

THE **WELLBEING** **EDITION**

ISSUE 72

MCCAST **LINK**

**WELL-
BEING**
THROUGH THE
PERFORMING ARTS



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MCASTLINK ISSUE 72

Welcome to this feature-packed edition of our magazine, dedicated to the theme of wellbeing. The importance of wellbeing—both personal and collective—has never been more evident. Our aim with this edition is to shine a light on the many ways MCAST is committed to supporting the holistic wellbeing of our students and staff, as well as to inspire our community to prioritise self-care and mutual support.

Within these pages, you will find an overview of the services offered by the College to nurture student wellbeing. We highlight the work of the Wellbeing Centre, a hub of support and guidance, alongside the Student Liaison Office, which plays a crucial role in assisting our most vulnerable students. Every individual deserves to feel safe and supported throughout their academic journey.

This edition features a range of articles that explore wellbeing from multiple perspectives. Discover how art can be a pathway to healing and self-expression, how spirituality can offer comfort and resilience, and how the performing arts and drama can foster confidence and emotional growth. We also delve into the importance of equality and inclusion, the restorative power of trekking in nature as well as the therapeutic benefits of animal-assisted activities.

We do not shy away from addressing the challenges to wellbeing. For instance, Stela Vladimirova Ivanova's article sheds light on the difficulties students have faced in recent months, particularly in relation to the Union directives. Such honest reflections remind us that wellbeing is a journey, sometimes marked by obstacles that require collective understanding.

Various staff have also contributed articles, sharing how wellbeing can be incorporated in the workplace. Through the efforts of the Corporate Social Responsibility team and the MCAST Social Committee, several activities have been organised to promote relaxation and connection among employees. The sense of community and the friendships that flourish within our institution are highlighted as essential pillars of wellbeing.

There is always more to be done, and MCAST remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering a culture of wellbeing. We hope this edition not only informs but also inspires you to embrace wellbeing in all its forms—at MCAST and beyond.

EDITORIAL



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PRINCIPAL AND CEO'S MESSAGE

MR STEPHEN VELLA



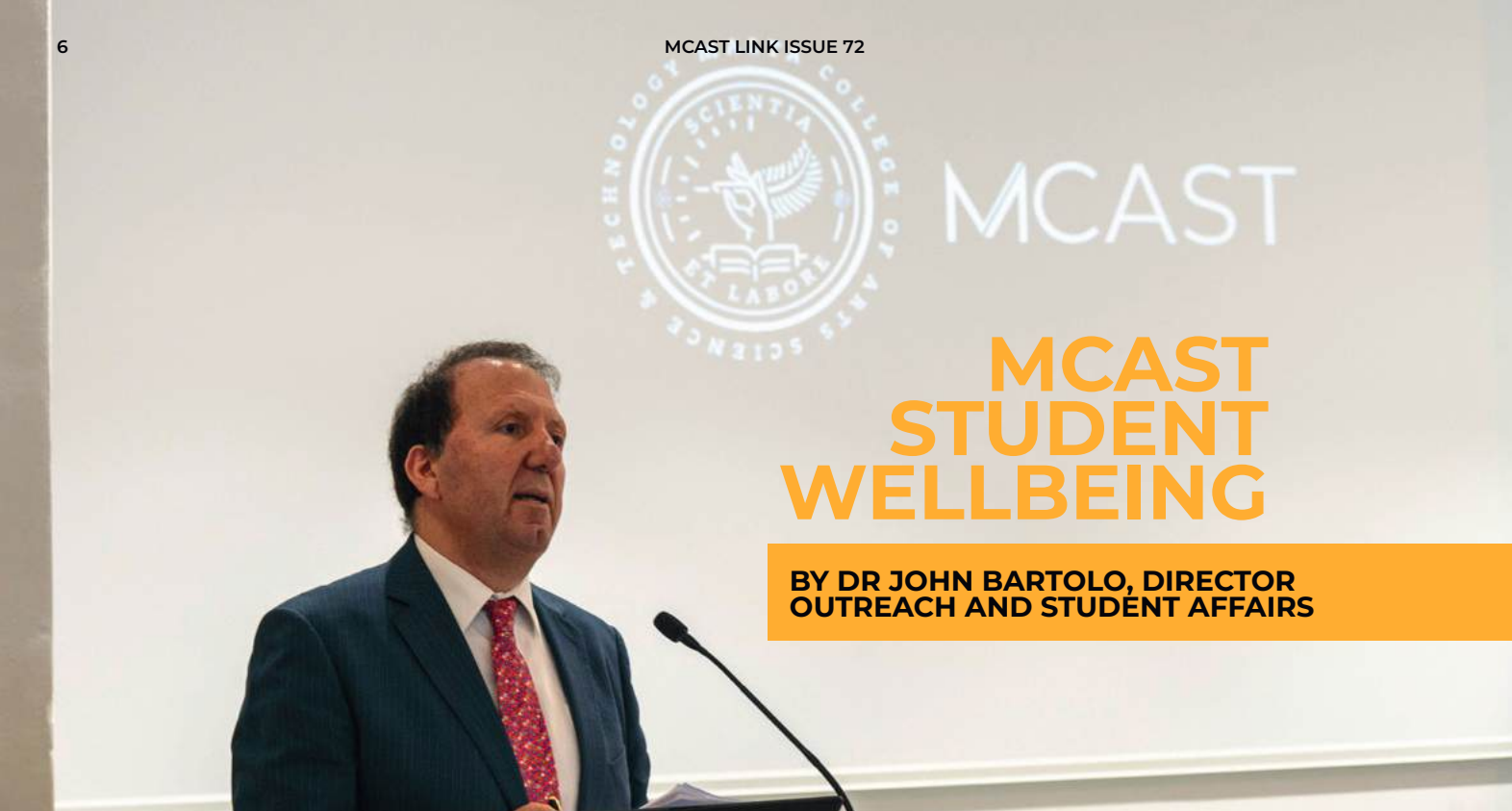
As we reflect on the experiences of the past year, we are also filled with a renewed sense of purpose and optimism. Together, we are moving forward — stronger, more connected and more aware of the importance of wellbeing in every aspect of our lives. This renewed momentum was clearly reflected with the signing of the collective agreement between MCAST and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT). This milestone reaffirms our commitment to valuing our educators and staff, whose wellbeing is essential to the success and growth of our entire College community.

One of the recent initiatives we've launched is the Youth Hub — a dedicated, welcoming space where students can relax, develop ideas, organise activities and work on projects. In today's fast-paced and often pressurised world, it's vital that young people have safe and supportive environments where they feel seen, heard and valued. The Youth Hub is more than just a physical space — it represents our commitment to creating a nurturing College community where wellbeing is prioritised.

We know that young people today are navigating complex challenges, not only in the real world but also in the digital one. From academic pressures to social expectations, and from managing mental health to making responsible choices online, the journey to adulthood has never been more layered. At our College, we are committed to supporting students holistically — by providing the right guidance, resources and opportunities for personal growth.

Wellbeing is not a one-size-fits-all concept. It includes mental, emotional, physical and social health — all of which are interconnected. As a College, we are working to embed a culture of care and resilience across everything we do.

Together, let's continue to build a community that champions kindness, encourages open conversations, and equips our young people with the tools they need to lead healthy, balanced lives.



**BY DR JOHN BARTOLO, DIRECTOR
OUTREACH AND STUDENT AFFAIRS**



The Welbeing Centre team

"On Thursday 15th May 2025, the Health Minister Jo Etienne Abela and Local Government Parliamentary Secretary Alison Zerafa Civelli announced a new initiative aimed at improving community support for people facing mental health challenges.

Described as a form of mental health first aid, the Richmond Foundation course is designed to equip participants with the knowledge to recognise signs of mental illness such as anxiety and depression and provide basic support until professional help becomes available.

The course aims to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental illness, which is often a barrier to people seeking help. Participants will be taught to identify the early signs of mental distress and how to provide appropriate support to those affected."

(Times of Malta 15 May 2025)

MCAST, with a population of over 7,000 full-time students, is a microcosm of the Maltese society. According to a study carried out at MCAST among 16- to 18-year-old students, 64.4% following level 1 to 3 courses were found to be struggling with at least one of the following: depression, stress, anxiety, eating disorders and health related quality of life (Abela C., 2022).

In higher vocational education, students face a unique blend of academic, personal, and career-related challenges, as they navigate course work, internships, job preparation and sometimes even financial issues and/or family responsibilities.

There are a variety of mental health risk factors associated with vocational college students. They may experience mild to severe depression, anxiety and stress levels. Therefore, the importance of taking the necessary proactive steps to identify, address, and nurture college students' mental well-being to mitigate the negative impacts.

In addition, different psychological intervention methods are practised by professionals according to the different psychological issues. These interventions aim to tackle the psychological challenges presented by college students in a timely manner.

Students with milder or more transient difficulties need to be encouraged to reach out. Let us avoid normalizing and labelling all negative feelings with psychiatric

terminology. The psychiatrist Derek Summerfield wrote, "To conflate normality and pathology devalues the currency of illness."

Reaching out is imperative as one need not experience distress in isolation. Additionally, early intervention is key to preventing more serious issues. Talking it out does not necessarily mean that there is something that needs to be fixed.

Self-diagnosing can be tempting, especially with the wealth of information available online, but it is important to recognize that it can backfire. Mental health issues are complex, making it difficult to assess one's own mental health. Self-diagnosis often leads to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and unnecessary anxiety. It can also delay seeking professional help, which is essential. Relying on professional advice ensures that individuals receive the support and care they need. Professional support, rather than self-diagnosing, fosters an effective and compassionate approach to mental health.

A Holistic Approach to Student Support

Mental health is something positive which we should all cherish. It is mental health difficulties or challenges that require attention and is not just about crises intervention; it is about creating an environment where students feel safe, supported, and empowered to seek help when they need it. MCAST takes a proactive and inclusive approach by offering a range of services tailored to student needs.

All services at the MCAST Wellbeing Hub are delivered with the highest level of confidentiality and professionalism. Students are encouraged to seek help without fear of stigma or judgement. Our goal is to create a supportive space where every student feels respected and valued. The services include:

- Therapy Sessions
- Addiction Related Issues
- Educational Psychology
- Nutritional Advice
- Psychiatric Services
- Sexual Health Services
- Tobacco Cessation Support.

**YOUR WELLBEING MATTERS. AND WE ARE WITH
YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY**

THROUGH IT ALL: HOW MCAST STUDENTS AND LECTURERS ALIKE DEAL WITH THE AFTERMATH OF THE DIRECTIVES AND ITS EFFECTS ON THEIR WELLBEING

BY STELA VLADIMIROVA IVANOVA

After years of meetings, directives and protests from students and lecturers, the situation at MCAST is finally reaching a resolution, but challenges remain. The Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) has reached a new Collective Agreement for MCAST lecturers, and the directives have now been lifted. Students can finally proceed with their exams and assessments and receive their marks. However, the question remains: How much is too much?

Assessments from previous semesters are being approved and uploaded as briefs and new deadlines are being assigned for numerous units. This sudden influx of work overwhelms many students and lecturers, making it challenging to manage the increased workload. One photography student at the Institute for the Creative Arts expressed, "I have to work hard juggling a bunch of units for which assessments did not take place last semester, even though we attended lectures and completed our work."

Lecturers are also feeling the pressure. One remarked, "Marks are taking a while to be submitted and verified because we have to manage not only the assignments from last semester but also teach new material and lectures for this semester."

In times like these, it's essential to prioritise our wellbeing and show kindness to ourselves and each other. This theme resonates throughout this new issue of the MCASTlink. Through various interviews with students and lecturers, we aim to explore how the current workload impacts everyone involved and to gain a deeper understanding of the situation.



Many students have experienced postponed assessments that are now all scheduled within a few short weeks until the end of the term. This includes assignments from last semester, which now overlap with second-semester units, significantly intensifying the workload and stress. One student shared, "With all this work, it is difficult to be mindful and maintain a good work-life balance. There's always a deadline looming, even during moments of rest, as there's always something left unfinished."

Despite the challenges, many students remain hopeful. One final-year student stated, "It will all be worth it. We have worked hard on our studies and will be rewarded when we graduate."

Ultimately, we will navigate through this difficult time. As we approach the end of the term and the beginning of summer, relief is on the horizon. With the new Collective Agreement in place for the next semester, working conditions for lecturers will improve, and the student workload will be more manageable. Without the directives, timely feedback and assessments will become the norm again.

We are gradually emerging from this challenging phase, and with each assignment completed and graded, we are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. It is crucial to remember why we are enduring this phase and to stay motivated for a better tomorrow. A student noted, "The sheer volume of assignments we have, especially with many of us on work placements in the second semester, is challenging, but it makes me even more motivated for summer and graduation. I want to work hard and succeed to enjoy the fruits of my labour."

MCAST'S ROLE IN THE EU4DUAL GRAND CHALLENGE

BY SEFORA BORG, PROJECT MANAGER -
EU4DUAL UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE

The EU4Dual Erasmus+ project has reached a significant milestone, entering its third year of implementation with momentum and purpose. Building on the progress made under Grand Challenge 1: The Future of Work, and Grand Challenge 2: Green Economy, the project now shifts its focus to Grand Challenge 3: Healthy Living—an area that resonates strongly with current global priorities and the evolving role of education in promoting wellbeing.



This year, Work Package 3 takes centre stage in developing solutions and collaborative actions around the theme of healthy living. At its core, this Grand Challenge aims to harness innovation, research and community outreach to enhance quality of life, increase longevity and promote happiness. Its scope is both broad and impactful, touching on a range of crucial topics including health promotion, disease prevention, personalised nutrition, digital health technologies such as wellness apps, and designing healthier work and learning environments.

MCAST is proud to be playing an active role in this phase of the project. Several academic staff members are contributing to the design and development of the EU4Dual Joint Dual Master Programme on Healthy Living. This unique educational initiative brings together expertise from various partner institutions across Europe to create a dynamic, interdisciplinary curriculum focused on sustainable wellbeing and lifelong health. The programme will equip students with the skills and knowledge to become change-makers in their communities and professions, bridging the gap between health sciences, social innovation and applied research.



In addition to academic contributions, MCAST will also be hosting an International Staff Week later this year, jointly organised by the Erasmus+ Office and the Mobility Office. This event will welcome faculty and administrative staff from EU4Dual partner institutions to the MCAST Campus, offering a platform to exchange experiences, best practices, and innovative approaches to healthy living. Sessions will cover topics such as mental wellbeing in academic settings, the use of digital tools for health promotion, and strategies for creating healthier workplaces for students and staff alike.

This collaborative effort highlights MCAST's ongoing commitment to not only academic excellence but also to the wellbeing of its community. By actively participating in the Healthy Living challenge, the College reinforces its dedication to nurturing environments that support

both personal and professional growth. Furthermore, it provides a valuable opportunity to showcase Malta's contributions in areas such as preventive healthcare, nutrition education and holistic wellness practices.

