

THE I BELONG
PROGRAMME
AT MCAST

ISSUE 65

INCLUSION

M C A S T L I N K

NCPE
EQUALITY
MARK

EXPLORING
INCLUSIVE
LEARNING



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Editorial



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Welcome to this special edition that puts a spotlight on the theme of inclusion within our College. In today's interconnected world, it is our profound responsibility to wholeheartedly embrace diversity and foster a culture of inclusivity. By prioritizing inclusivity, we can create an environment where students from all backgrounds feel respected, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Within the pages of this edition, you will discover a diverse range of thought-provoking articles that embody the spirit of inclusion. They address various barriers that hinder the progress of certain individuals, including financial constraints, physical disabilities, mental health, cultural and language barriers, as well as different learning difficulties.

Notably, two articles delve into transgender perspectives and offer suggestions for enhancing inclusivity within our College. By amplifying the experiences and insights of transgender students, we can take significant strides towards improving their inclusion and making our College an even more welcoming and nurturing place for everyone.

The "I Belong Programme" takes centre stage as it focuses on supporting migrants in acquiring essential language and cultural skills crucial to their integration process. By prioritizing their inclusion, the College aims to empower migrants and provide them with the necessary tools to thrive in their new communities. Dr. Renjith Raveendran Pillai, a student who has directly benefited from the "I Belong Programme," shares his personal experience and highlights the College's support on his journey. His story serves as a testament to the positive impact of the programme and showcases the College's commitment to fostering inclusivity.

This edition also features the recent award of the Equality Mark and the launch of the Inclusive Language Guidebook, further underscoring our dedication to creating an inclusive environment.

In the second part of the magazine, we shift our focus to the recent events and activities that have taken place at the College. This section aims to capture the vibrant life that thrives within our College community, highlighting the diverse range of engagements and opportunities available to students.

We hope that this edition will inspire meaningful conversations, spark awareness, and encourage active participation in fostering inclusivity within our College and beyond. Together, let us continue to champion diversity, celebrate differences, and ensure that every individual feels a sense of belonging in our community.



Principal's Statement



The stories in this edition cover two distinct but equally important achievements at our College. On the one hand, the strategic goal set in 2019 to be inclusive in our learning and teaching contexts is now a reality. Similarly, the series of initiatives, events and activities over these last few months, reported in the

second part of the edition, makes us proud of the service we give to our students, the Faculty and the community.

This edition focuses on an important aspect of life at MCAST. We embrace diversity and inclusion in no small measure. With increasing amounts of international students and with a philosophy that holds high the dignity of every person, we constantly warrant that no one is excluded and everyone is respected for what they are and what they morally represent. People and standards are values that we uphold constantly and at all times. Whether it's the language that we are expected to use among ourselves in formal and informal communication; whether it's our job to break down socio-economic and cultural barriers or whether it's our job to focus on dropouts we are now more conscious of the fact that unless you act results will be difficult to measure.

The reports in this edition highlight the strong commitment by so many employees at the College to convert inclusion into a learning and working environment that puts students and staff members at ease and respected. Huge efforts resulted into obtaining earlier this year the NCPE Equality Mark. Now

that standards have been set, we are all committed to put words into practice. Structures are in place to help young students with learning difficulties to avoid exclusion from the labour market. The Community College of the Third Age has had a very successful year in which more elderly are finding in MCAST a new lease of life, of sharing and learning. Transgender students claim that MCAST seems to have a very accepting community at school but more work needs to be done to create a more respecting environment for these individuals. Students who struggle with financial problems or others who migrated to Malta but are still finding it difficult to live here are among cohorts we care about. The I Belong programme which we run for the Ministry for Home Affairs, Security, Reforms and Equality is an example of inclusion for hundreds of migrants who look at us as their second home.

Our highest value is to respect and give every opportunity for growth to every individual student and employee regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, economic status and other diverse backgrounds. As evidenced in the many reports in this edition of MCASTlink, the College has grown into an intercultural community faster than we ever thought. Thankfully, we are prepared to face the challenges that diversity brings thanks to our committed staff members, the support we receive from government as well as the many industry partners and other sponsors of events.

MCAST is a today a Community College for All. Our mission is to embrace everyone who wishes to develop talents according to one's potential. We hold no barriers. Our doors are open to people of all ages who wish to join one or more of our courses for personal or professional growth. The same holds for NGOs who wish to organize their activities on campus. This is what inclusion for MCAST is all about.



MCAST



Inclusion is Vital

By Joseph Zammit, Deputy Director, Inclusive Education Unit, Inclusion and Support

Meaningful conversations about disability inclusion in education are crucial, but they must be followed by effective action and solutions. Inclusion in education settings has implications that extend far beyond the classroom, as it is ultimately about enabling individuals with disabilities to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives. We must strive to create an education system that is accessible and inclusive for all, regardless of ability, and work towards removing barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from achieving their full potential. Only then can we truly claim to have an equitable and just society.

The challenge lies with us to ensure that our systems are designed with inclusivity and access in mind, following Universal Design principles. MCAST has been working on policies and practices to make it easier for people with disabilities to pursue their education and reach their potential. Disability inclusion requires creating an inclusive college culture that values each individual and seeks to overcome barriers to accessing quality learning experiences. It is about creating a welcoming and comfortable environment where people feel seen and valued.

Prospective students must have access to information about the support available to them. At MCAST, the Inclusive Education Unit (IEU) is committed to providing learners with the educational assistance needed to reach their full potential. Students with specific needs or disabilities, such as dyslexia, autism, and visual/hearing impairment, can register with the IEU through an online application and a personalised meeting with our staff members to discuss their requirements. IEU services are available at all levels and institutes, enabling students to select their preferred area of study or career path.

Over the years, we have continuously improved and introduced a range of services to ensure our students with disabilities

receive the necessary support to achieve their full potential. These services include: access arrangements; individual support sessions in Maltese, Mathematics, English, and General Support with Learning Support Educators; Making Action Plan (MAP) sessions to identify students' challenges and the required support; multi-disciplinary support through professionals involved with the students; orientation tours to help new students with related difficulties (e.g., autism, anxiety, dyspraxia) to familiarise themselves with the campus and key staff members; support for Erasmus+ experiences; personal assistants and transport for students with considerable motor skills difficulties; and notification of students' needs to managers and lecturers so they can be aware of the students' needs and provide support accordingly. It is our commitment to continually evaluate and enhance our services to ensure that our students have access to the best support possible.

The IEU has taken steps to make its services more accessible through digitisation. All service forms are now available online, and assistive technology such as Text-To-Speech, script enlargement, and multi-lingual support are integrated to enhance access for people with disabilities such as dyslexia, visual impairments, and motor-skills disabilities. This digitisation has also automated various manual processes, allowing IEU staff to provide timely support and eliminating delays in service provision to geographically distant satellite College campuses. Real-time data collected through these processes now informs decisions regarding support strategies for service users. As a result of these efforts, students with disabilities can access IEU services with minimised barriers, regardless of their location, time, or disability.

The College's Strategic Plan (2022-2027) places a strong emphasis on diversity and the importance of providing meaningful learning and working experiences for all individuals. Inclusion is a critical aspect of our mission as we strive to become a truly inclusive community college that welcomes and supports everyone.

EQUALITY AND INCLUSION AT MCAST



By Cheryl Ann Vella, Human Rights Directorate

MCAST has been collaborating with the Intercultural and Anti-Racism Unit (IARU) within the Human Rights Directorate on the Learning-Exchanging-Integrating (LEI) project funded by the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the past years.

This project was key to initiate a much-required integration introduction programme in Malta which enables migrants to acquire language and cultural skills, which are vital to their integration process. In return, they become better-equipped to contribute to Maltese society with their experiences, traditions, work, and expertise. Democracy works best when it embraces diversity, since it brings forth everyone's potential. The moment it lacks diversity, democracy risks being stifled. Thus, successfully integrated, legally residing migrants are of great value. Change is crucial in our fast-paced era, and two-way integration can be a catalyst or an opportunity to prevent us from staleness – a much-needed breath of fresh air.

MCAST has been a major stakeholder in providing foundation and Stage 1 'I Belong' courses, which focus on the familiarisation of migrants to the Maltese and English languages and Maltese culture, aiming at facilitating their integration into Maltese society. The foundation courses facilitate access to basic Maltese and English languages to migrants who are completely new to the languages and to the alphabet used in the Maltese and English languages; that is, the Latin alphabet.

The participation of MCAST in the 'I Belong' programme within this project shows that education is dynamic and not limited to

schooling but embraces a lifetime of societal learning. In this case, it facilitates the encounter and dialogue between diverse cultures, beliefs, and values within an environment which is democratic and, thus, welcomes the challenge of diversity as a means of furthering democratisation.

It is a fact that migration is also a challenge. With globalisation, the media and technology have already surpassed many boundaries, delving us into a common "we" rather than a categorical "us – them" discourse. This was the subject of dialogue with various stakeholders throughout the project, which included persons of different nationalities living in Malta. Turning the Tables (TTT) and Migrant Integration Information Session (MIIS) conferences, amongst others, were the main opportunities to discuss various issues regarding migration, current scenarios, and the identification of ways forward.

MCAST prides itself in assisting in the reduction of the gap between persons of different nationalities living in Malta and to facilitate integration from both sides. These courses—and, therefore, this contribution by MCAST—are necessary to address an ever-growing demand to allow diversity to become a source of enrichment to Maltese culture. The efforts of this College contribute towards the promotion of a more inclusive and democratic society.

This project will end in June 2023. The closure of this project is definitely not a point of arrival, but a setting ground for further and greater struggles for better integration. The courses offered and the way integration takes place are dynamic. This process requires constant re-evaluation, adjustments, and modifications. The attitude one assumes during this process is crucial. Human rights are the basis of democracy and they come along with obligations towards the rights of the other. They are the same for all human beings irrespective of gender, ability, colour, religion, political alliance, nationality or ethnic origin, language, or any other status.

The Human Rights Directorate is grateful to all stakeholders who contributed to the project, including MCAST, and looks forward to further collaboration with the college in the near future.



The **I Belong Programme** at MCAST



By Mr Mark Fenech, Manager, Integration Office

In the past two decades, Malta has experienced a significant influx of migrants, resulting in a more cosmopolitan society. In an effort to facilitate the integration of these non-Maltese citizens into Maltese society, the Human Rights Directorate (HRD) has invested in training programmes focused on the Maltese language and culture and the English language. These courses are mandatory for obtaining long-term residence status, and the demand for them is increasing. The HRD has partnered with MCAST and the University of Malta to provide these courses to the migrant population.

A new agreement has been signed between the HRD and MCAST, building on the success of their initial collaboration. The agreement extends the delivery of courses under the I Belong Programmeme for an additional two years. In the past year, MCAST has delivered a total of 2,583 skills kits as part of its commitment to the programmeme. Additionally, 504 students have enrolled in the fifteenth cohort, and plans are underway to launch the sixteenth cohort in the coming month. The I Belong Programmeme continues to provide critical support for the integration of non-Maltese citizens into Maltese society, and its success is reflected in the growing number of enrolments and skills kits delivered.

The Pre-Integration Certificate (Stage 1) offers courses in Maltese and English languages, as well as Cultural Orientation, to provide basic information and skills to learners from abroad. The language classes aim to facilitate communication, while the cultural orientation provides learners with insight into local customs and traditions, making them more aware of the variety of services available to them and aiding their integration into Maltese society.

Upon successful completion of Stage 1, learners can choose to progress to the Integration Certificate (Stage 2), which offers more advanced Maltese language lessons and further Cultural Orientation classes. Additionally, learners who complete Stage 2 can use the certificate as evidence of integration measures when applying for their long-term resident status. The courses offered through these stages provide essential support and resources for non-Maltese citizens seeking to integrate into Maltese society, ultimately contributing to a more cohesive and inclusive community.

MCAST is expanding its support for non-Maltese citizens by developing a Pre-Stage 1 course that will provide basic instruction on Maltese and English languages, as well as a basic introduction to digital literacy. This new course will

equip learners with digital literacy skills that are increasingly important in today's world, providing accessibility and creating opportunities for further learning and a more convenient lifestyle. By offering a range of courses that cover both language and digital literacy, MCAST is helping to bridge the gap between non-Maltese citizens and Maltese society, ultimately leading to better inclusivity and unity within the community.

Classes for these courses are held at both the MCAST Paola and the MCAST Mosta campuses to accommodate learners living in different areas of Malta. In addition to the physical locations, learners also have the option of joining classes online, providing even greater flexibility for students who may have scheduling constraints due to their personal or professional responsibilities. This approach ensures that learners have access to the courses they need to successfully integrate into Maltese society, regardless of their location or circumstances. By providing multiple locations and online options, MCAST is helping to remove barriers to education and increase accessibility for non-Maltese citizens.





Easing Into a New Environment

By Teodor Reljic

An Ayurveda Consultant and Manager at Kempinski Hotel (San Lawrenz), Dr Renjith Raveendran Pillai speaks to TEODOR RELJIC about his successful integration journey, in which he was supported through MCAST's I Belong programme.

"It was not easy at the beginning. I felt a bit lost and out of place," Dr Renjith Raveendran Pillai tells me as he recounts his early days on the island. "Oh, and also...it was a bit challenging to come to grips with the Maltese accent."

This is certainly a struggle most non-Maltese can relate to, particularly those who come to the archipelago for the long term. Dr Pillai is certainly no exception to this universal rule. However, his early struggles certainly appear to have paid off.

Now an Ayurveda consultant and Manager at Kempinski Hotel (San Lawrenz), Dr Pillai has started studying at MCAST earlier this year, availing himself from the I Belong integration programme offered by the College.

If nothing else, his story stands as yet another example of how MCAST, as an institution, can further assist in integrating non-Maltese individuals, particularly when they are already on a successful career track.

Despite the language barrier and cultural differences, Dr Pillai quickly adjusted to his new surroundings with the support of his colleagues and the welcoming Gozitan community. "My

colleagues were very supportive, and they helped me become acquainted with the local community fairly quickly," he says.

Finding such a tolerant environment cannot be dismissed or minimised as one seeks to integrate into a new country. It is undoubtedly an important step in gaining both a social and professional foothold as one navigates fresh waters. "The people are a crucial part of it, of course. But the fabulous beaches and beautiful landscapes also had a role to play!"

Apart from these benefits, the ability to join a course at MCAST was another great opportunity that completed the "integration puzzle" for Dr Pillai. It is an experience that he would unequivocally recommend to all fellow non-Maltese people planning to take a similar plunge, for all that it may seem daunting at the beginning.

"I would advise new students to be patient and give themselves time to adjust. It is natural to feel overwhelmed at first, but with a positive attitude and an open mind, they can learn to appreciate and love Malta just like I did," he says. His confidence about the repeatability of this trajectory is not down to any infrastructural or abstract feature of MCAST, but has very much to do with the capabilities of its on-the-ground staff.

"The teachers at MCAST are very friendly, cooperative, and treat us like equals," Dr Pillai is quick to point out, adding that this, "makes us feel more comfortable when sharing our insights, opinions, and thoughts on subjects, as we feel there are no barriers stopping us". He enthusiastically adds that, "honestly, learning has never been easier for me!"



Why the **NCPE** Equality Mark?

By Edel Cassar, Director, Strategy Implementation

The Equality Mark is a nationwide initiative in Malta aimed at promoting gender equality in the workplace and increasing the employment of women. The programme encourages organisations to adopt policies that enable employees to balance work and caregiving responsibilities. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) introduced the Mark in 2010 and oversees the campaign. The initiative sets a standard for “gender equality employers” and offers a certification programme for public and private organisations that demonstrate their commitment to gender equality in the workplace and in the delivery of goods and services. The certification process involves a survey for employees, submission of various documents, and an audit. Applicants must meet the minimum requirements established by the NCPE to receive certification.

MCAST’s dedication to creating an inclusive and safe environment for all was recognised with the awarding of the Equality Mark certification on March 1st, 2023. This achievement

followed a rigorous process that involved the development of an Equality Policy and an Anti-Harassment Policy. These policies ensure the well-being of the entire MCAST community by establishing clear guidelines for accessibility, safety, and equality. The Equality Policy guarantees that MCAST provides an accessible environment and education to all students and staff members, free from discrimination in recruitment, employment, decision-making practices, research activities, and teaching content. The Anti-Harassment Policy defines harassment and outlines the procedures the College follows in cases of alleged harassment, providing a clear and safe reporting mechanism for all.

The MCAST community deserves to be valued, respected, and provided with an environment that promotes fairness and inclusivity, irrespective of gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic. With the Equality and Anti-Harassment Policies in place, MCAST is promoting diversity within the organisation and is working towards attracting a wider range of students and staff who share its values of equality and inclusivity.

“Being true to myself is of utmost importance to me. Regardless of my location, I strive to ensure that I never feel constrained in expressing my true self, and I extend the same wish to those around me.”



“Being myself is what is important to me!”

By Mr Taan Vissers, student intern at the MCAST Communications Office

My name is Taan Vissers, a 19-year-old Dutch student currently undertaking a marketing and communications internship at MCAST. I identify as an open trans man and queer individual. Over the past few years, I have been using he/him and they/ them pronouns. However, I have faced challenges when it comes to feeling included in educational environments like school.

