCAST Gozo Campus. December 2024 marked yet another important milestone with the first-ever Gozo Campus graduation ceremony to confer degrees on students completing Bachelor's degree programmes delivered totally at the Gozo Campus.

Undoubtedly, MCAST has evolved into a success story in Gozo as in Malta. Year after year, the Centre has gradually expanded its course provision in Gozo and the student population is steadily in the region of 230 full-time students, a number which reflects Gozo's demography. MCAST training programmes delivered in Gozo fulfil the same quality assurance standards that are applicable to the same programmes delivered at the respective MCAST Institute in Malta. This ensures that Gozitan students benefit from the same quality of service that is available to their Maltese peers at the Malta-based Institutes, on their own home ground.

Over the past years, we have endeavoured to provide an enriching learning experience to our students, through work placements and apprenticeships as well as through participation in EU programmes. Several students have benefitted from such initiatives. The first MCAST Gozo students to benefit from an industrial work placement overseas go back to summer 2004, when a group of IT students took an industrial placement under the then Leonardo Da Vinci (LdV) programme in Ireland. Since then, several MCAST Gozo students and staff participated in a number of Comenius, Erasmus+ school projects and Erasmus+ placement mobilities in educational institutions and industrial settings all over Europe.



Ultimately, the success of the MCAST Gozo Campus has become synonymous with the successes of its students and alumni. MCAST has left its mark on the lives of thousands of individual young people who chose our College to further their studies in the past years. MCAST has indeed made a difference in the lives of many of these young Gozitans. Choosing MCAST was indeed an investment for promising students who today have become entrepreneurs, after conceptualising and implementing their own business start-ups and going on to employ other people as their business activity expanded. We have certainly also made a difference to students who joined us without any formal qualifications. MCAST has given them the required skills and competencies to become responsible citizens who are gainfully employed and thereby contributing to our economy and society at large. Most of these students are now employed in sectors related to their area of study. Some of these students have even made it all the way up to a bachelor's degree and beyond! For all of our alumni, MCAST has provided an enriched learning experience and an investment for their future.

Our students' success is also testament to the quality, commitment and dedication of our staff. I wish to spare a few words to pay tribute to the contribution of all persons, in their various roles - academic, administrative, technical and support personnel - who formed part of the MCAST Gozo team during these years. I had the opportunity to work with a formidable team, through which these milestones could be achieved. Over the years, the team grew in numbers, quality, expertise and personality. After almost twenty years, in 2021, a Deputy Director, Dr Robert Vella was appointed, and this continued to strengthen the team in the accomplishment of our mission. Today, we have a mix of highly dedicated individuals, who collectively continue to make MCAST a success story in Gozo.

Undoubtedly, every alumnus has their own story and the Gozo Campus is proud of its student success stories. We have truly kept the student at the heart of everything that we do. We are committed to continue to do so in the years to come. The future looks certainly exciting for the MCAST Gozo community and its prospective students who will join us in the years to come.



# MCAST Institute For The Creative Arts – A Legacy Of Creativity: Student Driven Identity Brands That Shaped A Nation

DARREN DUNCAN, SENIOR LECTURER AND INSTITUTE COORDINATOR

Over the past years, the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts (ICA) has done more than teach design: it has actively contributed to leaving a mark on Malta's visual culture by strengthening public communication campaigns.

Through the creation of student driven identity brands that built meaningful bridges between students and the various sectors of the public sector, we have assisted government entities, cultural organisations, national events and also private initiatives. The result is a tangible impact that left a mark on national awareness proving that creativity in education has a very important role to play.

## Learning Beyond the Classroom

What sets the ICA approach apart is its emphasis on authentic professional practice. Students are not only trained in design theory and technical skill, they are entrusted with real briefs, real stakeholders and real audiences.

Foremost among these is Project EU2017MT, the logo for Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union that came to life amongst the 27 countries that make up the European Union. This demonstrated early on that student work could stand confidently on an international stage. Designed by an MCAST student, the branding symbolised Malta's voice within Europe, a testament to how emerging creatives can contribute meaningfully to national representation.

Similarly, branding initiatives like New Water for the Sustainable Energy and Water Conservation Unit within the Water Services Corporation illustrated how design can clarify public messaging. Students tackled complex institutional identity messages and translated them into accessible visual systems that communicate trust, sustainability and community



connection. The Social Security Department corporate logo is another example.

These projects highlight a key principle: design education becomes transformative when students are treated as collaborators rather than observers, providing fresh perspectives and invaluable experience that textbooks alone could never provide; where a new generation of designers approach branding with curiosity, cultural awareness and digital fluency.

Over the years, industry partners, from public authorities to cultural organisations, have increasingly turned to ICA for a fresh approach and "out of the box" thinking.

The MCAST Skills Challenge was more than just a branding exercise. It showcased not only technical ability but also problem-solving under real-life conditions, demonstrating that students are capable

of delivering professional results within tight timelines and practical constraints.

Other branding collaborations strengthened this reputation further. Work undertaken for organisations such as the Broadcasting Authority, the Foundation for Social Welfare Services and cultural entities like the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra, revealed the versatility of ICA students. Whether communicating cultural heritage, artistic excellence or social services, these projects showcased that strong design is a powerful storytelling tool.

Students also explored branding in the community sectors, as seen in the Drachma branding concept, demonstrating how thoughtful design can help organisations communicate complex and extremely sensitive missions, with clarity and authenticity. In such cases, design transcends aesthetics, and becomes a means of civic participation and cultural expression.



One of the most inspiring aspects of ICA branding projects is their ability to interact with Malta's cultural and social identity tasks. The MCAST ICA Festival branding not just celebrates creativity within the institution itself but reinforces the role of design as a communal language. Meanwhile, projects for national and international representation, including Malta's Presidency of the Council of Europe, an organisation that is made up of 46 European countries and has existed for 76 years, illustrated how young designers can contribute to Malta's diplomatic and cultural narratives on a global scale.

Looking back at projects such as MCAST's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary branding, it becomes clear that students are not simply producing assignments: they are shaping the visual evolution of Malta's institutions. And as the Institute for the Creative Arts moves into its next chapter, the legacy of these branding projects sets a powerful foundation. The future promises endless new opportunities for students to engage with emerging technologies and global audiences.



## Evaluating The Growth And Prioritisation Of MCAST Support Services



EMILY MICALLEF, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

What began as a small, reactive service has developed into an integrated support system that accompanies students throughout their educational journey.

Dr John Bartolo, Director of Outreach Services and Student Affairs, explains that counselling at MCAST is more about education than healthcare. "We're not a health service. Counselling exists to support students during their educational journey and help them reach their academic goals," he says. He adds that this philosophy has guided the development of student support services across the College.

As the College expanded and its student population became more diverse, the limitations of the earlier model became increasingly evident. In response, counselling services were strengthened, outreach efforts expanded, and collaboration with other student support units became more structured. Dr Bartolo notes that graduation ceremonies are a strong reminder of the impact these services have had. "When students graduate, it shows that the support we give them helps them stay on track and succeed," he says.

A major shift occurred as counselling moved from a purely reactive approach to one focused on early intervention and wellbeing. External events

accelerated this change. The COVID-19 pandemic and wider global crises brought increased anxiety, stress and uncertainty into students' lives. "We saw pressures that were not as visible before," Dr Bartolo explains. "Instead of waiting for students to come to us, we reached out to them." This approach helped normalise seeking support and reduced the stigma surrounding counselling.

Today, student counselling at MCAST forms part of a wider network of services that includes career guidance, learning support, inclusion services and educational psychology. This integrated approach allows students to receive holistic support that addresses academic, emotional and personal challenges at the same time. Referrals can be made by students, lecturers, or support staff, and services are available across campuses in Mosta, Qormi, Gozo and Paola. Sessions also continue during the summer period.

Mr Joseph Zammit, Deputy Director of the Inclusive Education Unit, highlights the importance of



# First MCAST Employee My Personal Experience

LOUISE ANNE SPITERI, MANAGER QUALITY ASSURANCE

In January 2001, I started working at MCAST as the Executive Secretary and Personal Assistant to the first Principal, Mr Frederick Fearne. I was the very first full-time member of staff, but was soon joined by another Executive Secretary and the members of the 2000-2001 Board of Governors.

supporting students with disabilities in creating a welcoming and inclusive College environment. “Inclusion isn’t just about what happens in the classroom,” he says. “It’s about giving people the tools they need to live meaningful and fulfilling lives.”

Innovation has also played a major role in improving accessibility over the years. Online applications, digitized processes, and automated systems have made services faster and easier to access, particularly for students studying across multiple campuses. “Digitisation allows us to provide timely support,” Mr Zammit says.

The Inclusive Education Unit provides personalised and integrated support for students with autism, dyslexia and physical disabilities. Mr Zammit emphasises the importance of early planning, explaining that Action Plan sessions help identify potential challenges from the outset and ensure that appropriate support is put in place. These plans allow students to access learning support, reasonable accommodations and assistive technology aligned with their individual needs.

Student feedback indicates that counselling and inclusive support services have had a positive impact.

Many students report increased confidence, stronger engagement, and a greater sense of belonging. Dr Bartolo observes that students today are more willing to seek help than in the past. “More people are realising that asking for support is a sign of strength,” he says.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain. Rising demand, increasingly complex needs and rapid social change continue to place pressure on resources. Mr Zammit describes the Inclusive Education Unit as a “victim of its own success,” as more students come forward for support. Both he and Dr Bartolo emphasise the importance of maintaining a human, student-centred approach. “We must not lose the human touch,” Dr Bartolo says. “Students aren’t just numbers.”

At the same time, digital tools such as the MyMCAST app have made support services more accessible, allowing students to find information, submit referrals, and connect with services more easily. These developments all help to highlight how student counselling at MCAST continues to evolve, with a strong commitment to wellbeing, inclusion and community.

In those early days, the Principal coordinated working groups that laid the groundwork for MCAST’s Institutes. I accompanied Mr Fearne to meetings for Art and Design (Valletta), Building and Construction (Naxxar), at the Hairdressing School (Sliema), at the Technical Schools (Paola), at the Maritime Institute (Kalkara), and at the Secretarial School (Paola)—all before the MCAST Institutes were formally established. Weeks later, the Administrative Director, the Financial Controller, the Registrar, and the Institute Directors were selected. Calls for administrative staff followed, enabling the onboarding of lecturers and the enrolment of students.

Come August and September 2001, a flurry of interviews were conducted to hire lecturers and instructors for various levels. By October 2001, MCAST opened its doors to the first cohort of students across the Institutes. This milestone demanded immense effort: running selection boards, designing the MCAST logo, preparing the inaugural prospectus, and managing student admissions.

As Executive Secretary to the first Principal, Mr Frederick Fearne, and then to the second Principal,

Mr Roy Snelling, I was involved in recruitment, administrative processes, procurement, and serving as secretary to the Administrative Bureau, the Board of Governors, the Disciplinary Boards and MCAST’s first Master Plan.

After Mr Snelling’s departure, I joined the Registrar’s Office as Executive Secretary to the then Registrar Ms. Josephine Cilia, handling applications from international students eager to study at MCAST. I later moved to general administration, covering Administrative Manager Mr Kevin Bonnici and stepping in for the vacant International Coordinator role. There, I organized work placements for Hairdressing and Early Years students from the Institute of Community Services.

I also pioneered the first Erasmus exchange for administrative staff. While the International Office focused on lecturers and students, administrative staff had never participated. I secured a partnership with a college in Letterkenny, Ireland, opening doors for Erasmus and Erasmus+ work exchanges that continue today.



# Strengthening Global Connections: An Insight Into International Collaboration At MCAST

SHANNAH MUSCAT, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

Since MCAST's founding in 2001, the College has steadily expanded its international engagement. Mr Louis Aquilina, Director of the Erasmus+ Projects and Mobility Office, has provided insights into the development of MCAST's international collaborations over the past 25 years, highlighting their role in shaping the institution's academic and cultural landscape.

Later, I served at the Ministry of Health as a person of trust, followed by three years as Executive Secretary in Local Government.

I returned to MCAST in 2014, starting in administration at the Institute of Mechanical Engineering under Director Ing. Aurelio Micallef Grimaud. I then moved to the Auto Section with Deputy Director Ing. Stephen Sammut, before succeeding in a call for Senior Administrative Officer. This led to roles covering the ICT Institute (Director Mr Conrad Vassallo), the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (Acting Director Mr Kenny Muscat, then Director Ing. Stephen Sammut), and the Institute of Engineering and Transport—specifically Building and Construction and Building Services (Deputy Directors Ing. Paul Borg and Ing. Roberto Tiscio).

Throughout, I pursued further education, earning a Diploma in Social Studies (Occupational Guidance and Career Counselling) from the University of Malta and a Master of Science in Industrial Relations and HR from Leicester University. In 2025, I secured two managerial positions and now serve as Manager 2 in the Quality Assurance Department under Director Dr Jacqueline Micallef Grimaud.

As MCAST's first full-time staff member, I wish the very best to all past and present employees, a prayer for those we have lost and a warm welcome to our newest colleagues. This 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrates a quarter-century of dedication, loyalty and invaluable contributions to our College's mission.

MCAST began participating in the Erasmus programme in 2002, just one year after opening its doors. Mr Aquilina joined the office in 2014, at a time when participation was limited. Following the adoption of a new strategy, engagement increased steadily, reaching active participation in 84 projects by the end of 2025.

MCAST participates in several Erasmus+ initiatives, including Key Action 1, which supports student and staff mobility, and Key Action 2, which focuses on strategic partnerships with other European institutions across various fields, including arts, sports, maritime studies, and engineering. The College also invests in Continuous Professional Development for staff, supporting the ongoing development of teaching practices. In addition, MCAST takes part in Centres of Vocational Excellence and the EU4Dual University Alliance.

"These projects have helped us to widen our network of international partners, and we share knowledge and best practices", Aquilina shared, when asked

what role the Erasmus programme has played in strengthening MCAST's international presence. "This has helped us a lot to improve our programmes, to offer students the possibility to go and study abroad at new universities. I'm happy to say that the numbers of students opting to go spend a semester abroad are increasing over the years, and yes, the impact has been phenomenal on the MCAST scene. We send kids abroad, but we get adults back."

From 2024 to 2025, participation in Key Action 1 increased by approximately 24%, with around 500 students and staff taking part in mobility programmes.