As the EU4Dual project continues to evolve, MCAST looks forward to strengthening its role in shaping a future where wellbeing is central to education, work, and everyday life. Through shared knowledge, innovative teaching, and a strong sense of community, the Grand Challenge on Healthy Living has the potential to leave a lasting impact—both within the EU4Dual consortium and beyond.



WHEN RESEARCH AND WELLBEING MERGE

BY DR LORNA BONNICI WEST,
DIRECTOR RESEARCH AND
INNOVATION, APPLIED RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION CENTRE, MCAST

In a world where higher education and research are constantly evolving, sustainable innovation begins with individual development. The Applied Research and Innovation Department (ARIC) at MCAST embraces the drive to thrive—a word that reflects not only the Centre's academic ambitions but its deep commitment to wellbeing.



To thrive in research and innovation is to cultivate an ecosystem where ideas are not only born but nurtured. However, research can be demanding. Deadlines are often tight, challenges can be numerous, and innovation does not always follow a linear path. Senior Research Officers at ARIC support staff with their need to explore complex questions and engage in meaningful research. By helping others thrive, Senior Research Officers also provide their support by empowering everyone to step into research with confidence—supported by structured opportunities, and a strong interdisciplinary network, such as the newly established Urban Mobility Research Group. Through this, the team acknowledges not only the outcomes but also the processes of learning and personal growth, recognising that these developments require time.

To thrive and maintain wellbeing are also at the centre of ARIC's strategic collaborations, intended to develop new research ideas addressing health and wellbeing. A key partnership involves MCAST's ARIC, the Institute of Applied Science and the Institute of Community Services, alongside Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland. Supported by Xjenza Malta's Research Networking Scheme (RNS-2024-015), this collaboration gave rise to a project titled 'Health and well-being nexus: bridging gaps for innovation and sustainability'. During this project, academics and management from both entities are working on a systematic review about educational interventions in relation to medication safety as well as a proposal for Citizens, Equality, Rights and Value Programme (CERV) funding.

Dr Lorna Bonnici West and Dr Judita Tomaskinova, Director and Deputy Director respectively of Research and Innovation and, Ms Paula Grech Bonnici, Director of the Institute of Community Services, had a two-day visit at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The visit, funded through Xjenza Malta as part of this collaboration project, was dedicated to foster knowledge sharing and establish relationships in the crucial field of health and wellbeing. The MCAST team brainstormed potential projects in the field of wellbeing, with further work aimed at keeping up the momentum during a two-day visit in Malta by Dr Sari Heikkinen and Dr Birgitta Tetri.

Aligning with Malta's Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021–2027, the 'health and wellbeing' pillar has also been given importance in this year's Research Fellowship Scheme call. This research call is launched by the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR), in consultation with MCAST and the Malta Chamber of SMEs.

As we move forward, the aspiration to thrive remains both our vision and our value. ARIC ensures that to thrive is not just a goal, but a continuous and sustainable outcome of its work.





**BY SANDRA CORTIS,
CHAIRPERSON MCAST
SOCIAL COMMITTEE**



At MCAST, we do not just share a workplace—we share a community. As Chairperson of the MCAST Staff Social Committee, I have had the privilege of witnessing how small moments of connection can lead to lasting impact. Whether it is sharing a coffee, enjoying dinner together, simply laughing together at an event, or at reflection time during spiritual celebrations, these moments contribute directly to our wellbeing and sense of belonging.

In today's demanding work culture, prioritising wellbeing is not optional—it is essential. Through the Social Committee, our goal is to create a space where colleagues can meet not only as professionals, but as people—people who support each other, learn from one another, and grow together.

A celebration of diversity which leads to a community

MCAST is a space where individuals with unique backgrounds, aspirations and talents come together. We are autonomous human beings, with the ability to produce something better, together, and human beings who thrive on connection. When we collaborate beyond our professional roles, we can build something even greater: a healthy, vibrant community.

As the MCAST Staff Social Committee, our mission is to create opportunities that allow staff to come together in meaningful, engaging and joyful ways. We aim to go beyond the formal and academic roles, and instead shine a light on the human side of our College—the side where relationships, creativity and personal growth flourish. To know someone on a personal level is different, yet complementary, to knowing them on a professional level.

The MCAST Staff Social Committee is made up of staff members who are passionate about creating a more connected workplace. Through our initiatives, we:

- Encourage staff from all departments and institutes to engage with one another.
- Create informal spaces where people can interact, relax, and have fun.
- Support wellbeing by promoting positive experiences and human connection.

We believe that a sense of belonging and collegiality is essential to both personal wellbeing and professional success.

This team spirit between members and the success of every event is due to the collaboration and input of different staff members during the planning, the preparation and on the day of the event.

Is there a need for the MCAST Social Committee?

In today's fast-paced, demanding work environments, wellbeing is not a luxury—it is a necessity. A connected community is a resilient one. Through our activities, we aim to:

- Reduce stress by offering relaxing social moments in the workday.
- Foster collaboration and understanding across departments.
- Build a culture of inclusion, empathy, and mutual respect.



Our Guiding Principles

- Promote positivity and mutual respect
- Encourage involvement, wellbeing and inclusivity
- Support staff through social interaction
- Foster creativity and teamwork
- Build trust and collegiality
- Celebrate diversity and individuality
- Emphasise clear, open communication
- Strengthen professional relationships in a human context.

I invite every staff member—across all institutes and departments—to get involved, whether by participating, planning or just cheering us on. Together, we can continue to build a culture that values not just what we do, but how we do it.

Let us keep creating joy, connection, and community. Come and grow with us.

The MCAST Staff Social Committee can be contacted on socialcommittee@mcast.edu.mt



ADVANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM THE CONFERENCE OF CHILDHOOD, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

BY DR SHIRLEY ANN GAUCI, SENIOR LECTURER AT THE INSTITUTE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

Dr Shirley Ann Gauci had the privilege of attending and presenting at the Conference of Childhood, Education and Society (Conference CES), held at Istanbul Kültür University, Istanbul, Turkey.

This esteemed international conference served as a dynamic forum for academics, scholars, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to engage in critical discussions centred around childhood, education and society. The Conference CES and its affiliated Journal of Childhood, Education and Society (JCES) strive to play a pivotal role in advancing the understanding of early childhood education, child development, family studies and early childhood special education from birth through to eight years of age.

The conference brought together researchers from 29 countries, showcasing a diverse range of perspectives and innovative research. It was within this vibrant academic environment that Dr Gauci, alongside Dr Josephine Deguara from the University of Malta (UoM), co-presented the paper entitled 'Exploring Educators' Perceptions and the Position of Children in their Understanding of an Emergent Curriculum: Children's Agency in Pedagogical Decision-Making'.

Exploring Educators' Perceptions and Children's Agency

The paper, which is in its concluding stages, delves into how educators position children within the framework of an emergent curriculum in Maltese kindergarten schools. It underscores the importance of recognising and nurturing children's agency to foster a more inclusive and responsive educational environment.

This research is part of the broader England-Malta Early Childhood Collaborative Project, an initiative that aims to address early years issues, concepts, and realities in both England and Malta.

The England-Malta Early Childhood Collaborative Project is a unique research initiative established in January 2022. It brings together three academics from different institutions: Dr Liz Chesworth (UoS), Dr Josephine Deguara (UoM), and Dr Shirley Ann Gauci (MCAST). Their common research interest in early childhood education and care has been the driving force behind this collaboration. They conduct small-scale research that addresses early years issues while identifying commonalities and differences between the early years' agendas, policies, and practices of England and Malta.

The England-Malta Early Childhood Collaborative Project is funded, providing the necessary resources to explore critical issues in early childhood education. The team is currently working on additional papers focusing on curriculum reform in Malta. These forthcoming publications aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about best practices in early childhood education and provide evidence-based recommendations.

Participating in the Conference of Childhood, Education and Society was an enriching experience that highlighted the importance of international collaboration in advancing early childhood education. The presentation on educators' perceptions and children's agency in an emergent curriculum framework was well received, sparking engaging discussions and valuable feedback from peers. As the team continues their collaborative efforts, they remain committed to contributing to the field of early childhood education through rigorous research and thoughtful dialogue.

For those interested in further exploring their work, the team invites readers to engage with their blogs and publications available through the England-Malta Early Childhood Collaborative Project. Together, they strive to make meaningful contributions to the understanding and practice of early childhood education in both Malta and England.



POSTURE AND PERSPECTIVE: AN ERASMUS+ EXPERIENCE IN TARNOW

BY ENEIDA HOXHA, MCAST STUDENT

The BIP Erasmus+ experience in Tarnow, Poland, proved to be an enriching and transformative journey for all involved. Hosted by the University of Tarnow, this one-week programme brought together students and academic staff from five different institutions—representing Hungary, Malta, two universities from Portugal, and the host country, Poland. At the heart of this international collaboration was the central theme: Body Posture—a topic deeply relevant to health, wellness and physical education.

Throughout the week, participants delved into the science and significance of body posture through an engaging blend of lectures, workshops and interactive sessions. These activities offered a holistic understanding of posture—not just from an anatomical or biomechanical standpoint, but also in terms of its implications on mental wellbeing, daily functioning and quality of life. From practical demonstrations to collaborative group work, the programme succeeded in creating an experiential learning environment that was as educational as it was inspiring.

What set this Erasmus experience apart was the dynamic cultural exchange it fostered. Students and lecturers had the opportunity to interact with peers from various countries and academic disciplines, creating a vibrant space for the sharing of ideas, methodologies and best practices. This intercultural dialogue enriched the academic content, while also cultivating mutual respect and a deeper appreciation of diverse perspectives on wellbeing.

Beyond the academic dimension, the social and personal growth aspects were equally profound. Informal networking, social events and group activities enabled participants to form genuine connections—many of which will likely evolve into long-lasting friendships and professional collaborations. The warm hospitality of the University of Tarnow and the shared experience of learning in a new environment added to the sense of community and belonging that defined the week.

Such opportunities for international exposure are invaluable. They not only reinforce academic learning but also support students in developing soft skills like communication, adaptability, empathy, and teamwork—all of which are essential in today's interconnected world. Importantly, initiatives like BIP Erasmus+ also align closely with the broader theme of wellbeing: encouraging self-awareness, promoting healthy habits, and fostering inclusive learning spaces where students can thrive.

The Tarnow experience served as a reminder that wellbeing is multidimensional—it spans physical health, mental resilience, social connection and continuous personal development. Through the focused lens of body posture, this programme managed to touch on all these elements, making it a truly holistic and impactful Erasmus+ experience.



PROMOTING EQUALITY AT MCAST

BY EDEL CASSAR,
DIRECTOR STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

#MCAST

EQUALITY IS NOT EXTRA – IT IS ESSENTIAL

At MCAST, equality is more than just a principle: it is an essential pillar supporting the wellbeing and success of both students and staff. By fostering a culture built on equal opportunities, inclusion and respect, MCAST is actively shaping an environment where every individual is empowered to reach their full potential, regardless of gender, background or ability.

Equality plays a fundamental role in promoting wellbeing within the College community. When individuals feel accepted, valued, and respected, their mental health improves, academic and professional engagement increases, and the overall College experience becomes more fulfilling and positive. Recognising this, MCAST has embedded equality at the heart of its mission, implementing various initiatives that reflect a deep commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Current Equality Initiatives at MCAST

MCAST has taken important steps to promote equality and safeguard the rights and dignity of everyone within the College. These initiatives include:

- **Comprehensive Equality Policies:** The College has formalised its commitment through robust policies and strategic plans that serve as a roadmap for equality. These policies outline measures to combat discrimination and ensure inclusivity in academic programmes, hiring practices, and day-to-day operations.
- **The MCAST Equality Consultative Committee:** A dedicated group of people who oversee the implementation and monitoring of equality-related goals. This group acts as a key driver of awareness and progress, ensuring that the College's policies are translated into meaningful action.
- **Gender Equality Progress:** Between 2017 and 2023, MCAST recorded a steady increase in the proportion of female students, rising from 41% to 44%. This positive trend reflects targeted efforts to break down gender barriers in traditionally male-dominated areas of vocational and technical education.
- **Inclusive Language Guidebook:** To promote a culture of inclusivity in both teaching and communication, MCAST's Equality Consultative Committee published a guide on gender-inclusive language. The guide

aims to encourage staff and students to adopt language that reflects respect, neutrality, and awareness of diversity.

- **Zero-Tolerance Policy:** The College enforces a clear zero-tolerance policy on discrimination, harassment, and bullying. This creates a secure environment where students and staff can work, learn, and grow without fear of prejudice or mistreatment.

How Equality Enhances Wellbeing

Inclusive educational environments play a pivotal role in enhancing students' mental health, fostering stronger social relationships, and improving academic performance. Impaired mental health status in the first semester significantly predicts an increased risk of poor academic performance during the undergraduate period (Duffy et al., 2020). Promoting inclusive student communities and a sense of belonging is essential for higher education students' wellbeing and mental health (Dietz et al., 2023). Furthermore, evidence from studies compiled by the Teaching and Learning Laboratory at MIT indicates that a student's sense of belonging improves academic outcomes, increases continuing enrolment, and is protective for mental health.

The promotion of equality translates directly into greater wellbeing. Students and staff who feel included are more likely to participate, express themselves, and contribute to the community. This sense of belonging reduces stress and anxiety and improves overall happiness. Equal opportunities also ensure that success is determined by talent and effort, not by background or identity. This motivates individuals to pursue their goals with confidence and perseverance. Furthermore, engaging in diverse and inclusive environments fosters empathy, cooperation, and better interpersonal skills — all of which are valuable both within and beyond the College setting.

What can MCAST do more?

While MCAST has made significant progress, equality is an ongoing journey that requires sustained effort and active participation from all members of the community. Several additional steps can help strengthen the impact of current initiatives:

- Continuous Education and Awareness: Offering regular workshops, seminars and training on topics such as unconscious bias, inclusive teaching practices, and cultural sensitivity, can build greater understanding and equip individuals with tools to champion equality in daily interactions.
 - More diverse Recruitment and Representation: Actively encouraging diversity in staff recruitment can provide more relatable role models for students and enrich the learning environment with broader perspectives.
 - Listening and Feedback Mechanisms: Introducing channels for students and staff to safely share experiences, raise concerns and suggest improvements will help the College remain responsive and adaptable to evolving needs.
 - Be Inclusive and Respectful: Practising everyday inclusion, such as using respectful language, listening to different viewpoints, and supporting peers, helps create a more welcoming community.
 - Get Involved: Participate in equality-focused initiatives, student groups or awareness events. These are valuable platforms for learning, dialogue, and advocacy.
 - Speak Up and Support Others: Standing against discrimination and offering support to those facing challenges reinforces a culture of allyship and solidarity.
- In conclusion, MCAST's dedication to equality is helping

What can YOU do more?

The success of any equality strategy depends not just on institutional policies, but also on the active engagement of individuals within the College. Every student and staff member has the power to make a difference:

In conclusion, MCAST's dedication to equality is helping to create a vibrant, respectful, and empowering environment where wellbeing can flourish. Through shared responsibility and continued commitment, the College is building a future where everyone has the chance to thrive.