Students spend a significant amount of time in school, often more than they initially anticipate. Therefore, I believe it is crucial for schools to prioritise creating a safe space where every individual can freely express themselves without fear of judgment or restrictions.

Not only do a lot of people deal with internal doubt and problems, but there are a lot of external pressures and challenges coming their way as well, making it even harder on someone.

So, if that is the case, what CAN a school do to make sure their queer students and staff feel safe and included? Well, there are a few things.

Address Topics With Gender Neutrality

How often do you catch yourself saying “Ladies and Gentlemen” when greeting a room? Or saying things like “He or She” when referring to a hypothetical person? Often, I bet. How about I tell you there are so many more neutral words which do not sound strange and make your audience feel more appreciated? People often feel left out of the norm, but it should not have to be this way. Addressing students, lecturers, guests, anyone you meet (whether it is within MCAST, another school environment, or otherwise) in a gender-neutral way can guarantee that people remember you for your efforts. I am not just talking about a gender-neutral opener either; saying things such as “people with periods” instead of “women” or “parents” instead of “mom and dad” really shows the effort you put into caring about others and, in turn, they will give their appreciation back to you.

Create Safe Spaces

Those who know you best are people like you and people who experience similar things as you. This is why community

and safety is so important. Promoting inclusivity and creating safe spaces for people is a good way to create lasting bonds and a feeling of belonging for people, especially young people like students. Schools often form GSA-like organisations for LGBTQ+ students to come together, get to know each other, have fun, and share all that with the rest of the school. They often work on organising events for the school relating to their inclusivity topic and making sure they are a known staple to students on campus, in case anyone needs a place to feel at home.

Put the Effort in

The biggest thing I personally struggle with regarding acceptance in school (and outside of it) is having to correct everyone that speaks to me at least twice every conversation. Of course, I fault no one for making mistakes, especially when we barely know one another, but a lot of the time, I will keep having to correct the usage of wrong names or pronouns months or even years after I introduced myself to someone. If you want to show how little you seem to care, that is definitely the way to do it. It really leaves you with an awful impression of a person, if they can never seem to remember names or pronouns right, even after multiple years. Spreading awareness about the awful effects this has and training to use names and pronouns on people is becoming more and more essential.

Perhaps not a direct solution—but a helpful tool—is to make pronouns a common integration in introductions and school accounts. A simple thing such as making name cards and stimulating to add pronouns below it or adding pronouns to the bottom of your e-mail signature makes it so people will not get confused, and it will also motivate others to do the same until it becomes a normality. Not only that, but constantly seeing the pronouns and their importance should, in theory, help people remember them better.

Many children and young adults face difficulties when it comes to going to school every morning, and decisions like the ones mentioned can make their experience a little bit easier. While a school cannot simply make discrimination and related issues disappear overnight, half the battle lies in the effort put in and demonstrating care for those around you. By taking these actions, schools can contribute to creating a more supportive environment for students, showing that they value and prioritise the well-being of their entire community.



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Do Transgendered Students Get the Validation They Need at MCAST?

By Aaliyah Galea, MCAST student reading for a Degree in Journalism

It is safe to say that, as time keeps passing, society is evolving and moving towards something better each time.

This is very evident, especially when it comes to LGBTIQ+ rights – which nowadays, we have normalised in many countries. Malta has progressed a lot with the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community, but I wanted to see how far society has come from the perspective of a non-binary student at MCAST to see if the College is doing enough to make this community feel respected.

The student I interviewed goes by Ames, and they are currently doing their Bachelor's Degree in Film Studies. (Their preferred pronouns are they/them).

The first question I asked them was about self-expression and if they feel comfortable expressing who they truly are at MCAST.

"It depends," said Ames. "There were a few times where I didn't feel accepted by other students." This is because MCAST is a big College, and they do not know how different people would react, especially since there are people who are closed-minded about this subject or not well-educated on it. Recently, we introduced the implementation of pronouns in our day-to-day life, so people will not make assumptions on someone just because they look more feminine or masculine.

In a College like MCAST, the staff plays a big role in how comfortable their students feel – especially if they must see them on a day-to-day basis. It is good to know that students like Ames feel moderately comfortable talking to the staff if

they have an issue regarding their gender identity. Ames has no problem being who they truly are in front of their lecturers, whom they see every day, but this has not always been the case.

Ames did not feel the need to go into much detail about this, but they mentioned that there has been an instance when a lecturer made them feel invalid about their identity. When asked if lecturers respect pronouns, Ames responded with "some".

Since the implementation of pronouns is new to some, there could be instances when someone struggles to remember to use the correct pronoun, but there is a distinction between someone who refuses to respect others and someone who made a simple mistake. Ames encourages others to get educated about the subject—no matter what age they are—to avoid these silly mistakes and to avoid invalidating others at all costs. They believe that, although there are staff members that are well-informed on how to be respectful towards the LGBTIQ+ community, there still is room for improvement.

In conclusion, Malta has done right to not tolerate disrespect towards the LGBTIQ+, but within the Maltese society, there are still people implementing their closed-minded thoughts to the younger generation, which is very harmful when, now-a-days, society is more accepting.

MCAST seems to have a very accepting community at school, but Ames wishes that more lecturers and staff members act when it comes to informing themselves and other students on how to help make MCAST a more respectful environment towards these individuals.



Understanding Your Learning Style

By Samantha Curmi, MCAST student reading for a Degree in Journalism

Have you ever contemplated your own learning style? While numerous articles discuss incorporating different learning styles in the classroom from an educator's perspective, this article will shift the focus to the student's viewpoint on learning styles.

What Are Learning Styles?

It is essential to grasp the concept of learning styles. Simply put, learning styles refer to the various ways individuals learn and comprehend new information—their preferred methods of taking in, understanding, expressing, and recalling knowledge. The four most prevalent learning modes are visual, auditory, read/write, and kinaesthetic.

The Learners

Visual learners primarily learn through sight. They benefit from using images, diagrams, graphics, charts, maps, mind-maps, and flashcards. These visual aids help them understand and retain information effectively.

Auditory learners, on the other hand, learn through hearing. They absorb knowledge through activities such as speaking, listening, using mnemonics, and engaging in verbal repetition. These students benefit from participating in discussions and hearing information presented aloud.

Read/write learners acquire knowledge through reading and writing. They excel when they can take detailed notes, review and revise their written materials, and engage with information presented in written form. Text-based resources and written exercises are particularly helpful for these learners.

Kinaesthetic learners learn best through touch and physical movement. They thrive when provided with opportunities for hands-on learning, tactile experiences, and the use of models or manipulative materials. Active engagement, practical applications, and interactive activities cater to their learning style.

Incorporating Different Learning Styles

In an analysis of a questionnaire distributed by the author of this article and completed by 50 students, several observations can be made:

- The majority of students identified as visual learners, indicating a preference for learning through visual aids, such as images and diagrams
- The second most common type of learner was those who learn through reading and writing, indicating a preference for written materials and note-taking.
- Notably, a significant portion (70%) of the survey respondents fell within the age range of 18 to 20, suggesting that the sample primarily consisted of young adults.
- A small percentage (3.4%) of the surveyed students were aged over 26 years old, indicating a diversity in age among the respondents.

These findings provide insights into the predominant learning styles within the surveyed group and the age distribution of the participants.

Additionally, the survey revealed the following results:

- 68% of students found it boring when lecturers read directly from a PowerPoint presentation, indicating a desire for more engaging and interactive teaching methods.
- When asked about regaining their focus by watching a video in class, the responses were evenly split between yes and no, suggesting mixed preferences among students regarding the use of videos as a means of refocusing.
- Approximately 37.9% of students expressed a preference for always having debates in class related to the subject matter, highlighting a desire for active class discussions and opportunities for exchanging ideas.

Another 37.9% of students indicated that they sometimes liked to have debates in class, indicating a variable preference for engaging in debates depending on the specific context or topic.

These findings indicate that students value interactive teaching approaches, express mixed preferences regarding the use of videos for refocusing, and appreciate opportunities for class debates as a means of enhancing their learning experience.

Furthermore, the questionnaire revealed the following insights:

- Regarding note-taking preferences, 40% of students preferred writing their notes, while typing them was the second most popular choice. 24% of students reported that they do not take notes, indicating a variation in note-taking practices among the surveyed students.
- A significant majority (72.4%) of students voted that a more interesting lecture incorporates both practice and theory, highlighting the importance of combining hands-on activities with theoretical concepts for enhanced engagement.
- On a scale from 1 to 5, the majority of students indicated that they tend to drift away when not given a break during a lecture, emphasising the need for periodic breaks to maintain attention and focus.
- Another notable finding was that 48.3% of students preferred working alone during tasks, while 34.5% expressed a preference for working with a partner, suggesting varying preferences for collaborative or independent work.

In addition to the quantitative data, students provided their thoughts through open-ended questions on the importance of catering to different learners and how educators can accommodate diverse learning styles. Their responses likely shed light on the significance of inclusivity and personalised approaches to education.

In conclusion, it is crucial to acknowledge the statistics presented in this article. These findings may have shifted your perspective or confirmed your existing beliefs. However, the key takeaway is that everyone learns differently. Recognising and accommodating diverse learning styles is essential to promote effective learning and ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.

“Not everyone is capable of learning in the same way, and everyone has the right to learn.”



THE TRUE CALLING LIES OUTSIDE OF THEORY

Building Services Lecturer Peter Fitzgerald is a strong advocate for hands-on experience and practice, not least because his own journey has led him to experience how a differently-abled life shapes one's expectations, as TEODOR RELJIC discovers...

By Teodor Reljic

"There's a lot more to my job than just helping facilitate the employability of students," Peter Fitzgerald, Building Services Lecturer within the Institute of Engineering and Transport, tells me, adding that it is also his priority to ensure that learners gain a holistic understanding of their subject "during their learning adventures at MCAST".

However, and perhaps even more poignantly, Fitzgerald—who worked in the construction industry as a private contractor prior to embarking on a 20-year-strong career as an MCAST lecturer—is keen to enthuse about his love for the Foundational Course that he teaches at the College.

"Topics I lecture at MCAST include electrical installations and plumbing at Levels 1 to 4. My principal areas of lecturing are the Foundation Levels, which I must say, have given me a profound sense of personal satisfaction and affinity over the years," Fitzgerald says, adding that, while such courses may not be the most theoretically complex on paper, they still keep the lecturer on their toes for a variety of reasons.

"This is particularly true when it comes to dealing with challenging behaviour and instances that require pedagogical creativity to deliver lessons which inspire and motivate students with different learning needs."

Perhaps Fitzgerald understands the importance of offering hands-on teaching to a diverse student body better than most. In 2010, a construction accident left him with severe mobility issues. This direct experience made the issues of inclusivity, diversity, and adaptability at MCAST all the more personal.

"As they say, charity begins at home, and the use of ICT, PowerPoint presentations, and digital projection in delivering lectures, along with accessible workshops, have played a key role in enabling me to continue to deliver learning to our students," Fitzgerald says, adding that this "enshrines not only the concept of equality, but also equity".

For Fitzgerald, inclusivity, diversity, and adaptability at MCAST are hands-on issues. He believes that it is essential for MCAST lecturers to cater to the individual needs of their students to help them reach their desired potential.

"Inclusivity is a universal learning experience for both ends of the spectrum, those delivering it and those receiving it," says Fitzgerald. "Hence, the issues of inclusivity, diversity, and adaptability at MCAST became a personal experience."

However, Fitzgerald also stresses that such a commitment to hands-on, diverse learning methods is not merely commendable for ethical reasons—there are practical benefits to be gleaned from it as well.

"In today's world, job mobility has become more dynamic, and learning a variety of trade skills which are both directly and indirectly related to your own expertise will inevitably enhance your employability," Fitzgerald says—which is why students at MCAST are taught transferable skills which allow them to adapt to different trades and professions.

"The hands-on approach to learning offered by us lecturers is, without doubt, what has made MCAST extremely attractive and successful," Fitzgerald says.

The Language Barrier From an Exchange Student's Perspective



By Federica Caruana, MCAST student reading for a Degree in Journalism

The language barrier, although less commonly discussed due to the prevalence of English as an international language in most devices, still poses significant challenges. While many countries have their mother tongue as the primary language of communication, some prioritise its exclusive use. This approach can lead to difficulties when interacting with

foreigners or when native speakers travel abroad. It becomes crucial to address how individuals can comprehend those around them in such situations, as this issue often starts as a source of humour but can quickly escalate into a problem, particularly for students.

Proficiency in reading, writing, and comprehension is essential for successfully completing assignments and exams. When these skills are lacking, it can significantly affect academic

performance, even if the individual possesses a deep understanding of the subject matter. Difficulties in reading and comprehending the course material can make it challenging to grasp key concepts, follow instructions, and effectively express ideas in writing.

Students who struggle with these fundamental skills may experience a decrease in confidence, as they find themselves unable to effectively communicate their knowledge and ideas. This lack of confidence can further hinder their academic progress, leading to frustration and a potential loss of motivation. In some cases, students may even consider abandoning their studies altogether due to the overwhelming challenges they face.

In this article, we will refer to a student using the fictitious name “Anne” who shared her experience as an exchange student at the MCAST Institute of Creative Arts during the first semester. Anne expressed a preference for the learning style at MCAST compared to her home university because she is someone who learns best through hands-on experience, and the Institute offered a practical-based approach to learning. If the learning style had been primarily theory-based, Anne believes it would have been more challenging for her to learn and make progress.

Anne went on to describe the lecturers at MCAST as professionals who were also modest, helpful, and approachable. She found it comfortable to talk to them and ask for assistance, which was different from her experience at her home university, where the atmosphere is stricter and more formal. According to Anne, these factors contributed to her successful completion of the semester.

However, what helped Anne the most was that English was her second language, and she found that everything in the school was translated or delivered in English. This ensured that her learning experience was not compromised. By having the content available in English, Anne was able to fully understand and engage with the material, which facilitated her academic progress.

In contrast to her positive academic experience, Anne faced challenges when it came to socialising at the MCAST Institute of Creative Arts. The majority of students were Maltese and preferred to communicate with each other in their native language. This situation made Anne feel uncomfortable and excluded from the social dynamics of the student community. When she tried to engage and express herself, she felt that her

contributions were not taken seriously. Despite spending hours working or sitting next to her peers in class, conversations remained limited to small talk.

Additionally, Anne felt that it was perceived as inappropriate for her to hold opinions or express thoughts on matters concerning the native students or the school itself. This sentiment may have arisen due to her status as an exchange student with only one semester to attend, leading to a perception that her perspective was not as valid or relevant as that of the local students.

Anne further extended her perspective to encompass the entire College environment, emphasising that, while she felt welcomed initially through the presence of symbols, signs, emails, and content in English, there is still room for improvement. She proposed the idea of having a designated person responsible for assisting foreign students with essential information, such as the semester starting date, location, important places to know about, and the assignment system. Anne highlighted that some exchange students arrived weeks later than the starting date due to confusion and a lack of support, which could have been easily avoided with proper assistance throughout the settling-in process.

While language barriers cannot be completely eliminated, Anne believes they can be worked around. She suggested that both foreign students and natives should make an effort to keep an open mind and try to communicate with each other. Learning a few basic words in the local language, such as “bonġu” (hello) and “grazzi” (thank you), can go a long way in building rapport and showing respect. Additionally, when verbal communication is challenging, resorting to gestures or utilising translation tools like Google Translate can be helpful.

Anne also emphasised the importance of natives being understanding and helpful towards foreign students. If necessary, natives should be willing to communicate in English to facilitate better understanding and inclusion. This mutual effort and understanding between foreign students and natives can bridge the language gap and create a more supportive and inclusive school environment.

By implementing Anne’s suggestions and fostering a culture of openness, understanding, and willingness to communicate, the College can create an environment where language barriers are minimised, and students from different backgrounds can feel supported and included.

Being Different Together: Inclusive Practices at the Gozo Campus



**By Dr Vanessa Saliba
(PhD)**

Inclusion is a widely discussed subject, and terms such as 'inclusion' and 'equity' can at times be perplexing because they may mean different things to different people (Ainscow, 2020). It is therefore of utmost importance to develop some shared understanding of such concepts within

schools, institutes, and society in general (Ainscow, 2020). Ainscow et al. (2006) define inclusion by dividing it into four categories:

- Inclusion as a process, whereby stakeholders are in a never-ending search for more effective ways of responding to the human diversity that exists all around us. This process requires us to learn not only how to live with differences but also how to learn from such differences. These differences will then be seen in a more positive light and will serve as a stimulus for nurturing learning for all.
- Inclusion as concerned with the identification and removal of barriers, which strives to plan improvements in both policy and practice by collecting and evaluating data from different sources and using it to inspire creativity and problem solving.
- Inclusion as focused on improving the presence, participation, and achievement of all students, where presence refers to where students are educated and how reliable their attendance is. Participation, on the other hand, is concerned with the quality of experiences students have, while achievement relates to the learning outcomes of students across all curricula.
- Inclusion involving a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalisation, exclusion, or underachievement, which incorporates our ethical

responsibility to ensure that such groups are carefully monitored to obtain maximum presence, participation, and achievement within our education system and beyond.