"The impact is very positive", Mr Aquilina said, noting that many participants had never travelled before. "For a number of weeks or months, they achieve a number of life skills and personal skills that are not really available in Malta." He added that certain students choose to participate in mobility programmes year after year, with some opting to remain abroad.



MCAST's internationalisation efforts also include welcoming students from overseas. "The reality of today is that globalisation is here to stay. In Malta, 28% of the population [is foreign]", Mr Aquilina said. "You start to understand that you are part of something truly big—our beautiful planet, and the community—and it helps you grow."

Forming international partnerships also presents challenges. "It's a lot of intense work. It's a lot of exchanges with foreign institutions to find the middle ground, to find the win-win situation," Mr Aquilina stated. He recalled an instance where an institution was eager to collaborate due to MCAST's English-language teaching, but reciprocal opportunities were limited, noting that courses at a partner French institution were offered exclusively in French.

"It's a lot of intense work. Rising living costs in certain countries have also affected mobility opportunities. Many MCAST students and staff used to go to Iceland, but nowadays, only a handful go because the cost of living is incredible," the Director of the Erasmus+ and Mobility Office shared.

Looking ahead, Mr Aquilina described the outlook for the coming year as "very promising," revealing plans to increase participation to around 600 mobilities and encourage more students to pursue study-abroad opportunities at Level 6. He also noted that this year marks the fourth and final year of MCAST's participation in the EU4Dual University Alliance, with hopes for a two-year extension. Reaffirming MCAST's long-term commitment to international collaboration, Mr Aquilina added that the College will continue working on Key Action 2 projects, which play a key role in the ongoing development and improvement in a wide range of courses.



## Interview With Long Serving Employee Mr Saviour Grech: 25 Years Of Building MCAST From The Ground Up

MARTINA AZZOPARDI, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

As MCAST celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the institution's growth is best understood through the voices of those who were there from the very beginning. One such person is Mr Saviour Grech, a long-serving employee whose journey mirrors the evolution of MCAST itself. From modest beginnings to the large, multi-campus institution it is today, Mr Grech has witnessed and contributed to every stage of this transformation.

Reflecting on his first days at MCAST, Mr Grech recalls a time marked by simplicity, hard work, and a strong sense of unity. "How could I ever forget them?" he says. "They were simple but very intense times. Everything was still at its beginning, and we were creating many things from nothing." Resources were limited, but commitment was not. Mr Grech remembers taking on a wide range of tasks, building tables for students, working in staff rooms, helping with construction, and opening doors wherever help was needed. "The budget was very limited, but the heart was big," he adds. "There was a beautiful spirit of togetherness, where everyone did their part to help MCAST move forward."

Joining MCAST was never just another job for Mr Grech. He felt he was becoming part of something meaningful. "I felt I was going to be part of something special," he explains. "MCAST wasn't just work, it was

a life project." Along the way, the institution also offered him opportunities for personal growth. He completed courses such as the ECDL and a Diploma in Construction Management, developing alongside the organisation itself. "The College grew, and so did the person I was becoming," he says.

Over the years, Mr Grech's role evolved significantly. While his responsibilities increased, his sense of ownership remained constant. "I started with hands-on work, and gradually I took on more responsibility," he explains. His experience spans projects, precincts, and estates, giving him an intimate understanding of every corner of MCAST. "Today, I don't just see it as a workplace, but as a whole system."

Looking back, the scale of change still amazes him. "The growth has been enormous," Mr Grech says.



Saviour Grech



“From a few small classrooms, especially in ICT, we now have a large institution with thousands of students and infrastructure we could never have imagined.” Seeing how far MCAST has come brings him a deep sense of pride and satisfaction.

That pride is strongest when he sees students using spaces and facilities he helped create. “Even small moments like that tell you your work was not in vain,” he says. Campus life today, however, is vastly different from the early days. “Everything is faster, more technological and more demanding,” Mr Grech explains. “Back then, things were simpler, but we worked with fewer resources and relied much more on willpower and sacrifice.”

Like any growing institution, MCAST faced difficult moments. Mr Grech recalls periods of intense pressure, tough decisions and limited resources. Yet what stands out most is the determination of the people. “There were always individuals who wanted to keep going, even when things were hard.”

One of the most challenging periods was during the COVID-19 pandemic. While much of the country came to a halt, Mr Grech and his colleagues continued working daily. “We distributed computers to students, built partitions and worked non-stop across different Institutes,” he recalls. It was a time of uncertainty, but also one of strong solidarity and commitment.

After 25 years, MCAST has become more than a place of work for Mr Grech. “It has become part of who I am,” he says. “It grew with me, and I grew with it.” The memories of the early years remain especially meaningful, when teams worked from nothing to build everything, from cleaning and security services to maintenance structures. “That spirit of “we must make MCAST work” has stayed with me until today.”

The experience has shaped him deeply, teaching him patience and the importance of seeing the bigger picture. Working with different generations has also been rewarding. “Young people bring energy and new ideas, while those with experience bring knowledge. When these come together, the best results happen.”

Despite all the changes, Mr Grech believes one thing has remained constant: MCAST’s heart. “Its mission to give real opportunities to students and help them build a better future has never changed.”

Looking ahead, he hopes to see continued investment in quality, both in people and in facilities. His advice to new employees is simple but heartfelt: “Be humble, be patient, and give it your all. Things take time, but if you believe in what you are doing, MCAST will give you back much more than you expect.”



# The MCAST Chaplaincy Through The Years

FR. AURELIO MULÈ STAGNO SDB, COLLEGE CHAPLAIN

Ever since MCAST was established in Paola in 2001, spiritual support and chaplaincy services have been part of its community life, evolving over time as the College expanded and placed greater emphasis on holistic student support, including spiritual and personal wellbeing.

## First Dedicated Chaplaincy and Chapel

In the first few years of the College (2001-2009), several Capuchins from the nearby convent at Ġhajjn Dwieli offered their services as Chaplains. Among these were Fr. Effie Mallia, Fr. Joseph Giuliano and Fr. Carmel Dimech.

In 2007, as part of MCAST’s First Foundation Day celebrations, the then Archbishop of Malta, Mgr. Paul Cremona, officially inaugurated a chapel just outside the main campus gate in Paola, intended to serve the spiritual needs of students and staff.

At that time, the care of this space and the pastoral support responsibilities were entrusted to Fr. John Curmi, who served as College Chaplain together with his team of priests and religious (including Capuchins and Salesians) who also contributed to pastoral care at MCAST, alongside lay people and sisters who supported the College community in various ways.

## Transition to Salesian Chaplaincy

In 2014, at the request of the Archbishop of Malta, the Salesians of Don Bosco were asked to take responsibility for the MCAST Chaplaincy. Fr. Antoine Farrugia SDB was appointed as the first Salesian Chaplain at MCAST, marking the beginning of a distinct Salesian presence and pastoral style. Since then, the Chaplaincy has been run by a team of Salesian priests and religious, including a Salesian Sister and a growing number of committed lay people, allowing for broader outreach and support — particularly attentive to the needs of a diverse student body.

## More Recent Developments

Since 2013, the Salesians have continued to provide spiritual services at MCAST, rooting their work in the values and educational spirit of St. John Bosco, which emphasise friendship, accompaniment, and holistic care for young people.



# Nursing At MCAST: A Journey Of Growth, Innovation, And Commitment

KEVIN HOLMES, SENIOR LECTURER MCAST

The first cohort of 18 nursing students began their studies at MCAST in October 2017, embarking on a programme launched in collaboration with Northumbria University (NU).

The Chaplaincy Team now functions as a living presence of faith, involved in daily campus life, from offering daily Eucharist services to being present in classrooms, common areas, and pastoral initiatives.

In late February 2025, the Campus Connect Chaplaincy Hub opened its doors at MCAST, creating a welcoming and flexible space for students to gather, connect and be listened to, an initiative highlighting the Salesian focus on “sacred listening and presence.” On 3 October 2025, the Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Fr. Fabio Attard, officially inaugurated and blessed the premises. At Campus Connect, free coffee and tea are regularly available, while on Thursdays a simple hot meal, usually pasta or rice, is served around midday.

## Role in College Life Today

The Chaplaincy today plays an integral part in MCAST’s student support and community life, offering: regular Eucharistic celebration and quiet prayer spaces; a friendly, informal presence to support spiritual and personal growth; assistance with integration — especially for new and international students;

involvement in major College ceremonies such as graduation masses and other community gatherings.

As MCAST marks its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the journey of its Chaplaincy stands as a quiet yet constant thread running through the life of the College. From its early beginnings supported by nearby religious communities to the establishment of a dedicated chapel, and later the transition to a Salesian-led pastoral vision, the Chaplaincy has grown alongside MCAST itself — adapting to change while remaining faithful to its core mission of accompaniment, care, and presence.

Today, the Chaplaincy reflects the maturity of a College that recognises education as more than academic formation alone. Rooted in the Salesian spirit of Don Bosco, it continues to offer spaces of welcome, listening, prayer and human connection, responding to the realities and hopes of a diverse and dynamic student population. As MCAST looks ahead to the future, the Chaplaincy remains committed to walking with its community — nurturing not only skilled professionals, but whole persons, grounded in values, compassion and hope.

This joint initiative laid the groundwork for MCAST’s long-term vision: the creation of a fully homegrown nursing degree. In September 2021, the decision was taken to move forward with the development of the MCAST Bachelor of Science (Hons) Nursing. A month later, a call for an Institute Vocational Coordinator was issued to lead the work on a course scheduled for launch in October 2023. By November 2021, I occupied this new role and started dedicating one day a week to shaping what would become MCAST’s own nursing degree.

Although I had previously designed short courses, this was my first experience constructing a full bachelor’s degree. My background in nursing and adult education provided a solid foundation, but it soon became clear that the process demanded an in-depth understanding of EU directives governing nursing education, relevant local legislation and MCAST academic policies. This research phase was demanding, yet indispensable.

Once confident enough to proceed, I began examining the challenges faced within the joint degree - issues that would require careful resolution.

One major concern was the misalignment between MCAST and NU academic calendars, which was disruptive to our processes. Solutions had to be grounded in reality. So, I initiated a rigorous three-month consultation process involving all stakeholders: lecturers, alumni, current students, IAS management, administrative staff, nurse mentors and clinical staff who had worked with our alumni, members of the regulatory Council for Nurses and Midwives and nursing directors.

This collective insight proved invaluable. It identified areas needing refinement - from minor adjustments to complete redesigns - and strengthened the evidence base behind proposals that challenged established College practices. With the course required to meet EU standards of 4,600 hours and 180 ECTS over three years, transitioning from a 40-week NU calendar to MCAST’s 36-week model was no small feat. Still, determination drove us forward.

By April 2022, the course structure was presented to the MCAST curriculum department. In May, I began identifying unit writers from among our then 14-strong lecturing team. While a few were

hesitant about moving away from NU, the majority embraced the challenge. By June, the core of the programme was approved, and writing began on 32 units comprising the 180 ECTS. Collaboration between the curriculum department and unit writers was exceptional, with feedback consistently provided, often within days. The programme was submitted to the Council for Nurses and Midwives in January 2023 and received approval without changes two months later.

Approval of the programme marked a major milestone, but our work was far from complete. We needed to strengthen academic resources, expand staffing and secure access to essential learning tools. A subsequent call for academic staff expanded our team to 17 full-time lecturers and several part-time staff. The latter are a source of constant support and another sturdy bridge joining us to the clinical setting.

A comprehensive review of academic databases and the support of Ms. Liza Franco (Director of Library

Services) led to the procurement of key online resources, including the Elsevier Clinical Skills module – a tool previously unavailable to our department. Further support from Dr Mario Cardona and Mr Ronald Curmi (Deputy Principals), together with the procurement team, enabled us to obtain access to NEWS2 online training, ensuring our students met clinical requirements and received both in-house training and independent certification in the NEWS2 scoring system.

Not all challenges have been resolved, nor will they ever be completely eliminated. New ones emerge as the programme grows and the profession evolves. For example, recognising the serious issue of burnout in the nursing profession, we proactively introduced a new unit, titled “Self-Care for Nurses”, that focuses exclusively on equipping students with the skills essential for sustaining their own wellbeing...hopefully improving long-term retention of our alumni.



The first cohort of students enrolled in the joint degree in 2017 are currently mentoring our students in the clinical settings and joining us on events, whereas those who enrolled in the homegrown degree in 2023 are now in their final year of study. From an initial cohort of 18 students, we have expanded to three cohorts of over 80 students each, taught in groups of 30 to ensure personalised attention and continuous lecturer support.

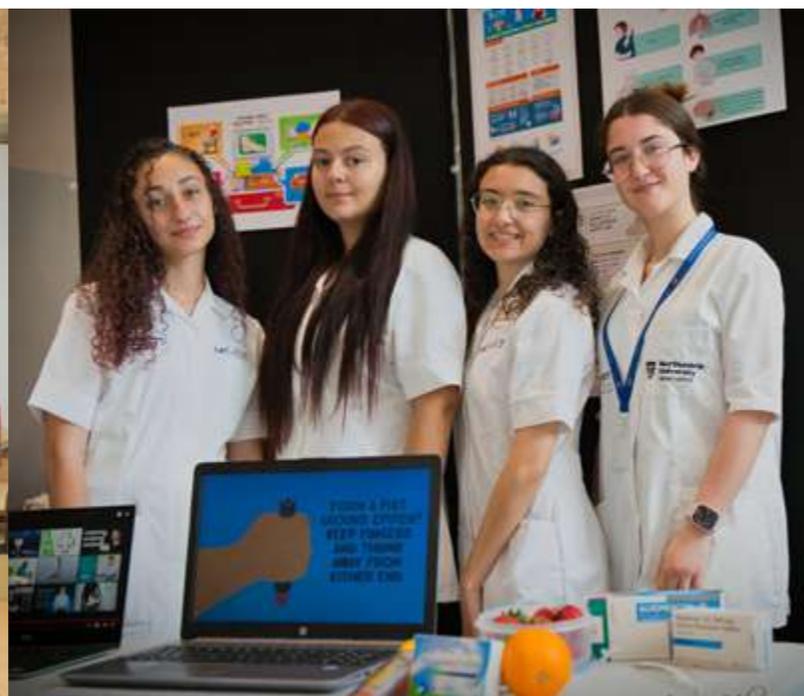
As the team has grown, so has its collective expertise, generating new ideas, identifying areas for enhancement, and creating new opportunities for innovation. Nursing thrives on continuous learning and adaptation, and our programme reflects this mindset.