SPIRITUAL CARE AS PART OF OUR WELLBEING

BY ENRIQUE CAMILLERI, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

It is recognised nowadays that a truly holistic education involves the whole person! Therefore, it stands to reason that spiritual care is an integral part of our overall wellbeing.

It is for this reason that the attention given to students by MCAST stretches beyond the classroom and into their lives. Right from its foundation, the College offered a variety of student services which included the presence of a Chaplain on Campus.

Most of the students attending MCAST are on the threshold of young adulthood, a time when one tends to question the meaning and purpose of one's life. We are living in a time marked by profound shifts in the lives of the young. The collapse of family structures, new forms of poverty, the rise of anxiety and loneliness, and the ever-deepening impact of artificial intelligence and social media, are reshaping the world in which our youth are growing.

It is therefore understandable that students tend to be concerned about their future and anxious about whether they will be able to take their place in society. Many may feel overwhelmed, uncertain, or even tempted to give up, believing they are not able to meet life's challenges.

The Chaplaincy Team at MCAST seeks to meet people where they are at; through an informal, friendly presence on Campus, they help provide a welcoming and caring environment where students are cherished and valued. They offer a listening ear, as they accompany individuals in their quest for a meaningful life existence. They seek to reach out to new and international students to help them settle and integrate in their new environment.

While they draw inspiration from the values of our Christian heritage, they are open to all faiths, encouraging each to draw on his or her inner resources and beliefs. They recognise the large diversity that exists on Campus; that is why they focus on spiritual care and accompaniment as part of the search for wholeness and a meaningful purpose in life. They encourage and enable each one to draw on their inner resources and beliefs to realise one's personal potential.

Spirituality is the search for wholeness, meaning and purpose. It affirms the dignity and value of each individual while respecting all spiritual paths.

The Chaplaincy Team believes that spirituality is something everyone can experience, and it helps to find meaning and purpose in life. It can bring hope in times of suffering and loss, while it encourages persons to seek peace with themselves, others and... what lies beyond!



RETHINKING STAFF WELLBEING IN VOCATIONAL COLLEGES



BY FRANCESCA ATTARD, DEPUTY DIRECTOR POLICY ANALYSIS

You know what is funny? We talk about student support all the time—study skills, mental health, digital inclusion—but when it comes to staff in vocational colleges? The conversation tends to taper off after, “Don’t forget your annual leave.”

And yet, it is the educators, technicians, administrators and leaders who hold the scaffolding together. They are the ones juggling workshops and lesson plans, fixing broken projectors, listening to student worries, and trying to stay afloat in the fast-moving tide of digital and green transitions. They are also the ones quietly burning out.

So the question is—what would it look like if vocational colleges truly centred staff wellbeing? Not as a side dish, but as the main course.

The Quiet Crisis We Do Not Talk About Enough

Let us call it what it is: working in VET can be intense.

Whether you are teaching plumbing to 17-year-olds at 8am, trying to update course content to meet new sustainability targets, or navigating bureaucratic systems with one too many tabs open, the job is demanding. And it does not stop when the bell rings.

Studies across Europe show rising stress, fatigue, and disengagement among staff in the sector. Managers feel isolated. Teachers report decreasing job satisfaction. Support staff often feel like the invisible backbone, rarely recognised unless something goes wrong.

And while some countries, like Finland and Denmark, have robust support systems built into the education workforce, others are still playing catch-up. One recurring theme is this: the staff’s ability to work well should be on every institution’s management agenda.

It Is Not Just About Mental Health—It Is The Whole Picture

Wellbeing is not just stress levels. It is how people feel at work. Whether they feel safe. Whether their contributions are valued. Whether their bodies ache from standing all day or their minds spiral because there is no pause between meetings.

In places where staff feel truly supported, you tend to see a few common threads:

- Leadership that does not just talk wellbeing—but lives it
- Policies that actually allow for recovery, not just lip service
- Opportunities for growth and connection, so people do not feel like robots.

In short? The system bends towards humanity.

For example, colleges like Warwickshire College Group (UK) offer 24/7 employee support, mental health first aiders, and even resilience apps tailored for staff. Others, like Technical Education Copenhagen, recognised ‘technostress’ among teachers juggling digital overload—and tackled it head-on with an easy-access digital support hub. It worked.

The Right To Disconnect (And Mean It)

One of the most talked-about needs across VET communities in recent years? A real, non-negotiable right to disconnect. Emails at 10pm? No thanks. Weekend planning marathons? Let us not.

Work-life balance is not just about logging off. It is about trusting staff to be professionals, not timecard machines. It is also about leaders modelling that

behaviour—taking breaks, using their own leave and not glamourising overwork.

When staff feel they can rest without guilt, they come back sharper, calmer and more creative. It is not just humane—it is smart.

Making Wellbeing A Team Sport

Some of the most effective approaches were not big programmes. They were small, human-scale shifts rooted in community.

Take Fircroft College of Adult Education. Their peer-led support circles and whole-staff resilience training made people feel seen and heard. No jargon. No fluff. Just genuine conversations and space to breathe.

In Belgium, employee wellness programmes are now becoming the norm in both public and private sectors. Things like fitness challenges, mindfulness sessions and stress management workshops are helping educators create cultures that actually care. The key? Make wellbeing part of the rhythm—not a one-time event.

Small Tweaks, Big Wins

Not everything needs to come from the top. Often, it is the little things that signal care:

- Creating quiet rooms where staff can step away
- Social meetups that build camaraderie, not competition
- Celebrating everyday wins—not just big promotions.

Let Us Talk About Physical Health Too

VET educators are not exactly sitting in comfortable chairs all day. Whether it is running practicals or supervising labs, the physical strain adds up.

Some colleges, like Fareham College, have been recognised nationally for offering wellness programmes, healthier food options and partnerships with local gyms. Others, like Reaseheath College, use weekly themed activities to keep physical and emotional health in the spotlight.

When it becomes routine—yoga on Mondays, team walks on Wednesdays—people are more likely to participate and, more importantly, to feel better.

Culture Over Campaigns

Here is what we sometimes forget: wellbeing is not a project; it is a culture.

It is embedded in how we lead, how we talk, how we treat each other. And it starts with managers and leadership teams showing that it is okay to talk about stress, to ask for help, and to say “not today.”

This is not about chasing buzzwords. It is about protecting the very people who make vocational colleges work. As one recent EU-level workshop revealed, burnout does not just affect performance—it reshapes the whole institutional climate.

Europe’s Strength? Learning From Each Other

Across the continent, the momentum is building. From Finnish burnout detection models to Ireland’s strategic focus on staff satisfaction, and from Denmark’s digital capacity support to UK colleges investing in staff recognition—there is no shortage of smart ideas.

We just need to share them more. Listen more. And act faster.

Final Word: Staff Wellbeing Is Not A Luxury

Let us stop thinking of wellbeing as an ‘extra’. It is the infrastructure behind every lesson, every student breakthrough, every smooth-running department.

And really—it is what makes people stay. Not just in the job, but in education as a calling.

Because wellbeing is not just about individual resilience—it is about the strength of the community around us: the staffroom conversations that shift your day; the colleague who notices when you are not quite yourself; the leadership that makes space for people to be human.

So here is the challenge: What would it look like if your college treated staff wellbeing not as a box to tick, but as the heart of everything—a culture of care that everyone contributes to, and everyone benefits from?

THE ROLE OF THE PSYCHIATRIST



BY DR EMMA SALIBA,
PSYCHIATRIST AT MCAST

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 out of every 8 people live with a mental disorder. Mental illness impacts a person's thoughts, emotions and behaviours. This affects the individual's level of function (at school, at work, in relationships) and quality of life.

Psychiatry is a speciality in which one can make a meaningful positive difference in another person's life. In my experience, the effects are remarkably far-reaching. When one helps another person, one is bringing a change not only in that individual's life, but also in the lives of others—family, friends and colleagues. The ripple effect is incredible. I find it is exceptionally rewarding and fulfilling to witness the improvement attained.

The role of the psychiatrist consists of:

Development of a therapeutic relationship

This refers to the doctor-patient relationship. This is based on respect, trust and authenticity. It is essential that the patient feels at ease as delicate and sensitive topics may be discussed. I strive for the psychiatric consultation to take place in an environment of empathy, compassion and non-judgement. All cultures and nationalities are welcome.

Assessment of mental illness

As a psychiatrist, I carry out a comprehensive assessment for mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar affective disorder, psychosis, eating disorders, among others.

Risk assessment

Mental disorders may be associated with risk to self (self-harm or suicidal thoughts) or risk to others (verbal or physical aggression). Risk assessment is an integral component of the psychiatric evaluation.

Treatment of mental illness

Management depends on the type and severity of the mental disorder. One of the options of treatment is psychiatric medication. Locally, we follow the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. These international guidelines ensure that evidence-based treatment is prescribed. Medication has two main roles: to treat the acute illness but also to reduce risk of relapse, that is the re-emergence of mental illness later in life.

Psychoeducation

Undoubtedly, there is increasing awareness on mental health and mental illness. However, further work is required to improve mental health literacy, that is knowledge on mental health. Oftentimes, I encounter misconceptions or misunderstandings about mental disorders and their treatment. An appointment with a psychiatrist may be an opportunity to clear any misunderstandings on mental illness and ask questions. The psychiatrist may offer to direct a patient to evidence-based scientific literature should they wish to read more about their mental disorder or the recommended medication.

Prevention of mental illness

I strongly recommend good quality sleep, a healthy well-balanced diet and regular physical activity to promote and maintain both physical and mental health. Moreover, I observe the long-term benefits of a good support network on a person's mental health. Being surrounded by positive and healthy relationships improves one's mental health. Making time for hobbies is crucial. These contribute to a sense of purpose and personal satisfaction.

Liaison with the patient's relatives

Understandably, the thought of meeting an unknown professional and discussing personal issues may appear daunting. Patients may opt to bring a family member or their partner for their appointment. The psychiatrist can provide guidance to the relatives on how to support the patient as well as give information on red flags or warning signs, which indicate that the patient may be deteriorating.

Liaison with the rest of the multidisciplinary team

One of the joys of my profession is collaborating with colleagues. It is always an enriching experience to hear others' perspectives, keeping the patients' best interests in mind.

I encourage anyone who is concerned about their mental health to seek help. Early presentations lead to a better outcome. I recommend communicating with one's general practitioner or visiting one's local health centre first. The family doctor's assessment will indicate whether referral to a psychiatrist or a psychologist may be required. If risk is present, it would be best to visit the Emergency Department at Mater Dei Hospital. Let us continue to work together to make a positive difference.



WALKING PART OF THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO IN SPAIN - A PILGRIMAGE OF SELF-DISCOVERY, FRIENDSHIP, ENDURANCE, ADVENTURE AND MORE

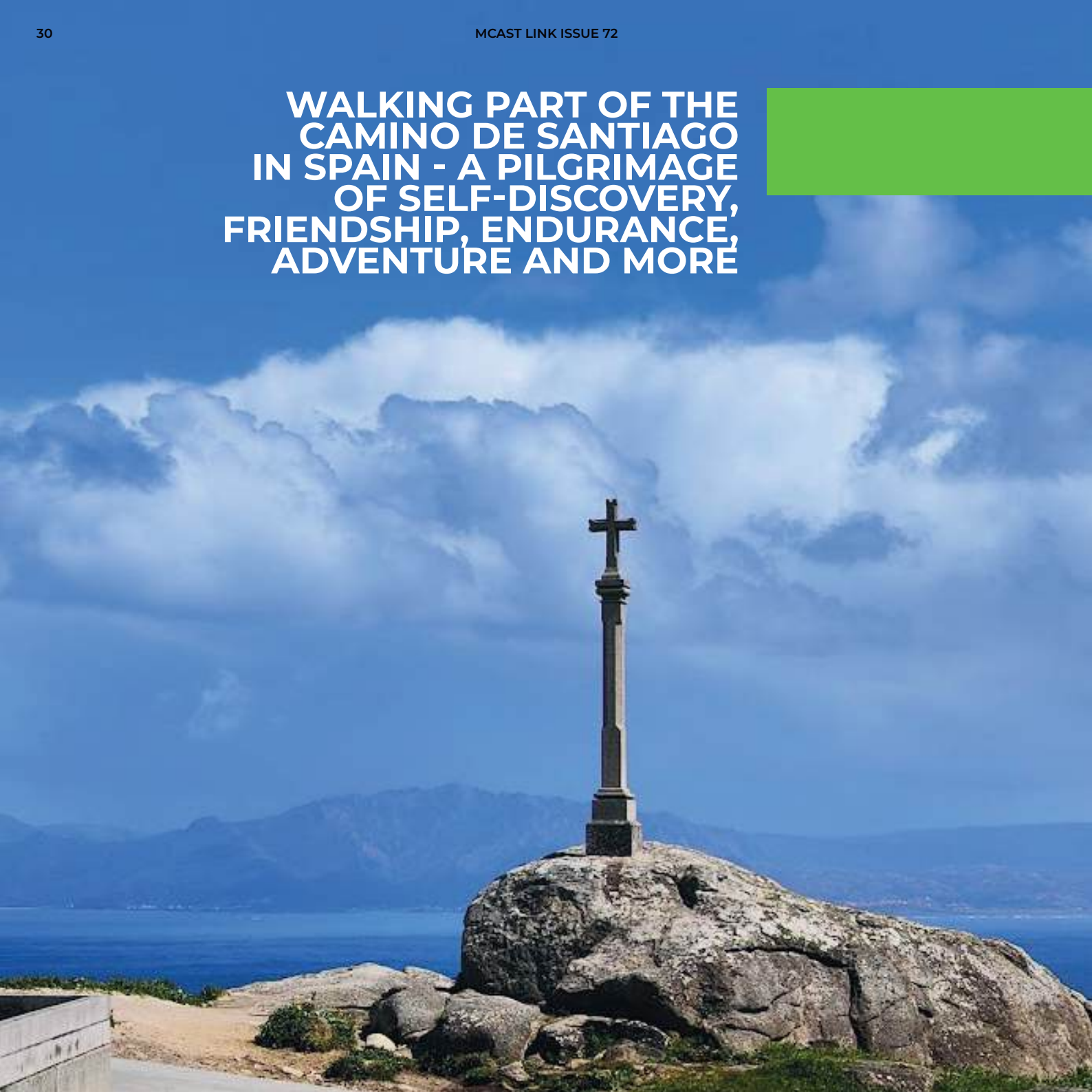
**BY ELAINE ATTARD, DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
INSTITUTE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES,
AND LILIANA GRECH, SENIOR
ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN**

It all started in 2022, when a group of people, mostly from Mosta, coming from all walks of life and ages ranging from the 30s to the 70s, got together to tick off one item on our bucket list: walking the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. We realised our dream in April 2023, walking from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela in five days—116 km.

Little did we know that we were going to contract the trekking bug! We then wanted to finish the rest of the walk from Santiago to Finisterre to Muxia—120km. Rigorous training started in October 2023, on Saturdays and then also Sundays, come rain or shine, so that in April 2024 we could walk the rest of the way.