At MCAST, we strive to embrace inclusion in all the above categories. Indeed, MCAST offers the course Award in Vocational and Employability Skills, which is specifically designed for students who encounter challenges with learning and is aimed at helping those students acquire the required skills for gaining and maintaining employment or for furthering their education. Both are very important aspects of life that render an individual a social being, with sufficient agency to build their own life and contribute to the society of which they are a part.

Throughout the course, students are trained in the vocational areas of hospitality and retail and office and digital skills. Considering the importance of basic knowledge in core subjects, during the course, students are also assessed in Maltese, English, mathematics, personal social and health education, information technology, and daily living and community skills. As part of the course, students will also experience a work placement, which gives them a real insight into the skills needed and responsibility entailed in maintaining employment; thus, merging the class practice with real-life experiences and leading to inclusion at its best.

The process, as discussed by Ainscow et al. (2006) above, is seen in our students throughout the course as they transform from shy and timid individuals to sociable and independent youths with a variety of skills. Lecturers strive to remove existing barriers not only by guiding and mentoring the students to overcome their individual challenges but also, through the students themselves, by educating their peers and society in general on how to be more inclusive. Thus, our students are agents of change. Throughout the course, our students are respected for who they are, their efforts are merited and rewarded, and their achievement is not merely assessed through graded assessments but also through their overall progress throughout the two years leading to an accredited certification.

Apart from its academic purpose, the course also gives our students the opportunity to socialise with other students, especially when spending their break time in the canteen, in the garden within our campus, or even in cafés beyond the campus. Such opportunities benefit not only our students with learning difficulties but, equally, other students in other courses. Through such opportunities, other students can see the person as an individual instead of seeing them in light of their difficulties, which in turn, increases awareness of such difficulties within society, where once again, our students serve as agents of change. Awareness is indeed an extremely important pillar of inclusion. Moreover, it increases the sense of acceptance and tolerance of diversity, which is a very positive step towards more inclusion. Indeed, inclusion is significantly dependent on the synchronisation existing between an individual and the group that the individual is trying to become part of (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This course offers far more than an opportunity for students with different abilities to continue their education beyond secondary school. The course is a reflection of what we at MCAST believe: “Diversity is the mix, but inclusion is making that mix work” (Tapia, 2013).

Apart from the Award in Vocational Skills, at MCAST, we also offer the Bachelor of Arts in Inclusive Education, a course at MQF Level 6. Students reading for this Degree, aim to become prospective learning support educators (LSEs). Hence, in this course, lecturers lecture about inclusion as a concept, various practices and approaches of inclusive education, its benefits, its challenges, different abilities encountered in schools, and the different types of existing supports that could be used for all students. Moreover, during the Degree, students have various practice placements within schools, where they experience and practise inclusive approaches and methods within primary and secondary schools. These placements offer our students a real experience of inclusion, where they can transform the theory they learn on campus into practice within schools. Therefore, at MCAST, we embrace inclusion in all its forms.

Above all, I strongly believe that inclusion is about providing the individual with a sense of community (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014), making the individual feel accepted, respected, and loved for who they are, and instilling a sense of belonging (Shore et al., 2011) and of purpose. After all, as author and illustrator Liz Fosslien (2019) states, “Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, and belonging is having that voice be heard.”





EXPLORING INCLUSIVE LEARNING: PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF MCAST STUDENTS

By Jade Debattista, student following a Degree in Journalism at MCAST

A comprehensive questionnaire was conducted among MCAST students to gather their experiences and viewpoints on navigating learning differences, with the aim of gaining insights into how to foster a more inclusive learning environment. The questionnaire provided a platform for students to share their valuable experiences and perspectives.

Classroom Challenges

From ADHD to dyslexia and dysgraphia, the challenges faced by MCAST students are as diverse as they are daunting. But it is not just these specific learning difficulties that pose a challenge – some students also have communication issues, and others face vision impairments. Notably, one respondent pointed out that distractions from peers also pose a problem. Learning difficulties can be a major hindrance to a student's academic performance. As one student put it, "I automatically get tired and shut down my brain completely," illustrating the difficulty of taking in new information during class. Similarly, another student mentioned how they "just dissociate [themselves] from the rest of the class or else distract the whole class with the rest of [their] classmates who are also struggling". Such struggles can lead to falling behind in class and feeling lost during lectures. In fact, some students may have to rely on reviewing their notes after class, with one admitting, "I will not know what's going on in class unless I read my notes post-lecture." Beyond that, for many students, staying engaged during lectures can be an uphill battle. As one individual shared, "I have to find a place at the front, and if I don't, I don't follow the lesson well." Others find it difficult to focus and concentrate, both of which can have a detrimental effect on their learning and participation.

A student's academic performance can significantly improve if they receive accommodation and support. Unfortunately, a lot of students feel unsupported in this regard, and some even claim to have never received any help whatsoever. Additionally, some students believe that their learning difficulties do not qualify them for support, with one saying that their case "isn't considered bad enough to get help".

Effective Approaches and Tools

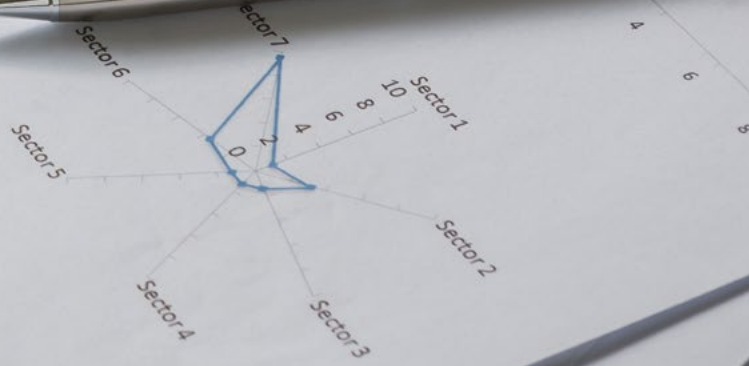
Fortunately, there are certain approaches and tools that have

proven helpful for students with such difficulties. For instance, one particularly effective method is the use of assistive technology. In the words of one student, "using the text-to-speech software has been helpful for me to better understand written material." This technology can help to make reading and studying more accessible for students with reading difficulties, dyslexia, or other related issues. In addition, some students find that alternative assessment methods can also be beneficial. As one student explained, "being able to show my understanding through projects and presentations rather than just exams has been really helpful for me." With this method, students can display their knowledge and abilities in a way that fits within their strengths and learning style.

When it comes to working with a partner or in groups, opinions among students vary. Some feel that it helps them stay focused and engaged, especially when working with someone who is willing to collaborate. For others, however, they prefer to work on their own, as they find it easier to concentrate without any distractions. Nonetheless, many agree that groupwork can promote crucial skills such as teamwork and communication. However, it is worth noting that, for some students, group work can sometimes hinder learning, depending on the dynamics and cooperation of the group members. When it comes to creating a more inclusive classroom environment, there are a variety of suggestions that educators can consider. Some students recommend more interactive and hands-on activities, which can help engage students who struggle with conventional teaching methods. Others suggest incorporating more group work, as well as soliciting feedback from fellow classmates. Some students also underlined the value of play in the learning process, advocating for a less formal and more dynamic approach to education. Additionally, smaller class sizes and better timetabling were highlighted as strategies for creating a more conducive learning environment.

Tips From Students

Overcoming learning difficulties is possible through seeking help and finding motivation. Students should reach out to educators and provide feedback to improve their learning experience. Teachers are willing to adapt if students communicate their needs. Remember that help is available, so do not hesitate to ask for it. You are not alone—do your best and everything will fall into place.



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Living in Malta and Financial issues

By Nicole Balbi, student following a course in Journalism at MCAST

How can disadvantaged students (from low-income families/financially unstable) be supported more effectively?

Similar to many other countries, Malta faces the challenge of ensuring that all students, regardless of their financial circumstances, have equitable access to high-quality education. One of the major barriers to success for disadvantaged students, particularly those from low-income households or unstable financial situations, is the lack of support, resources, and opportunities available to them.

Financial support, tutoring, the use of technology, adaptable options for learning, and career assistance are some ways with which disadvantaged students in Malta might be helped more successfully. By confronting these difficulties head-on, we may contribute to the development of an even and everyone-inclusive educational system that encourages all students to reach the highest possible level of achievement.

The cost of education can pose a significant financial burden for many students. However, there are various forms of financial assistance available to help alleviate this hardship. Grants, scholarships, and education loans are among the options that can assist students in covering these expenses. To ensure access to the necessary funding for their educational pursuits, it is important for students to proactively research and apply for these opportunities in a timely manner. By exploring and pursuing these avenues of financial support, students can better manage the costs associated with their education.

Addressing the needs of students from underprivileged backgrounds requires considering several key factors. One crucial aspect is ensuring access to technology, as it plays a vital role in effective learning in today's digital era. Educational institutions can support students by providing laptops, tablets, or other necessary technology resources, especially for those

who may not have access at home. This enables students to stay on track with their academics and bridge the digital divide.

In addition to tuition, students in Malta may face other financial responsibilities such as transportation, housing, books, and food. Finding affordable housing options, such as shared apartments or student dormitories, can help reduce these expenses. Utilising student discounts and public transportation can also help minimise transportation costs. Flexible learning options, such as online courses or evening classes, are essential for disadvantaged students who may have work schedules or family obligations. Offering flexibility in education allows them to balance their studies with other responsibilities and successfully complete their programmes.

Career counselling and support are crucial for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue their desired careers effectively. This support may include opportunities for internships, job exposure, career guidance, and assistance with employment. By providing students with the necessary information and skills, they can thrive in their chosen fields.

As part of my research, I conducted a student-based questionnaire to investigate the current financial challenges faced by students living in Malta, particularly those from low-income families or with unstable finances. The primary objective was to identify potential support strategies for these underprivileged students. The questionnaire received 41 responses, predominantly from full-time students aged 18 to 19.

The survey results indicated that the participating students were employed and not living alone. Saving money was found to be extremely challenging for most respondents, resulting in limited social outings, typically two or three times per week. Many participants expressed the stress caused by inflation and rising prices, leading them to advocate for an increase in stipends to alleviate financial strain.

Service Quality and Consumer Choices for Food Allergies and Dietary Restrictions in Tertiary Schools



By Yasmin Mifsud, MCAST student reading for a Degree in Journalism

A lot of individuals, notably students, depend on canteens for most of their daily meals or snacks. For a busy student, a nutritious diet that is gratifying and well-balanced is just as vital as the right class schedule. The university canteen should provide meals that encourage a balanced diet while, at the same time, not limiting their customers' food options, incorporating emerging nutritional trends. Young adulthood is a crucial stage in the promotion of a healthy diet because it is currently that dietary habits that last a lifetime are formed.

As a student who personally experiences a food allergy (lactose intolerance), I often find myself consuming food without knowing whether it contains any dairy. This uncertainty arises because even the canteen staff themselves are often unaware of the dairy content, resulting in me suffering from an upset stomach throughout the day. To address this issue, I conducted a survey among my friends and posted it on the MCAST Facebook group, aiming to determine if other students face similar challenges. The primary objective of my questionnaire was to evaluate the quality and variety of food offered in different tertiary school canteens.

The survey yielded diverse outcomes, with 52.6% of respondents being University of Malta students, 42.1% being MCAST students, and 5.3% representing ITS students.

Upon analysing the survey responses, it was found that only 10.5% of the students expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction with the food provided by the school canteen, while 31.6% expressed dissatisfaction. When asked whether the canteen should allocate more funding towards improving the quality of food, 63.2% of the students agreed.

Several students provided suggestions on how the school could enhance the quality of food. Some proposed including more healthy options instead of relying heavily on junk food, as many students depend on canteen meals for their daily sustenance during school hours. Another suggestion was to promote nutritious and nutrient-packed food choices.

Regrettably, the current food options at the school canteen do not adequately cater to various dietary restrictions, such as Halal or Kosher requirements. Consequently, students with these restrictions have limited or no food options available at the canteen, forcing them to purchase meals from outside vendors. As a result, other students, particularly those at

MCAST, have also started resorting to food vans located outside MCAST Paola or purchasing food from Lidl in the case of MCAST Mosta. This trend has led to an increase in obesity rates and a decline in overall nutritional intake among students.

The survey results reveal an intriguing cognitive aspect that can be leveraged by the administration to improve the quantity, quality, and health standards of university food services. By analysing customer feedback, valuable insights can be gained regarding canteen activities. This information is beneficial not only for the canteen organisers and administration but also for researchers studying behaviour and its impact on students' fitness levels, health, and other factors.

The primary objective of conducting this questionnaire was to highlight the significance of meeting customer expectations, particularly considering the high reliance of students on the canteen for their meals. It is crucial for food service operations to not only provide quality products but also deliver quality service. By understanding and addressing customer needs and preferences, the canteen can ensure a more satisfactory dining experience for students.





FGM – A Combination of Letters That Should Never Have Been

By Kevin Holmes, Senior Lecturer in Nursing at MCAST, and Maali Boukadi, Senior Staff Nurse

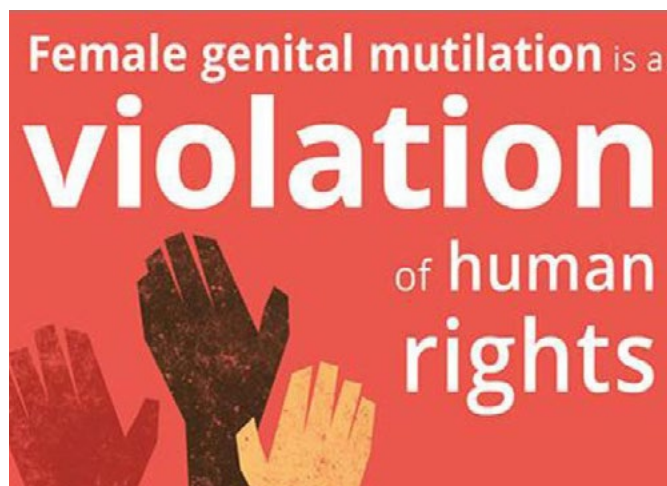
Ms Maali Boukadi, a Tunisian-born woman and a senior staff nurse, has been researching FGM for over two decades.

As a nurse, it is important to address taboo topics like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and work towards its eradication. FGM is a culturally accepted practice in some parts of the world, where females undergo intentional cutting of their genitalia without any medical reason. This practice has been inherited for centuries and is still practised despite being illegal in many countries.

I qualified as a nurse in 1999, and I spent the last few years before joining MCAST leading a specialist Urology clinic. To be honest, I had barely known about it until, one day, a woman in her late twenties, whose genitals had been mutilated when she was young, turned up at my clinic for a procedure that would usually take no more than thirty minutes. The intricacies of that two-hour visit were endless; from the clinical to the cultural, from the social to the moral and ethical...not one option was a clear-cut decision without a number of serious repercussions. That day, I left work with a ton of thoughts and raw emotions to reflect upon. The search that followed got me engulfed in a lot of reading about the topic. I wanted to be prepared if I ever faced another such patient. Thankfully, I never had the opportunity, but the interest about the topic remained, and

when I read about Ms Maali Boukadi's master's thesis, I could not resist the temptation to email her and ask for a copy.

Ms Boukadi is a Tunisian-born woman, a youth worker, and a senior staff nurse who qualified in Malta in 2010. As a nurse, she has experience in several settings including acute surgery. For over two decades, she has had this keen interest in researching FGM. Her nursing background and experiences of voluntary work locally and in Ethiopia, strong spirituality, and knowledge of both language and culture put her in a unique position to investigate the subject...and advocate for its eradication.



What is FGM?

In some parts of the world, Female Genital Mutilation is a rite of passage, a ritual necessary to become a woman. It is an initiation that has been inherited for centuries across countries and religions, a culturally accepted atrocity practised despite being illegal in many countries. As the name implies, it is the intentional cutting of the female genitalia for no medical reason. There are varying degrees of FGM conducted for reasons of improved marriage prospects and social acceptance. It is estimated that between 100-140 million women have been subjected to FGM, and another 3 million girls are at risk. What we do not know is how many have perished because of the complications it has caused. Besides the physical pain, the scarring and the alteration of body image, and the extremely high risk of mortal infections, FGM leaves behind it a trail of psychologically broken women—millions of reasons why this practice needs to stop.

In her master's thesis entitled "Exploring the perceptions, experiences and healthcare needs of young migrant women living in Malta who have experienced Female Genital Mutilation", Ms Boukadi explores the perceptions, experiences, and healthcare needs of young migrant women living in Malta who have experienced FGM. The study concluded that there is a need for mass education and awareness, campaigns involving the community, empowerment of girls and women through education and social change, and targeting rural villages where the practice is rife.

Ms Boukadi states that a lot of women are afraid to talk about FGM for fear of rejection by their families for bringing shame onto them. Others prefer silence for fear of being misunderstood by healthcare professionals. So, she set out to qualitatively find answers to how young migrant women in Malta perceive FGM; their experiences and challenges in relation to Maltese healthcare services; and which changes they wish to see in the Maltese healthcare system. Eight participants were recruited for the study. Four were migrant women who had been subjected to FGM in their native countries, whereas the other four were nurses/midwives who had experience with patients who had undergone FGM. The interview transcripts were thematically analysed and, when presenting the findings, Ms Boukadi used verbatim quotes which gave me the shivers when I read them. When reading how these women felt that they were betrayed by their own family, one realises why they are psychologically scarred for life. The main conclusions from the study merge a consensus by both the women who had undergone FGM and the health professionals. There is a need for mass education and awareness. Campaigns with involvement of the community are crucial in the fight against FGM. These should also be targeting the rural villages where the practice is rife, and so, the call is on groups who travel abroad for voluntary work to start targeting this issue. This should go hand in hand with the empowerment of girls and women through education and social change.