A significant upcoming development is our first Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), proposed by a member of the nursing team and scheduled to launch during International Nurses Week this year. Additionally, in April 2026, MCAST Nursing and the

University of Malta’s Department of Nursing will host their first joint activity: a large-scale event bringing together 200 nursing students, industry specialists, and academics to apply AI solutions to real-world healthcare challenges.

We look ahead to deeper local and international collaborations, expansion of our research portfolio, broader Erasmus opportunities, stronger engagement of alumni, enhanced outreach, our first MCAST Nursing conference, and an extended academic offering including Level 6 and Level 7 CPD courses, master’s and doctoral programmes.

With the support of our Principal and CEO, Mr Stephen Vella, MCAST and IAS management, and clinical partners, we are ready for the challenges and opportunities ahead. Whether through incremental improvements or through transformative leaps, we remain guided by a simple mantra, Always forward, forward always. This is the spirit that will define the next 25 years of Nursing at MCAST.



# Research As A Cornerstone Of MCAST's Institutional Identity

DR CLARA CHETCUTI, DR MARIA CARDONA, DR JUDITA THEUMA, DR LORNA BONNICI WEST AND DR TATJANA CHIRCOP, APPLIED RESEARCH AND INNOVATION CENTRE

“We cannot consider higher education without research and innovation” (UAS4Europe, 5 December 2018). As one of the foremost actors in higher education in Malta, MCAST fully recognises the central role that research and innovation play in advancing teaching, learning and societal impact.

In response to this, MCAST established the MCAST Research Framework and, with it, the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) in 2019 with the aim of enabling and supporting academics to undertake research as an integral part of their academic duties.

In just under seven years since ARIC's mission was conceptualised, the Centre has played a decisive role in expanding MCAST's research footprint, both in scale and in ambition. Although relatively young, ARIC has developed into a steadily growing structure comprising both pre-award and post-award teams through which robust and comprehensive support is provided for research activities across MCAST. Marking a major milestone in its research journey, MCAST was officially recognised by Xjenza Malta in 2023 as a research organisation under Legal Notice 212 of 2008.

Internally, this expanding research culture is mirrored by growing research participation across the College. In the calendar year 2025 alone, MCAST counted 115 active researchers, engaged in a healthy mixture of internally funded research projects and externally supported initiatives. Notably, this academic year

registered an unprecedented number of applications for internal research contact hours attesting to both resilience and a deepening commitment to research activity across disciplines.

At the core of ARIC's research support is a dedicated team of six Senior Research Officers (SROs), each working closely within an Institute to guide academics and staff through the development and submission of research proposals. While embedded within individual Institutes, the SROs form a centralised team within ARIC, enabling and actively encouraging cross-Institute collaboration. Such interdisciplinary research is particularly valued at MCAST, as it brings together the diverse expertise that can be found on campus and enables research initiatives that would not be possible through the efforts of one Institute acting alone. Within their respective Institutes, SROs support individual researchers and also contribute as non-voting members of the Institutes' Research Committees.

Following the successful award of external funding, researchers are supported by ARIC's post-award team composed of an EU Projects Manager and a

Finance Manager, whose expertise underpins the smooth delivery of projects. The team plays a crucial role in supporting administrative, contractual, and financial processes, ensuring compliance with funder requirements, allowing researchers to concentrate more on what matters most: delivering high-quality research outcomes.

ARIC also hosts the Research Ethics Committee and has recently placed renewed emphasis on strengthening awareness and understanding of ethical considerations, particularly in relation to research proposals submitted across all levels of academic activity. To this end, tailored ethics training is currently being piloted across Institutes to address their diverse research contexts and needs. In addition, ARIC coordinates multiple training events for MCAST staff aimed at bolstering their research skills. In 2025 alone, ARIC coordinated 19 training events, ranging from proposal-writing workshops to sessions on the use of AI in research and education.

Over the past decade, more than 90 externally funded research and capacity-building projects have been successfully awarded to the College, reflecting the sustained and collaborative research efforts of multiple Institutes across MCAST. Notably, this figure does not account for Erasmus+, ERDF, and ESF projects, which are supported through other specialised departments. This unifying momentum has positioned research as an increasingly embedded dimension of MCAST's institutional practice and the development of its human resources. The breadth of this growth is perhaps most clearly reflected in the diversity of funding mechanisms secured. To date, MCAST researchers have attracted awards from 36 distinct funding streams, spanning national (e.g., Xjenza Malta, Malta Digital Innovation Authority, Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture and Melita Foundation), bilateral and transnational (e.g., ERANET Med, MarTERA, Interreg, the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, JPI Oceans Joint Call, Xjenza



Malta-TÜBITAK, and Sino-Malta), as well as European programmes (Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Climate KIC, Food and Urban Mobility, Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), and European Space Agency).

A significant milestone in this evolving research ecosystem was achieved with the welcoming of MCAST's first European Research Area Post-doctoral Fellow, under the highly competitive Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral ERA Fellowships. This achievement not only enhances MCAST's international research standing but also signals its readiness to host frontier-level interdisciplinary research.

This trajectory has been further strengthened through the launch of the MCAST Research Fellowship Scheme in 2024, developed in partnership with the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) in consultation with the Malta Chamber of SMEs. Intended as a cornerstone initiative and now successfully in its second year, the scheme provides structured funding for applied research rooted in vocational education and delivered through close collaboration with industry. By supporting joint innovation projects across areas such as

smart manufacturing, sustainability and digital transformation, the Fellowship consolidates the vital link between national Smart Specialisation goals, and the research excellence in and through vocational practice that only MCAST can deliver.

Beyond the landscape of funding, MCAST has established a number of research groups aimed at expanding the College's research ecosystem. One such successful group is the Qualitative Research Hub situated at ARIC, which aims to cultivate a collaborative and supportive environment for researchers using qualitative methodologies, particularly the Grounded Theory methodology across multi-context and interdisciplinary research. In parallel, another group of researchers collaborates through the Interdisciplinary Research Community of Practice (IRCOP), meeting regularly to generate research ideas and develop proposals for local and European projects.

A range of initiatives have therefore come into place to help academics showcase the fruits of their work. ARIC is particularly proud of the annual Research and Innovation Expo, designed to provide an annual platform for researchers to share their insights and results among colleagues, stakeholders, and students. This is complemented by the MCAST Qualitative Research Conference, which is open to both internal and external researchers and features invited keynote speakers who offer valuable insights into qualitative research methodologies.

Academics are always strongly encouraged to disseminate their research findings through publication; this is no different at MCAST. In response to this appetite for publication, the MCAST Journal of Applied Research & Practice was launched from and is edited by ARIC so as to increase the visibility of MCAST applied research within the academic community. More recently, the MCAST Monograph Series has been

launched, with its second publication issued in 2025, to showcase specialized, in-depth research conducted by MCAST professionals.

ARIC's remit extends even further to the cultivation of long-term research capacity through its extensive student body. The Centre currently houses a portfolio of MQF Level 7 and Level 8 programmes, including the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methods (PG Cert), the MA in Research Methods, the MA by Research, the MA in AI Technologies and Applications, and the MBA in Retail. Moreover, In 2021, ARIC marked a major institutional milestone with the launch of MCAST's first doctoral-level qualification: the Professional Research Doctorate (DRes) focusing on the competitive behaviour of small organisations. Central to these programmes is a bottom-up approach to inquiry, enabling researchers to define topics aligned with their disciplinary expertise and professional practice.

Finally, ARIC's physical environment reflects its integrative research philosophy. The MCAST Resource Centre (the building housing ARIC) brings together a newly established library occupying the two upper floors, while the ground level hosts an advanced EdTech Hub equipped with immersive and interactive technologies. From semi-humanoid and telepresence robots to virtual reality (VR) systems, a curved high-resolution visualisation wall and 360-degree optical motion-capture facilities, the space functions as a shared research resource, supporting experimentation, training, simulation and creative inquiry for researchers, lecturers and students alike.

When all these R&I sections interlock, they depict ARIC's maturation into a kind of connective tissue within MCAST: a space where vocational knowledge and research rigour come together naturally, and where interdisciplinary collaboration is encouraged and sustained.



## Fifteen Years Of Social Impact: Celebrating Social Care Management At MCAST

ANTONELLA BRINCAT, SENIOR LECTURER AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES COORDINATOR, INSTITUTE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

MCAST proudly offers a range of Level 6 degree programmes, including the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Social Care Management. Since the graduation of its first cohort in 2012, this programme has grown into a strong and vibrant learning community, shaping future professionals and leaders in the social care sector for over 15 years. The data below shows the number of MCAST graduates in Social Care Management since 2012:

Graduation Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Number of Graduates	5	11	20	12	18	14	25	18	10	24	15	22	12	23	229

The degree programme spans three years and brings together a rich mix of study units that equip students with the knowledge, skills and values needed to thrive in social care management. What truly makes this programme special, however, is the people behind it. Heartfelt thanks go to all the lecturers who contribute to the Social Care Management degree. Through their dedication, expertise and real-life professional

experiences, they bring learning to life and inspire students every step of the way. A special word of appreciation is also extended to the Institute Director, Deputy Directors, Senior Administrative Officer, Clerks, and all staff at the Institute of Community Services. Their commitment, teamwork and constant support ensure that students feel guided and encouraged from their very first day at MCAST right through to graduation.

One of the most valued elements of the programme is the work placement component. This experience gives students the opportunity to step into the world of social care, gaining hands-on experience within a variety of organisations across the sector. These placements are only possible thanks to the many organisations in the social care sector that have generously opened their doors to our students over the years. We are deeply grateful to all placement providers who have supported the programme and helped shape hundreds of future social care professionals.

While organising and coordinating placements requires significant effort, seeing students grow in confidence, competence and professionalism makes it immensely rewarding. As a placement lecturer, I have had the privilege of witnessing students return from placement with new insights, skills and a deeper understanding of the realities of social care work. Their personal and professional growth is often remarkable.

The greatest reward of all comes when former students successfully transition into employment and proudly share how their academic journey at MCAST helped prepare them for their careers. In some cases, students are even employed by the same organisations where they completed their placements, clear evidence of the lasting impact and mutual value of these experiences.

Who better to celebrate the journey of Social Care Management at MCAST than the students themselves? The following pages feature a collection of reflections and success stories shared by MCAST Social Care Management alumni, voices that truly capture the spirit, impact and legacy of this programme.



## Silvan Magro

**Graduation Year** 2013

### **Current Employment Title**

Executive Director – Foundation for Respite Care Services

### **What do I remember most from my years of study at MCAST?**

What I remember most from my time at MCAST is the strong sense of belonging. Although the course was demanding and required a great deal of hard work, it truly felt like being part of a family. The supportive environment created by both lecturers and peers made the learning experience challenging yet enjoyable. In addition to the academic component, we gained valuable practical skills and real work exposure, which helped prepare us for the realities of professional practice.

## Kim Muscat

**Graduation Year** 2018

### **Current Employment Title**

Senior Practitioner 1 – Leader – Agenzija Support

### **How has this course helped me in my personal and professional life?**

This course supported my growth on both a personal and professional level. Professionally, it provided me with practical skills and knowledge that I can apply directly in the workplace. Personally, it strengthened my confidence, improved my time-management skills, and enhanced my ability to work both independently and as part of a team.

## Gayle Marie Bugeja

**Graduation Year** 2019

### **Current Employment Title**

Human Resources Manager - Social Care Standards Authority

### **What do I remember most from my years of study at MCAST?**

What I remember most from my years of study at MCAST is the practical and supportive learning environment that helped shape both my academic and personal growth. The strong balance between theory and hands-on experience made learning meaningful and closely linked to real-life situations. Equally memorable were the students from diverse backgrounds and lecturers who went beyond teaching, encouraging confidence, critical thinking, and self-belief. My time at MCAST was extremely valuable, as it taught me important life skills such as responsibility, communication, teamwork, and time management. These skills proved especially useful during my time working as an assessor within the same authority, where professionalism, adaptability, and practical understanding were essential. Looking back, MCAST was not just a place of study, but a foundation that prepared me for my career and motivated my personal development.

## Keaurein Ellul

**Graduation Year** 2023

### **Current Employment**

Learning Support Educator III

### **What do I remember most from my years of study at MCAST?**

I particularly remember the extensive group work completed with my classmates, as well as the many presentations we delivered on a range of interesting subjects. These activities allowed me to gain insight into various aspects of the health and social care sector. I also recall the different placements undertaken across a variety of settings, each offering valuable and meaningful learning experiences. My favourite study units were Addiction and Poverty, as I found them especially engaging and highly relevant to contemporary society. In addition, I completed my thesis on substance abuse and mental health issues within minority groups, a topic which further deepened my interest in the field.

## Mariah Micallef

**Graduation Year** 2025

### **Current Role**

Residential Support Mentor (RSM) – Fondazzjoni Sebħ

### **How has this course helped me in my personal and professional life?**

This course has had a profound impact on me, both personally and professionally. On a personal level, it played a significant role in shaping the person I am today. Studying Health and Social Care Management encouraged deep self-awareness and helped develop essential values such as empathy, compassion, understanding, and respect for others—qualities that are fundamental not only in professional practice but also in everyday life. Professionally, the course equipped me with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to pursue my current role. I take great satisfaction in my work, particularly in supporting children and young people within my care setting, where I am able to make a positive difference in their lives. The foundations provided by this course continue to guide my practice and strengthen my commitment to helping others.



# The Institute Of ICT: A New Space, A Renewed Purpose

DARIA TANTI, ICT LECTURER

From student to lecturer, reflecting on responsibility, technology, and returning to the Institute that shaped my career.

A few months ago, I walked into the new Institute of ICT at MCAST for the first time. The building is modern and purpose-built for learning, offering updated spaces for teaching and study. For me, it also marked a return to a place that has been part of my journey for many years.

Years ago, I was not there as a lecturer, but as a student. I first came to MCAST in 2005, not because I lacked other options, but by choice. I had enough 'O' Levels to continue to Junior College, yet I was drawn to MCAST because I believed in learning by doing. I wanted an education that was practical, hands-on and closely connected to real skills, and MCAST offered exactly that.