Our challenge started on 5 April 2024, from the city of Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where we walked an average of 26km every day. We passed through beautiful countryside, picturesque villages, farms, fields, forests, streams and waterfalls. Some paths were level, others with steep uphill and downhill. The weather offered its own challenges with rain, wind, sunshine and cloudy days. However, nothing dampened our spirits because we walked to the same final destination as a group, to arrive first to Finisterre (end of the earth) and then to Muxia.

As one, we motivated each other to keep going when we were tired, with friendship and laughter, giving a hand and advice for blistered feet and tired muscles. Our spiritual leader kept us going with daily prayers and mass. This time we were lucky to have two doctors and a nurse as part of our group, so all our needs, both spiritual and physical, could be attended to if needed.



Our adventure ended with an unexpected stop in Barcelona, due to a flight delay and a missed flight to Malta. Most of us welcomed this opportunity and spent a relaxing day sightseeing.

So what is the Camino de Santiago? Back in the 9th century, a shepherd from Spain's Galician countryside, stumbled upon the remains of the Apostle St James. These were then placed in a tomb in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. People started visiting from all over Europe, and thus, this pilgrimage was born. The Santiago path is made up of multiple routes, starting from France, Spain and Portugal. At the beginning of each walk, one gets a pilgrim's passport (Peregrino Credential) and collects rubber stamps (at least twice daily) to prove the walk was completed. When one reaches the end, a Compostela Certificate is issued. The trails are marked, often with the shell, symbolising the Camino.

So that ended our second adventure—walking part of the way of St James! It was an amazing and rewarding experience, filled with different challenges that made us stronger as individuals and bonded us as friends.

This year, 2025, Elaine and Liliana are embarking on another journey along the Camino Portugués. To celebrate two significant milestones—one of us turning 40 and the other reaching 60—we are combining this meaningful adventure with a cause close to our hearts, raising funds to support Hospice Malta, as a way to give back to the community.

Donations are welcome on the link <https://hospicemalta.org/product/camino-portuguese-for-hospice-malta-a-birthday-celebration/>





LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF NEW STAFF: BUILDING A HEALTHIER WORKPLACE TOGETHER

**BY REUBEN MIFSUD,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
CENTRE FOR
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

At the Centre for Professional Development (CPD) within the Human Resources Office, we believe that a strong onboarding process is more than a formality—it is the foundation for a fulfilling employee experience. From day one, we strive to foster a culture of care, connection and purpose. One of the ways we do this is by giving space to an often-overlooked conversation during our induction process: mental wellbeing at work.

Rather than relying on standardised surveys or artificial intelligence-generated lists, we took a more meaningful, grassroots approach. During the first half-day induction session, new employees from all roles and grades were invited to privately reflect on three things they considered essential for maintaining good mental health at work.

Their responses, shared candidly and without filters, formed the foundation of a unique and insightful checklist—comprising 50 key elements and 20 core values. This bottom-up exercise has allowed us to capture what truly matters to our people, providing us with a practical and human-centred tool in our mission to make MCAST a healthy, inclusive and supportive community College.

WHAT NEW STAFF VALUE MOST

A Calm and Comfortable Physical Environment

New employees highlighted the importance of a welcoming and well-equipped space that supports focus and calmness. They expressed a preference for:

- Bright, airy environments filled with natural light
- Smaller, more intimate offices to ease initial anxiety
- Adequate resources and tools to perform tasks efficiently
- Green outdoor areas offering peaceful spots for breaks.

Fair and Flexible Working Conditions

Work-life balance emerged as a central theme. Staff called for:

- A calm and positive workplace atmosphere
- Fair and secure financial remuneration
- Flexible working hours and ample vacation leave
- A clear boundary between work responsibilities and personal time.

Thoughtful and Transparent Leadership

Leadership has a strong impact on employee wellbeing. New staff seek:

- Leaders who genuinely care about staff wellbeing
- Supportive, accessible managers with open-door policies
- Clear communication and realistic expectations
- Opportunities to share feedback and receive recognition
- Proactive approaches to conflict resolution and performance review.

Smooth and Supportive Work Processes

Employees emphasised the importance of clear and equitable systems:

- Transparent policies and standardised procedures
- Harmonious, cooperative team dynamics
- Respect for personal boundaries and space
- Fair distribution of work and achievable challenges
- A non-punitive culture that sees mistakes as learning opportunities.

A Sense of Community and Belonging

Building meaningful connections at work matters. Staff expressed the need for:

- Informal social interactions and themed events (e.g. Valentine's Day, Carnival)
- Regular team-building activities
- Opportunities to connect across departments for greater understanding.

Learning, Support, and Mental Health Services

Support systems are crucial, not only during onboarding but throughout the year. Employees valued:

- Structures that support professional growth and administrative tasks
- Time for reflection, learning, and peer sharing
- Awareness sessions on mental health and stress
- Access to professional counselling and therapy options
- Continued guidance, especially throughout the first year of employment.

Collegiality and Trust among Colleagues

Positive peer relationships are essential to a healthy work culture. Staff desire:

- Respectful, cooperative working relationships
- Emotional support from trusted peers
- Opportunities to build friendships, while respecting diverse perspectives
- An empathetic environment free from grudges.

THE VALUES THAT MATTER MOST

Alongside the checklist, 20 core values emerged—ethical and emotional anchors that new staff hope to see upheld across MCAST:

Collegiality · Community · Unity · Empathy · Kindness · Patience · Honesty · Respect · Compassion · Professionalism · Intelligence · Motivation · Autonomy · Trust · Responsibility · Empowerment · Job Satisfaction · Appreciation · Belonging · Feeling Seen

These values are not abstract concepts—they represent real expectations and aspirations for the workplace culture at MCAST.

A TOOL FOR GROWTH AND REFLECTION

This checklist, born from the authentic voices of our new staff, is more than a snapshot of what people need to thrive at work. It serves as a compass—one that points towards the kind of workplace we aspire to be: inclusive, respectful, caring, and empowering.

It challenges us to pause and ask: Are we truly listening to our people? Are we responding meaningfully to their needs? Are we creating a workplace where everyone feels seen—not just a number?

At MCAST, we believe the answer lies in listening—and then acting—together.

FOSTERING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

A supportive and dynamic environment for both students and staff is key to the institution's success. One of the primary ways MCAST promotes wellbeing is through a diverse array of events that engage the community, promote inclusion and create a positive atmosphere. These initiatives not only enhance mental health and encourage collaboration but also enrich the overall educational experience. In addition, the community work carried out by MCAST students further strengthens this sense of connection, allowing them to make a meaningful impact while developing valuable skills.

RAISING FUNDS AND AWARENESS

Fundraising is an integral part of MCAST's commitment to community engagement. The essential components of MCAST's dedication to supporting the wellbeing of its students and staff are portrayed through the organisation of staff and student events, collaboration with NGOs, and hosting fundraising campaigns. These initiatives promote personal growth, social responsibility and community engagement. By working together with external organisations, MCAST students, staff, and the wider community help create an environment that is enriching, collaborative, and impactful... everyone contributing to making the world a better place, one event at a time.



FROM FIRE CIRCLES TO FACETIME: HOW FRIENDSHIP HAS EVOLVED

BY SARA DESIRA,
COUNSELLOR AND EDUCATOR

Though our fires may now be glowing screens, the need for connection has not faded—it has evolved.

In early human history, friendship was tied to survival and group cohesion. Today, it is often about individual wellbeing, emotional support and personal development. Historically, friendship was a necessity to stay alive and function within the group. Today, friendship is a choice, something we seek out to enrich our lives in ways beyond just survival. Back in the day, friendships were often collective, as part of the group. Now, friendships are more individualised as people value connections that support their personal aspirations, not just the group's survival.

Friendship as a Survival Mechanism

In ancient societies, friendship functioned primarily as a survival mechanism rather than a matter of personal preference. Living in tribal communities, individuals depended heavily on group bonds for safety, access to supplies, and mutual physical support. In these harsh and raw environments, trust and loyalty were not just emotional luxuries—they were necessities to ensure collective survival. Hunting, being together, and working collectively against dangers necessitated strong social connections, often established through situations that brought these people together. Rather than being rooted in shared interests or other forms of compatibility, early friendships were deeply practical, emerging from the need for alliance.

Friendship in Ancient Civilisations

Friendship evolved along with the changes in human societies. Philosophers like Aristotle brought a more varied understanding of friendship, categorizing it into three types: friendships of utility, pleasure, and virtue. The former two served practical or emotional needs, whilst friendship based on virtue, considered as the highest form of friendship, was founded on mutual

Imagine a cold night at Mnajdra Temples (1/6 Qrendi) thousands of years ago. A small group huddles around a fire—sharing food, telling stories, watching each other's backs. In a world full of threats, trust is everything. Friendship is not optional. It is survival.

respect and shared values. At this point, the concept of friendship shifted, as it went beyond necessity. Friends were viewed as mentors, guiding each other in personal growth, politics, and/or time of war. Alliances were also formed through friendship, particularly among rulers and military leaders, where trust and loyalty were vital. Eventually, friendship in these civilizations began to be considered as an important part of personal and social fulfilment, not only as a route to survival.

Friendship in the Age of Individualism

Fast forward to 2025, in a world that puts a big spotlight on independence and self-improvement, friendship can sometimes feel like it has been put on the back burner. We are encouraged to keep striving, focus on our goals, and build our own paths... but where does that leave the people we lean on and laugh with? We might be dealing with a confusing concept: we are more connected than ever through social media, yet many of us still feel lonely or crave deeper connections. Real friendship does not always fit nicely into the 'hustle culture', but that is exactly why friendship matters. Good friends remind us we do not have to do it all alone. They offer support, different mindsets as well as moments of pure joy—the kind you cannot find in a productivity app or self-help book. In a time when everyone is trying to aim higher, friendship might just be the thing that keeps us grounded and authentic.

The Digital Age: Global Connection, Local Isolation?

Digital technology has undeniably transformed how we connect with the world. Social media, instant messaging, and video calls allow us to interact with people across the world in ways that were unimaginable up to some years back. But what about local connections? A growing concern is that local connections in our communities, the kind that happen face-to-face, are becoming, in our communities are becoming more distant. While we can stay in constant touch with friends from different

continents, some might feel disconnected from the people living just down the street. Are we truly more connected, or are we simply more isolated in our own corners of the world? Is the idea that technology made us closer, just a fantasy?

Friendship as a Path to Self-Actualization

At its core, friendship is more than just companionship; it is a powerful driving force for self-actualization and overall wellbeing. True friends challenge us to be our best selves, offering honest feedback, encouragement and a safe space for vulnerability. They help us navigate the complexities of life, from personal growth to

overcoming adversity, making it somewhat easier to navigate through life. In a world that often promotes individual success over collective growth, friendship serves as a reminder that success is not just about achieving goals—it is about the people who walk alongside us in that journey. As we seek meaning and connection in a world that sometimes feels divided and scattered, we might ask ourselves: How much richer would our lives be if we prioritized these deep, supportive friendships as the foundation for our happiness and growth?



WELLBEING OF STUDENTS AND STAFF: A JOURNEY OF GROWTH AND RESILIENCE



BY MATTHEW CAMILLERI, MCAST GRADUATE IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE MANAGEMENT

Looking back at where I came from, it is clear to me that every challenge, every late night, and every opportunity shaped who I am today: a proud Gozitan working in the health and social care sector of our country.

My journey began in 2018 when I embarked on a Bachelor's degree in Health and Social Care Management at MCAST. Initially, being the only male student in the course, was a daunting prospect. I feared that this would present difficulties in integration and acceptance among my peers. However, this fear quickly dissolved. I found constant support from my classmates and developed a sense of belonging. We worked together, overcame challenges, and built a bond that remains strong to this day.

Throughout my studies, I was guided by lecturers who helped shape my understanding of both management principles and the health and social care sector. Their mentorship allowed me to view the sector from a broader perspective, encouraging me to think critically and develop leadership skills.

These moments helped strengthen my resilience and provided me with professional skills. Learning to discuss openly, work in a team and lead effectively, were vital takeaways that have influenced my approach to leadership and service delivery today.

At the beginning of the course, I was hesitant to voice my opinions, debate topics or deliver presentations. Public speaking felt intimidating. However, through consistent practice, encouragement and exposure to various learning situations, these tasks became strengths.

Today, communication and confident public speaking are key aspects of my professional identity, and I owe this transformation largely to the foundations built during my time at MCAST.

Beyond the academic setting, the practical placements arranged by MCAST were invaluable. They allowed me to gain hands-on experience in various sectors within the health and social care fields. These placements were not only educational but also character building. MCAST truly pioneers in blending theoretical knowledge with practical experience, giving students an opportunity to bridge the gap between education and the realities of the working world.

MY ERASMUS+ EXPERIENCE

One of the most transformative experiences during my studies was participating in the ERASMUS+ programme. Initially hesitant to leave my comfort zone, I then decided to embrace the opportunity and was placed in Prague, Czech Republic. There, I spent almost three months working with two organisations: ENVIRA Ops, a social enterprise, and ARTYKEL Creative Form, a media entity. Through persistence and determination, I overcame the barriers of culture and language.

Integrating into a new culture with language barriers and adjusting to unfamiliar work environments was challenging. However, through persistence and determination, I overcame these obstacles. The experience taught me invaluable lessons about adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and teamwork. Currently, I work within the health sector and have served as the Head of Services at Dar il-Kantuniera and as a Mental Health Recovery Officer at the Sunrise Project within the Malta Trust Foundation, roles I know would not have been possible without this essential experience abroad.

To students who are currently pursuing their studies or are about to embark on their journey, I offer this advice: Be persistent. Take calculated risks. Embrace change even when it feels uncomfortable.

Dreams and goals are not achieved by wishing, but by acting. Surround yourself with positive, motivated individuals, and view every challenge not as a setback, but as an opportunity to grow.

When facing tough times, remember that pain and struggle are part of the growth process. Reflect, persevere, and heal. Success often lies just beyond the challenges you dare to face.





**FOSTERING
A SENSE OF
COMMUNITY**

**BY RICHARD CURMI, DIRECTOR
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

At MCAST fostering a supportive environment for both students and staff is key to the institution's success. One of the primary ways MCAST promotes wellbeing is through events that engage the community. These initiatives not only enhance mental health and encourage collaboration but also enrich the overall educational experience.

Wellbeing is the foundation of a thriving educational environment, and events such as team-building activities, cultural celebrations, and social gatherings provide students and staff with opportunities to relax, connect, and take a break from academic or professional routine. These events not only contribute to mental wellbeing but also strengthen the sense of community within MCAST.

In recent months, we have witnessed the impact of such events through gatherings like Hot Chocolate Day, Burger Day, Ftira Day, the Qagħaq tal-Appostli celebration, and the Kafè and Figolla event. These occasions fostered a deeper sense of unity and a shared experience across the MCAST community.



A key aspect of MCAST's approach to student wellbeing is its collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As part of their academic programmes, MCAST students are required to complete 20 hours of community work, which allows them to gain an understanding of societal issues while contributing positively to the community at large. By working with a variety of NGOs, students are exposed to real-world issues such as social justice and environmental sustainability.