As Maali describes, the mass migration from African countries that has been happening for a few decades has seen millions of women who have undergone FGM in their native countries emigrate to other parts of the world. Quoting her words, "FGM nowadays is no longer a problem of 3rd world countries but a worldwide problem. It is everywhere and has reached everywhere, especially in countries where mass migration occurred...we can no longer say that we are not aware of this." The time for FGM to stop is long overdue. We must all fight for women to have the right to safely say, "I will not circumcise my daughter."



**Remember,
Diversity
is Freshness**

By Teodor Reljic

If diversity is worth celebrating, then it is worth fighting for. And sometimes, these battles are fought within—both institutionally and psychologically. TEODOR RELJIC speaks to Resident Specialist in Psychiatry Dr Patrick Abela about how his work at the Well-Being Hub at MCAST helps to ensure that the College’s diverse student body feels listened to, respected, and put at ease.

“Challenging diversity is like challenging freshness,” Dr Patrick Abela memorably tells me as we talk about his role within MCAST’s Well-Being Hub. “The false ideal of a never-changing social fabric is akin to wearing the same clothes or watching the same movie every day.”

As a Resident Specialist in Psychiatry with the Maltese Mental Health Service, Dr Abela would be well-placed to identify the benefits of a diverse student body, as well as the psychological pitfalls which associate a lack of diversity with a tempting, albeit ultimately stifling, idea of comfort.

However, neither can he deny that students and staff members who identify themselves as being members of diverse or minority communities are often at risk of discrimination and exclusion, and that this is bound to create anxiety and even, possibly, create or exacerbate existing mental health disorders.

“Most students who identify as minority groups must overcome the hurdle of exposing their minority status and demystifying preconceived notions for their immediate circle of contacts,” Dr Abela says. “While there is a best-case scenario in which all misconceptions are dispelled and the individual is perceived as such, this is rarely the case, and conflicts or tensions do arise between the individual and their surroundings.”

Thankfully, however, the aforementioned Well-Being Hub stands as a concrete example of a safeguard against such issues. As Dr Abela explains, “at MCAST, students are encouraged to explore their mental health and discuss any issues that emerge in this exploration. When students or staff members identify issues that require specialist intervention, they are seen at the Well-being Hub for multidisciplinary assessment and therapy.”

Should the need for any specialised assessments and pharmacological therapy arise, Dr Abela would step in to interview the persons in question to discuss medication options, which would prevent or control any psychiatric disorders.

Enjoying such direct access to mental health services is certainly beneficial for both staff and students at the College. But, though he is a keen advocate of the work of the Well-Being Hub, as well as the safeguards in place at MCAST aimed at preventing discrimination, Dr Abela is also aware that being sensitive to diversity means engaging in out-of-the-box thinking and expanding his academic repertoire.

In fact, when considering the well-being of such students, Dr Abela stresses the danger of applying a one-size-fits-all approach, which runs the risk of imposing a rigid structure onto the patient which does not take into consideration important cultural sensitivities.

“Through continuous professional development, I learn which tools are universally applicable for all individuals, and which concepts need to be broadened or focused for individuals in different groups,” Dr Abela says, adding that the College itself also provides a pivotal bedrock of support in tackling discrimination through its own internal policies. “This ensures an environment that feels inclusive and safe and that encourages the emergence of diversity within this crucial educational period of the students’ lives.”





“Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.” Vernā Myers

The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

By Marcela Fratescu, Senior Learning and Development Executive, and Deidre Botes, Audit Manager

There are few organisations nowadays that have not invested in Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives. The trend is understandable; in a globalised world, workplaces are becoming increasingly multicultural. However, whether they are becoming more inclusive is an issue up for debate. In fact, most D&I programmes have had little success in achieving a culture of inclusivity. In some cases, they have had the opposite effect, that of increasing backlash against the very ideas they intend to promote. The reasons are multifaceted but worthy of investigation. It is also worth naming some strategies that have worked when it comes to enhancing cultural inclusion. After all, workplace inclusion is a win-win situation: it impacts employee satisfaction, which in turn, benefits the company by increasing productivity and profitability, innovation at work, and retention.

It is important to understand the difference between a diverse and an inclusive environment, especially because the terms have often been used interchangeably in business settings. But there is a distinction. Put simply, diversity is about equitable representation of people (in this case, of different cultures) at all levels in the organisation. Inclusion, on the other hand, is the perception of all staff that they belong in their organisation and are heard and recognised for their contributions. They do not come hand in hand; increasing diversity will not necessarily increase inclusion.

However, businesses still often rely on diversity training as their main driver for inclusion. The main content for such trainings revolves around recognising and correcting biases regarding a particular group. The first reason they are often met with resistance from training participants has to do with a fundamental human characteristic: nobody likes being told what to think or believe. The second reason is that these trainings are often deployed top-down, with a particular focus on leadership and management. These are the people-facing

employees, whose commitment to an inclusive organisational culture is vital to its success. However, they will not shift this culture on their own and in a vacuum; they need to be implementing change alongside other employees across different levels of the organisational structure.

The main principles behind successful inclusion strategies rest on two pillars: equipping employees with the tools to act and fostering a sense of belonging in the workplace. For one thing, focusing on bystander intervention rather than bias reduction training, has been shown to be more successful. The main difference is that, rather than pointing out the number of ways in which people can be biased, we can empower staff to step in and intervene when they do notice discrimination happening. It is important to note here that people who attend on their own accord and in sessions where the group is diverse and from all layers and parts of the organisation will reap the most benefits.

Fostering a sense of belonging at work is more complex but, nonetheless, important. This will take a number of initiatives aimed at increasing formal and informal contact between employees of different cultures. The goal is a shift in mindset so as to understand and value each individual and their

specific culture for the unique characteristics they bring to the table. For example, at PwC Malta, we organise an annual food festival, an internal celebration where staff cook and eat traditional foods from their home countries. Other more informal events we organise are hikes, which give people a chance to meet and socialise with people from different backgrounds and whom they might not have a chance to get to know otherwise.

Lastly, building structures that will allow people from diverse backgrounds to integrate in the company culture and navigate its internal practices will increase their feeling of belonging in the organisation. Think of mentoring, coaching, or sponsorship relationships – these are all practices that have succeeded in ensuring that people of all cultural backgrounds excel in their roles by bringing their full selves to work.

Truly effective inclusivity building strategies are no easy task; they require full stakeholder and leadership commitment, a willingness to let employees take ownership of the issues they face but also of the ways in which to solve them. Most of all, enhancing a multicultural environment requires acknowledging the power that comes from embracing each other's differences and asking them to dance.



STUDENT MENTORING IN IVET AT MCAST

By Dr Tatjana Chircop, Deputy Principal, Research and Innovation

In 2016, MCAST drafted a proposal for an ESF project which aimed to develop innovative ways to engage vulnerable students in education. At that early stage, MCAST had envisioned how a new role of student mentoring could support students during their educational experience within the College. In 2018, the ESF 02.058 project, entitled “Adding Value: Nurturing Learning Journeys in IVET at MCAST”, started being implemented and, through this project, a team of multidisciplinary student mentors, led by Dr Tatjana Chircop as the project leader, started working with students taking courses up to MQF Level 3 at the College.

The mentoring programme aimed to create an outreach system through which all students up to MQF Level 3 could be reached and supported. By doing so, the mentoring service not only supported students who sought help, but reached out to all students, supporting them during the transition from secondary school to a post-secondary college, supporting them during their stay at MCAST, as well as encouraging them to actively engage in their educational journey.

The student mentors' role within MCAST is quite different to the more traditional understanding of the term 'mentoring', where an employee would mentor a new recruit into a job. The role of the student mentor at the College is that of being a reference point where students can reach out and discuss challenges they might be facing in different aspects of life and which might be impinging on the learning process. Settling into a college as big as MCAST after secondary school can be a daunting experience for newcomers and, thus, student mentors create opportunities for the students to familiarise themselves with the College and its procedures. Student



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mentors strive to ensure that students have the opportunity to reach their full potential and have a positive experience in the College. Reaching out to students and being open to discuss any issues of concern that the students come across in life helps the students explore possibilities before taking decisions. Student mentors are there to accompany students in navigating through the learning journey and through the various challenges that the educational process brings with it.

Small teams of student mentors have been working closely with students following programmes up to MQF Level 3, in each institute, including the Gozo campus, since the academic year 2018-2019. Through research entitled “Evaluating the New Mentoring Programme in IVET in a Post-Secondary College in Malta” (MCAST Journal of Applied Research and Practice, 6:1) which Borg and Chircop (2022) carried out on mentoring, findings show that students found mentoring to be a source where they could vent out and felt listened to. Students felt that, because they felt understood, good mentoring-mentee relationships were built, and so, they were able to communicate

and share their issues with someone who was ready to listen. Through the same research carried out in 2020, a substantial 58% of the student participants agreed that the mentoring service helped prevent them from dropping out of the course they were following.

The student mentoring service is one which promotes both equality and inclusion, particularly when focusing on the social domain. Moreover, through activities organised by the student mentoring team, students are encouraged to celebrate diversity. One example is the Debate Tournament organised regularly with Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, whereby students are trained not only on debating skills but also on respecting each other's opinions. The process of researching different perspectives on controversial topics and expressing them through debates is one way of developing active citizenship. Overall, student mentoring, through its core principles, encourages students to navigate through life challenges as a developmental process whilst embracing equality and inclusion.



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Why Do Students Drop out of College?

“There can be several reasons as to why a student may decide to drop out. People may think that being a full-time student is easy, and they couldn’t be more wrong.”

- What factors influence students to drop out or continue their course to completion?



By Rhianydd Demanuele

In 2022, MCAST celebrated the success of 2,411 graduates, which included 621 students who graduated at the master's and bachelor's levels. Additionally, 708 students completed diplomas at Levels 4 and 5, while another 937 students successfully finished their studies at Levels 1, 2, and 3 (MCAST holds graduation ceremonies, 2022). These numbers reflect the significant achievement of over 2,000 students who successfully completed their MCAST courses. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are also instances where students choose to discontinue their studies and do not complete their courses.

For the purpose of this article, I conducted interviews with four students who attended MCAST but dropped out of their courses midway. To respect their privacy, I will refer to them anonymously. Each student had unique reasons for leaving their respective courses. However, it is worth noting that three out of the four students eventually returned to MCAST, with two successfully completing their studies.

Two of the interviewed students stated that they discontinued their courses because the programmes did not meet their initial expectations. They found that the content or approach of the courses did not align with their interests or career goals, prompting them to make the difficult decision to drop out.

Another student mentioned that she left her course due to the overwhelming intensity and demands it posed. Recognising that the course was not suitable for her, she decided to explore alternative paths. A year later, she chose a different course at MCAST and successfully graduated from it.

The fourth student cited financial reasons as the primary factor behind her decision to drop out. She made the difficult choice to leave her studies and work full-time for a year to save money. However, over time, she became accustomed to the financial stability her full-time job provided, ultimately deciding to continue working instead of returning to her studies.

Interestingly, the remaining three students eventually returned to MCAST to continue their education. Two of them successfully completed their studies, demonstrating resilience and determination in pursuing their academic goals. These individual stories highlight the complexities and challenges that students may face during their educational journey, including factors such as mismatched expectations, intensity of coursework, and financial constraints.

When asked about the factors that contribute to students dropping out of courses, the four interviewed students shared insightful perspectives. One student emphasised the misconception that being a full-time student is easy and highlighted financial struggles as a common reason for dropping out. She explained that living off a monthly stipend rate of 100 euros, which is the current amount, can be incredibly challenging for students in their 20s. While students have the option to work part-time, the added stress often leads them to abandon their studies and opt for full-time employment instead.

All the interviewees agreed that unsupportive lecturers or an impractical timetable can also push students to leave a course. They emphasised the importance of a supportive learning environment to encourage student retention. Additionally, one student mentioned that feelings of loneliness and isolation can contribute to dropping out. Some students find it difficult to make friends, which can impact their overall experience and lead to a decision to discontinue their studies.

On the other hand, when asked about factors that motivate students to stay in a course, all the students highlighted the significance of supportive lecturers and a convenient timetable. These elements play a crucial role in fostering student engagement and commitment. Two students also emphasised the importance of ensuring that the course aligns with one's interests before applying. They suggested that prospective students should carefully review the MCAST prospectus to gauge their interest in the subject matter. When students are genuinely fascinated by what they are learning, the likelihood of them dropping out decreases.

Overall, the students' insights shed light on various factors that can contribute to students' decisions to drop out of courses, including financial struggles, unsupportive environments, and feelings of loneliness. Conversely, supportive lecturers, practical timetables, and a genuine interest in the course subject matter were identified as key factors that encourage students to persist and complete their studies.

Indeed, in any educational institution, there will always be students who choose to drop out of their courses and others who successfully complete them. The decision to continue or discontinue one's studies is a deeply personal choice, influenced by various factors and circumstances. Ultimately, what matters most is that individuals are content with the choices they make.

Migration

By Dr John Bartolo, Director Outreach Services and Student Affairs

The phenomenon of migration is not new for our world and, of course, is not exclusively for humans. It is commonly observed in nature that even animals migrate to protect themselves from famine and harsh weather conditions. Historically, human populations migrated to different countries following preestablished patterns of people escaping conflicts, poverty, persecution, war, unemployment, or as a

result of environmental changes. Although it is not universally acknowledged, migration has been and is an integral aspect to human experience, encompassing both human flourishing and human suffering (Harzig & Hoerder, 2009). What is different in today's migration reality is the nature and extent of the social transformations produced by these movements. Worldwide, people are increasingly on the move. Amongst others, one may include international students, highly skilled workers, economic migrants, retirees, refugees, nomads, those within global care chains, and others whose unauthorised status



leaves them vulnerable to all sorts of human rights violations, including slavery. The effects of migration in the twenty-first century are causing huge global transformations, which raise numerous questions about various issues such as identity, nationality, citizenship, the changing contemporary societies, community, and neighbourhood. As it is a complex challenge for modern societies, migration can be perceived as the emblematic condition of this age (Castles & Miller, 2009). According to UNDESA (2013), it is estimated that 232 million people (3% of the world's population) live outside their country of birth. Although it is a small proportion of the world's population, its impact is far greater than the numbers suggest. The Global North, or 'developed' countries, account for 136 million international migrants, compared to 96 million in the Global South, or 'developing' countries. 74 % of the total international migrants are of working age (20 to 64 years). Globally, half of all migrants are women, most of reproductive age. Women migrants are particularly vulnerable to labour market exploitation, human trafficking, and sexual violence (UNDESA, 2013). Refugees fleeing natural disaster, famine, persecution, and conflict form a distinct category within this movement and constitute an estimated 34.4 million people in 116 countries. Unaccompanied minors, often traumatised by violence and war, arrive in country contexts only to find their rights as children subsumed to their refugee status. It is difficult to collect data on such minors but, in the EU alone in 2012, there were just over 12,700 applications from unaccompanied minors (Eurostat, 2014).

The impact of migration varies according to circumstances and factors such as the reason behind the migration itself, influences on the country of birth as well as on the receiving country, culture, legislations, policies, access to services, and influences on economy. For local citizens, migration often leads to their being confronted by perceived 'differences' of migrant peoples, resulting in perceived (our emphasis) greater competition in labour markets, for housing, education, or social benefits (Clarke & Garner, 2005). Almost everywhere, local citizens are seen as the social norm and migrant peoples as exceptions, leading to social, cultural, and political practices that draw fundamental lines of difference between "people already established in a country or region and the newcomers" (Benhabib et al., 2007). Too often, migrants experience great difficulties in their education, training, and transitions into labour markets and face hurdles of discrimination and racism. As Castles and Miller point out, "...one of the dominant images in the highly developed countries today is that of masses of people flowing in from the poor South and the

turbulent East, taking away jobs, pushing up housing prices and overloading social services. Similarly in the South, such as Malaysia and South Africa, migrants are blamed for crime, disease and unemployment" (Castles & Miller, 2009, p. 15). This view presents the migrant as carrying a one-way ticket, in flight from a set of disadvantaged conditions, and demanding priority access to services. According to Williams and Graham (2014), such assumptions represent a profound misreading of the nature of migration. Recent trends show that migrant motivations can be complex and multidimensional, often linked with family or community ties. Williams and Graham (2014) state that, as a new dynamic of globalisation, pathways to migration are firmly mapped within transnational networks. Furthermore, through the use of new technologies, migrants deploy their networks for engagement with homeland and international politics.

The experience and the impact of both pre- and post-migratory experiences disrupt the individual's identity whilst producing conflict between past experiences and the realities of the receiving culture. Families might experience a drop in their standard of living and status in society; the interruption in education; parents and family members emotionally absent; the loss of family members maybe at sea whilst crossing. They also lack the network of acquaintances which can be drawn upon to access knowledge and information on educational, training, and employment opportunities as well as to other resources.