At the time, the Institute was housed in what had once been a secondary school, later repurposed as the Institute of ICT. Those classrooms were where I took my first real steps into the world of technology. The environment was still very male dominated, but I felt at home. This was my area of interest, the space where my skills and curiosity made sense, and where I felt confident in what I enjoyed doing. Like many students, I began with ambition and uncertainty, unsure of where this path might lead, but eager to explore it.

That period challenged me to grow, compete, and believe in my abilities, including representing MCAST in Web Design at EuroSkills in 2012. Looking back, I can clearly see how that environment not only introduced me to technology, but laid the foundations of my career and shaped the professional I would become.

When I later returned to MCAST as a lecturer, it was to that same Institute. The role had changed, but the environment and the sense of purpose remained familiar.

I am back as a lecturer at the Institute of ICT, in its new building. The Institute remains the same in spirit. Many of the colleagues are the same, and the shared commitment to teaching and learning is unchanged. At the same time, the new space changes how teaching and learning happen, with a more open layout that encourages interaction and collaboration. It reflects growth for both the Institute and the students it serves.

This new chapter is made even more meaningful by the fact that the Institute is dedicated to St Carlo Acutis, a young man often referred to as "God's

influencer.” He used technology not for attention or status, but to serve others and share what is good. In a time when technology shapes almost every aspect of daily life, this dedication carries strong meaning.

We are all called to be holy, meaning that we are called to live with integrity, kindness, and responsibility, not only in private moments, but also in how we act and make decisions in the world, including the digital one. Today, code, data, and algorithms influence how we communicate, learn, and work. The question is not whether we use technology, but how we choose to use it responsibly.

I have a deep appreciation for St Carlo Acutis because of how closely his life connects faith and technology. His example is a reminder that technical ability alone is not enough. Intention, ethics, and purpose must guide it.

These reflections have become even more relevant to me as I continue my Master’s in Artificial Intelligence. AI is one of the most powerful technologies humanity has developed. It is transforming medicine, education, accessibility and research in very positive ways. At the

same time, it carries serious risks if misused. Like all powerful tools, it depends on the values of the people who design and apply it.

Pope Leo has also spoken about AI and the responsibility humanity carries in shaping its future with wisdom and ethical responsibility. This aligns closely with what I see daily in the industry. Progress without values is not real progress.

Standing in this new building among future developers, engineers, designers, and innovators, highlights both opportunity and responsibility. The next generation of students will learn here. They will not only develop technical skills, but will also shape systems that influence society in very real ways.

The Institute of ICT may have changed buildings, but its core mission remains the same. This new space implies renewal and investment in the future of education.

It is a privilege to be part of this new chapter of the Institute of ICT, and I wish all our students the very best as they learn and grow in this new home.



## From Page To Screen – MCAST’s 25 Year Legacy In Creative Media

DR IAN ATTARD, SENIOR LECTURER, INSTITUTE FOR THE CREATIVE ARTS

As MCAST marks its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is fitting to reflect on projects that embody the College’s enduring commitment to innovation, collaboration and applied learning.

One standout initiative is the Professional Media Practice Project—a creative and educational journey that began in 2017, when final-year students from the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Creative Media Production first adapted classical and contemporary Maltese poetry into cinematic learning tools.

Developed in collaboration with Aġenzija Nazzjonali tal-Litteriżmu, the project bridged creative media and formal education. Its simple yet ambitious goal: to equip teachers and secondary school students across Malta and Gozo with engaging audiovisual interpretations of poetry for SEC Maltese Language exam preparation. These adaptations soon became invaluable classroom resources, showing how film and media can deepen literary understanding while sparking creative and analytical thinking.

This academic year brings a pivotal evolution. Dr Maris Camilleri from iċ-Ċentru tal-Ilsien Malti, alongside the Uffiċjali Edukattivi tal-Malti, formally invited MCAST to co-develop 13 new short film adaptations tailored for secondary learners. The initiative underscores national recognition of MCAST’s role in cultivating creative professionals who enrich Malta’s educational and cultural landscape.

At its core, the project features MCAST’s final-year Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Creative Media Production students, who formed dedicated teams to co-create each adaptation with professional artistry. They began with rigorous research into the poems’ historical, cultural and literary contexts, then progressed through idea generation, concept development and full production. The outcome: cinema- and broadcast-standard audiovisual works that fuse artistic expression with pedagogical precision.

Students collaborated closely with Uffiċjali Edukattivi Ms Doreen Coleiro and Mr Carlston Grima to ensure interpretations stayed true to each poem’s principles and intent. Under Senior Lecturer Dr Ian Attard’s guidance, production maintained professional standards from concept to screen-ready outputs suited for classrooms and home learning.

These milestones affirm MCAST’s 25-year legacy of blending vocational excellence, creative innovation, and national educational impact.





## MCAST Energy Research Group: Pioneering Applied Energy Research

DR ING. BRIAN AZZOPARDI, PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR |  
MCAST ENERGY GROUP AND SENIOR LECTURER

The MCAST Energy Research Group was instrumental in establishing Malta's first institutional microgrid concept, transforming energy research from isolated studies into a continuously operating system embedded within MCAST infrastructure.

Designed as a living laboratory, this platform enabled sustained data acquisition, system optimisation, and integration with teaching, demonstrating the value of research assets that are institutionally owned, maintained and stewarded over time.

Among its national firsts, the group carried out Malta's first real environmental degradation performance measurements of perovskite photovoltaic technologies on a round robin experiment, generating locally relevant evidence on emerging solar materials and having the capacity of producing roll-coating energy devices. This work highlighted the importance of long-duration monitoring under real operating conditions, rather than short-term or externally hosted experimentation.

At its peak, the Energy Research Group became the largest coordinated energy research team in Malta, providing a stable base for collaboration with industry,

regulators and international partners. It hosted multiple MCAST Energy Day conferences and the ISOS-10 international conference in 2017, reinforcing MCAST's role not only as a participant, but as a convenor and custodian of national energy dialogue.

The group also supported MCAST's first Master by Research graduates, coordinated two Horizon Europe projects, and contributed to several locally funded initiatives, demonstrating how sustained institutional structures enable both advanced research training and long-term project delivery.

As MCAST marks 25 years, the Energy Research Group stands as an example of how research flourishes when it is treated as a shared institutional responsibility, where infrastructure, knowledge, and expertise are developed with continuity, ownership, and long-term impact in mind.



## When Generation Is No Longer Scarce: Redefining "Ability" At MCAST's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary In The Age Of AI

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR ADAM CASSAR ON JUDGEMENT,  
AESTHETICS, AND EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY BY  
JUN ZHANG, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

### Introduction: The Shift of Scarcity

In 2026, technology is no longer a distant horizon for higher education; it has already become embedded in everyday teaching, assessment, and learning practices. In its 2025 report, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) noted that generative artificial intelligence (AI) was reshaping how universities approach teaching methods, assessment frameworks and learning outcomes, forcing institutions to reconsider what constitutes "ability" and "value" in higher education (HEPI, 2025). When content generation is no longer scarce, redefining student capability becomes unavoidable.

This question arises at a particularly significant moment for MCAST, which marks its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. As an institution that has continuously expanded while periodically reassessing its mission, MCAST outlines in its Strategic Plan 2022–2027 a clear objective: to prepare students for a digital economy by equipping them with long-term adaptability rather than short-lived technical

skills (MCAST, 2022). Within this institutional framework, the impact of AI is not merely technological; it prompts a deeper reconsideration of the purpose and limits of education itself.

At MCAST's Institute for the Creative Arts (ICA), Assistant Lecturer Mr Adam Cassar confronts these questions directly through his teaching practice.

### From Student to Lecturer: A Trajectory Shaped by Change

The experience of Mr Adam Cassar reflects the evolution of game art education at MCAST over the past 25 years. When he enrolled as a mature student in 2017, the programme was still developing its structure and scope.

"At the time, key areas such as 3D sculpting were not formally included in the curriculum, and I largely

relied on self-directed learning to develop those skills,” Mr Cassar explained in email correspondence. “I am also aware that the course structure then was far less refined than it is today.”

Learning during that period required a high degree of individual initiative. Mr Adam Cassar spent significant time experimenting with modelling workflows while seeking guidance from different lecturers on anatomy and technical processes. These experiences exposed gaps in institutional provision but also fostered a form of technical resilience that later informed his approach to teaching.

Today, Mr Adam Cassar has returned to MCAST as a lecturer, teaching units such as 3D Modelling, 3D Sculpting, Character Detailing and related disciplines.

His dual perspective—as both former student and current educator—offers a practical vantage point on how the programme has matured from a loosely structured pathway into a more coherent and professionally oriented curriculum.

### Beyond Software: Re-centering Fundamentals

The Institute has increasingly shifted its focus from expanding provision to ensuring that graduates remain relevant in the long term. In Mr Cassar’s teaching, this strategic intent is reflected in a deliberate emphasis on fundamentals rather than tools alone.

“While students must learn professional software,” he noted, “the core of my teaching is anatomy, design principles, and critical thinking.”

Rather than treating software proficiency as an end in itself, Mr Cassar structures his assignments to require students to justify design decisions, demonstrate anatomical understanding, and articulate their creative processes. As he put it, his aim is not simply to show students “which buttons to press,” but to help them understand why certain forms, proportions, and structures work.

This approach signals a broader shift within MCAST’s creative programmes—from skills-based instruction toward vocational standards grounded in judgement and design reasoning.

“There are now many ways to access information,” he observed. “My value as a lecturer lies more in helping students develop judgement, confidence, and professional habits.”

This position aligns closely with UNESCO’s Guidance for Generative Artificial Intelligence in Education and Research (2023), which advocates a human-centred approach to AI integration. The document explicitly warns against overreliance on automated systems and emphasises the need to preserve human judgement, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility within educational contexts (UNESCO, 2023).

Within this framework, the emphasis Adam places on judgement is not a matter of personal preference but a clearly defined educational boundary.

### AI and Educational Pressure: Why Judgement Matters

This transition takes place against growing uncertainty about the role of AI in education. A 2026 national survey reported by Inside Higher Ed, based on research conducted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in collaboration with Elon University, found that 95 per cent of higher education faculty believe generative AI will increase students’ reliance on technology and weaken independent critical thinking (Inside Higher Ed, 2026).

Mr Adam Cassar does not respond to these concerns by rejecting AI outright. Instead, he adopts a pragmatic stance that distinguishes between efficiency and competence. He recognises that AI can accelerate certain stages of production and lower barriers for independent creators. However, he draws a clear line between using AI as a tool and allowing it to replace evaluative judgement.

### Reconsidering Educational Responsibility at 25 Years

As MCAST reflects on its first 25 years, the institution faces questions that extend beyond infrastructure or enrolment growth. The more pressing issue concerns direction: how education should respond when technological capability evolves faster than institutional structures.

Mr Cassar’s experience suggests that the next phase of MCAST’s development will depend less on adopting new tools than on clarifying what education should protect and cultivate. When generation is no longer scarce, the ability to evaluate, contextualise, and make informed creative decisions becomes increasingly central.





**Several questions follow naturally from this shift:**

When generation is no longer scarce, how should human ability be defined within creative disciplines?

As assessment practices adapt to technological uncertainty, do existing curricular structures remain adequate?

In a changing landscape of creative production, what responsibilities does higher education ultimately hold toward its students?

For MCAST, these questions are no longer abstract. They are already present in classrooms, assessment criteria and teaching decisions. Accepting AI is inevitable; using it responsibly is a professional requirement. What remains non-negotiable is the cultivation of judgement, aesthetic standards, and ethical awareness—capacities that technology cannot supply, but education must.



**MCAST at 25:  
A Story of Purpose, Courage,  
and Transformation**

DR ROSE ANNE CUSCHIERI, MCAST CONSULTANT  
OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

As MCAST celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the College stands as one of Malta's most defining educational achievements, an institution that has reshaped the national landscape of vocational and professional education and profoundly influenced the lives of thousands of learners.

**A Reflection on the College's Journey  
and the Legacy It Continues to Build**

A quarter of a century may seem modest in the lifespan of an institution, yet for MCAST it represents a period of remarkable expansion, institutional maturation and strategic reinvention. From its early years, when vocational education was still burdened by perceptions of being “less academic,” MCAST’s development has been driven by a powerful conviction, that applied, hands-on learning has the capacity to transform lives and support Malta’s economic and social progress.

**The Early Years: Building  
Identity, Purpose, and Trust**

For many observing from outside, particularly from regulatory, policy, or national quality assurance roles, MCAST appeared as a vast and complex institution, one that played a central but challenging role in

Malta’s education system. Its scale, its diverse learning population, and its evolving mission positioned it simultaneously as a cornerstone and a demanding player within the education sector.

Even from that external perspective, one truth was unmistakable: MCAST mattered, deeply and unequivocally. It mattered to learners seeking new opportunities, to industries seeking skilled professionals, and to national strategy seeking innovation, flexibility, and long-term economic stability.

**Seeing MCAST From Within: A Human  
Institution Behind the Systems**

Stepping inside MCAST as an advisor reveals a richer and more profound reality.

What appears externally as a large organisational structure becomes, from within, a living community defined by dedication, hope, and purpose. Behind

every programme, workshop, studio, apprenticeship, and research initiative are people who work tirelessly to keep the institution moving forward. It becomes clear that MCAST is not simply a college; it is a dynamic ecosystem of educators, professionals, and learners, united by a shared commitment to opportunity and applied learning.

The real power of MCAST lies not only in its frameworks, procedures, and strategies, but in the human stories that have shaped it, stories of perseverance, second chances, innovation, and community.

## A Legacy Rooted in People

What distinguishes MCAST, more than any physical campus or organisational blueprint, is the collective legacy created by its people over the past 25 years.

### The lecturers who saw potential where others saw barriers

MCAST's lecturers have consistently acted as motivators and mentors, often serving as the pivotal influence that changes a learner's trajectory. Many bring years of professional experience directly into their lessons, transforming real-world practice into meaningful learning.

They champion learners who may have struggled in more traditional academic settings, nurturing confidence and unlocking hidden potential. Their belief in the transformative power of vocational education lies at the heart of the College's mission.

### The students who discovered talents they never knew they had

Generations of students have walked through MCAST's doors with uncertainty but also with hope. At MCAST, many discovered new abilities, passions, and directions for their future.

For some, MCAST provided a second chance; for others, it offered the first real opportunity to excel. Today, alumni contribute significantly to Malta's workforce, in engineering, ICT, creative industries, health, maritime, manufacturing, and countless other sectors. Their achievements form the beating heart of MCAST's legacy.