These partnerships not only enhance practical learning but also allow students to develop essential skills such as leadership, communication and problem-solving skills, and to gain valuable experience while making a tangible difference in society, cultivating a strong sense of social responsibility.

Fundraising is an integral part of MCAST's commitment to community engagement. By hosting charity events, campaigns, and other fundraising activities, the College helps raise both awareness and funds for a variety of important causes.

These fundraising and awareness events are not only about raising money but also about creating awareness around important causes. They offer students the chance to promote issues, educate the MCAST community and inspire others to get involved. Through these campaigns, students also develop their advocacy skills.

The essential components of MCAST's dedication to supporting the wellbeing of its students and staff are portrayed through the organisation of staff and student events, collaboration with NGOs and hosting fundraising campaigns. These initiatives promote personal growth, social responsibility and community engagement.



MCAST STUDENT LIAISON OFFICE



**BY SOPHIE AGIUS VADALA,
MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT**

“We’ll just have a chat, and sometimes that’s what students need.”

**– Ms Mary Rose Formosa,
Manager of the Student Liaison Office**

Since its inception in 2001, MCAST has been dedicated to the wellbeing and success of its students. At the heart of this mission is the Student Liaison Office which plays an important role when it comes to providing support to students in the various aspects of their lives.

The Student Liaison Office is central to MCAST's commitment to providing a supportive environment that offers the support necessary for students to thrive both academically and personally. The support given can be anything ranging from offering laptops, food, toiletries, stationery supplies (material support) to providing mentoring and guidance in areas such as time management etc. There are also two funds managed by the office, the MCAST Student Fund (dedicated to buying student resources), and the Raw Materials Fund (supporting students to buy things to develop a project).

Knowing there is continuous support available, starting from the induction meeting all the way to graduation, is important. There are also collaborations between the Office and support staff, mentors, and co-ordinators to ensure the assistance is comprehensive and ongoing.

As previously mentioned, the Office provides resources to assist the students, however these must be used responsibly, so repurposing and reusing when possible is fully encouraged. Additionally, the Office is open to receiving donations from organisations.

Besides material support, there is also support when it comes to fostering a sense of community among students. This sense of community is promoted through college events that can range from CSR projects to workshops and conferences. These events help and encourage the students to participate and feel more connected to life on campus.

MCAST strives to provide equal opportunities for all students, including international students and those with various abilities. The Office works closely with the Student Council and other departments to address the unique needs of these students and ensure they feel welcomed and supported. The Student Liaison Office works closely also with other MCAST departments to enhance student support. There are different networks with the mentors and co-ordinators across different institutes. This holistic approach ensures that students receive tailored support based on their individual needs.

Ensuring students are aware of the services offered is a continuous effort. Information about the services is provided during student induction sessions, through the student services app, and by using email signatures to promote available services. Additionally, the Office employs outreach methods to ensure student are aware of the support available. This proactive approach helps students feel comfortable seeking assistance and it also fosters a supportive atmosphere.

The Student Liaison Office at MCAST is a milestone to the College's commitment to student welfare. By offering a diverse range of services, from having a simple chat to material aid, it plays a crucial role in helping students navigate their academic journey and personal challenges. The collaborative efforts between this Office and the academic staff ensure that students receive the support they need to thrive.

WELLBEING THROUGH THE PERFORMING ARTS

**BY DR VICTOR-EMMANUEL JACONO,
COORDINATOR PERFORMING ARTS,
MCAST INSTITUTE FOR THE CREATIVE
ARTS**

The term wellbeing seems to have become something of a buzzword over the past decade, with wellness centres springing up all over the world. Yet, wellbeing is now being recognised as a vital part of the holistic human experience. Following a growing body of scientific evidence linking wellbeing to participation in the arts, research in this area has significantly increased in recent years, as highlighted in the WHO Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67 (2019).

However, the connection between psychophysical health and the performing arts has been documented for thousands of years across different cultures. In Poetics, the Greek philosopher Aristotle asserted the link between attending theatre and psychosocial wellbeing over 2,300 years ago. Traditional Chinese medicine acknowledged the connection between music and the harmony of body and mind. In India, the power of music and dance to promote mental and physical health was recognised in the Natyashastra, an ancient Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts. In medieval Europe, Gregorian chant was known to induce spiritual and emotional tranquillity.

Today, music, drama and dance are widely used in arts therapy to support people in different aspects of their healing processes. They are also used within communities to address issues and themes that are important to their members.

So, what is it about participating in the performing arts that can improve our lives and our relationships with others? Whereas sculptors or painters use tools and materials other than themselves, actors, dancers and singers are themselves the instruments, materials and outcomes of the artistic process. Beyond style and genre, performance involves organising oneself and one's relationship with the environment according to a particular aesthetic.

Of course, the arts cannot claim to substitute specific medical or psychological interventions where these are needed. However, with a clear understanding of the connections between the physical, mental and ecological aspects of life, the performing arts can contribute to a person's sense of wellbeing—even when medical intervention reaches its limits in the face of serious illness.



While all forms of arts therapy require facilitators with specific professional qualifications and sound scientific preparation, independent participation in the performing arts has also been found to significantly enhance general wellbeing. At a conference on Theatre and Cognitive Neuroscience, French performance scholar Jean-Marie Pradier observed: “Art in itself is not therapy, but the lack of art is pathogenic.” Artistic expression allows us to process life experiences in ways that can support wellbeing.

Engaging in music, theatre and dance has been shown to reduce symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety. Participation in music and dance activities has also been associated with improved physiological markers such as optimal heart rate, stronger immune function, and lower cortisol levels.

Performing arts training and creative practice tend to engage the whole person, involving memory, attention, problem-solving and decision-making—thereby benefiting key cognitive functions. According to the late Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, theatre was born when human beings began to observe themselves. In that observation lies the potential of theatre for both psychological and social wellbeing.

Psychologically, performing in front of others in a safe environment can help individuals address issues of self-esteem and develop the courage to express their identities authentically. Socially, theatre has long served as a space for examining how we relate to one another. It becomes a kind of laboratory in which we use imagination and action to explore themes such as empowerment and oppression, acceptance and rejection. Facilitators in such spaces have a responsibility to create a healthy context that prioritises safety and trust.

These performative explorations of human relationships not only allow for the study of social dynamics but also foster community, encourage social connection, and offer participants a sense of belonging. Importantly, the benefits of these experiences can be accessed not only by performers but also by audience members. For those not ready to take the stage, simply attending performances can offer opportunities for self-reflection and a shared sense of connection.

We must emphasise that the performing arts are sophisticated instruments that engage with the complexity of people’s lives. Like all sophisticated instruments, they must be used with care and understanding to yield the personal and social benefits described above. When used without adequate knowledge or with ill intent, they may cause harm. This is why the application of such practices demands life-long learning, ongoing training, and an ethical commitment to those involved or affected by the work.

The performing arts programmes at MCAST’s Institute for the Creative Arts are built upon these core principles, with full awareness of the profound benefits that theatre, dance and music can have on the wellbeing of both individuals and society at large.



BALANCING PRESSURE AND WELLBEING IN ENGINEERING

BY JULIANA ZAMMIT, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

Studying engineering is no easy task. It is a field that asks for more than just attending lectures and passing exams. It requires problem-solving skills, staying organised, and working well under pressure. Matthew Sant, a student at MCAST who is in his third year of his advanced diploma in construction engineering, whilst also holding the role of President of the Student Council at MCAST (KSM), knows this all too well.

He shared his thoughts on how he balances the demands of his course with his mental and physical wellbeing.

“Engineering is one of the most challenging academic paths,” Matthew said. The course often involves long hours of lab work, tight deadlines and tasks that require careful attention to detail. It’s a lot to handle at once”. Still, Matthew sees the pressure as something that helps him grow.

“It teaches us how to manage time, solve problems, and keep going even when things get hard,” he explained. “These skills are useful both inside and outside the classroom.”

For many students, exam season can be stressful and overwhelming, but Matthew has found that simple habits help him stay focused and calm. “Wellbeing during exams means staying hydrated, going for short walks, sleeping enough, and setting realistic goals,” he said.

He believes that working non-stop does not help in the long run. “Taking care of your health helps you think clearly and stay productive. A clear mind is just as important as clear notes.”

Matthew is not just an Engineering student. As President of KSM, he works to represent the voice of all MCAST students. “I help speak up for student needs, work on improving the student experience and help organise events and initiatives,” he said.

When he is not working or studying, Matthew enjoys spending time with his family and doing creative activities. “It’s important to take a break and be around people who help you feel grounded,” he added.

At the start of his studies, Matthew did not have a solid routine. “I used to deal with things as they came up,” he said. But over time, he learned how to plan ahead.

He now uses calendars and to-do lists to stay organised. Breaking big tasks into smaller parts has helped him manage his responsibilities better. “It’s made my daily routine more manageable and less stressful.”

Matthew believes that universities should support students not only academically but also personally. “Academic success should not come at the cost of mental and physical health,” he said. He suggests that schools provide more mental health support, offer flexible deadlines when needed, and keep communication open between students and staff. He concludes, “When students feel supported, they are more likely to succeed in all areas of life.”



Matthew Sant

THE MALTESE DONKEY AND THE PATH TO WELLBEING

BY ARNOLD SCIBERRAS, FORMER MCAST AGRIBUSINESS STUDENT

MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts has collaborated with biodiversity researchers and former MCAST Agribusiness student Arnold Sciberras, alongside Jeffrey Sciberras and equine expert Gina Curmi, in the production of a special episode for the educational nature series Malti Kulturali: Flora and Fauna. This student-led series explores Malta’s unique natural heritage through the lens of traditional ecological knowledge.

Last year, Arnold Sciberras, a leading authority on Maltese landraces, co-authored a scientific publication with his collaborators, officially describing the Maltese donkey for the first time. The paper sheds light on the breed’s distinct characteristics and the alarming threat of its extinction—a loss that would not only affect biodiversity but also erase an essential thread in the fabric of Maltese cultural and agricultural history.

The episode was developed with the contributions of students Miguel Attard, Bradley Frendo, and Mattias Polidano, under the guidance of lecturers Ms Nicky Aquilina, Mr David Tanti and Dr Ivan De Battista and the technical assistance of Mr Mauro Fenech. Together, they brought forward a compelling story that blends environmental science, culture, and personal narratives: ‘More Than a Beast of Burden: The Maltese Donkey and Human Wellbeing’.

Donkeys have served humanity for thousands of years, offering physical support, companionship and therapeutic benefits. In Malta, the indigenous donkey is a symbol of resilience, having adapted to the island’s challenging terrain and climate. Historically, it has played a pivotal role in agriculture and transport, helping sustain rural livelihoods for generations.

Beyond their utilitarian value, donkeys have been shown to contribute to human wellbeing, especially in rural and therapeutic settings. Their calm, gentle nature makes them excellent partners in animal-assisted therapy, supporting individuals with emotional or cognitive challenges. In an age of rising urbanization and mental health concerns, reconnecting with such



traditional animals fosters empathy, mindfulness, and emotional balance.

Each episode of Malti Kulturali: Flora and Fauna explores a specific Maltese landrace, celebrating its ecological function, cultural importance and ongoing conservation efforts. With interviews from researchers, biologists, and local communities, the series invites viewers to rediscover the deep connections between Malta’s people and its unique natural environment.

This episode on the Maltese donkey serves as a powerful call to action, reminding the public that preserving our natural and cultural heritage is essential not just for biodiversity, but for our collective identity and wellbeing.

NURSING STUDENTS: THE FRONT LINES OF THE WORKFORCE

BY SERENE MGHERBI, MCAST
JOURNALISM STUDENT

“Before God and those assembled here, I solemnly pledge:

To adhere to the code of ethics of the nursing profession; to co-operate faithfully with the other members of the nursing team and to carry out faithfully and to the best of my ability the instructions of the physician or the nurse who may be assigned to supervise my work; I will not do anything evil or malicious and I will not knowingly give any harmful drug or assist in malpractice.

I will not reveal any confidential information that may come to my knowledge in the course of my work.

And I pledge myself to do all in my power to raise the standards and prestige of practical nursing.

May my life be devoted to service and to the high ideals of the nursing profession.”

— The Nightingale Pledge (1893)

Named after Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, the Nightingale Pledge captures the very essence of what it means to serve as a nurse. At its heart lies a profound devotion to human wellbeing—preserving dignity, restoring health, and offering compassionate care to those in need. Revered globally as one of the most noble professions, nursing is even protected under international humanitarian law, with the Geneva Conventions affirming the right of medical personnel to protection in times of conflict.

Despite its honourable status, nursing is also known to be one of the most demanding careers—physically, mentally and emotionally. It is a vocation where the wellbeing of others is always paramount. And yet, year after year, new cohorts of students step forward to pledge themselves to this life of service, placing the care of others above all else.

To explore the realities of nursing today, particularly the balance between care and personal wellbeing, I spoke with Kevin Holmes, Nursing Coordinator at MCAST and an elected member of the Council of Nurses and Midwives. Mr Holmes was quick to acknowledge the intensity of the field, stating: “Nursing is not a walk in the park. It is often a rollercoaster of physical and emotional demands, with a lot of highs but also a few deep lows. Yet, if your call is to make a difference in people’s lives, then there is nothing else you want to do.”