Refugees are not a homogeneous group – age, gender, faith, ethnicity, culture, and education system in their country are among the variables, which impact on, and shape their ability to succeed. The key difference between refugees and indigenous people of the receiving countries is the impact of the refugees' experience of migration and the effects of both pre- and post-migratory experiences. Their experience of migration disrupts identity and produces conflict between past experiences and the reality of the receiving culture. The experience of being a refugee continues to play a significant role in their lives and in their sense of belonging and recognition, deficit, and exclusion/inclusion. Morrice (2013) suggests that understanding the experience of refugees is multilayered and cannot be fully comprehended without reference to the deep-rooted material, inequalities of globalisation, and involuntary migration and the associated policy discourses.



TO THRIVE AND FLOURISH - A SALESIAN PERSPECTIVE ON INCLUSION

By Fr Antoine Farrugia, SDB M.Sc., College Chaplain

In a secular world that values materialism and consumerism, certain aspects of life hold a sacred and special significance that goes beyond their physical or monetary worth. These sacred elements vary from culture to culture and person to person but are timeless and universal, falling under the categories of ethics and spirituality.

Salesian educative practice is founded on three timeless values: love, respect, and acceptance for all individuals, especially the marginalised and vulnerable, regardless of their background, social status, or abilities. This practice promotes a vision of the young person as someone who deserves opportunities for self-development in a just and equitable society where such growth is nurtured and cherished.

Every person possesses a unique and valuable inner essence, a spark of goodness that has the potential to contribute to a more just and fair society. This inner spark is like a hidden holiness that can manifest itself in different ways, such as a student with a learning disability who has a deep sense of empathy and compassion for others facing similar challenges. The MCAST Chaplaincy Team recognises and supports the development of this inner goodness in many ways.

As Salesians, the Chaplaincy Team operates from a philosophy of education that believes every person is created in the image of God and is worthy of respect and dignity, regardless of their race, gender, or any other distinguishing characteristic. Equality and inclusion are integral to Salesian values, and the Chaplaincy Team supports the education of all young people, including those who are disadvantaged and wish to develop their skills and potential.

Creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all students requires educators to work towards offering the same level of respect and recognition to students from diverse

backgrounds and experiences. Salesian principles emphasise the need to support disadvantaged youth, particularly those who are poor, marginalised, or at risk, in a faith-based belief that every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Furthermore, public education should offer training and instruction to those who might not otherwise have access to it and support them to remain in education.

Community plays a vital role in nurturing an inclusive environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds can build relationships based on mutual interests, respect, and understanding. Educators who create a supportive and caring environment foster a sense of belonging and value among students, encouraging them to participate in extracurricular activities, sports, and other social events while providing mentoring and guidance to help them succeed.

An educative institution influenced by the Salesian philosophy of education also seeks to promote equality and inclusion in the broader society by advocating for social justice and working to address issues such as poverty, discrimination, and inequality. Salesian values align closely with MCAST's vision for education, and the Chaplaincy Team supports MCAST in encouraging students to become active and engaged citizens who make a positive difference in their communities through supervised placements, CSR, volunteering, and similar initiatives.

Don Bosco provided education and vocational training to young people while advocating for the rights of the young, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Similarly, the MCAST Chaplaincy Team strives to promote Salesian values and practices in creating a third-level college environment where all individuals are respected and given the opportunity to realise their potential.



Breaking Down Barriers: The MCAST Library's Efforts to Ensure Equal Access and Inclusion for All

By Liza Franco, MCAST Director Libraries

The European Union (EU) Gender Equality Strategy asserts that all individuals, irrespective of their sex, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, sexual identity, racial or ethnic origin, age, religion or belief, or any disability, should be able to pursue their chosen path in life and have equal opportunities to thrive, participate, and lead. The MCAST Library, under the guidance of MCAST, is committed to supporting and promoting this strategy.

To promote equality, the MCAST Library has undertaken several initiatives to create a more inclusive and diverse user environment. The library is available to all users, regardless of their gender, race, religion, or orientation.

The library aims for equal access to information for all students and staff and adapts its opening hours to meet the needs of all categories of students. The library's structure and organisation ensure that everybody can integrate and use its facility.

One of the key initiatives undertaken by the library is the diversification of its collection. It acquires materials representing diverse gender identities, cultures, and perspectives, including books and articles that discuss gender equality and related

issues. The library has included more literature and resources on gender studies and LGBTQ+ issues. Electronic resources are available to all member users to ensure equal access to a diverse and inclusive collection of literature.

The library has also created an inclusive and accessible environment, including gender-neutral restrooms and seating areas, to ensure all patrons feel safe and comfortable within the library. All patrons are welcome and respected, regardless of gender identity.

The library acknowledges the need for equality and inclusion within its staff and patronage to promote a healthy and thriving learning environment. The library ensures that all users are respected, regardless of their gender identity or expression. These initiatives are essential for promoting an inclusive and healthy learning environment and creating a more equitable society.

The MCAST Library's efforts to promote gender equality are essential to its commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all. These initiatives promote an inclusive and healthy learning environment and create a more equitable society.



A selection of recent magazines/
publications on display at the
MCAST Resource Centre; The
MCAST Resource Centre Building
at the Main Campus



The MCAST Resource Centre Building at the Main Campus



Students at the MCAST Resource Centre



MCAST

Inclusive

words

reflect

an inclusive

community

Equality Committee Publication

Inclusive Words Reflect an Inclusive Community

– Considerations on Our Inclusive Language Guidebook

By Reuben Mifsud, MCAST Equality Committee

The Inclusive Language Guidebook was launched on Wednesday 1st March, coinciding with the award of the Equality Mark. The title MCAST chose for the Inclusive Language Guidebook is telling in itself. If we want to be inclusive, the words we use need to be inclusive. It also means that, should we use non inclusive words, we cannot state to be an inclusive community—no matter the policies and practices that we write and endorse. The language that we use has an impact. It shapes our collective perception of the world. Inappropriate language can make people feel excluded or offended and can be a barrier to community participation. Furthermore, the use of derogatory or inappropriate language may amount to discrimination and impinge on human rights. By adopting language that celebrates diversity, we will contribute to strengthening the dignity of every individual.

A Plain Affirmation as a Starting Point

The vision of our College is firmly grounded on three fundamental values: Inclusion, Equity, and Excellence. It is our ethical and moral obligation as human beings to help create an environment in which each one of us has a meaningful learning and working experience at MCAST. Indeed, any community is not a homogeneous group, and persons and groups may self-identify in various ways. This rich diversity of identities should be respected and recognised. Diverse refers to two or more people who are, naturally, different from one another. Diverse is not defined as a person or group of people who are different from you, as if you are the norm and they are diverse.

Inclusive Due to Our Belief in Equity

Everybody needs to give a share in this change in the use of words. The will to do that stems from an inclusive attitude. Integration is the process of making a person adapt to or fit into society. Inclusion refers to the process of an ever-changing society to include everyone. Inclusion is different from integration, which only requires a particular group to

change so as to fit within pre-established parameters in a community. Also, equality is treating everyone in the same way, often while (falsely) assuming that everyone also starts out on an equal footing or with the same opportunities. Equality is different from equity, which values fair outcomes for people or groups by treating them in ways that address their unique disadvantages or barriers. MCAST attempts to be radical in its outlook, choosing the side of the poor and marginalised.

SOME INCLUSIVE PRACTICES FROM THE GUIDEBOOK

Some general basic directions would include the following:

- Using positive, enabling and empowering language as opposed to language which places focus on the limitation or difference.
- Using asset-based as opposed to deficit-based language which thus focuses on strengths.
- Using people-first language and therefore, the emphasis goes on the person as a human being and not on the difference.
- Avoiding undue references to difference unless reference to difference is absolutely necessary.
- Avoiding absolutist or judgmental terms
- Avoiding excessive spotlight or elaborations.
- Being specific as opposed to hiding behind vague words or generalisations however uncomfortable they might feel.

Some specific directions pertaining to gender would include the following:

- Using gender-neutral words which have replaced stereotypically laden vocabulary.
- Using the passive voice.
- Using the plural.
- A reorientation of the sentence can lead to the omission of the masculine or feminine word.
- Whenever a survey is being conducted, a gender-sensitive choice in forms needs to be given—if gender identification is absolutely necessary.
- Keeping in mind that not everyone might wish to share their identity, and therefore, certain questions should not be mandatory.

Individuals have the right to describe themselves as they wish because identity is something personal. Therefore, it is recommended that you ask when interacting with people for the first time. In this way, community members can tell you how they wish to be referred to.

Make a Difference – Participate in a Snowball Effect

Using inclusive language is not typically learnt at school, but schools can be powerful learning environments. Unlearning certain things, however difficult, can make a difference. Simple changes in the words used can make a difference. Using inclusive language can help to push other people to do the same and create a more inclusive environment for everyone. When you use an inclusive word, you are deliberately making the effort to include everyone, no matter who they are.

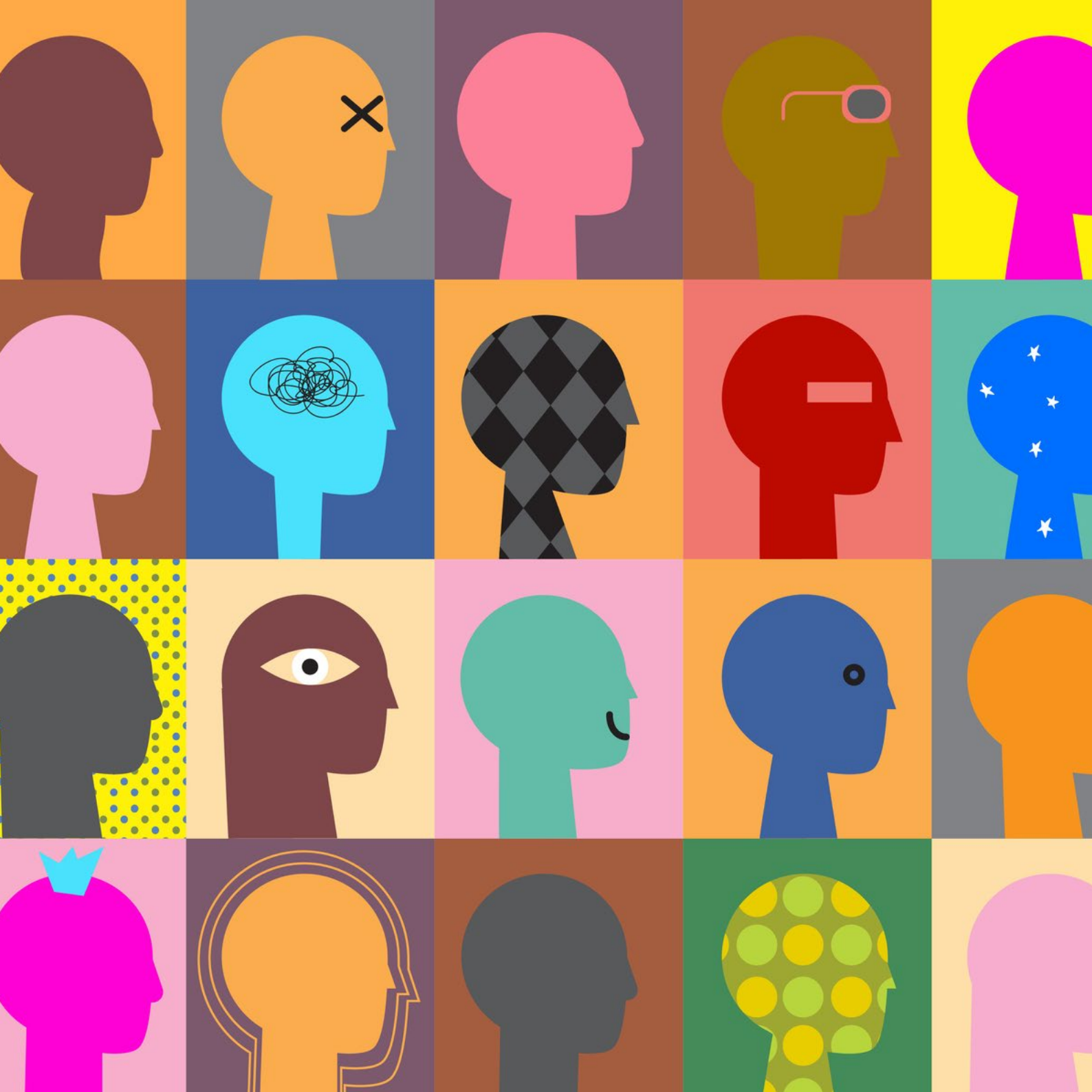
The Bottom Line is Very Simple: Respect

The preparation of this Inclusive Language Guidebook intends to create a reference document to improve our language so as to be more respectful towards each member of the community. Respect is the main driving force of this document, but, above all, of the interactions in a community. Any trepidation is uncalled for. When respect is a primary guiding principle, we surely cannot go wrong.

Evaluating and Mapping out the Next Steps in Our Inclusive Mission

Collectively, we need to think and evaluate continuously as true reflective practitioners. As language changes, this document will also continue to change to mirror the use of the language in our country. We are the brand of a Malta College of Arts Science and Technology which lives its calling as an inclusive community. We need to prove it in our words—and actions!



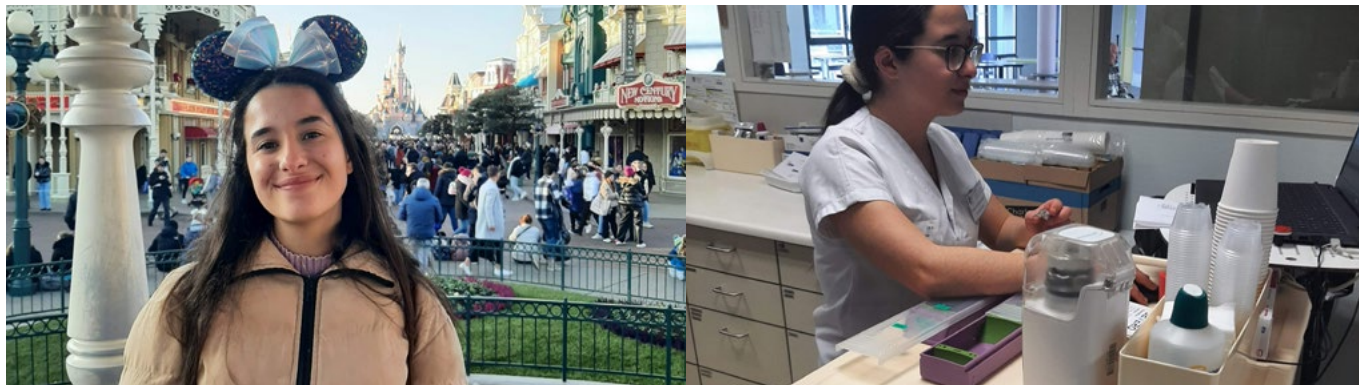




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ERASMUS+ PROJECTS AND MOBILITY OFFICE

NURSING PLACEMENT IN FRANCE



By Denise Debrincat

As a second-year nursing student, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the Erasmus exchange programme and travel to France for my placement. I was fortunate enough to be placed in the beautiful commune of Niort, which is located in the Deux-Sèvres department in western France.

During my placement in France, I was fortunate to gain exposure to various sectors of healthcare. Specifically, I was placed in the Internal Medicine section for four weeks, where I encountered patients with cancer and blood diseases. Witnessing and practising various nursing skills was an incredible learning experience, and I am grateful for the kindness of the nurses who answered my many questions.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to spend several days in the Infectious Disease Unit. The nurses conducted consultations with patients and determined which blood tests were necessary. During my time in this unit, I primarily encountered patients with sexual diseases, needle stick injuries (often acquired in healthcare settings), and patients with meningitis. Overall, my time in these sectors provided me with valuable insights into the French healthcare system and expanded my nursing knowledge and skills.

For the following five weeks of my placement, I was placed in an elderly home where I had the opportunity to practise various nursing skills. These included wound care, bandaging, administration of insulin and medications, and others. Despite

the language barrier, I was able to gain a significant amount from this experience.

During the weekends, when I do not have placement, I had the opportunity to explore various cities in France and even ventured out to Belgium. Some of the cities I visited include Paris, Nantes, Bordeaux, Limoges, La Rochelle, Poitiers, and of course, Niort itself. It was a wonderful chance to experience the diverse cultures and see the various landmarks and attractions that each city had to offer.

As a food lover, I also made sure to try a variety of typical French cuisine and sought out local specialties in each city I visited. It was a great way to immerse myself in the local culture and culinary traditions. Overall, I had an unforgettable experience during my placement in France, both in terms of professional growth and personal adventure.

I highly recommend the Erasmus exchange programme to anyone who is interested in living in a different country for a few months. The experience was transformational for me, helping me to grow as an individual and become more independent. Additionally, it provided me with a newfound appreciation for different cultures and ways of life.

My time in France was an experience of a lifetime, and I will always cherish the memories I made during my placement and travels throughout the country. Overall, the Erasmus exchange programme was an invaluable opportunity that I would encourage others to pursue if given the chance.

MY INTERNSHIP AT THE NATIONAL SWIMMING CENTRE DE TONGELREEP IN EINDHOVEN



By Abdullah Sahal

My Erasmus internship mobility flew by in what felt like a blink of an eye. I still vividly recall my first day in the Netherlands, where all the new and unfamiliar faces quickly became a part of my life. This internship was a memorable experience for me, as it afforded me the opportunity to visit many cities and neighbouring countries, including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, and the UK.