### The administrators who shaped the College's backbone

Behind the scenes, a dedicated group of administrators has ensured that the College's operations run smoothly, even during times of immense growth.

Their work in admissions, timetabling, apprenticeship coordination, quality assurance, student support, finance, and logistics forms the quiet yet essential structure that allows teaching and learning to flourish. Their consistency has stabilised MCAST through reforms, expansions, and new initiatives, making them indispensable architects of the institution's success.

### The leaders who navigated change, expansion and reform

MCAST's evolution, from its founding vision to multi-campus growth and, more recently, its expansion into higher education and applied doctoral research, required leadership that was courageous, strategic, and resilient.

Each leadership phase brought its own challenges and opportunities, requiring vision, planning, and perseverance. These leaders guided MCAST through transitions while ensuring its mission remained clear: to provide relevant, high-quality, practice-based education for all.

### The industry partners who trusted MCAST to deliver skilled, adaptable graduates

MCAST's relationship with industry has always been one of its greatest strengths. Employers recognised early that MCAST's learners brought practical skills, adaptability, and professionalism into the workplace.

Through years of collaboration, work placements, apprenticeships, curriculum input, and joint projects, industry partners helped shape the relevance of MCAST's programmes. Their trust validated the importance of vocational and professional education within Malta's national development strategy.

## A College That Grew with Malta

As Malta diversified and modernised, MCAST grew alongside it. The College became instrumental in supporting new sectors, addressing skills shortages, and preparing the workforce of the future. It offered pathways, often flexible and inclusive, that allowed learners at different life stages to continue growing and contributing.

## Research, Innovation, and Academic Maturity

MCAST's shift into higher education and applied doctoral research represents one of its most significant achievements.

With Level 7 and Level 8 programmes now established, MCAST is embracing a new identity: that of a research-active, innovation-driven institution, aligned with European trends in applied science and vocational higher education.

This academic maturity reflects the College's commitment not only to teaching but to knowledge creation, industry-linked innovation, and practice-based research.

## Looking Ahead: The Next 25 Years

As MCAST moves forward, its path will be shaped by the same principles that sustained it to this point:

- the conviction that vocational and professional education matters;
- the belief that every learner deserves opportunity;
- the commitment to innovation and collaboration;
- the courage to evolve with national and global demands;
- the dedication of its people.

The next 25 years will bring new challenges but also new possibilities. With its foundations strong, its vision clear, and its community committed, MCAST is poised to continue leading Malta's educational and economic transformation.

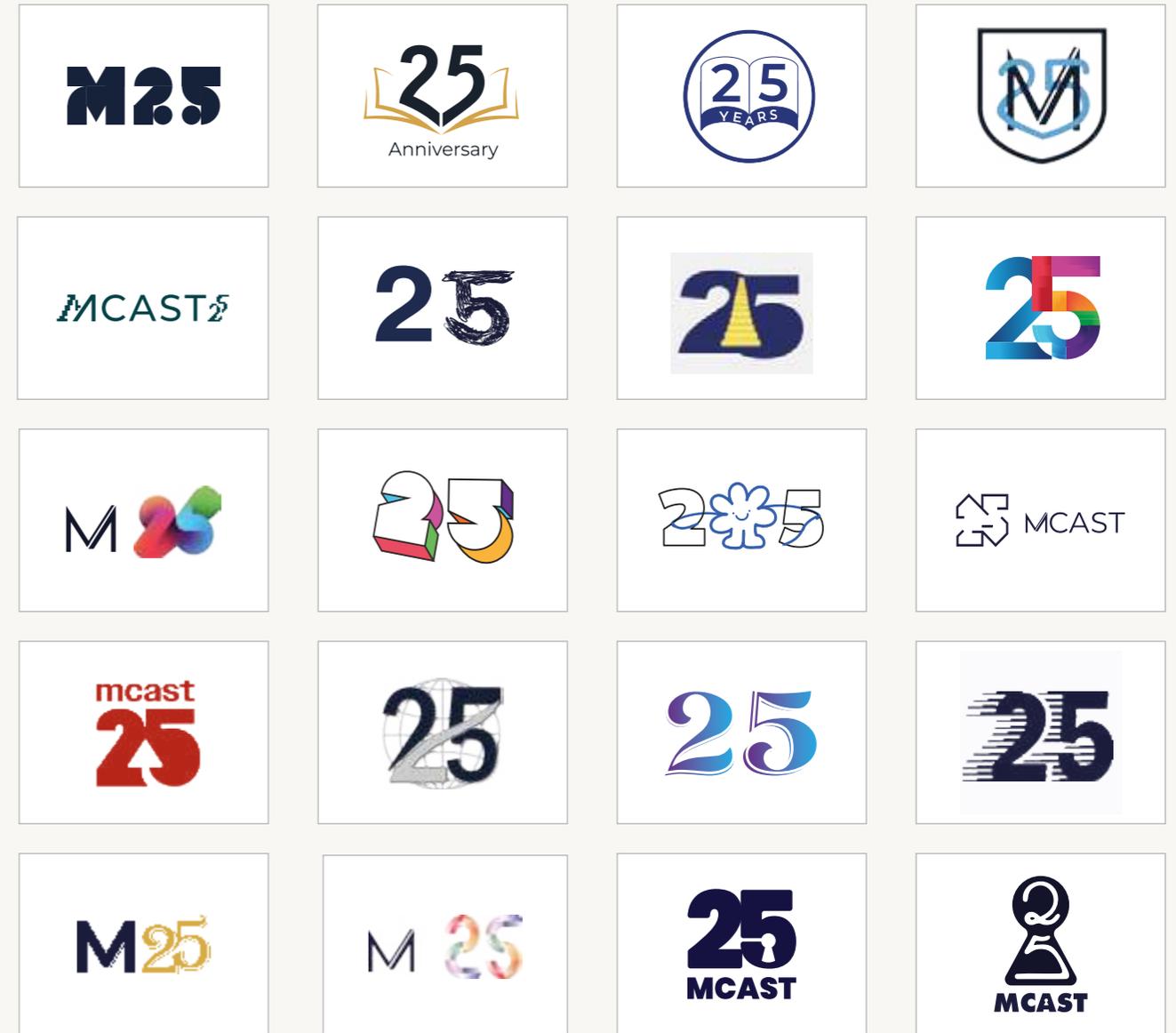
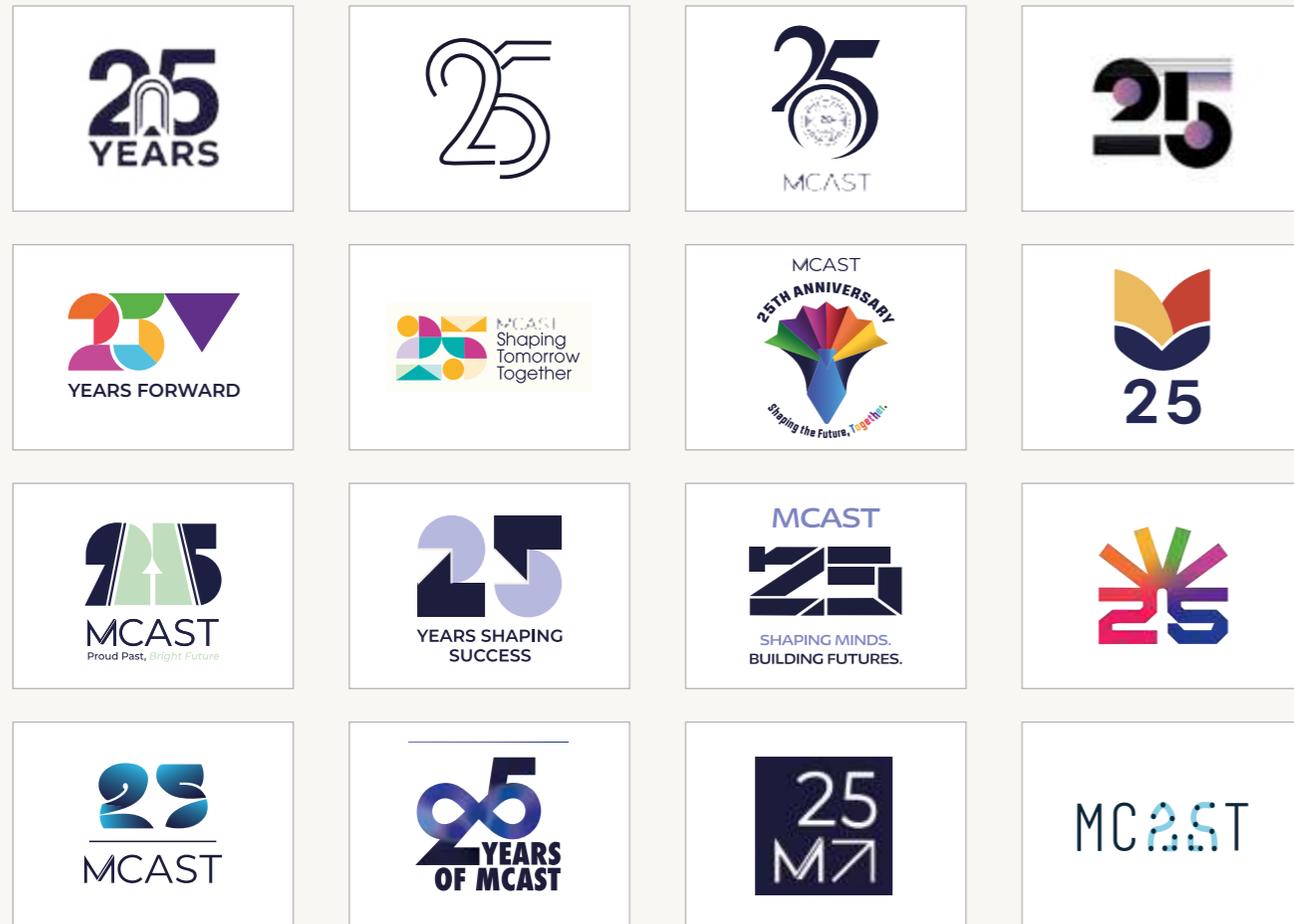
MCAST at 25 is not only a celebration of what has been achieved, it is a tribute to the people who made it possible, and to the futures that will continue to be shaped within its walls.

# MCAST Students Design 25th Anniversary Logo

MCAST's talented Bachelor of Arts (Honours) design students rose to the challenge of creating a logo for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, following a detailed briefing from Ms Caroline Balzan on representing the College's identity, legacy and forward vision.

Working closely with this guidance, the students crafted innovative designs that captured MCAST's spirit since 2001. Eliakim Gyan Aldea Mercado's entry

emerged victorious, with Duaa Ezeddin H Beleid as runner-up—congratulations to both for their outstanding contributions!





## Graduates Awarded Engineering Warrant For The First Time

Two MCAST engineering graduates received their engineering warrants for the first time at the official warrant ceremony hosted by the Bord tal-Inġiniera at the Mediterranean Conference Centre on 2 February 2026.

This milestone follows a decision by the Bord tal-Inġiniera, which has repeatedly supported motions in recent years to evaluate warrant applications from MCAST engineering graduates.

MCAST's engineering programmes underwent international accreditation by the engineering agency ASIIN from 2017 to 2022. Upon successful completion, the Bord tal-Inġiniera—after consulting key stakeholders, including the Chamber of Engineers—confirmed that graduates of MCAST's Pre-Warrant Qualification Course (PWQC) and Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) programmes qualify for the engineering warrant under Article 3(2) of the Inġiniera Act.





## St Carlo Acutis IICT Building Officially Inaugurated At MCAST

MCAST has inaugurated its new Institute of Information and Communication Technology (IICT) building at the Main Campus in Paola. The state-of-the-art facility, named after St Carlo Acutis, was officially opened by Prime Minister Robert Abela, alongside the Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation Clifton Grima and the Minister for European Funds and the Implementation of the Electoral Programme Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi.

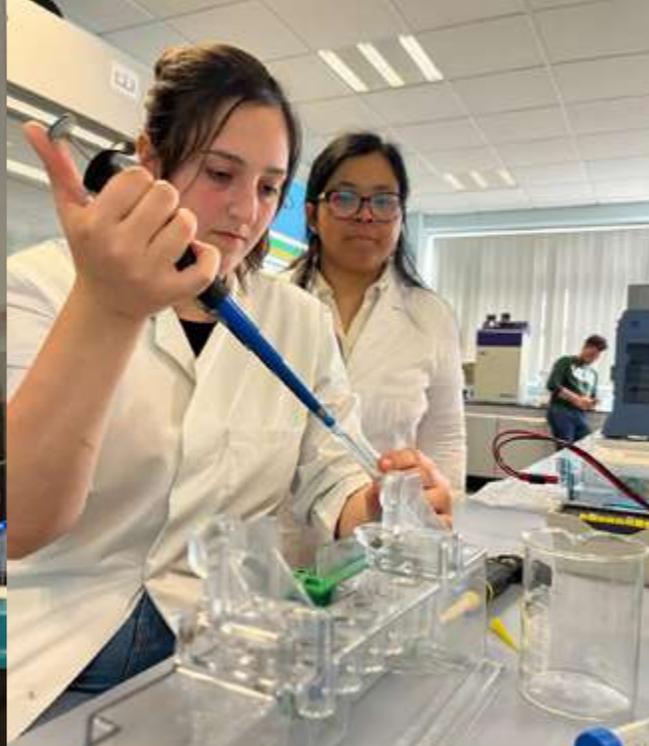
Named after St Carlo Acutis (1991–2006), the building honours a young role model known for his responsible and creative use of digital platforms. MCAST selected

him as the patron of the IICT to reflect the College's commitment to shaping graduates who not only excel technologically but also apply digital skills with integrity for the benefit of society.

The new IICT building forms part of the MCAST Campus Masterplan Phase 2 Project, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The initiative enhances access to high-quality vocational and tertiary education while supporting national priorities to reduce early school-leaving and improve digital skills. The Campus Masterplan represents a €33 million investment, of which €31.9 million was contributed through ERDF funds.

The facility covers a gross floor area of 11,900 square metres on a footprint of 3,420 square metres. Modern laboratories, classrooms and specialised digital learning environments are now supporting the work of more than 1,400 ICT students enrolled at the Institute. The building designed by the College's Capital Projects Office includes 30 computer labs, 16 classrooms, five hardware labs, two network labs, a dedicated Network Operating Centre laboratory seating 32 learners, a 56-seat training room, together with study spaces, academic offices and meeting areas.