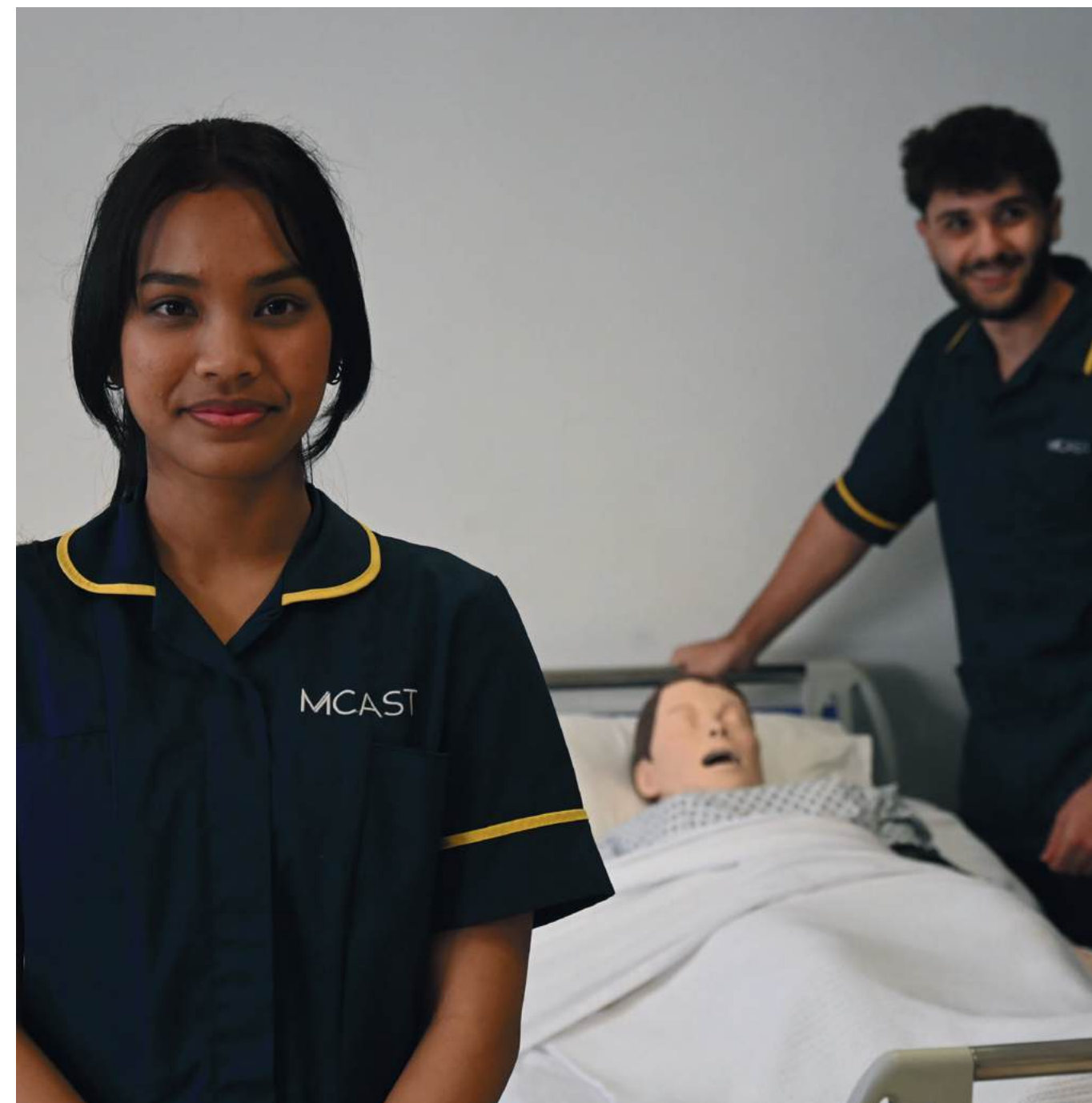
The emotional weight of caring for the sick and vulnerable can be immense. Nursing students face long clinical shifts, strict attendance requirements, and the realities of human suffering. These demands place a heavy strain on their personal wellbeing—a factor that Mr Holmes and the academic faculty at MCAST actively address. The curriculum includes dedicated self-care units that help students develop emotional resilience and practical coping strategies.

“Coping is a personal matter—it’s not the same for everyone,” Mr Holmes explains. “That’s why our clinical nurse mentors are crucial. They provide ongoing support throughout the students’ training, guiding them through the emotional complexities of the profession.”

Promoting wellbeing among nursing students is not just about avoiding burnout—it is about sustaining their passion and capacity to care. Mr Holmes highlights several student-led strategies that have proven effective: exercise, meditation, structured breaks, and the use of buddy systems to foster peer support.

These tools are vital, as modern nursing must be sustainable—not just for the sake of patients, but for the professionals who provide care. The concept of wellbeing, therefore, is twofold: nurturing the wellbeing of patients, and preserving the wellbeing of the nurses who care for them.

After more than two decades in the profession, Mr Holmes states appreciation is key. “A thank-you card, a hug, the occasional smile—or a visit to the unit months after someone has recovered. Knowing that you’ve made a positive difference in someone’s life... that means everything to us.”



STUDENT AND LECTURER WELLBEING

BY LUKE MALLIA AZZOPARDI, SENIOR LECTURER, INSTITUTE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

The concept of wellbeing has undergone a significant transformation over the years. Once narrowly defined as the mere absence of illness or disability, it has since evolved into a far more holistic construct. Contemporary understandings of wellbeing now encompass not only physical health but also psychological, social and spiritual dimensions, amongst others. This paradigm shift reflects a growing awareness that an individual can be in peak physical condition yet still experience a diminished quality of life or emotional distress. Such a reality prompts a deeper, more critical inquiry: how well is a person, truly, if their sense of wellbeing is fractured beneath the surface?

As a Psychology lecturer at the Institute of Community Services for several years, and a counsellor by profession, I was intrigued to explore the stressors faced by those close to me, i.e. MCAST students and lecturers—two groups on qualitatively different yet intersecting journeys. I was also curious about the coping strategies each cohort employed to manage these challenges. With the support of my director, Ms. Ann Marie Cassar, and the generous participation of those involved, I first conducted a qualitative study on students' experiences. This was followed by a separate but complementary study examining the stress experiences of lecturers. The following paragraphs aim to bring some of the most poignant insights to light, with the hope of giving voice to both students and lecturers and, ultimately, to inspire meaningful reflections on student and educator wellbeing.

When discussing student stressors, a recurring theme was the urgent need for greater flexibility in academic structures to accommodate full-time employment alongside full-time study. For many students, working was not a matter of choice but a financial necessity

to meet daily living expenses. Students also voiced concerns about assessment scheduling, emphasizing the importance of avoiding overlaps—both between the different assessments and between assessments and placements. Additionally, several participants highlighted the challenges related to their inclusive educational needs. While most reported that provisions were generally in place, there was a shared sentiment that inclusive support must be continually reviewed and refined to respond to emerging and evolving challenges throughout their academic journey. Finally, students emphasised that their own personality traits, such as 'perfectionism' and more generally 'neuroticism', were also contributing to their stress experience.

Interestingly, lecturers also identified similar personality traits previously mentioned by students, namely 'perfectionism' and 'neuroticism', as factors that exacerbated their own experiences of stress on campus. Additional stressors highlighted by lecturers included perceptions of unfair treatment by colleagues and inadequate work environments. Moreover, the diverse student body, along with occasional student oppositionality, emerged as significant challenges that, at times, took a toll on the lecturers' overall wellbeing.

In response to these stressors, both students and academics turned to various coping strategies, including walking, gym sessions, jogging, yoga and other physical activities. Significantly, both groups also relied on interpersonal relationships, particularly 'collegiality', as a crucial means of coping. These relationships interestingly encompassed interactions between students, lecturers and student-lecturer dynamics. In some instances, individuals sought additional support from psychosocial professionals on campus, as well as from MCAST management. Furthermore, acquiring more work experience, along with personality traits such as 'determination' and 'positivity', played a protective role, helping participants buffer the effects of heightened stress levels.

In conclusion, I wish to sincerely advocate for the integration of wellbeing as a fundamental component of daily life. Far from being a luxury, it serves as a vital safeguard against emotional fragmentation, empowering individuals to navigate the inevitable challenges of an often demanding world. More profoundly, prioritising wellbeing allows one not merely to endure, but to flourish—to move beyond mere existence and towards a life of purpose, authenticity and fulfilled potential.



THE POWER OF GIVING: HOW VOLUNTEERING ENRICHES US ALL

BY JOSEF MIZZI,
COUNSELLOR / COUNSELLING SUPERVISOR

One of the key elements that helps shape any society is, without doubt, voluntary work. Many individuals dedicate their time to various areas of volunteering.

If a country had to financially compensate all the voluntary work carried out across different sectors, it would simply not be sustainable through public funds alone. As a College, we also place great importance on this aspect through a range of on-campus activities and subjects that are integrated into our curriculum.

When we talk about volunteering, we often view it as a way for individuals to give back to society. While this is true, the reality is that the person offering their time and effort often gains just as much—if not more—in return.

Here are just a few of the positive outcomes that come from engaging in voluntary work:

1. Stepping out of your comfort zone – Volunteering can challenge us to go beyond what we are used to and push us to try things we would not normally do in a formal learning environment.

2. Purpose-driven passion – It can be a way to turn something we love into a meaningful contribution to a cause we believe in.

3. Building valuable skills – The abilities we gain through volunteering can be extremely useful when job hunting or even progressing in our careers.

4. Boosting self-esteem – Doing what we love and what we are good at through volunteering can strengthen our confidence and sense of self-worth.

5. Making connections – Volunteering helps us meet new people who can support our personal growth and help us develop important interpersonal skills.

Voluntary work is much more than simply supporting a charitable cause or performing an act of kindness.

It is an exchange of skills, opportunities, and personal growth—benefitting both the individual and society as a whole. Every person has the potential to make a meaningful impact on the community they live in by using their strengths and talents.

This happens when individuals come together with a common goal: to improve the society around them. It reminds us of our shared humanity and the difference each person can make within their own community.

Let us continue to nurture the spirit of volunteerism within us all—a spirit that inspires a strong sense of civic responsibility and advocacy for the causes we believe in. This can lead to a more vibrant and welcoming environment in our college, our communities, and the country as a whole.

We should also remember to appreciate the personal growth that comes from these experiences, and how fulfilling it is to broaden our horizons, support our mental health, and enhance our overall wellbeing as we develop as individuals.





NAVIGATING LIFE IN A BLENDED FAMILY: FEELING STUCK INSIDE OR OUTSIDE

BY ISABELLE CAMILLERI, COUNSELLOR

Growing up in a blended family, where stepparents, stepsiblings, and shifting roles are part of everyday life, comes with its own set of complexities. Whether you are moving between two households or adjusting to new family members, it can sometimes feel like you are an outsider in your own home. For teens and young adults, who are already navigating identity, independence and belonging, these challenges can feel especially intense. Some young people feel stuck outside (disconnected or out of place), while others feel trapped inside (overwhelmed by constant change and emotional tension). You may find yourself wondering: Where do I belong? Who understands me? Why does this still feel hard, even after months or years? Understanding these experiences is the first step towards making sense of your emotions and finding ways to build stronger, more meaningful connections within your family.

Blended families often come together after significant life changes: a marital separation, the death of a parent or the end of a long-term relationship. These transitions can be painful, and for teens and young adults, they happen right in the middle of their own major life milestones, such as starting tertiary school, building relationships and figuring out who they are.

One of the hardest parts of living in a blended family is feeling caught between people you love. This is called a loyalty bind, the sense that if you care about one person (like a stepparent), you are betraying another (like your biological parent).

Loyalty binds often make young people feel like they need to choose sides, even when no one is asking them to. But these internal conflicts can create stress, confusion, and withdrawal.

Stepfamily expert Dr Patricia Papernow describes two common experiences in blended families: stuck outsiders and stuck insiders. These roles often apply to children and teens, depending on how much time they spend in a particular home.

Stuck Outsiders - If you are living part-time in a home (living in one home half the week, or visiting only on weekends), you might feel like an outsider. Life goes on without you when you are not there. Conversations, routines, inside jokes, and changes in relationships all continue, and re-entering the home might feel like stepping into someone else's world.

Stuck Insiders - If you are living full-time in the home with a stepparent or stepsiblings, you may feel like you are constantly dealing with tension, conflict, or adjustment fatigue. You are in the middle of every disagreement, rule change, or power struggle. You might envy siblings who come and go, thinking they have it easier, while they may feel like outsiders themselves.

Both roles are difficult, and neither is 'better' or 'easier'. The stuck insider might feel overwhelmed, while the outsider might feel invisible.

The insider/outsider dynamic may be one of the hardest parts of living in a blended family. Parents and stepparents naturally feel a stronger connection to their biological children. For teens and young adults, one of the most painful experiences in a blended family is feeling like they do not belong anywhere.

You might think:

"They don't get me."

"This doesn't feel like home."

"I can't be myself here."

These feelings might not always be spoken out loud, but they are common and real. Part of adolescence and young adulthood is about figuring out who you are and where you belong. When your family system keeps shifting, that process can feel even more disorientating.

Dr Papernow's Bruise Theory of Feelings offers an important insight into why emotions in blended families can be so raw. The theory suggests that each person brings emotional bruises from past pain, such as separation, rejection, grief, feeling replaced, or family tension. These bruises can be triggered unintentionally.

For example:

- A stepparent's attempt to bond may feel intrusive to a teen still grieving their parents' separation.
- A teen's withdrawal might feel like rejection to the stepparent, but it is self-protection.
- A parent trying to maintain peace may unintentionally make one child feel neglected or unheard.

The problem is not the bump itself, it is the bruise underneath. Recognizing that everyone in the family carries emotional bruises can help people respond with compassion instead of anger or blame.

If you ever feel like you do not quite fit in at home, or if you are caught in the struggle of feeling stuck, remember that you are not alone. Blended families can be complicated, but they also have the potential to be filled with love, growth, and new connections. It takes time, patience, and effort from everyone to bridge those gaps. Here are some tips to help strengthen those family ties:

- Communicate openly – share your feelings and make sure to listen to others too.
- Build shared experiences – look for activities that everyone can enjoy together.
- Establish new traditions – create something unique that belongs to your family.
- Respect boundaries – understand that everyone adjusts at their own pace.
- Discuss family roles openly – clarify who does what, what is expected, and ensure everyone feels acknowledged.
- Seek support – whether it is from friends, other blended families, or a therapist, finding help outside the home can be beneficial.

Living in a blended family can sometimes feel like you are caught between two worlds, especially for teens and young adults. It can be a beautiful journey, but it can also be confusing, exhausting, and filled with emotional challenges. By recognizing the insider/outsider dynamic, validating the struggles, and working towards connection, you can cultivate a family life that feels more balanced, supportive, and fulfilling. Remember, it is perfectly okay to ask questions, set boundaries, take your time, and hold onto the hope that your family relationships can grow stronger, even if they do not look exactly like you envisioned.



EXPLORING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF ART: A PATHWAY TO EMPOWERING SELF-SUPPORT

BY JEANETTE CACHIA,
PSYCHOTHERAPIST

Art captures the essence of who we are. It unites our emotions, thoughts, and experiences into a creative process that transcends mere representation. Both artists and audiences are invited to delve into the depths of our shared human experience. Through art, we discover a powerful means of self-expression and connection, allowing us to communicate across diverse and unique perspectives.

“To use the arts expressively means delving into our inner selves to uncover our feelings and to express them through visual art, movement, sound, writing, or drama. This process promotes emotional release, self-understanding, insight, and encourages creativity and heightened states of consciousness.”

– Natalie Rogers

Art conveys emotions that words often struggle to express. It encourages us to explore our inner world, fosters mindfulness, and becomes a powerful tool for managing anxiety. Engaging in self-reflection not only enhances self-esteem but also deepens our connection with ourselves and others. Various forms of artistic expression empower individuals to adopt personalized coping strategies.

“I didn’t know how to express it, but my characters said it for me.”

Written art—whether poetry, scriptwriting, or songwriting—serves as a powerful outlet for organizing thoughts, encouraging self-reflection, and fostering self-awareness. These creative processes clarify our minds and help us transform inner experiences into meaningful, tangible expressions.



In therapeutic settings, students often share how scriptwriting and character creation allow them to explore their thoughts, express emotions, and articulate their dreams. This creative journey helps them navigate complex feelings and facilitates healing from past traumas.

Engaging in visual arts such as painting or drawing nurtures emotional expression and creativity, offering a reliable coping strategy for stress. As one student beautifully explains, **“Paintings channel feelings, using metaphors to explore and express our innermost thoughts and experiences.”**

Auditory art and music also possess a unique emotional power. They tap into deep feelings, evoke moods, and provide a grounding force. Whether it is the soothing tones that calm the mind or the energizing rhythms that uplift the spirit, these auditory experiences help us regulate our emotional states.