Through this programme, I also gained a newfound sense of independence and confidence in myself, which has served me well in both my personal and professional life. Moreover, I had the privilege of making a lot of friends from different parts of the world, providing me with a unique opportunity to learn about the differences in cultures between various countries.

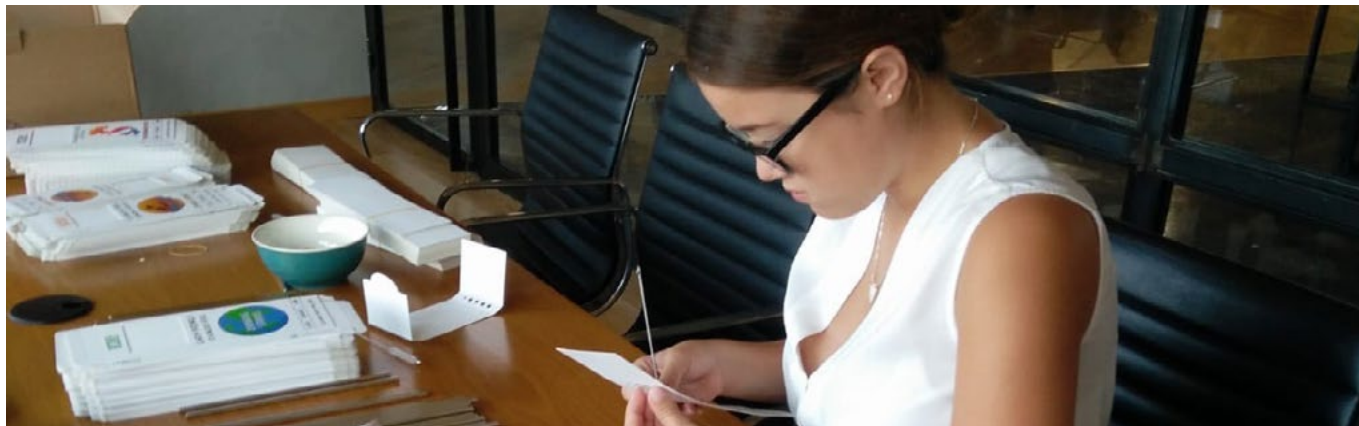
I completed my internship at the National Swimming Centre de Tongelreep in Eindhoven, where the National Olympic Team of the Netherlands and other professional swimmers train with scientists to enhance their performance and improve their techniques for competitions such as the Olympics and European Championships.

During my time at the centre, I gained valuable insight into the workings of the office and had the opportunity to learn about the different types of experiments they conduct using underwater cameras and biomechanical analysis to help the swimmers improve their performance. As a sports student, it was a great privilege to work with such a talented group of individuals, and the warm welcome I received from everyone made me feel right at home.

In addition to the valuable experience I gained during my internship, I also had the opportunity to explore the beautiful city of Eindhoven and its surroundings. I was amazed by the friendly and welcoming nature of the people I met, and the countless travel experiences I had during the summer of 2022 were unforgettable.

To prospective students, I would strongly advise taking advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to join the Erasmus programme. It is important to never take anything for granted and to seek out new experiences. Challenging oneself and stepping out of one's comfort zone can be rewarding, and the proud experience of joining the Erasmus programme will stay with you forever.

MY EXPERIENCE AT THE INTERNATIONAL LAB WEEK 2020 AT THE HOCHSCHULE ESSLINGEN UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES



By Christopher Gauci

The Lab Week was held between the 2nd and 6th March 2020. The first day of the International Week began with introductions and an overview of the programme. We were also treated to a guided tour of the city centre of Esslingen, which was fortunate enough to escape destruction during World War II. Later that day, we enjoyed an International Coffee Break, where each participant from their respective country brought traditional sweets to share with everyone.

During the rest of the week, we participated in three workshops: Drinking Water Hygiene and Water Transfer, Metal Forming Technology and Laser Cutting, and Hydrogen Fuel Cell and New Mobility.

In the “Drinking Water Hygiene and Water Transfer” workshop, we learned about the dangerous bacteria that can be found in water, such as Legionella, and how to treat it. We also saw a demonstration of how water can be stratified in a tank to extract different temperatures from different levels.

In the “Metal Forming Technology and Laser Cutting” workshop, we witnessed a demonstration of a design being laser cut using a CNC laser machine and then bent using a pre-programmed bending machine. We also learned about designing metal forming objects with dedicated software and simulating the forming process to improve the design. Finally,

we used testing equipment, such as Hydraulic and Mechanical Press benches, to calculate the ultimate tensile strengths and individually formed an object out of an aluminium sheet using a manual press.

In the “Hydrogen Fuel Cell and New Mobility” workshop, we were presented with how a hydrogen fuel cell works and even prepared one of the laminations that is part of the cell. We then saw a demonstration of an actual hydrogen cell and heard from a company representative about alternative fuels, including a car driven by a hydrogen fuel cell.

In addition to the workshops, we also went on industrial visits to Audi in Neckarsulm, Porsche in Stuttgart, Mahle in Stuttgart, and The Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart. At Audi, we saw fully automated production lines of cars, while at Porsche, we noticed more manual intervention in the production of custom-made cars. At Mahle, we saw wind tunnels for aerodynamic testing, sound testing chambers, and an area for endurance/failure testing on parts for different carmakers. At The Mercedes-Benz Museum, we took a self-guided tour that showcased the automobile industry’s history over the past 130 years.

Overall, thanks to the excellent organisation by Esslingen University, this international week was an enriching experience in technology, culture, and networking.

EMPOWERING CHANGE: MY UNFORGETTABLE ERASMUS JOURNEY WITH 'LET'S MAKE CYPRUS GREEN'



By Emily Lang

The Erasmus Mobility experience has proven to be one of the most remarkable and enriching chapters of my life. For four transformative weeks, I immersed myself in the 'Let's Make Cyprus Green' initiative, where I not only delved into the intricacies of marketing within an organisation but also embraced the paramount importance of environmental impact. This experience has left an indelible mark on my understanding of the world and my role in making a difference.

Throughout my time with the organisation, I gained comprehensive insights into the multifaceted nature of marketing and its pivotal responsibilities within an organisation. I honed my skills in crafting compelling social media content, effectively utilising text to engage and inspire audiences. Additionally, I dedicated myself to developing and

enhancing the client database, meticulously curating emails tailored to individual clients. I also took charge of promoting the company's services across diverse social media channels, amplifying its reach and impact. Furthermore, I acquired proficiency in leveraging Mailchimp to efficiently send personalised and automated emails to a multitude of potential clients simultaneously.

Beyond the acquisition of specific skills, this experience instilled in me a sense of effective and independent work ethic. I am now equipped with the tools and knowledge to carry these invaluable lessons into future work experiences, where I will continue to make a positive difference. This Erasmus journey has empowered me to embrace my role as a catalyst for change and has ignited a passion within me to shape a more sustainable future.

NAVIGATING NEW HORIZONS: MY TRANSFORMATIVE ERASMUS MARITIME EXPERIENCE



By Jake Ellul

Embarking on my Erasmus experience, I ventured beyond the confines of academic education, gaining a holistic set of knowledge and skills that shaped me in profound ways. Among the many challenges that arose during this journey, living away from home emerged as a catalyst for enhancing my communication skills and fostering independence.

As a student at the Maritime Institute, my Erasmus experience unfolded aboard a ship, where I served as a Deck Cadet. Tasked with assisting the vessel's officers in all aspects of safe navigation, I embraced roles that demanded discipline, punctuality, and unwavering precision. Living onboard

reinforced the necessity for meticulous actions and accurate decision-making. Through hands-on participation in various ship-related responsibilities, I seamlessly applied and adapted my theoretical knowledge to the practical demands of everyday maritime tasks.

Reflecting upon this invaluable experience, I now recognise its immeasurable worth as an investment in my career trajectory. It has equipped me with a diverse skill set that will undoubtedly propel me towards future opportunities. Looking back, I am filled with gratitude for the transformative impact this Erasmus maritime journey has had on my personal and professional growth.

STUDENTS ERASMUS TRIP TO SOUTHERN SICILY



Environmental Students from the Institute of Applied Sciences, MCAST were accompanied by Dr Eman Calleja and Mr Edward Falzon on a two-day training programme on bioengineering techniques in Sicily between the 17th and 18th April 2023.

The trip was organised by Dr Eman Calleja and financially supported by the Erasmus+ Office within MCAST. During the trip, the students were taken to see various environmental projects in the province of Ragusa that included a slope stabilisation project in the archaeological park of Ispica and various other green infrastructure in the commune of Modica.

The 10 students from the BSc (Hons) Degree in Environmental Sciences and Sustainable Technologies were exposed to innovative techniques that are not currently in use in Malta. The host, Engineer Gianluigi Pirrera of Biocity Engineering, explained that the challenges met in Sicily and Malta are similar in terms of land use conflicts and intersectoral conflicts

that make the use of bioengineering techniques particularly effective at finding environmentally friendly and economical solutions to problems in major infrastructural projects. One particularly interesting project was the use of vegetation and geotextile mesh to cover the 50km-long pipeline that runs from Lake Rosalia to Ragusa, Modica, and Scicli. The 1m-wide pipeline was laid above ground but covered with vegetation at a fraction of the cost with minimal visual impact and minimal cost compared to having used traditional engineering techniques that use concrete and steel.

The group from MCAST were also accompanied by a group of six Austrian specialists in green infrastructure from the University of BOKU Vienna, with their team leader being Professor Rosemarie Stangl, a renowned environmental engineer and general manager of the European Federation of Soil Bioengineering.

EXPANDING HORIZONS: ENHANCING ENGINEERING EDUCATION THROUGH COLLABORATION AND PRACTICAL TRAINING



In the scholastic year 2021-2022, the Institute of Engineering and Transport's Department of Mechanical Engineering at MCAST received cutting-edge equipment from the renowned German company, Gunt Hamburg. This equipment was aimed at furnishing two specialised laboratories focusing on statics, dynamics, strength of materials, and vibration analysis. To maximise the impact of this equipment, a group of five lecturers embarked on a practical training journey at Gunt Hamburg between February 26th and March 3rd, 2023.

Upon their arrival at Gunt Hamburg, the lecturers were warmly greeted with a tour of the main company and its manufacturing facility. They witnessed the setting of a small production company specialising in individually ordered setups, observing various aspects of lean manufacturing, including just-in-time production systems, automated material handling systems, and modern storage facilities. Collaborating with professionals from Gunt Hamburg, the lecturers discussed improvements to the existing equipment at MCAST, receiving first-hand explanations on optimal operation methods.

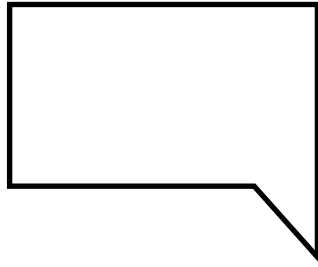
Gunt Hamburg also seized the opportunity to showcase a range of experimental arrangements aligned with the engineering curriculum. These included open-channel flow experiments, demonstrations of turbomachine operating principles, fluid

mechanics experiments utilising a PLC-controlled system, and an interactive refrigeration system for efficiency and work ratio calculations.

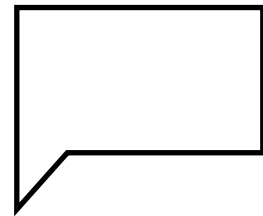
One of the highlights of the visit was a seminar introducing the state-of-the-art Didactic Concept Gunt-DigiSkills 3 equipment. This advanced equipment focused on preventive maintenance in a production setting, allowing students to observe operational components through augmented reality and facilitating maintenance tasks through remote data transmission. The equipment's versatility and comprehensive nature made it suitable for multiple lecturers, encompassing various aspects of technical engineering knowledge.

To enrich the overall experience, the lecturers also visited engineering-related industries in the Hamburg area, including the Airbus Hamburg-Finkenwerder industrial facility and the U-Bootmuseum Hamburg, a Russian submarine museum.

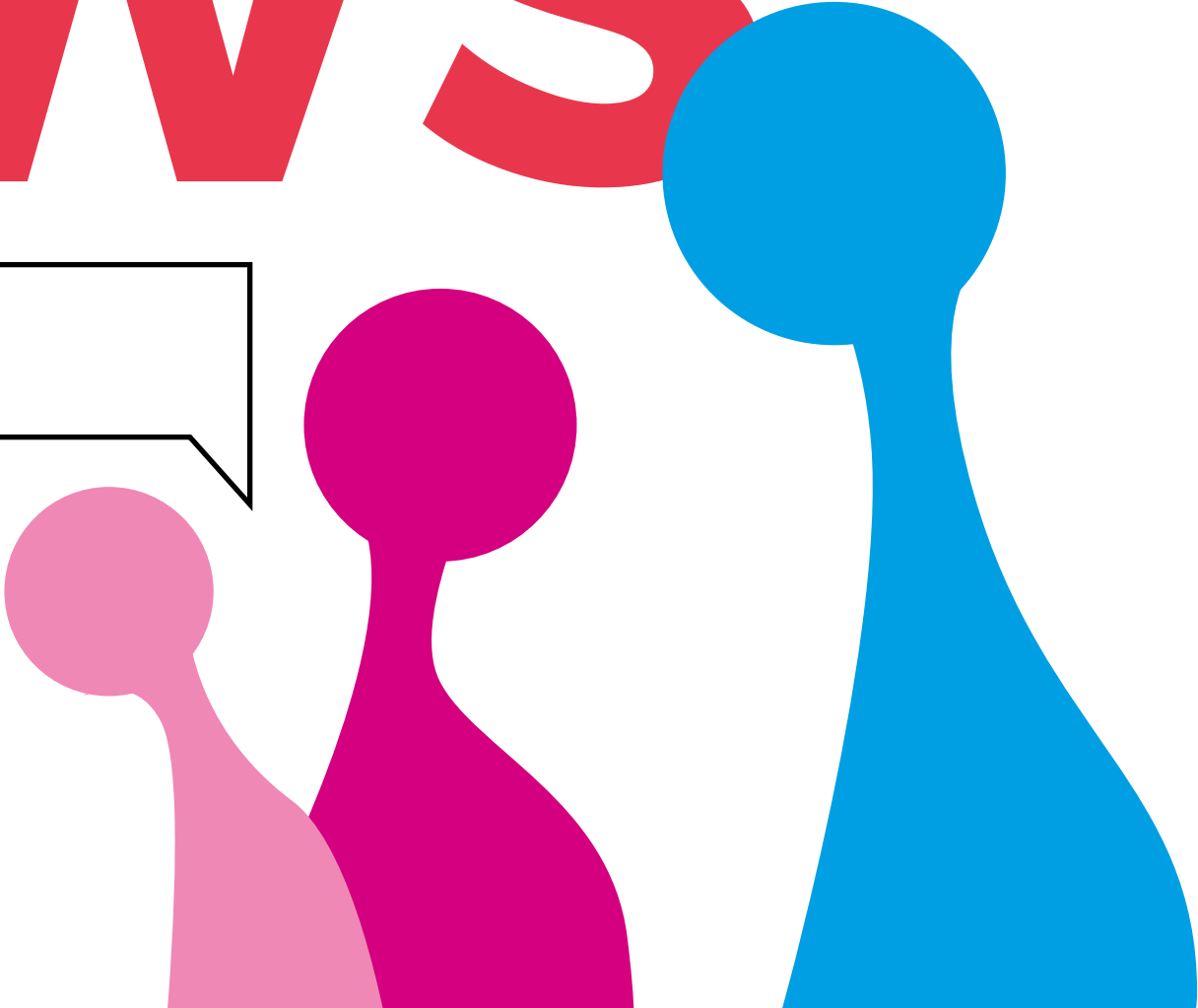
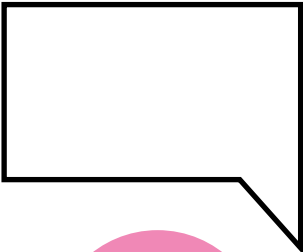
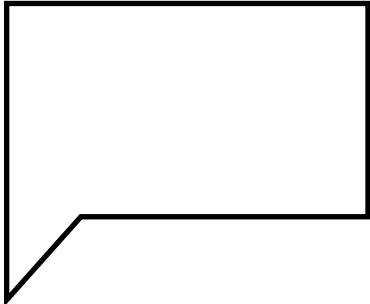
The lecturers extend their heartfelt gratitude to the Institute of Engineering and Transport, the Erasmus+ Projects and Mobility Office, and all individuals involved in providing the necessary resources and support to make this enriching experience possible.



LINE



WWS



MCAST and MG2I Collaborate with University of Malta and SpaceOmix for an Exciting Space Endeavour





MCAST and MG2i are collaborating with the University of Malta and SpaceOMIX on a space mission for the very first time. SpaceOMIX is leading the project.

In mid-March 2023, Maleth 3 was launched aboard the SpaceX CRS27 rocket from Cape Canaveral, headed to the International Space Station. Dr Ing. Leonardo Barilaro, a lecturer at the MCAST Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET), collaborated with Professor Joseph Borg's team from the University of Malta to conduct integration tests on the experiment at Space Application Services in Brussels, Belgium, before it was shipped to SpaceX.