## MCAST Veterinary Medicine Master's Recognised Across Europe

MCAST and the Veterinary Surgeons Council are pleased to announce that the College's Master's degree in Veterinary Medicine has been formally recognised by the European Commission.

The qualification was included in Annex 5 of Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications and titles of training courses. The decision, published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 29 October 2025, established the official recognition of MCAST's veterinary training across the European Union and EEA member states.

This development means that graduates from MCAST's Master's in Veterinary Medicine will be eligible to apply for a professional warrant not only

in Malta but also in all EU and EEA countries. The recognition provides graduates with full mobility and professional parity across Europe. The first cohort will graduate in 2029.

The inclusion of the programme in Annex 5 follows a rigorous evaluation process involving scrutiny from EU member states, the European Council, and the European Parliament. The application required close collaboration between the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) and the Veterinary Surgeons Council, ensuring that the degree meets European standards and satisfies the criteria for automatic recognition.



## MCAST Signs Aviation Training Agreement With easyJet Engineering Malta

MCAST has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with easyJet Engineering Malta to enhance training and skills development in the aviation maintenance sector.

The agreement brings together MCAST's Aircraft Maintenance Training Centre (AMTC) and easyJet Engineering Malta, creating new opportunities for students to gain hands-on industry experience recognised as On-the-Job Training (OJT), while ensuring that academic programmes remain aligned with current aviation standards.

Under the three-year agreement, the two organisations will collaborate on practical training, apprenticeships and curriculum development for aircraft maintenance programmes. Students enrolled at MCAST will benefit from exposure to modern aviation technologies, supervised practical

maintenance training and access to working in the hangar environment, as well as industry professionals through guest lectures, workshops and technical demonstrations.

Both parties have committed to close cooperation through designated liaison officers and a joint review committee, which will monitor training quality and key performance indicators on a quarterly basis. All activities under the agreement will comply with Maltese legislation and European Union Aviation Safety Agency standards.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Principal and CEO Mr Stephen Vella on behalf of the College and Managing Director Mr Daniel Galea on behalf of easyJet Engineering Malta.



## MCAST Appoints Two New Deputy Principals

MCAST announced the appointment of Dr Ing. Stephen Sammut as Deputy Principal for Vocational and Professional Education and Training, and Ms Ann Marie Cassar as Deputy Principal for Student Experience.

These strategic appointments strengthen MCAST's leadership as the College advances its reputation, aligns with institutional strategy and Malta's national priorities and prioritises top-tier education for students.

Dr Sammut will oversee all Institutes, the Gozo Campus and the Centre for Learning and Employability. He will also join the Board of MG2i Ltd as ex officio Director. His proven experience and

institutional expertise will ensure academic excellence and strategic alignment in vocational training.

Ms Cassar will manage Student Support and Well-being, the Erasmus+ Projects and Mobility Office, Work-Based Learning, Inclusive Education, International Student Support, Student Council and Societies, Events and Corporate Social Responsibility, Outreach, Equality, Alumni and Chaplaincy. Her dedication to student development will enhance the overall student experience.



## MCAST Robotics Team Shines At FIRST Global Competition In Panama

The Institute of Information and Communication Technology (IICT) at MCAST has achieved remarkable success at the FIRST Global Robotics Competition, held this year in Panama, by proudly representing Malta among the world's most talented young innovators.

In the final rounds, MCAST's students formed an alliance with teams from Serbia, Lithuania, and Kenya, achieving an outstanding second place in the semi-final. Competing against 181 countries, the MCAST team ranked an impressive 19<sup>th</sup> overall in the initial stages, securing a place among the top 24 teams worldwide to qualify for the playoffs.

The students were accompanied by Director Mr Conrad Vassallo and Deputy Director Mr Thomas Gatt, whose guidance and support were instrumental throughout the competition. This outstanding achievement reflects the students' technical skills, creativity, and teamwork, while also showcasing MCAST's commitment to excellence in robotics, innovation, and technology education.

MCAST extended its appreciation to all sponsors and partners whose support made this success possible, marking another proud moment for the Institute of ICT and for Malta on the global stage.



## MCAST Opens Its Library To The General Public To Borrow Books

MCAST has launched a new initiative enabling members of the public to borrow books from its library, blending the roles of an academic resource and a community learning hub. This scheme underscores the College's commitment to lifelong learning and public engagement.

MCAST library facilities were already open to the public, but this expanded programme now permits non-staff and non-student users to borrow from a collection exceeding 65,000 physical items. These include academic textbooks, technical manuals, professional references, and research materials, complemented by e-books and online journals.

The initiative, framed as MCAST's Christmas gift to the public for 2026, was launched at an event on 17 December 2025 at the Paola Campus Library.



## MCAST Strengthens Ties With Leading Kuwaiti Universities

MCAST signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with leading higher education institutions in Kuwait—the Arab Open University (AOU) and the Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST)—to boost academic collaboration and research initiatives.

The MCAST delegation was led by Principal and CEO Mr Stephen Vella and was accompanied by the Maltese Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, Prof Dr George A. Said-Zammit.

Both institutions provided the MCAST delegation with tours of their campuses and facilities. MCAST will invite AOU and KCST to its upcoming annual Research and Innovation EXPO and will hold follow-up meetings in the coming weeks to advance the collaboration.

These partnerships reflect MCAST's ongoing commitment to international engagement and research excellence.



## MCAST Welcomes First ERA Fellow

MCAST is proud to host Dr Shuntaro Yoshida, its first ERA Fellow under the prestigious Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellowship programme. The two-year project, funded by the European Research Executive Agency (REA) through Horizon Europe, brings international research excellence to MCAST. Dr Yoshida received dedicated support from both MCAST and Xjenza Malta in preparing his successful proposal, reflecting the strong national effort being made towards fostering research excellence and international collaboration.

Dr Shuntaro Yoshida is an accomplished academic and practitioner in dance studies and performance. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from Tokyo University of the Arts and has conducted research at prestigious institutions, including New York University, Waseda University (Japan), and the Berlin Centre for Advanced Studies in Arts and Sciences. As a lecturer at Kobe University in Japan, he is also a prolific author, with recent publications including the monograph *Post-choreography: Jérôme Bel's choreography and movement in malfunction* (Routledge, 2024).

In addition to his academic career, Dr Yoshida has over a decade of experience as a choreographer, performer and dancer. He has collaborated with international artists and collectives, and his collective works, which often integrate participatory performance, environmental themes, and AI-driven methods, have been showcased at prominent events such as the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (Japan) and "Tanz in August" (Dance in August, Berlin).

Leveraging his dual role as a researcher and practitioner, Dr Yoshida's fellowship project, "Environmental Turn of Dance: Convergence of Therapeutic Practice, Art Creation with AI and Community Practice (ETD)", addresses one of the greatest challenges of our time: climate change.

By combining therapeutic practice, artistic innovation, AI technologies, and community outreach, ETD positions Malta at the forefront of arts-based climate advocacy. The fellowship demonstrates the EU's and MCAST's shared commitment to innovation with societal impact—advancing research excellence while engaging the public in sustainable futures.

## Belgian Education Delegation Visits MCAST To Study Malta's Vocational Training Model

A group of 12 education professionals from Belgium visited MCAST on Monday 12 November 2025 to observe Malta's vocational and further education system in practice. The study visit formed part of an Erasmus+ consortium initiative led by DHOS Brugge.

During the visit, discussions focused on the College's integrated vocational pathways, collaboration with industry, inclusive learning strategies, and ongoing professional development for educators. The group also toured the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET), where they observed workshop-based training, and the Institute of Community Services (ICS), including the hair and beauty salons used for hands-on learning. The visit concluded at the MCAST Library,

where digital learning resources and student support services were highlighted.

MCAST representatives emphasised the importance of international collaboration in enhancing quality and innovation across vocational systems. Members of the Belgian delegation praised the College's applied learning model and strong engagement with industry partners.

The exchange forms part of MCAST's wider internationalisation strategy and its sustained participation in Erasmus+ partnerships, which support knowledge sharing for both students and staff.



## MCAST Hosts The 4<sup>th</sup> Qualitative Research Conference: "Bridging Disciplines: Qualitative Research Across Fields"

The Qualitative Research Conference took place from 10 to 12 November 2025. The conference, organised by the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC), was themed "Bridging Disciplines: Qualitative Research Across Fields."

The conference has grown into a truly international event, featuring over 30 presenters from diverse backgrounds representing a number of countries and institutions. The conference served as a vibrant platform for researchers, practitioners, and students to explore the versatility and impact of qualitative research across a wide range of disciplines.



## AI-Driven Education: Opportunities, Risks, And The Path Forward

A two-day international workshop examining the growing influence of artificial intelligence in education was held at MCAST on 22 and 23 October 2025. The event, titled "AI-Driven Education: Opportunities, Risks, and the Path Forward," was organised by the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) and supported through the Xjenza Malta Research Networking Scheme (RNS-2024-068).

The workshop brought together academics, researchers and education specialists from MCAST alongside experts from Dublin City University (DCU) and the University of Mons (UMONS) in Belgium. Its aim was to explore how artificial intelligence is reshaping teaching, assessment and educational research, while strengthening international collaboration in this fast-evolving field.

The workshop opened with a welcome address by MCAST Principal and CEO Mr Stephen Vella, who underlined the need for educational institutions to embrace AI responsibly. He emphasised that technology must support learning rather than replace the essential human relationship between educators and students. His remarks also highlighted the value of international partnerships in building research capacity and fostering innovation.





## MCAST To Play Key Role In Malta's New Semiconductor Competence Centre

Malta has launched an €8 million Malta Semiconductor Competence Centre (MSCC) under Malta Enterprise, to position the country as a recognised location for semiconductor manufacturing and specialised workforce development. MCAST will be a core partner in the centre and, together with other institutions, will sit on the council responsible for guiding the sector's growth.

MCAST has been allocated more than €900,000 to lead the training and education element of the project. The work will be coordinated by Project Manager Dr Ing. Stephen Sammut, along with team members Ing. Carolina Sofia, Dr Ing. Barnaby Portelli, and the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC), which includes Senior Research Officer Dr Francis Delicata and the post-award team.

The College will develop eight micro-credential courses focused on semiconductor manufacturing

and development. These courses will be subsidised to support both those already working in the sector and individuals who would like to enter it. Initially they will be delivered online, with the option to be offered in person if there is the demand.

MCAST will also set up a new laboratory with clean-room facilities. The lab will feature equipment such as a probe station for exposed dies and a laser vibrometer, which enables precise measurement of micro-level vibrations without direct contact. This €500,000 investment will enable practical training and support services for the industry.

The project aims to train at least 100 individuals over its duration and to upskill at least 50 people already working in the semiconductor industry. The centre forms part of a wider national effort to strengthen Malta's capabilities in a sector that is central to modern technology and advanced manufacturing.

## MCAST Opens First Overseas Centre In China, Strengthening Educational Ties With JSMC

On Wednesday 29 October 2025, MCAST opened its first educational centre outside of Europe at the Jiangsu Vocational College of Medicine (JSMC) in the city of Yancheng, China.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Ms Kimberly Zammit, Deputy Head of the Embassy of Malta in China, who represented the Embassy, alongside MCAST Principal and CEO, Mr Stephen Vella.

Ms Zammit congratulated both MCAST and JSMC on this significant milestone and reaffirmed the Embassy's commitment to supporting future educational initiatives between Malta and China. She noted that while the relationship between MCAST and JSMC is relatively young, it has quickly developed into a strong and lasting partnership that continues to bring students from both countries closer together.

Mr Vella described the opening as a proud moment for MCAST and a reflection of the institution's expanding international presence.

"This is not only a proud milestone for our institution but also a tangible reflection of how far our partnership has come. The new Centre represents a bridge between Malta and China, between MCAST and JSMC, and between our students, educators, and communities," he said.

The new MCAST Centre in China will initially offer micro-credential programmes in health sciences,

giving JSMC students access to specialised learning designed and delivered by MCAST. The facility is equipped to host online learning sessions, allowing for seamless delivery across continents.

In addition, MCAST will provide professional development opportunities for JSMC's nursing lecturers and deliver guest lectures to nursing students, fostering academic collaboration and knowledge exchange.

The opening marks a landmark achievement in MCAST's international outreach, strengthening educational and cultural connections between Malta and China while expanding opportunities for students and educators alike.



## From Research To Reality: Flipped Gamification Drives MCAST Student Achievement In Outreach Education

During the academic year 2024-2025, MCAST Multimedia Software Development students completed an innovative WebVR/3D project using the Flipped Gamification Framework, a pedagogical model developed by Nocilla & Nocilla (2024).

The aim of the flipped gamification model is to tackle one of the most pressing educational challenges of our time: fostering student motivation and engagement in an era defined by artificial intelligence and the complexities of 21<sup>st</sup> century curricula.

By implementing this innovative framework immersed in the pedagogical aspect, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, combining independent exploration, creative problem-solving, and use of educational digital technology. The model redefines traditional teaching methods by integrating play, research, and applied innovation with the aim of transforming students into both self-directed learners and creators owing to its relevance as well as due to the fact that it encourages students to take ownership of their own learning.

A notable example of this framework's success was demonstrated by Kieran Pisani, an MCAST student who integrated his newly acquired coding skills with research on environmental awareness. His research project transformed into a fully functional WebVR/3D game an engaging digital experience designed to promote environmental responsibility.

Following his participation in Malta's PlayCon 2025 exhibition, Kieran was approached by a local educator with whom he shared his interactive game which is now being used as an educational tool for younger students in schools, effectively reinforcing sustainability concepts through an engaging and immersive learning experience.

This success underscores MCAST's commitment to educational innovation, promoting research-based frameworks that prepare students not only to adapt to emerging technologies but also to lead the change in digital technology and research study.

## MCAST Collaborates With Tableo On AI-Driven Restaurant Management Project

MCAST has collaborated with Tableo, developers of the award-winning restaurant reservation and management platform, on an innovative project supported by the FUSION: R&I Technology Extension Support Programme (TESP).

Through this programme, administered by xjenzamalta.mt on behalf of the Foundation for Science and Technology, Tableo was awarded a €35,000 grant to advance its Restaurant AI Assistant Project. The initiative brings together MCAST researchers and Tableo's product development team to integrate cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence into hospitality technology.