Performing arts—such as dance and movement—unite mind and body, enhance self-awareness, and release suppressed emotions. This embodied practice often fosters a deeper connection with oneself.

“The physical movement, together with the music rhythm, allowed me to feel things that I didn’t know I was holding inside.”



Photography offers a different yet equally valuable perspective. It deepens our appreciation of the world and captures moments that speak volumes. Similarly, crafts and repetitive creative tasks can become meditative practices that ground us and encourage mindfulness.

Embarking on an artistic journey can lead to the discovery of a passion that evolves into a fulfilling career. More importantly, it offers personal transformation, nurtures independence, and enhances wellbeing, contributing positively to both the artistic community and society at large.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID KENELY ON THE MENTAL WELLBEING OF STUDENTS

BY TIMEA FAYE PISANI,
MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

Finals week is the worst for a lot of students, so stress is at an all time high. This combined with anxiety can put students in a very harsh situation, they can not handle it alone and would need to reach out to receive external support to propel them forward. David Kenely, who is a lecturer at ICA MCAST but also helps council students will help shed light on their situation.

He details how facing new situations and when you stray from your comfort zone will make you more stressed. This is not something strange as students are in a stage of constantly learning new things and adapting to their environment, this mixed with any other forms of stress from home or work could cause a student to abandon their studies and leave school. Some ways a student can seek help is through the counselling department in MCAST or reaching out to fellow students, each situation is unique so they would need to be supported in different ways.

Mr Kenely explained a few simple things could be wasting your time and stress a student out more on deadline and finishing assignments, many students are still used to a secondary school system where they would have daily homework needed to be completed in a few hours. MCAST assignments work differently where the work given out needs time to be worked on and not rushed through. Due to this, students could miscalculate how much time they have and either procrastinate their work or have many assignments piled on one another, spending most of their time on social media and they could lose track of time. Mr Kenely suggested that students add app limits so they can time how much they use certain apps, to make a to-do list to have a better visual on how much work they must do, and this can help them make realistic deadline for themselves.

However, students might not reach out for help and suffer in silence, a few signs of a student going through a tough time are an increase of absence, withdrawn from the lecture, a big shift in mood or not completing the work needed. Sometimes, there are no signs that lecturers notice, and it is essential for the people closer to being, friends or family, help them to receive the aid that they need.

Mr Kenely has stated that

Regular attendance for lectures and staying on top of class notes also helps to reduce the stress. It is also important to schedule time for studying. That way, you would know that you have done the required time studying. Having studying time scheduled out, helps with overcoming the feeling that you have not studied enough, and you can find it easier to strike a study-life balance.

In conclusion, self care can also help to improve a student's school and social life. A balance is essential for someone to perform better and excel in life which could land them a career they enjoy and have a fulfilling life, school and education are the base for building on your future.



A new initiative of the MCAST Chaplaincy is **Campus Connect**, a common room in Block G designed as a welcoming space for young people to hang out, make friends, and build a sense of community.

It will be equipped with a kitchenette for the use of students, with sofas and beanbags where one can chill out. Tea and coffee make the conversation more engaging. For those who prefer a quieter environment, there is a cubicle for reflection, meditation or prayer.

Campus Connect is a safe and supportive environment, encouraging personal development and community engagement. It also offers the opportunity to seek advice or ask questions from people with a vast experience.

By combining leisure, education, and community service, **Campus Connect** serves as a vital resource that seeks to promote the wellbeing of young people.

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€45 MILLION INVESTMENT TO BENEFIT MCAST EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

An investment of over €45 million will see educators and staff at MCAST benefit from a collective agreement featuring significant salary increases and improved working conditions. This initiative not only recognises the vital role of MCAST's workforce but also ensures that students receive an enhanced educational experience.

Prime Minister Robert Abela described the agreement as a strategic and substantial investment in Malta's education sector. He emphasised that, in line with the government's commitments, the agreement provides accelerated career progression, robust salary increases, and new allowances for MCAST educators. These improvements will enable the College to attract top talent across specialised sectors. Beyond better working conditions, the agreement places a strong emphasis on classroom quality and student welfare, with the goal of enriching the overall learning experience. It will empower students with clearer pathways and real opportunities for success.



Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation, Clifton Grima, added that the agreement addresses multiple aspects of the professions it covers—from substantial financial improvements to enhancements in day-to-day working conditions.

MCAST Principal and CEO Stephen Vella described the agreement as a meaningful recognition of the College's dedicated educators and staff—professionals who work tirelessly in pursuit of excellence and are shaping the leaders of tomorrow. "This investment speaks volumes not just for our workforce, but for every student who walks through our doors," Vella said. "It supports individuals who aspire to grow personally and professionally, who aim to compete both locally and globally, and who are seeking more than just a certificate—they are seeking a transformative educational experience."

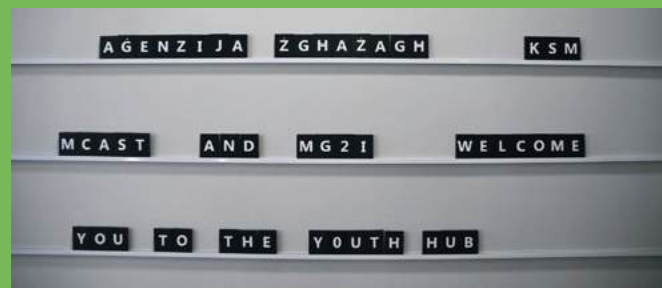


NEW YOUTH HUB OPENS AT MCAST TO EMPOWER STUDENTS

A newly refurbished Youth Hub has been officially opened at the MCAST Main Campus in Paola, offering students a modern, inclusive space designed to support their personal, social and educational development.

The launch event, held on Friday 16 May 2025, was attended by the Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation, Clifton Grima and the Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Research and Innovation, Keith Azzopardi Tanti. They were welcomed by Principal and CEO Stephen Vella, Aġenzija Żgħażaġh CEO Miriam Theuma, and MCAST Students' Council (KSM) President Matthew Sant.

The renewed space in Students' House includes comfortable seating zones, games, workstations and a new office for the KSM, all tailored to the evolving needs of the growing student population.



The Youth Hub will also be home to Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, which has been active at MCAST since 2013. The agency offers non-formal education services within a safe, inclusive, and recreational setting. Run by a dedicated team of qualified youth workers, the Youth Hub host a variety of activities ranging from informal games and thematic discussions to creative workshops and life skills sessions.

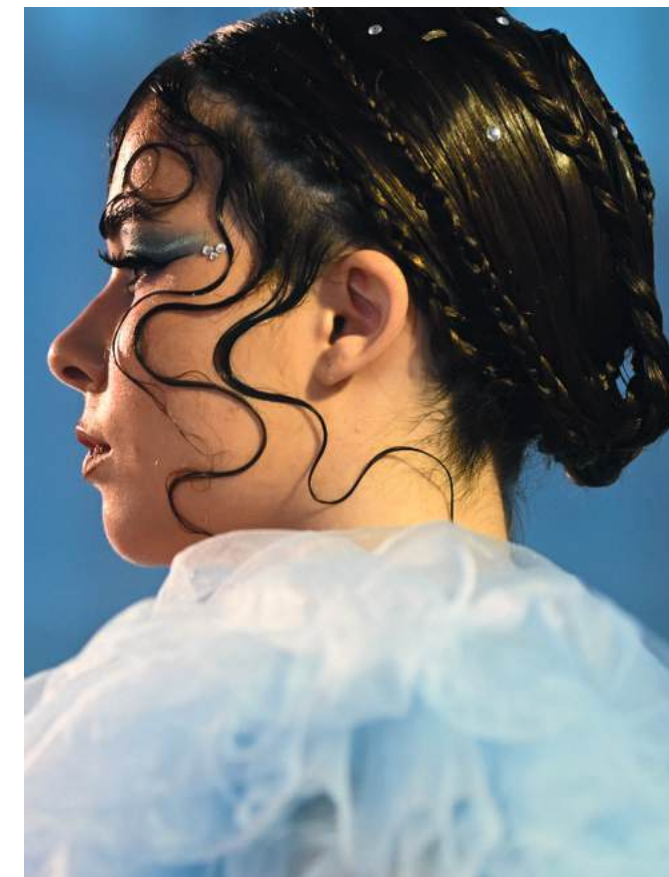
The new space was refurbished in collaboration with the Corradino Correctional Facility inmate workers.

The event attracted students from various institutes and student clubs and ended with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque, blessed by the MCAST Chaplain, marking a new chapter for student wellbeing and engagement on campus.

MCAST HAIR SHOW BLENDS ART, INDUSTRY AND DIALOGUE

The Institute of Community Services (ICS) at MCAST delivered an evening of creativity and conversation on Monday with its highly anticipated Hair Show, themed Order or Chaos. The event transformed the stage into a vibrant space for innovation, artistic expression, and professional dialogue.

The show featured the creative work of Level 4 Hairdressing students, who interpreted the theme through sculptural and expressive hair designs. Under the direction of lecturer Roberta Curmi, as part of the Cultural Expression unit, the students explored diverse aesthetic and cultural influences, pushing the boundaries of conventional hairdressing.

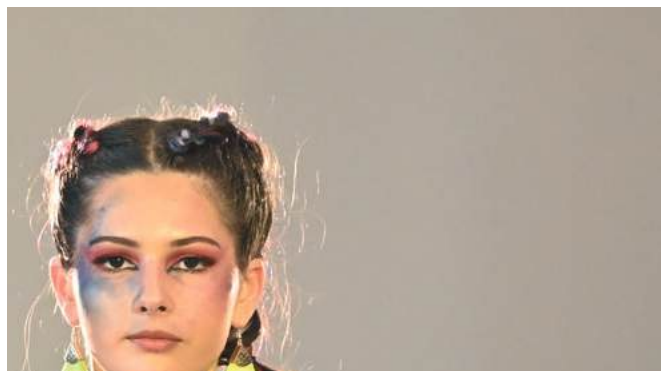


The event went beyond visual spectacle, serving as a platform for industry engagement. A panel discussion featuring ICS alumni, salon owners, creatives, and educational leaders addressed key themes in the sector—including sustainability, vocational training, entrepreneurship, and the evolving identity of the profession. The dialogue raised powerful questions around whether the future of hairdressing is defined by structure and control, or by innovation and reinvention.



The students were mentored and supported by ICS Director Ms Ann Marie Cassar, Deputy Directors Ms Christianne Gatt Fenech and Ms Elaine Attard, and Ms Stephanie Ann Formosa, Institute Vocational Coordinator. Technical and backstage support was provided by Ms Vicky Ebejer, Hairdressing Technician, along with a team of dedicated lecturers and Level 3 Hairdressing students.

The showcase forms part of the ongoing MCAST Meets the Industry Encounter series—designed to strengthen ties between vocational education and the professional world, while offering students a platform to explore their craft through real-world engagement.



NEW MEDSEAPLAN PROJECT LAUNCHED TO STRENGTHEN MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

A new project called MEDSEAPLAN has been launched to improve the management and sustainability of marine activities in the Mediterranean Sea, one of the world's busiest and most ecologically valuable marine regions.

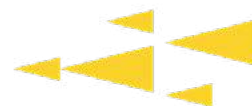
The project aims to address increasing pressures on the Mediterranean's marine environment caused by dense maritime traffic, fishing, tourism and energy production. MEDSEAPLAN will develop more coordinated and evidence-based approaches to Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), helping to balance economic growth with the protection of marine ecosystems.

Bringing together 16 partners from across Europe, including MCAST, the project will focus on improving data collection, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and applying the European Union's Ecosystem-Based Approach to real-world MSP processes.

Key initiatives within the project include deploying monitoring instruments on industry vessels, testing floating data buoys, using nature-based monitoring methods, and creating a digital twin model of selected marine areas. In addition, MEDSEAPLAN will develop an Ocean Literacy Programme to build capacity among marine and maritime professionals.

The three-year project is led by the World Ocean Council in the Netherlands and is funded by Xjenza Malta through the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, with support from the European Union's Horizon Europe programme.

MEDSEAPLAN is expected to provide vital tools and insights that will improve marine governance in the Mediterranean and serve as a model for sustainable maritime planning worldwide.



**Sustainable Blue
Economy Partnership**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

MCAST ICT STUDENTS LEAD SUCCESSFUL ERASMUS+ EXCHANGE WITH DUTCH PEERS

Students from the Institute of Information and Communication Technology (IICT) at MCAST recently played a leading role in an international exchange with peers from MBO College Amstelland, a renowned vocational institution in the Netherlands. The initiative, held from 5 to 15 May 2025, was part of the Erasmus+ mobility programme and focused on fostering cross-cultural collaboration, hands-on learning, and professional development.

In preparation for the visit, MCAST students worked closely with Deputy Director Paul Pulis and Senior Lecturer Kassandra Calleja to develop tailored training kits, instructional materials, and practical exercises. This groundwork ensured the sessions were not only relevant but also engaging for the visiting students.

A highlight of the programme was a series of three peer-led bootcamps, each delivered by MCAST students:

- Game Development, led by Liam Schembri and Adam Darmanin, introduced participants to the basics of designing and building simple games using Unity.
- Introduction to Object-Oriented Programming, conducted by Mandy Farrugia and Josef Muscat, explored fundamental programming concepts using C#.
- Web Development, facilitated by Nicole Grima and Mireya Francesca Vella, covered the essentials of front-end design and responsive coding.

All six bootcamp leaders are currently pursuing degree programmes in Digital Games Development, Software Development, or Creative Computing at MCAST.

Beyond the structured sessions, Ms Calleja integrated the Dutch students into project-based group work alongside MCAST learners. This gave participants the opportunity to experience the collaborative nature of vocational education at MCAST.

The programme also included a live demonstration of Motion Capture technology by Josef Muscat at the MCAST Resource Centre, showcasing its application in 3D animation—an experience that stood out for many visitors.

The exchange extended beyond technical training to include cultural outings, giving participants a taste of Maltese history and traditions. The collaboration between MCAST and MBO College Amstelland, both focused on applied learning, made the experience particularly relevant and rewarding.

With discussions already underway for future exchanges and joint projects, the success of this initiative highlights MCAST's commitment to international collaboration and experiential learning.

MCAST JOINS GLOBAL SCIENTIFIC COLLABORATION AT CERN'S ALICE EXPERIMENT

MCAST is now officially participating in the world-renowned Large Ion Collider Experiment (ALICE) at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN). Following MCAST's acceptance as an associate academic member institution in March 2024, academics from the College's Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) are actively contributing to advancements in engineering and particle physics.

Dr Ing. Stephen Sammut, Director of the Institute of Engineering and Transport, and Dr Francis Delicata, Senior Research Officer at the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) and Deputy Team Leader, led a visit to CERN from 9 to 11 December 2024, marking a significant milestone in MCAST's research journey.