Professor Borg is the Principal Investigator and molecular geneticist that started the Maleth Programme with the SpaceOMIX mission. The primary scope of the research mission is to target and study human skin samples in space, complete with the skin microbiome of Diabetic Foot Ulcers from patients undergoing treatment.

Dr Barilaro composed a new space music composition that will fly with the experiment and will be broadcasted to Earth. Besides the high scientific value of the project, this first collaboration for the College will open a window of opportunities for students, boosting education and STEM activities.

This new SpaceX Dragon launch will deliver new science investigations, supplies, and equipment for the international crew. These investigations lead to new technologies, medical treatments, and products that improve life on Earth.

The College currently offers a Level 7 Master of Science in Aerospace Engineering.



MCAST Students Shine at the International Project Week in the Netherlands

Two students pursuing the Advanced Diploma in Applied Sciences and one student pursuing the Advanced Diploma in Environmental Sustainability, both from the Institute of Applied Sciences, had the opportunity to learn about the theory and practical aspects of water purification in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.

Also present were delegations from Latvia, Czech Republic, and the Netherlands. Mr Simon Feersma-Hoekstra, a Water Technology lecturer at Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Science, delivered a series of lectures on water, with particular emphasis on water pollution, legislation and regulations, and the theory behind biological water treatment. Other lecturers supported Mr Feersma-Hoekstra's lectures by delivering topics related to programming wastewater treatment processes using Arduino and the ecology of wastewater. After the theoretical background, the students were divided into teams of four, one from each participating country, and had to apply what they had learned in the lectures into practice.

They had to set up a laboratory scale wastewater treatment plant, set up a computerised program using Arduino, and effectively treat a calculated volume of wastewater to legal specifications. The students had to analyse the quality of the wastewater prior to and after the treatment for various parameters related to wastewater. During the two weeks, a number of excursions to plants where water use is crucial were held. These included a wastewater treatment facility, a treatment plant to produce water destined for municipal potable water distribution, and a plant where French fries are produced, including how they treat the water they produce. Other social activities were organised, which proved to be an effective and successful means of inducing all participants to integrate and share experiences, both at student and at lecturer level. Anton Mangion At the potable water production plant VITENS In the lab at the Lamb Weston Fries Factory at the WAC next to the waste water pilot plant constructed by the students.





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MCAST Applied Research and Innovation Centre launches first Monograph Series



The College's Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) has recently released the inaugural issue of the MCAST Monograph, which focuses on a research project conducted over several years that aims to better understand the challenges students face in education. The study's ultimate goal is to improve the student experience and promote their engagement with education.

Dr Tatjana Chircop addressing the audience

The MCAST Monograph's inaugural edition was produced based on research conducted as part of the ESF 02.058 project "Adding Value: Nurturing Learning Journeys in IVET at MCAST".

The Monograph is the result of research conducted in secondary schools and at MCAST, documenting the findings of the ESF 02.058 project "Adding Value: Nurturing Learning Journeys in IVET at MCAST". Such research provides valuable data that can inform decision-making by educational institutions and the state. In addition to quantitative statistics, MCAST Applied

Research and Innovation Centre launches first Monograph Series this research utilised qualitative approaches to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences, offering valuable insights into their challenges and needs.

The results of this research project indicate that a significant number of students drop out of non-compulsory schooling and enter into employment. Possible models were discussed as opportunities to incorporate students' choices and allow them to work and study concurrently at their workplace. This research provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by students and highlights potential solutions to improve their educational experiences.

The ARIC has been publishing the MCAST Journal of Applied Research and Practice for several years, featuring research conducted by staff members in various fields. In recent years, ARIC has significantly increased its research output and now offers master's courses in research as well as a doctorate programme.



EXCELLENT MEDITERRANEAN NET M E N



EU Funds
for Malta
2014-2020



MCA

Interreg
Italia-Malta



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT
FOR EUROPEAN FUNDS



MCAST organises “MEN Excellent Mediterranean Net” Seminar

MCAST organised a seminar with the theme “Socially Sustainable Tourism: Capacity Building and Community Engagement”, as part of the MEN Excellent Mediterranean Net Project.

The College—in partnership with the Municipality of Acireale, Sicily—is executing an Interreg Italia-Malta project called MEN Excellent Mediterranean Net. The project aims to achieve its objective of integrating cross-border work placement for the benefit of the Maltese economy and educational sectors.

Various themes were discussed during the seminar, including innovative examples of tourism initiatives that promote social sustainability, capacity building, community engagement linked to migration and integration, tourism, and the promotion of cultural heritage.

Through this seminar, current MCAST students understood the importance of cross-border work mobility through stable networks by listening to the key expert speakers.





Consultation with Construction Industry Stakeholders at MCAST

As part of the “Encounter: MCAST Meets Industry” series, MCAST and the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) held a consultation event with local stakeholders within the construction industry. This is the second consultation meeting by the Institute following the first meeting with the aviation industry held earlier on during the year. Through these consultation sessions, MCAST is continuing to position itself as the leading institution, ensuring that the sector is provided with the top-quality vocational training it requires.

The event was held to discuss and gather feedback from local stakeholders on construction courses offered by the College to students. The content included in various construction courses, students’ performance within the industry after graduating, and strategies to deliver more industrially relevant coursework were debated.

Minister of Public Works and Planning Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi said, “We need to communicate clearly the standards and skills needed in the construction sector. Giving value to training and investment in people is crucial. Attracting young people to the different professions and trades in the sector is a priority.”

MCAST Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja said, “New technology is pushing the construction industry into new fields, making it imperative to have a skilled workforce. MCAST strongly believes in closely collaborating with industry partners, as this benefits both parties. Students following construction-related courses at the College also follow industry apprenticeship programmes. This real-life experience helps them bolster their knowledge and capabilities to become industry-relevant professionals.”



India National Day of Science



Ms Gloria Gangte, High Commissioner of India to Malta, visited MCAST to celebrate India's National Day of Science in an event organised in collaboration with the High Commission of India.

During the event at the College's MCAST Resource Centre (MRC) to provide information on the International Year of Millets, Ms Gangte highlighted the importance of this food and how this correlates with scientific endeavours.

Ms Gangte said that it is important to "try and see how science can help us solve problems that humans face, and this how we are looking to correlate science with the consumption of millets".

Millets are an extremely nutritious grain that provides a wide array of health benefits. India is the top producer of these diverse grains. This was highlighted during a presentation by Second Secretary Mr Aniruddha Das.

Ms Doreen Micallef, Deputy Director at MCAST's Institute of Applied Sciences, explained how "millets help in reducing cardiovascular diseases and cancers." Moreover, millets are also planet friendly, since they can be cultivated using a zero-carbon footprint, low water consumption, and a good energy footprint.

Mr Malcolm Borg, Deputy Director at the College's Centre for Agriculture, Aquatics and Animal Sciences (CAAAS), explained how the "millet is a symbol of what agriculture should look like and what it is trying to replace", and he added that the millet, "is highly compatible with local agricultural, and local farmers should consider cultivating this grain".





Apostolic Nuncio Visits and Celebrates Mass at MCAST



MCAST welcomed His Excellency the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai Fai SDB, at its Paola campus. The theme chosen for this visit was “One Family – Nurturing a Community”.

The Nuncio was welcomed by MCAST Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja, the Chaplaincy team led by Chaplain Fr Antoine Farrugia SDB, the Staff Social Committee, and the Kunsill Studenti MCAST (KSM).

During his visit, the Nuncio toured various Institutes, met with staff, and congratulated students, wishing them the best of success in their studies. During his visit to the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET), the Nuncio blessed a chalice crafted for the occasion in the woodwork and metal workshops by the Institute’s staff.

Professor Calleja explained how, at MCAST, “we must establish a community of communication. It takes an effort to bring people and their skills together. We saw how our people came together with shared values on this occasion. Above all, we are here for the students and want to ensure strong educational formation while they are here at the College.”

With MCAST representatives, the Nuncio also visited the College’s Business Career Expo, which was being held at the time. He also visited the Institute of Community Services.



A dialogue event was held, including speakers representing College students and staff. “The dialogue provided an opportunity for participants to discuss and reflect on the identity of the College, including challenges faced by the students and staff,” explained the Chaplain.

His Excellency the Archbishop said, “As Don Bosco’s words remind us, education is a matter of the heart. The welcoming, family atmosphere at MCAST touched me. I commend the College for its inclusive and empowering approach, which places learners at the centre of all its work.”

During the dialogue, various issues were discussed, including the role of media and technology in our lives, the empowerment of women, work-life balance, and the importance of listening to the needs of students. Furthermore, diversity and equality were highlighted, as the College welcomes students from over 85 countries within its community.

MCAST students and staff had the opportunity to attend the Holy Mass on the occasion of Our Lady of Sorrows, celebrated by the Nuncio. The MCAST choir animated the liturgy.

The visit ended with a moment of prayer at the Chapel. The Nuncio’s visit served as a reflection during Lent and a focus on the Catholic Church’s role in the modern world.



SUSTAINABLE FASHION TAKES CENTRE STAGE IN “SCAMPER IT!” COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE EDWARD DE BONO INSTITUTE AND MCAST

“Scamper It!” is a three-year collaboration between the Edward De Bono Institute at the University of Malta and the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts. The project aims to enhance students’ competencies in innovative thinking skills, with a particular focus on promoting sustainability in the creative arts, especially in the field of fashion.

The collaboration provides students with a valuable opportunity to develop their innovative thinking abilities and apply them to real-world challenges. Through the project, students can gain practical experience and skills that can help them succeed in their careers while also contributing to the promotion of sustainability and ethical practices in the creative arts industry.

As an introduction to the collaboration, Dr Margaret Mangion, Director and Senior Lecturer at The Edward de Bono Institute for Creative Thinking and Innovation, led a masterclass/workshop on creative thinking for the ICA students enrolled in the Advanced Diploma in Fashion and Retail. During the workshop, Dr Mangion explained the SCAMPER technique,

a team brainstorming method used to develop or improve products or services.

To implement the technique, ICA lecturers collaborated to guide fashion students in creating and developing costume designs inspired by various fashion eras using recycled textiles and other sustainable materials. Mrs. Sharon Abela and Ms Evelyn Baluci conducted extensive research on the historical and cultural aspects of period costumes within the Historical and Cultural Studies unit, while Ms Maria Cutajar and Ms Elisha Camilleri guided students in generating garment design ideas and producing costumes as part of the Pattern Cutting unit.

The highlight of the collaboration was the presentation of the final outcomes by MCAST students to UoM students, promoting collaboration between students from both institutions through creative thinking and making.





MCAST EXPLORES OPPORTUNITIES AND COLLABORATIONS IN MOROCCAN TRADE MISSION

MCAST, together with its commercial arm MG2i - MCAST Gateway to the Industry, recently participated in Trade Malta's inaugural trade mission in Morocco. The primary objective of this mission was to offer Maltese businesses an opportunity to explore new markets, unlock potential opportunities, foster partnerships, and diversify their operations.

During the trade mission, MCAST officials, including Mr Stephen Vella, Deputy Principal for Business Development and Communications, engaged with various student recruitment agencies. Their discussions revolved around identifying collaboration opportunities that would enable MCAST to host and provide educational opportunities to a greater number of international students.

In addition to networking sessions, the MCAST team conducted presentations for stakeholders involved. These presentations highlighted the core values of the College, emphasising its focus on vocational education, apprenticeships, and industry-relevant training in various sectors such as business, finance, and maritime.

The trade delegation, led by the Hon. Dr Ian Borg, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade, comprises five entities and seventeen companies representing sectors such as education and training, construction, healthcare, advisory services, manufacturing, renewable energy, retail, and risk management.

As a leading tertiary level educational institution, MCAST offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Through its diverse curriculum, MCAST equips international students with practical skills and knowledge necessary for success in various industrial fields, preparing them for competitiveness on the global stage.

Currently, MCAST already welcomes a significant number of Moroccan students. The College aims to further strengthen its networks and increase the enrolment of international students from this region by expanding its offerings and promoting its courses within the local community.



EUROPEAN
YEAR OF
SKILLS

PROF JAMES CALL

PRINCIPAL AND CEO OF MALTA
OF ARTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



LAUNCH OF HACKATHON FOR SKILLS: FOSTERING INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION IN LARNAKA

The launch of the HackatHon. for Skills in Larnaka, Cyprus, marks a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, and various organisations including MCAST (Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology), the National Skills Council, the EUPA, the Western Regional Council, the Foundation for the Management of European Lifelong learning (IDEP), the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM), and the Cyprus Human Resources Development Authority (ANAD).

The HackatHon. aims to provide a platform for 40 young participants to showcase their innovative ideas regarding career paths in the upcoming decade, upskilling and reskilling strategies aligned with industry needs, and how educational institutions can tackle the challenges posed by skills requirements in an era of artificial intelligence and emerging internet technologies.

The Maltese delegation, comprising MCAST Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja, Executive Chairman of the National Skills Council Dr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando, Ms Amanda Cassar (Manager Transition MCAST), Mr Raymond Schembri (Mayor of Dingli), Ms Elke Sghendo (Deputy Executive of the Western Regional Council), and Ritianne Giorgino (Executive Secretary Siggiewi Local Council), attended the event in Cyprus.

A competition will soon be launched in Malta to select 20 participants aged between 18 and 30. These individuals will be divided into four groups, competing to develop the best ideas related to reskilling, upskilling, and the acquisition of new skills for future jobs. Winners will be rewarded, and the face-to-face competition will take place at MCAST's Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) in November 2023.

Professor Calleja, in his speech, emphasised the significance of providing training that addresses both present and future job requirements. He highlighted the role of training institutions in delivering practical and relevant practices that enhance employability among young and experienced individuals, while acknowledging that technology holds a superior position in disseminating knowledge. Professor Calleja stressed the need for engaging young people in a dialogue to understand their perspectives on education and training, which lead to the acquisition of applicable skills.

The event also featured keynote addresses by Dr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando and Elke Sghendo, followed by a panel discussion involving their Cypriot counterparts, focusing on skills for the jobs of the future.



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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) REVOLUTIONISES HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a transformative force in higher education (HE), reshaping policies and practices across educational institutions. On 1st June 2023, MCAST organised a workshop focusing on the challenges and opportunities of AI within the context of Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) assessments.

During the workshop, MCAST's management team and Professor Alexiei Dingli delved into the impact of AI tools on vocational education. They discussed the need for a shift in the assessment approach to effectively capture the learning that takes place. Notable participants included the Principal, Deputy Principals, Institute Directors, Institute Deputy Directors, Director of Education and Training Programmes, Director of Quality Assurance, Applied Research and Innovation Centre, and the Registrar's Office.

In his intervention, MCAST's Principal and CEO, Professor Joachim James Calleja, emphasised the importance of integrating AI and humans in the future of education. He highlighted how technology can enhance accessibility, accuracy, and lifelong learning capacity.

Professor Alexiei Dingli shared the latest advancements and applications of AI, encouraging all educational institutions to incorporate AI into their teaching, learning, and assessment methods.

MCAST intends to continue this discussion and implement actions that address the ongoing developments in AI, emphasising the need for conscious and carefully planned integration. The seminar underscored the necessity to reconsider policies and practices as AI drives change in education. It is imperative for management and staff at higher education institutes (HEIs) to expand their knowledge and awareness of AI developments to keep pace with the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

(HEIs) should proactively stay informed about AI developments, including notable projects such as OpenAI's ChatGPT (text-based AI), DALL-E (image-based AI), and Whisper (voice-based AI). Monitoring these advancements will be crucial for anticipating the future of AI in education.

AGHŻEL JOB FIL-



MALTA FILM COMMISSION EMPOWERS MCAST STUDENTS WITH 'MALTA CREATE' SHORT FILM FUND

The Malta Film Commission (MFC) recently organised an informative event at MCAST to enlighten students about the vibrant local film industry and introduce the details of the 'Malta Create' initiative. This short film fund aims to empower the Maltese film industry by providing necessary resources.

During the event, representatives from the Malta Film Commission briefed students about the scheme, which was launched as part of the Mediterranean Film Festival, and encouraged them to participate. The selected candidates will receive a fund of 100,000 euros to produce a 15-minute professional short film. In addition to the financial support, the chosen candidates will also receive guidance and training from industry experts to enhance their filmmaking skills.

Professor Joachim James Calleja, MCAST's Principal and CEO, expressed his enthusiasm for the initiative, stating, "At MCAST, we strongly advocate for training and industry practice. We provide apprenticeships and work-based learning. This initiative presents a remarkable opportunity for MCAST students pursuing film-related courses to explore the industry, gain practical skills, and acquire knowledge that will facilitate their successful careers in this sector."

MCAST's Institute of Creative Arts (ICA) offers a diverse range of courses designed to prepare students for careers in the film industry. These courses span from advanced diplomas to bachelor degrees, providing comprehensive training and expertise.

Malta Film commissioner Johann Grech highlighted the commission's commitment to nurturing talent, promoting creativity, and establishing pathways for emerging filmmakers to enter the industry.

Hon. Dr Clifton Grima, Minister for Education Sport, Youth, Research, and Innovation, and Hon. Clayton Bartolo, Minister for Tourism, were present for the event and demonstrated the government's support for the initiative.