## MCAST Invests In New Industrial PLC Training Kits To Enhance Hands-On Learning

In line with MCAST's commitment to strengthen its "learning by doing" approach, the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) – Mechanical Engineering has received eight brand-new industrial Programmable Logic Controller (PLC) training kits. This investment was made possible through the financial support of the MCAST Erasmus+ Projects and Mobility Office.

PLC systems are widely used in industry to automate and control machinery and processes across sectors such as manufacturing, energy, transportation, and building automation. The new training kits offer students a safe and practical environment to programme, wire, and troubleshoot real automation systems—equipping them with the skills needed to succeed in modern engineering careers.

Students following programmes in Mechatronics, Control Engineering, and related areas at IET will benefit directly from this investment. The kits will support lecturers in delivering more engaging, applied lessons and will help learners develop critical problem-solving and technical skills required in today's automated industries.

A handover event was held to mark the occasion, showcasing the equipment and acknowledging the valuable cooperation between the Erasmus+ Projects and Mobility Office, iAutomate, and the IET Mechanical Engineering Department.



## EU4Dual Rectors' Council Meets In Brussels

Rectors and senior leaders from the nine partner universities of the EU4Dual European Universities Alliance met in Brussels on 16 and 17 February 2026 to agree on strategic priorities and governance steps for the next phase of the alliance.

The meeting marked an important milestone as partners focused on strengthening the alliance's long-term sustainability and its capacity to deliver shared initiatives at European level. Central to discussions was the establishment of an EU4Dual legal entity (AISBL), designed to reinforce structured governance and support the alliance's continuity beyond the current project cycle.

Partners reviewed progress across EU4Dual's strategic priorities, including the development of joint Master's programmes and the advancement of a Joint Industrial PhD pathway. Discussions also addressed work on a Dual Studies quality framework and delivery model, as well as internationalisation priorities and the renewal of consultative councils to further strengthen links with industry and regional stakeholders. Participants shared implementation updates and examples of collaboration across member institutions.

## Principal Launches Initiative To Strengthen Staff Engagement

Mr Stephen Vella, MCAST Principal and CEO, has launched a programme of staff encounters aimed at strengthening collaboration across the College. The initiative combined Institute meetings with on-site visits, giving staff more opportunities to share their views and shape future priorities.

The first phase, held in September 2025, saw a series of meetings with each Institute. Staff were invited to raise ideas, discuss ongoing projects and receive updates on the College's strategic direction. The sessions encouraged open discussion and gave staff the chance to reflect on their daily work experiences.

A second phase followed in October 2025, with weekly visits to Institutes. Unlike the larger gatherings, these visits took place in staff members' own working environments, allowing for informal conversations and practical exchanges.

The programme was designed to strike a balance between structured dialogue and day-to-day engagement. The initiative reflected MCAST's values of transparency, inclusivity and partnership. The third stage included the administrative departments, ensuring that all areas of the College were engaged in the same spirit of collaboration.

According to MCAST, the programme underlined a vision of a strong and inclusive community, where staff played a central role in the College's growth and success.



## MCAST, In Collaboration With MUMN, Takes The Stage At Medtech World 2025 With Reach-Ethics And Isadd Projects

MCAST took centre stage at MedTech Malta 2025, alongside the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses (MUMN), presenting two innovative, technology-driven workshops held on 13 November 2025 at the Mediterranean Conference Centre, Valletta.

The first workshop showcased REACH-ETHICS, an MCAST-led project aimed at enhancing research ethics training in both animal and human healthcare. Funded by Xjenza Malta through the Research Excellence Programme, the project is conducted by Dr Lorna Bonnici West, Mr Daren Scerri, Mr Alan Gatt, Mr David Deguara, Mr David Debono, Ms Marisa Galea Vella, Dr Marco Montalto, Dr Francis Delicata, and Ms Lisa Theuma.

During the workshop, Ms Marisa Galea Vella and Mr Scerri demonstrated how the system integrates virtual reality and generative AI to create immersive, scenario-based ethical decision-making environments. Participants explored realistic 3D simulations guided by expert AI avatars, experiencing firsthand how MCAST's applied research is

redefining ethics education within healthcare and scientific disciplines.

The second workshop highlighted ISADD, a cutting-edge simulation and assessment prototype that enhances training on personal protective equipment (PPE) procedures. Developed by Dr Neville Schembri, Mr Gerard Said Pullicino, Mr Daren Scerri, and research teams from the Institute of Applied Science and the Applied Research and Innovation Centre, ISADD leverages augmented reality, image processing, and machine learning to provide real-time feedback on donning and doffing techniques. Also funded by Xjenza Malta's Research Excellence Programme, the system has already undergone initial testing with healthcare educators and practitioners, reflecting its strong potential for clinical training enhancement.

These workshops reaffirm MCAST's role in partnering with key stakeholders to drive transformative, technology-enabled innovation in healthcare education.

## MCAST Received Book Donation

Mr Charles Bezzina, a distinguished Gozitan historian and poet, has generously donated ten books to the MCAST Library. The collection features works authored by Mr Bezzina himself, alongside publications by his late father, Mr Frank Bezzina, showcasing their profound literary and historical legacy from Gozo.

The donation was presented via MCAST President of the Board of Governors, Mr Horace Laudi, who accepted

it on behalf of the College. This event underscored the value of preserving local history and literature, ensuring accessibility for students and researchers.

MCAST extends heartfelt thanks to Mr Charles Bezzina for his thoughtful contribution, which will enrich academic research and foster deeper appreciation of Maltese and Gozitan cultural heritage.

## International Students Participate In The POVE Water Summer School In Malta

From 27 to 31 October 2025, students and educators from the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Latvia, and France took part in the POVE Water Summer School hosted in Malta. The programme offered a dynamic platform for academic exchange, professional collaboration, and a detailed examination of Malta's water management systems.

The Summer School kicked off with introductory and team-building sessions that sparked interactions among participants from the diverse nations. This collaborative spirit persisted throughout the week, promoting cross-cultural partnerships and mutual learning.

The schedule included presentations, hands-on projects, and field trips designed to deepen insights into sustainable water practices. Thought-provoking discussions enabled students and lecturers to share viewpoints and explore European water management strategies.

The Summer School provided immersive cultural experiences, allowing participants to uncover Malta's history, environment, and traditions—highlighting the island's deep ties to its natural resources.

A key highlight was forging international ties between institutions. These connections have broadened students' academic perspectives while bolstering professional networks among educators.



## MCAST Launches The Seventh Edition Of Its Research And Innovation Expo

MCAST launched the seventh edition of its Research and Innovation EXPO, marking a significant milestone in the College's ongoing mission to strengthen applied research across Malta. The event, which showcased diverse projects spanning various areas and disciplines, was held over two days on 13 and 14 November 2025.

The opening of the Research and Innovation EXPO was addressed by Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Research and Innovation Keith Azzopardi Tanti, who praised MCAST's expanding role in shaping Malta's applied research ecosystem.

Speaking at the event, he announced an increase in support through the Research Fellowship Scheme. The Hon. Azzopardi Tanti emphasized the programme's importance within the national innovation strategy.

The MCAST Research Fellowship Scheme continued to elevate the College's capacity to link vocational education with industry-led research. The projects spanned areas such as environmental science, technology, education, culture, and digital innovation.

## Industry Visit By Institute Directors

On Wednesday 21 January 2026, the senior management team of MCAST, made up of the Institute Directors and the Deputy Principal for Vocational and Professional Education and Training, were very kindly hosted by Maypole Caterers at their Bakery in Tal-Handaq, Hal Qormi.

They were given a presentation about the way this family-run business has evolved from a traditional bakery owned by the Debono family in Hal Qormi to a fully-fledged company employing around 900 employees. While well rooted in traditional Maltese

bread making, the company is always on the lookout for new business opportunities with community-based food retail at its core. Later, the MCAST team were given a very interesting tour of the factory, going around kitchens, ovens and packaging stations.

This visit was one of several outreach initiatives that the College organises in order to keep in touch with the economic operators where our students will be taking up research, work placements or eventual employment.

## Greendale Methodology: Embedding Sustainability Competences In Higher Education

MCAST is proud to announce the publication of the Greendale Methodology for Incorporating Sustainability Skills into Higher Education Curricula – Building on the GreenComp Framework, now officially available for download via the MCAST website at [www.greendimension.eu](http://www.greendimension.eu).

Developed under the Erasmus+ Greendale project (“Green Dimension: Adapting Learning in Higher Education”), this innovative methodology provides higher education educators and curriculum designers with a practical and structured approach to embedding sustainability competences across all subject areas. It builds upon the European Commission’s GreenComp Framework, which defines sustainability as a key competence for lifelong learning—empowering learners to act responsibly and shape sustainable futures.

The Greendale Methodology recognises that sustainability is not a separate subject, but a cross-cutting theme that should be integrated throughout higher education curricula.

By following this process, educators can effectively embed the GreenComp competences—including systems thinking, critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, and foresight—into their teaching practice. This strengthens students’ academic development, professional employability, and capacity to contribute meaningfully to the green transition.

This publication represents a significant milestone for MCAST and its European partners in advancing Education for Sustainable Development and promoting the integration of sustainability across higher education.

## MCAST Secures Funding For National Food Labelling Research Project

MCAST has been awarded substantial national funding to carry out Label-Ed+, a two-year research project that will explore how food labelling shapes everyday food choices in Malta and how clearer information can support healthier habits nationwide.

“By bringing together different areas of expertise, this project allows us to build practical, research-informed solutions that can genuinely support families in making healthier choices.”

The project is being undertaken by a multidisciplinary team consisting of Dr Daniela Cassola, Mr Paul Calleja, Mr Johann Zarb, Dr Massimo Pierucci, and Dr Clara Chetcuti. Together, the team brings expertise in public health, education, nutrition, behavioural research, and scientific methodology. Label-Ed+ is funded through Xjenza Malta’s Obesity Research Programme 2025.

Malta consistently records some of the highest childhood obesity rates in Europe. At the same time, most packaged foods sold locally are imported, resulting in inconsistent or unclear front-of-pack labels. This makes it challenging for many families—especially those with busy routines or lower levels of health literacy—to make informed choices.

Label-Ed+ aims to address this challenge through a combination of research, education, and real-world testing.

The project will culminate in a Policy-in-a-Box resource—an evidence-based package designed to support national stakeholders in improving

food labelling and empowering families to make healthier decisions.

The team highlighted the collaborative nature of the project, noting that:

“By bringing together different areas of expertise, this project allows us to build practical, research-informed solutions that can genuinely support families in making healthier choices.”

Label-Ed+ strengthens MCAST’s contribution to applied public-health research and demonstrates the College’s commitment to addressing issues that directly affect the wellbeing of communities in Malta.



## MCAST's Space Pianist Shines At IAC 2025

Dr Leonardo Barilaro, Senior Lecturer in Aerospace Engineering at MCAST's Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) Aviation Department—and known as “The Space Pianist”—made a notable impact at the 76<sup>th</sup> International Astronautical Congress (IAC 2025) in Sydney. As Malta's sole delegate, he presented three technical papers and co-authored a fourth at the world's leading space conference, held between 29 September and 3 October 2025 under the theme “Sustainable Space: Resilient Earth.”

His MCAST research tackled key space challenges. One paper with the University of Padova explored 3D-printed Kevlar® and carbon fibre composites for cost-effective satellite shielding against debris. Another detailed the “ASTROBEAT 2” project with NYU Abu Dhabi, advancing ISS-validated in-space repair tech and debris sensors. He also shared “Music from Space,” an outreach initiative streaming original compositions from the ISS, in collaboration with artists like Tina Guo and Steve Mazzaro. A co-authored paper outlined safer orbits and spacecraft end-of-life strategies.



Beyond research, Dr Barilaro performed at Sydney's Steinway Gallery, blending art and science: “Surrounded by Steinway and NASA passions, I saw how both stem from humanity's drive to explore and inspire.” The event spurred global collaborations, with Dr Barilaro noting, “Representing MCAST and Malta here for the fourth time is an honour—our work with international partners pushes boundaries, and I hope it inspires more Maltese researchers to join.”



## MCAST Launches Second Monograph On Maltese Illustration

MCAST has launched the second publication in its monograph series, “Documenting Maltese Illustration: An Exploratory Study of Common Contemporary Themes, Potentials, and Challenges” on 6 February 2026.

Authored by Ms Moira Scicluna Zahra, the study documents contemporary Maltese illustration through interviews with illustrators, publishers and cultural practitioners from different generations.

The research examines illustration across children's publishing, editorial cartoons, comics, commercial work and digital media. It highlights recurring themes such as nostalgia, cultural memory and responses to Malta's changing environment, while also addressing ongoing concerns around sustainability, professional recognition and working conditions.

A dedicated section explores the impact of digital platforms and artificial intelligence on illustration, reflecting practitioners' views on how

new technologies are influencing creative work and authorship.

The publication also notes how illustrators often move between roles in design, fine art, authorship and education.

The launch included addresses by MCAST Principal and CEO Mr Stephen Vella and Deputy Principal for Research and Student Academic Management Dr Tatjana Chircop. The visual aspects of the research were presented by Ms Ruth Ancilleri. The monograph was edited by Mr Sandro Vella.

The publication forms part of MCAST Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC)'s continued commitment to research within the creative arts sector.

## Koszalin University Of Technology Study Visit At MCAST

Koszalin University of Technology (KUT) conducted a study visit at MCAST from 15 to 19 September 2025. The University was represented by Ms Izabela Juskiewicz, Head of the Research Project Office and Ms Magdalena Małecka, Specialist at the Research Project Office, who participated in the five-day programme at MCAST. The main objective of the study visit was to identify barriers limiting higher education institutions' engagement in the EU4Dual programme and to propose practical solutions to overcome them. The visit was funded through the Mini-Grants for Research Work and Study Visits within EU4Dual.

During the visit, Ms Magdalena Małecka and Dr Lorna Bonnici West, Director Research and Innovation at MCAST, delivered presentations on organisational structures that support participation in Horizon Europe and other funding schemes within their respective institutions. This was followed by comparative discussions between the two higher education institutions. The discussions highlighted some challenges and limitations affecting the institutions' participation in the EU4Dual programme, while also identifying strategies to address them. Key proposals included mentoring researchers in proposal writing, raising awareness of EU4Dual opportunities, improving information exchange between the two institutions, and fostering skill development through joint workshops and research networking sessions. These initiatives are expected to strengthen and expand institutional collaboration in research.