**Hairdressing
Students
Showcase
Creative Works
at 'Misfits'
Exhibition**



On May 17, 2023, students pursuing hairdressing courses at the Institute of Community Services (ICS) organised a hairdressing exhibition titled 'Misfits'. The exhibition served as a platform for students to display their creative expressions and cultural interpretations through their hairdressing works.

The event featured the artistic endeavours of students enrolled in the Advanced Diploma in Hairdressing programme. Through their creations, the students conveyed messages and stories to the audience, showcasing their ability to experiment with diverse hairdressing looks.

Professor Joachim James Calleja, the Principal and CEO of MCAST, emphasised the significance of such activities, apprenticeships, and networking opportunities with industry professionals in preparing MCAST students to excel in their chosen fields upon completing their studies.

Under the guidance of their lecturers, the students worked on the project for three months, handling various tasks from conceptualisation to execution. They developed mood

boards, refined their ideas, and ultimately presented their hairstyling looks during the show. The process involved thorough research on current hairdressing trends, in-depth creative discussions, and practical application.

Ms Ann Marie Cassar, the Director of the Institute of Community Services, highlighted the importance of collaboration with industry leaders in vocational education and training (VET). The hairdressing exhibition exemplified the culmination of such collaborations, allowing students to showcase their creativity and achievements resulting from their apprenticeship experiences throughout the course.

The exhibition attracted a diverse audience, including industry partners, salon owners, lecturers, and prospective students. Additionally, three hairdressing workshops, featuring student participation and industry involvement, were organised during the event. These workshops provided valuable learning opportunities for students to interact, ask questions, and gain insights into the hairdressing industry.



#MCASTmyfuture



MCAST Hosts Ghanaian Delegation on Campus

On May 19, 2023, MCAST had the honour of hosting a delegation from Ghana as part of a trade mission, facilitated by Trade Malta. The event was attended by Hon. Micheal Bassfi Okyere, Deputy Minister for Ghanaian Trade and Industry, H.E. Barbara Aboukor Benisa, Ghana High Commissioner, and Anton Buttigieg, CEO of Trade Malta.

Mr Stephen Vella, Deputy Principal for Business Development and Communications at MCAST, and Mr Ronald Curmi, Deputy Principal for Vocational and Professional Education and Training, warmly welcomed the Ghanaian delegation. Together with MCAST representatives, the delegation was given a tour of the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) facilities. Additionally, Director Mr Stephen Sammut delivered a presentation on the courses offered at the Institute of Engineering and Transport.

In his opening speech, Mr Stephen Vella, Deputy Principal, stated, "MCAST provides an immersive learning environment that connects international students to the real world. The College offers a diverse range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of study, aiming to equip all students with the skills and knowledge required for success in the industry." During the visit, the Ghanaian delegation had the opportunity to explore the MCAST Library and the new state-of-the-art MRC Building. They were also shown ongoing projects on campus, including the construction work on the new IICT Building.



MCAST Students Participate in Water Management Hackathon

The MCAST Institute of Applied Sciences (IAS) collaborated with the Energy and Water Agency (EWA) and the University of Malta (UoM) to organise a hackathon with the theme, 'Connecting the Drops – Circular Water Management for Urban Greening'.

The hackathon was led by two Dutch experts who work with the 'POVE Water' project, an Erasmus+ project that the College is participating in.

The hackathon, spread over a day and a half, involved an interactive workshop for students. MCAST students following Advanced Diplomas and Degrees in Environmental Sustainability, Horticulture, Chemical Technology, Environmental Health, and Sustainable Technologies at the Institute of Applied Sciences participated in the hackathon.

The event provided the perfect opportunity for students and recent graduates to meet and learn from individuals working for various government agencies within the water and urban greening sectors. Activities held during the event helped students explore being part of a multidisciplinary team working on a practical challenge to integrate rainwater harvesting and greywater reuse for urban greening.

During the hackathon, participants were divided into groups, composed of students with different academic backgrounds, and presented with a challenge, for which they needed to provide solutions and, eventually, pitch their ideas before a panel of judges.





MG2i Launches New Prospectus: Over 300 Part-Time Courses for Skills Development

The MCAST Gateway to Industry (MG2i), the commercial arm of the College, has unveiled its latest prospectus featuring an extensive selection of part-time courses. With more than 300 offerings ranging from short to accredited programmes, including degrees and master's degree programmes, the prospectus caters to a wide range of competencies and skills. The courses cover diverse fields such as agriculture, construction, maritime, aviation, IT, and more.

The prospectus introduces new and tailor-made graduate and postgraduate courses that align with Malta's social, economic, and industrial landscape. Areas of focus include information technology and systems, logistics management, and sports science. MCAST offers flexible learning options, including practical sessions, face-to-face lectures, and blended learning formats.

The Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research, and Innovation, Hon. Dr Clifton Grima, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "The variety of courses available in this part-time offering is truly inspiring, providing people with opportunities to build new skills, gain qualifications, explore new passions, or develop hobbies. We believe in creating a lifelong learning culture and ensuring that flexible learning is accessible to all."

Most courses in the prospectus are fully accredited according to the Malta Qualifications Framework. Designed to accommodate adults with work and family commitments, the part-time courses offer convenience. They enable individuals to acquire new skills and qualifications for career progression, job transitions, or personal interest exploration.

Professor Joachim James Calleja, MCAST Principal and CEO, emphasised the College's commitment to empowering individuals through learning. He stated, "At MCAST, we believe

in unlocking the potential of every individual, both in education and throughout their lives. Gaining new skills and upskilling benefits individuals, employers, the economy, and society as a whole. This new prospectus addresses the needs of thousands of adults who seek part-time and flexible learning opportunities."

During the launch event, MCAST Deputy Principal Stephen Vella highlighted the diverse pathways available to learners through the wide array of part-time courses. He emphasised MCAST's distinctive features, including a practice-based approach, modern facilities, and strong industry partnerships.

The prospectus also offers a wide range of hobby courses for individuals of all ages, promoting lifelong learning. These courses encompass various trades, arts and crafts, as well as professional fields such as welding, electronics, automotive maintenance, aviation, and construction.





MCAST's Institute of Community Services Empowers Childcare Professionals at 'Connections at Heart' Seminar

On 3rd May 2023, MCAST's Institute of Community Services (ICS) organised a highly informative seminar catering to childcare professionals. Themed 'Connections at Heart', the event revolved around the concept of 'professional love', developed by esteemed international researcher Dr Jools Page, who also delivered a keynote speech.

The seminar primarily focused on enhancing the local Early Years practice within childcare centres catering to children aged 0 to 3. It included a comprehensive presentation outlining how MCAST prepares students enrolled in the Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning, and Development programme to excel as skilled professionals in this field. Additionally, the seminar showcased research conducted by students and staff, further enriching the knowledge exchange within this arena.

This gathering served as an invaluable platform to highlight MCAST's commitment to equipping students for successful careers in the childcare industry. It fostered open communication and discussions around work-based placements and current best practices.

Professor Joachim James Calleja, Principal and CEO, inaugurated the seminar by emphasising the pivotal role played by the Institute of Community Services in training and preparing future professionals in the Early Education sector.

He stated, "Investing in quality early childhood education is imperative, as the early years provide a crucial window of opportunity for learners and pave the way for a lifelong learning culture."

Ms Ann Marie Cassar, Director of the Institute of Community Services, underscored the seminar's significance in enhancing the participants' understanding of current childcare practices. She expressed her satisfaction, stating, "This seminar consolidated our knowledge of prevailing childcare practices and ensured that our learners are well-prepared to embrace the latest trends in childcare centres."

Attendees provided positive feedback on the courses and training offered by MCAST, lauding their effectiveness. The discussions during the seminar delved into pertinent issues within the childcare sector, explored the latest policies, and aimed to establish effective communication channels between childcare professionals and educators. The collective goal was to continually improve and shape the future of early childhood education.

By organising this seminar, MCAST's Institute of Community Services demonstrated its commitment to advancing the childcare profession and fostering an environment of continuous learning and growth.



Graduation Celebration: Fisheries Management Awards at MCAST

MCAST recently held an award ceremony to honour the accomplishments of 21 graduates from the Centre of Agriculture, Aquatics, and Animal Sciences (CAAAS). These graduates successfully completed a specialised course tailored for Fisheries Trainee Officers and were presented with Level 3 certificates in Fisheries Management and Administration.

Spanning a period of six months, the course aimed to enhance the skill set of Fisheries Trainee Officers, equipping them with the necessary expertise for their daily operations in collaboration with fishers. The ceremony was graced by the presence of Anton Refalo, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries, and Animal Rights, who expressed the government's commitment to both education and the fisheries sector. He emphasised the government's initiatives to support the growth of the sector and its workforce.

Alicia Bugeja, Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Animal Welfare, emphasised the pivotal role of education in driving social and economic progress in the country. She commended the graduates for their potential to contribute to the advancement of this vital sector in terms of economy, culture, and social development.

Professor Joachim James Calleja, Principal and CEO of MCAST, highlighted the institution's strong belief in upskilling

and continuous learning within the agricultural and fisheries industries. He underscored the importance of such skills in regulated sectors, both at the European Union level and by other governing bodies. Professor Calleja encouraged the graduates to embark on a lifelong learning journey, taking advantage of the unique courses offered by MCAST's Centre of Agriculture.

Director for Fisheries, Gilbert Balzan, congratulated the graduates for their determination and dedication in successfully completing the course. He acknowledged their existing work experience and emphasised the course's role in strengthening essential skills such as communication, technology utilisation, data collection, law enforcement, and management. Participants also gained hands-on experience through laboratory training, enabling them to analyse various aquatic species.

The award ceremony served as an occasion to recognise the achievements of these graduates and reaffirm MCAST's commitment to supporting the growth and professional development of individuals within the fisheries sector. Their knowledge and skills will undoubtedly contribute to informed decision-making and shape a prosperous future for the country.



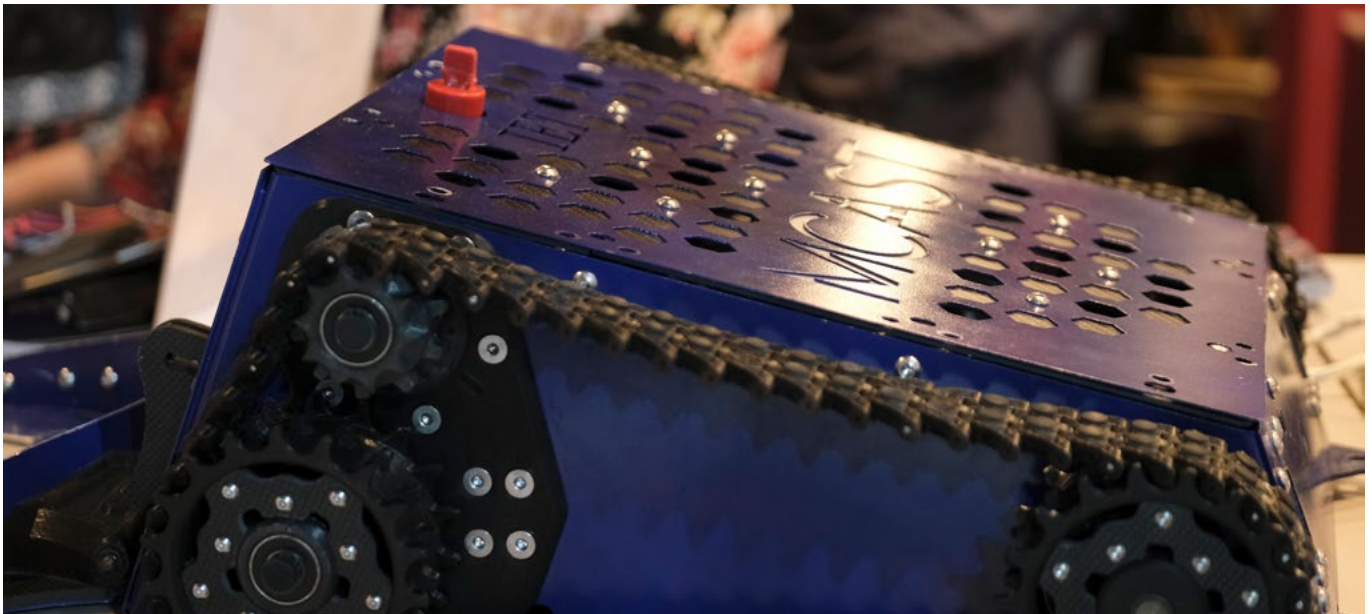
MCAST Showcases Digital Innovations at Public Service Expo 2023

MCAST actively participated in the Public Service Expo 2023 held from 10th to 12th May 2023. This influential event brought together various public administrations under one roof, providing an ideal platform for MCAST to share information about their cutting-edge digital innovation initiatives. Innovation serves as a driving force for the College, enabling them to achieve their strategic objectives while enhancing the student learning process and exploring new directions with innovative methodologies.

During the Expo, MCAST proudly exhibited its remarkable robotics and engineering projects. Knowledgeable staff and lecturers engaged with visitors, providing valuable insights into the College's contributions within this sector. The showcase included the award-winning Institute for Engineering and Transport Alpha Beetle robot, which emerged victorious in the Robotics International Competition of 2022.

This annual Expo presented an exceptional opportunity for the public to witness the diverse range of services offered. It provided an immersive experience, shedding light on the remarkable work accomplished across different public service sectors. Additionally, the event served as a valuable networking opportunity for public service employees, enabling them to connect with peers and industry leaders. They gained valuable knowledge, fostering positive change and empowering them to achieve their professional goals.

Throughout the three-day event, engaging stands, informative demos, spontaneous workshops, and interactive activities were organised. The primary focus remained on highlighting the latest trends, technologies, and methodologies in the field of Public Administration.





MCAST Strengthens Collaboration with Career Guidance Teachers in Seminar

MCAST recently hosted a seminar on its campus in Paola, dedicated to career guidance teachers. The event aimed to foster and reinforce the ongoing collaboration between the College and education professionals from Church, State, and Independent schools.

Approximately 75 guidance teachers, career advisers, and PSCD (Personal, Social, and Career Development) teachers attended the seminar organised by MCAST's Outreach and Student Affairs Department. This gathering served as a follow-up to a previous event held in December, where industry partners had the opportunity to address the audience and provide valuable insights into MCAST students and the experiential aspect of vocational education.

During the seminar, Professor Joachim James Calleja, MCAST's Principal and CEO, emphasised the pivotal role of vocational education and training in today's labour market. He underscored the relevance of vocational careers and

highlighted MCAST's responsibility in equipping students with the essential skills and industry connections needed for success.

The seminar featured two panels composed of representatives from industry partners engaging in discussions on various themes. These topics encompassed the value of apprenticeship programmes, the strong bond between MCAST and industry partners, the range of courses available at the College, and the application process.

The primary objective of the event was to provide guidance teachers with up-to-date information about studying at MCAST, including the diverse range of courses offered and the state-of-the-art campus facilities. Equipped with this knowledge, the teachers would be empowered to effectively guide their students in making informed decisions regarding their educational paths after completing their secondary education.





MCAST ICA Festival

The 7th edition of the MCAST ICA Festival took place between July 6th and July 30th, 2023, at Spazju Kreattiv in Valletta. This year's festival drew inspiration from the adventurous spirit of 'Don Quixote', embodying the values of creativity, authenticity, and imagination. With the theme 'Dare to Be Quixotic', the festival aims to encourage all creative individuals to embrace their expressive and eccentric sides and freely express themselves.

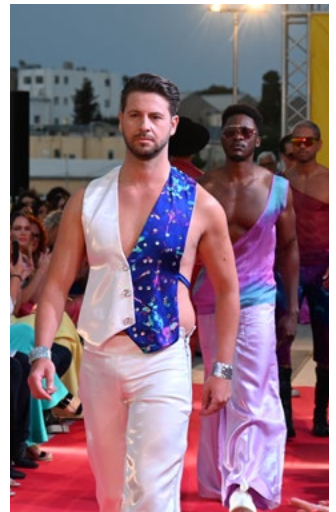
During the festival, a diverse range of creative works and final-year dissertations by students pursuing Bachelor of Arts (Honours) courses at MCAST's Institute for the Creative Arts (ICA) were showcased. Projects included various creative disciplines, including creative media production, fashion, fine arts, game art, visual design, graphic design, interactive media, journalism, performing arts, photography, product design and spatial design.

This annual event serves as a platform for the general public to discover the remarkable work produced by MCAST students and witness how vocational education and training prepare them professionally for the industry.

Mr Rupert Cefai, Chairman of Fondazzjoni Kreattività, emphasized the significance of the festival, stating, "This event holds immense importance as it provides a valuable platform for MCAST students to exhibit their hard work and individual talents. It allows them to gain exposure among stakeholders in the creative industry and the local arts and design community."

Furthermore, the festival provides an excellent opportunity for current MCAST students to showcase their work and connect with industry professionals from diverse creative sectors.

Dr Martina Caruana, Director for the Institute of Creative Arts (ICA), explained, "Don Quixote's qualities transcend those of the creative field. He possessed a strong sense of duty, determination, conviction, and justice. An idealist and motivator of change, he was never discouraged by the challenges and mishaps he encountered on his chosen journey. Many of these qualities are collectively embodied in the students' work."









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