## Talexio Payroll And HR Software To Be Used By MCAST Business Students In Practical Learning Initiative

Talexio's HR and Payroll software will be made available to students at MCAST, as part of a new collaboration aimed at enhancing hands-on learning in business, payroll and human resources.

Students and lecturers at the Institute of Business Management and Commerce will gain free access to Talexio's Human Resources Information System (HRIS) and payroll platform. The software will be integrated into classroom learning to support modules related to HR operations, payroll processing and digital business tools.

The partnership reflects a shared commitment to equipping students with relevant, job-ready tools. MCAST remains committed to collaboration between education and industry to enhance the Institute's job and career prospects.

## MCAST Renews Partnership Agreement With Scope Solutions

MCAST has renewed its partnership with Scope Solutions to enhance practical training for students within the Institute of Business Management and Commerce (IBMC).

Under the renewed agreement, students enrolled in accounting programmes will continue to have direct access to Xero, a widely used cloud-based accounting platform. The software will be integrated into teaching and coursework, allowing students to work in a simulated professional environment.

The collaboration gives both students and lecturers the opportunity to use industry-standard tools as part of their training. By working with real-world accounting processes and digital platforms, students gain experience that reflects current business practice.

The partnership aims to strengthen employability by ensuring graduates are familiar with the systems used in today's accounting and finance sectors.

In an event that took place on 6 February 2026, MCAST Principal and CEO Mr Stephen Vella and Mr Brian Ferris from Scope Solution signed the renewed agreement in the presence of Mr Andrew Galea, Director Institute of Business Management and Commerce.



## MCAST Graphic Design Students Visit Government Printing Press

On 19 February 2026, a group of 20 Graphic Design students from the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts, accompanied by members of staff from the MCAST Communications Office, visited the Government Printing Press - Malta. The visit was hosted by Director General Mr Osvaldo Pace and his team.

During the visit, students were given a comprehensive overview of the printing industry, followed by a guided tour of the facility. The Government Printing Press provides printing services to all Ministries, Government Departments and other public entities in a timely and cost-effective manner, while utilising the latest available technology.

The visit proved to be an incredibly rewarding experience, providing students with valuable, real-world exposure to every stage of the printing and production process. Such initiatives continue to strengthen the link between academic learning and industry practice, equipping MCAST students with practical knowledge and professional insight into their chosen field.



## MCAST Academics Showcase Early Years Research At The 33<sup>rd</sup> EECERA Conference In Bratislava

A group of five academics from the Institute of Community Services, Dr Shirley Ann Gauci, Dr Heathcliff Schembri, Ms Eliza Cachia, Ms Rose Piccinino, and Ms Christine Schembri, participated in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA), held between 25 and 28 August 2025 at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, Bratislava. The conference, Europe's largest annual gathering of early years researchers, carried the theme "Early Education for All: Celebrating Diversity and Seeking Inclusion" and attracted delegates from across the globe.

Dr Shirley Ann Gauci organised and chaired the first-ever symposium abroad led by Early Years lecturers from MCAST. This milestone provided international visibility for the institution and showcased the expertise and research commitment of its academics. The symposium, entitled "Parents as Partners: Sustaining Collaboration for Inclusive and Diverse Early Childhood Education and Care in Malta", featured three presentations, each exploring the pivotal role of parental engagement in inclusive education.

- Dr Heathcliff Schembri presented *Beyond the School Gate? Repositioning Parents as Agents of Change in School Reform*, which examined a Maltese curriculum reform initiative designed to strengthen continuity between the early and junior years. His study showed how school leadership, teachers, and parents co-construct reform processes, while drawing attention to the tensions that can arise between institutional governance and genuine participatory engagement.
- Dr Shirley Ann Gauci delivered *Fostering Reciprocal Parent Partnerships: Leadership Practices for Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Childcare*. Her research, based on interviews with childcare managers in multicultural Maltese settings, highlighted the possibilities and challenges of cultivating authentic parent partnerships. The findings pointed to the need for adaptive leadership practices that can overcome institutional barriers and promote collaborative decision-making.

- Ms Eliza Cachia presented, on behalf of the COMPASS Project team, a research initiative supported by MCAST and conducted by five academics: Ms Eliza Cachia, Ms Ann Marie Cassar, Dr Melanie Darmanin, Dr Shirley Ann Gauci, and Dr Heathcliff Schembri. The presentation, *The COMPASS Project: Prioritising Parental Perspectives on Initial Teacher Education*, emphasised the importance of integrating parents' voices into teacher education. The findings revealed that parents often felt limited in their opportunities to contribute to discussions on initial teacher education, while also expressing the need for stronger communication and inclusive engagement strategies. The study called for greater recognition of parents as active partners in shaping teacher preparation programmes.

The symposium was very well received and highlighted the value of MCAST's contributions to international research in early childhood education. It also created a platform for dialogue with scholars and practitioners from diverse contexts, enriching

the exchange of ideas and paving the way for future collaborations.

Beyond the symposium, attending the EECERA conference proved to be a formative professional experience for the team. It provided opportunities to engage with the latest global debates on inclusion, diversity, and participation in early childhood settings. The team also connected with academics from the University of Malta and other Maltese institutions in the field, strengthening local scholarly networks within an international forum. The insights gained will feed directly into the teaching and learning process, ensuring that MCAST Early Years students remain informed by current research and practice, and that their learning is enriched with up-to-date international perspectives.

The participation of MCAST lecturers in EECERA 2025 represented a step forward in strengthening the institution's international profile, building scholarly networks, and reaffirming its commitment to research-informed teaching in early childhood education.

## MCAST Hosts 6<sup>th</sup> ENIHEI Conference In Malta

MCAST hosted the Conference of the European Network of Innovative Higher Education Institutions (ENIHEI), a network of 38 higher education institutions across Europe, with outstanding performance in some area of the European innovation system.

Having been set up by the European Commission in 2022, ENIHEI members share ideas with the aim to mobilise the higher education sector through the implementation of the European Strategy for Universities and the New European Innovation Agenda.

The two-day General Assembly, held at the MCAST Resource Centre Auditorium on 23–24 October 2025, focused on the future role of the network in promoting an innovation culture within the framework of the European Innovation Agenda. A highlight of the Assembly was the setting up of a Steering Committee with Dr Tatjana Chircop representing MCAST at the helm, responsible for chairing the committee and the secretariat of the network. Over the month of October 2025, the coordination role was passed on from the predecessors, the University of Salamanca, to MCAST, a prestigious step recognising the College's growing role in innovation and European higher education.

The Assembly reaffirmed ENIHEI's mission to act as a platform to exchange knowledge, ideas and experiences and develop collective innovative thinking on how higher education can drive innovation, nurture talent, and foster a culture of creativity and entrepreneurship.



## Honorary Consuls Visit MCAST To Gain Insight Into Malta's Education Landscape

A group of Honorary Consuls, representing Malta in various countries, visited MCAST. This visit was part of an official programme organised by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, along with Trade Malta.

The visit aimed to give the delegates a better understanding of Malta's education system, focusing on vocational and higher education opportunities at MCAST. As important representatives of Malta abroad, the Honorary Consuls help strengthen diplomatic, cultural, and commercial ties. This visit aimed to give them first-hand knowledge of the country's academic framework.

MCAST Principal and CEO Mr Stephen Vella gave an in-depth presentation on the development of education in Malta. He outlined the College's strategic vision and the variety of academic programmes available across its Institutes and Centres. The session highlighted MCAST's growth, industry partnerships, research projects, and its commitment to providing career-oriented pathways that meet local and international job market needs.

After the presentation, the delegation toured the MCAST Maritime Centre. They learned about the specialised training facilities that support Malta's

maritime sector. The visit concluded with a tour of the MCAST Library, where Director Ms Liza Franco presented an overview of the academic resources, digital services, and student support systems available to learners.

The visiting Honorary Consuls represent Malta in Armenia, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, the Philippines, Singapore, Spain, Turkey, the United States, and Vietnam. In their areas, they support Malta's diplomatic efforts, promote cultural exchange, and encourage commercial and educational collaboration.



## MCAST Lecturer Therese Debono Receives Falcon Award at Malta Biennale 2026

Photography lecturer and artist Therese Debono has received The Maltese Falcon Award for Best Artwork at the Malta Biennale 2026 for her project Blank. The award was announced during a ceremony held at the Oratory of St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta and was selected by an independent international jury of experts in the visual arts.

The prize was shared between Debono and artist Concetta Modica, recognising two works presented within the Biennale's international exhibition programme.

Debono's project Blank examines the visible traces of urban transformation within the Maltese landscape. The work focuses on exposed party walls that appear when buildings are demolished or replaced by taller developments. These walls, often overlooked within everyday environments, function as indexical markers of absence, revealing the physical traces of structures that once occupied these sites.

As part of the Malta Biennale exhibition programme, Blank was presented as a large-scale photographic installation at the Ġgantija Temples in Gozo, creating a dialogue between contemporary urban transformation and one of the world's oldest prehistoric sites.

Reflecting on the project, Debono explains:

**"Blank walls appear silent and neutral, yet they carry a quiet violence. They mark absence and reveal the traces of what has been removed."**

Therese Debono is a photographer, researcher and lecturer at MCAST, where she teaches photography while maintaining an active artistic practice exploring the relationship between landscape, memory and the built environment.



## MCAST Signs Training Agreement with KM Malta Airlines and Centrecom

MCAST has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with KM Malta Airlines and Centrecom Ltd to strengthen collaboration in education and training for the aviation sector.

The agreement establishes a framework for cooperation between the three organisations, creating new opportunities for students to gain practical industry exposure while ensuring that academic programmes remain aligned with the evolving needs of the aviation industry.

Through this partnership, MCAST will work closely with KM Malta Airlines and Centrecom to support the development of industry-relevant skills through practical workshops, technical demonstrations, seminars and other collaborative initiatives. The agreement also promotes opportunities for student internships, apprenticeships and potential employment pathways within the aviation industry.

Students will benefit from exposure to industry technologies and operational systems used within the aviation sector, providing valuable insights into real-world practices and strengthening the connection between academic learning and professional application.

The Memorandum further outlines cooperation in curriculum development to ensure that study programmes remain responsive to emerging industry standards and requirements. In addition, the collaboration will enhance knowledge exchange between the parties and support the ongoing professional development of students preparing to enter the aviation workforce.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by MCAST Principal and CEO Stephen Vella on behalf of the College, Chief Officer People and Culture Robert Fenech on behalf of KM Malta Airlines, and CEO Robert Spiteri on behalf of Centrecom Ltd.

## Girls in STEM event at MCAST to promote gender equality in technical careers

More than 350 students from state, church and independent schools took part in a Girls in STEM event at MCAST on 9 March 2026, aimed at encouraging young people to explore careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The event, organised by the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET), formed part of the College's activities marking International Women's Day and sought to raise awareness that careers in technical and scientific fields are open to everyone, regardless of gender.

Throughout the morning, participants took part in a series of interactive workshops and demonstrations led by MCAST female lecturers and students. Industry leaders were also invited to the sessions designed to give schoolchildren practical insight into the different fields of engineering and technology.

Activities included metal workshop practice, where participants observed sheet-metal techniques such as marking out, cutting, and bending, as well



as aerodynamics demonstrations using a wind tunnel to visualise how airflow affects aircraft and other structures.

Students also explored robotics, electronics and drone technology, learning how modern systems are designed, programmed and tested. Other sessions focused on green energy and sustainable engineering, where participants built small wind turbines and participated in experiments demonstrating hydrogen fuel cells powered by water electrolysis.

The event aimed to inspire young people to consider future careers in engineering and technology by providing hands-on exposure to these subjects and showcasing the opportunities available in the sector.

## MCAST Launches Quantitative Research Hub

MCAST's Applied Research and Innovation Centre has launched the Quantitative Research Hub, an initiative aimed at strengthening quantitative research skills across all institutes. The Hub was officially opened on 12 March 2026.

Led by Dr William Gatt Fenech and Dr Jean-Pierre Brincat, the Hub will serve as a central resource for quantitative methods and statistical analysis at the College. As part of the Applied Research and Innovation Centre, this initiative reflects MCAST's commitment to maintaining high research standards.

With data-driven approaches becoming essential across many fields, quantitative skills are increasingly important. The Hub is designed to help researchers and students develop stronger statistical reasoning and greater confidence in working with data.

Services will include one-to-one consultations and focused sessions on quantitative research design and analysis, with particular attention to selecting

appropriate statistical methods and using analytical software effectively.

Support will centre on guidance and skills development. It will not cover supervision, data collection or entry, writing, or editing.

Staff and students are encouraged to contact the Hub at [QuantitativeResearchHub@mcast.edu.mt](mailto:QuantitativeResearchHub@mcast.edu.mt).

## H.E. The President of Malta Visits MCAST IBMC Career EXPO 2026

MCAST welcomed Her Excellency, the President of Malta, Myriam Spiteri Debono, to its Main Campus in Paola on 05<sup>th</sup> March 2026 during the IBMC Career EXPO. The event forms part of the College's ongoing efforts to strengthen collaboration between academia and industry, while supporting students as they prepare for their future careers.

In her address to staff and students, the President spoke of her continued interest in the IBMC EXPO, noting that it was among the first events she attended following her appointment. This year marked her third visit to the EXPO, where she once again highlighted the important role of education and training in connecting education with the world of industry. She commended MCAST for its ongoing commitment to equipping students with the knowledge, practical experience, and skills required to succeed in today's professional environment. During the visit, photography students from the Institute for the Creative Arts presented one of their works as a gesture of appreciation for the President's presence.

Held over two days, the IBMC Career EXPO 2026 provided an important networking opportunity for



students interested in careers within the business and finance sectors. Now in its fifth edition, the event continues to bring students and industry representatives together, offering valuable insights into the professional landscape and future employment opportunities. This year's EXPO featured 21 exhibitors from a variety of industries.

MCAST extends its appreciation to all industry partners who participated in the EXPO.



# 25 Years of MCAST Members of Staff









# MCAST

Communications Office  
Students' House, Level 1  
MCAST Main Campus  
Corradino Street  
Paola PLA 9032, Malta

**[MCAST.EDU.MT](https://www.mcast.edu.mt)**