ALICE—A Large Ion Collider Experiment—is one of the flagship scientific projects at CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC). It is dedicated to exploring the properties of quark-gluon plasma, an early-state form of matter believed to have existed shortly after the Big Bang. By colliding heavy ions, such as lead nuclei, at near-light speeds, ALICE recreates the extreme conditions of the early universe. This allows scientists to investigate the fundamental forces of nature and the strong nuclear interactions that bind quarks and gluons together.

The ALICE detector, a highly complex instrument located 56 metres underground near the French village of St. Genis-Pouilly, plays a central role in these experiments. As part of this international collaboration, MCAST's team is contributing expertise across a range

of fields, including artificial intelligence, finite element modelling, computational fluid dynamics, machine learning, materials science, electronics, and automation.

Its contributions are supporting both the ongoing operation of systems such as the High Momentum Particle Identification Detector (HMPID) and the development of future technologies for next-generation detectors and experiments. This collaboration highlights MCAST's growing impact on global scientific research and its commitment to innovation in engineering and technology.

A delegation of managing directors from German Chambers of Commerce visited MCAST as part of a fact-finding mission aimed at exploring vocational education initiatives and strengthening international collaboration. The visit was coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce of Potsdam.

The eleven-member delegation was hosted on 7 April 2025 at MCAST's Main Campus in Paola, where they were welcomed by the President of the MCAST Board of Governors, Horace Laudi, and MCAST Principal and CEO, Stephen Vella.

Throughout the visit, the delegation was introduced to MCAST's strategic role in vocational education and training (VET) in Malta. Discussions focused on common challenges in the VET sector and MCAST's integrated approach to work-based learning and industry engagement.

The visit concluded with a campus tour, giving the delegation a first-hand look at the College's practical learning environments and how they are tailored to meet the evolving needs of the labour market.



MCAST TEAM CLINCHES TOP PRIZE AT LITHUANIAN HACKATHON

A team from the MCAST Institute of ICT has returned from Vilnius, Lithuania, after participating in Saltunities – an international hackathon dedicated to environmental robotics. This prestigious event brought together students from across Europe to design and build robotic boats equipped with environmental sensors, with the goal of collecting and analysing water quality data from real lake environments.

Representing MCAST were five talented students: Andrene Azzopardi, Gabriel Sultana Marmara, Julia Muscat, Krish Ahuja, and Emiliano De Santis. The team was mentored by Institute Director Conrad Vassallo and Deputy Director Thomas Gatt. Throughout the competition, participants were challenged to think creatively and apply their technical skills to address real-world environmental issues.

The MCAST team's entry, Dghajsa.MT, was constructed using plastic pipes, making it both sustainable and lightweight. All components were ingeniously mounted within a compact, waterproof lunch box, resulting in an agile and practical design.

The robotic boat underwent rigorous testing at the Green Lakes in Lithuania, where it successfully collected 677 sensor readings. These included data from a comprehensive array of sensors: pH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, air and water temperature, pressure, humidity, lux, GPS, air quality, gyroscope, and accelerometer. All data was securely stored on an SD card in CSV format. The boat featured two onboard computers—a flight controller and an Arduino MKR1000—with all sensor data routed to the Arduino for logging.

The students also produced an in-depth data analysis report, which included a GIS heatmap of water quality readings, a complete GPS path of the boat's journey, an animation visualising its orientation using gyroscope data, and a series of graphs and insights derived from the collected data. Additional analysis was conducted in a chemistry lab, further enhancing the depth and quality of the final results.

We are extremely proud to announce that the MCAST team received three awards at the event:

- 1ST PRIZE – MASTER OF WATER AWARD
- TOP DATA ARCHITECTS AWARD
- BEST WATER EXPLORERS AWARD



FOSTERING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

Participants from the Community College for the Third Age and students pursuing degrees in Social Work, Early Years and Vocational Education and Training at MCAST's Institute of Community Services (ICS) took part in an intergenerational activity led by Dr James Carabott.

The session aimed to foster dialogue and mutual understanding between generations, promoting co-learning and reflection. Participants explored ideas around youth and ageing, challenging preconceptions and encouraging the co-production of thoughts and experiences across age groups.

The event was attended by 40 older adults and 30 ICS students. It forms part of a wider initiative coordinated by Dr Marisabelle Camilleri, designed to promote active ageing through free, informal lifelong learning opportunities that support community integration.



MCAST AND AQUATIC RESOURCES MALTA SIGN MOU TO ADVANCE MARINE EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

In a significant step towards enhancing sustainable aquatic practices and education in Malta, the MCAST has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Aquatic Resources Malta (ARM). The agreement aims to strengthen collaboration in aquaculture, marine biology, and fisheries.

The MoU was signed by MCAST Principal and CEO Mr Stephen Vella and ARM CEO Dr Francis Fabri, marking the start of a strategic partnership centred on joint educational programmes, research initiatives, and student training opportunities.

Key provisions of the agreement include the development of new educational and training modules aligned with sector needs, the organisation of workshops and seminars, and access for students to ARM's field-based data and facilities. It also provides for internships and collaborative research involving students, lecturers, and researchers.

This partnership reinforces both institutions' commitment to supporting Malta's marine and aquatic sectors through evidence-based education and collaborative innovation.



MCAST SHOWCASES OCTOBER 2025 COURSE OFFER WITH FOCUS ON INNOVATION AND INCLUSION

MCAST has officially unveiled its course offerings for October 2025, reaffirming its commitment to high-quality, inclusive education across a broad range of disciplines.

The updated prospectus was presented during an information event for guidance professionals, career advisers and PSCD teachers from state, church and independent schools.

MCAST students and lecturers shared their experiences through panel discussions highlighting learning opportunities, future careers, and work-based learning. The MCAST Students' Council also presented results from a recent skills survey conducted among the student population.

The 2025 prospectus includes 208 full-time courses across key sectors such as Engineering, Applied Science, Information Technology, Business, Health and Social Care, and Creative Arts. Highlights include:

- **Malta's first Master's in Veterinary Studies**, launched in 2024 in collaboration with the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, providing students with the opportunity to pursue veterinary training locally.
- **Bachelor's Degree in Social Work**, introduced in 2024 and continuing due to high demand, offering a structured academic and professional route into this essential field.
- **Launch of the Institute for the Trades**, opening in 2025 with foundational courses in both traditional and contemporary crafts. Students will develop practical skills in stonework, tile-laying, textiles, and metalwork, while also exploring modern technologies such as 3D printing. The initiative aims to safeguard Malta's artisan heritage while meeting the needs of the modern economy.
- **New Advanced Diplomas** in areas such as **Phlebotomy** and **Emergency Ambulance Response**, aligned with national healthcare priorities.
- **Expanded Sports Portfolio**, including Bachelor's degrees in **sports coaching** with specialisations in **football, swimming, and coaching children**.

The event helped ensure that career advisers are well-informed about MCAST's diverse pathways and emerging areas of study. Prospective students seeking individual guidance are encouraged to contact the MCAST Career Guidance team at careerguidance@mcast.edu.mt.



MCAST HOSTS 9TH INTERNATIONAL ICOACHKIDS CONFERENCE PROMOTING ETHICAL YOUTH COACHING

MCAST hosted the 9th edition of the International iCoachKids Conference on 7 May 2025, bringing together educators, coaches and sports professionals from across Europe to promote ethical and inclusive coaching practices for young people.

Organised in collaboration with the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) and Sport Coaching Europe, and coordinated by the Malta Sport Coaches Association, the event underscored the importance of child-centred coaching, safeguarding and fostering positive youth development through sport.



ARIC HOSTS INSIGHT WORKSHOP SERIES TO ADVANCE OPEN SCIENCE

The Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) successfully concluded its three-day workshop series, Navigating the Open Science Landscape: From Theory to Practice (INSIGHT), held from 8 to 10 April 2025 at the MCAST Main Campus in Paola.

The series convened international experts alongside ARIC staff and researchers to explore the opportunities and challenges of Open Science, research data management, and open access publishing. Emphasising collaborative learning, the workshops provided valuable insights and practical skills to advance open science practices.

Through initiatives like INSIGHT, ARIC continues to strengthen the professional development of researchers by building capacity in Open Science principles and methodologies.



MALTA'S COUNCIL OF EUROPE PRESIDENCY LOGO CREATED BY MCAST GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENT

The official logo representing Malta during its upcoming Presidency of the Council of Europe has been designed by Shelley Borg, a student from MCAST's Institute for the Creative Arts, showcasing the College's creative talent and commitment to applied learning. The logo was unveiled on Tuesday 28 May 2025 by Foreign Minister Ian Borg at an event held at the Mediterranean Conference Centre.

Second-year BA (Hons) Graphic Design students at MCAST were invited by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade to participate in this prestigious commission. Shelley Borg's design was selected as the official landmark for Malta's Presidency, which runs from May to November 2025.

This marks Malta's second time holding this significant international role and coincides with the 60th anniversary of the country's accession to the Council of Europe.

Seventeen students submitted logos that reflected the core values of the Presidency—democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—while interpreting Malta's identity within a modern European context. The final selection was based on originality, thematic relevance, and professional execution.

The Ministry praised the professionalism and fresh perspectives brought by the students, emphasising the importance of involving young creatives in shaping Malta's international image.



TOP STUDENTS HONOURED FOR BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL SERVICES ACHIEVEMENT

Outstanding student achievements in business and financial services were celebrated at the Fexserv Awards presentation held at MCAST. This annual event recognises academic excellence and research innovation, honouring top performing students for their dedication and accomplishments.

Awards were presented by MCAST Principal and CEO, Mr Stephen Vella, alongside Mr Andrew Galea, Director of the Institute of Business Management and Commerce, and Mr André Vella, General Manager of Fexserv Fund Services.

In the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business Enterprise category, Zack Camilleri claimed first place, with Monica Theuma securing second place, while Larissa Vella was recognised for the Best Dissertation.

In the Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Financial Services category, Nave Ellul took first place, followed by Emma Ifeoma Onourah in second. Amy Bonello received the Best Dissertation award for her outstanding research contributions.

The Fexserv Awards serve as an important platform for recognising academic excellence and fostering industry links, underlining the vital role education plays in shaping future leaders in the business and financial sectors. Fexserv Fund Services, a leading fund administration company and part of the Fexserv Group, provides customised fund administration solutions to a diverse range of clients.



MCAST STRENGTHENS EDUCATIONAL TIES WITH JAPAN AHEAD OF OSAKA EXPO 2025

MCAST Principal and CEO Mr. Stephen Vella recently met with Counsellor Tadahiko Yamaguchi from the Embassy of Japan in Malta. He was accompanied by Ms. Sarah Bugeja, Political and Economic Officer. Also present were Deputy Director for Policy Analysis Ms. Francesca Attard and International Business Development Manager Ms. Maxine Micallef.

The meeting underscored MCAST's commitment to vocational education and industry-led learning, with a focus on the Institute for Trades. Key topics included Malta's role in the upcoming Osaka Expo 2025 and MCAST's planned contributions to the event.

Discussions explored potential collaborations between MCAST and Japan, including academic exchanges and the Matsumae International Foundation (MIF) Fellowship 2026—a fully funded research opportunity. The conversation also highlighted MCAST's partnerships in aquaculture education with Kindai University and Chiba University of Commerce.

The meeting reinforced the strong educational ties between Malta and Japan, setting the stage for future collaborative initiatives.





THE PRESIDENT OF MALTA VISITS MCAST

MCAST welcomed Her Excellency the President of Malta, Myriam Spiteri Debono, to its Main Campus in Paola on 13 March 2025.

In her address to staff and students, Her Excellency highlighted the crucial role of vocational education and training as a bridge between education and employment. She praised MCAST's dedication to equipping students with the skills and tools needed to succeed in today's professional world.

MCAST JOINS KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN ADVANCING MALTA'S NATIONAL BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION CODES IMPLEMENTATION

MCAST is among the key organisations collaborating with the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) on the implementation of the National Building and Construction Codes. Representing MCAST at a recent press conference organised by the BCA was Dr Ing. Stephen Sammut, Director of the Institute of Engineering and Transport.

During the event, Minister for Justice and Reform of the Construction Sector, Jonathan Attard, announced a new agreement uniting the main partners in the construction industry to commit to the development and implementation of these codes. He emphasised that the immediate priority will be regulations concerning

structural integrity, security, and fire prevention.

The Chamber of Architects (KTP) will lead the drafting of the Building and Construction Codes, in agreement with the BCA. Architect André Pizzuto, President of the Chamber, expressed satisfaction at KTP's integral role in the process, highlighting that this collaboration will bring fresh perspectives to the industry.

The agreements binding all parties for three years will facilitate the gradual introduction of 17 Building Codes and 6 Construction Codes, representing a major advancement in Malta's construction regulation framework.



MCAST LEADS NATIONAL STANDARDS AND VALIDATION CONFERENCE

MCAST, in partnership with the National Skills Council (NSC) and supported by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA), hosted a key conference on the role of National Occupational Standards (NOS) and Skills Cards in building a skilled workforce.

Held on 11 March 2025 as part of the Encounter – MCAST Meets Industry initiative, the event brought together industry leaders, policymakers, educators and students to explore best practices and innovations in skills validation and workforce development.

MCAST Principal and CEO, Mr Stephen Vella, highlighted the importance of NOS as a framework for recognising industry-relevant skills, reinforcing MCAST's

commitment to aligning education with labour market needs.

Student voices were also heard, with Matthew Sant, President of Kunsill Studenti MCAST (KSM), and fellow students sharing survey findings on skills recognition and the role of education in shaping employment pathways.

This event strengthened partnerships aimed at validating skills and supporting lifelong learning to meet evolving industry demands.



FR. BEJARANO'S VISIT TO MCAST

"While we recognize the evolving profile of the young, we must also turn our attention to the profile of the educator." This was one of the remarks that Fr Rafael Bejarano SDB addressed to an audience comprised of lecturers, management, mentors and students during a special formation meeting that was held in the Library on Wednesday 7th of May 2025.

Fr Rafael is a Salesian of Don Bosco from Colombia who has just been appointed General Councillor to co-ordinate Salesian Youth Ministry at an international level. He was visiting Malta in order to lead a number of sessions to various entities involved in education, social care and youth work.

Fr Rafael was welcomed at MCAST by the College Chaplain Fr Aurelio Mulè Stagno and the Chaplaincy Team, who explained to him the ethos of MCAST as they walked around the campus. The role of the Chaplaincy in such an environment is very much one of presence, creating a sense of welcome and belonging. Fr Rafael was able to see the new Chaplaincy premises in Block G, named CAMPUS CONNECT, which are being refurbished as a common area for students and staff.

Fr Aurelio led Fr Rafael to the Resource Centre where he presented him to Mr Stephen Vella, the College Principal and CEO, who spoke fondly of the warm memories he still has of his time as a student at Savio College. Fr Rafael was shown around the library by the chief librarian, Ms Liza Franco, before he was led to the lecture room where he delivered his talk.

There was a good attendance from various departments, the CSR, the Staff Social Committee, Student Services etc. In his words of appreciation, Fr Aurelio thanked Fr Bejarano for his insightful sharing and commented on how much the Chaplaincy can serve as a place of connection.



MCAST AND CHIBA UNIVERSITY OF COMMERCE STRENGTHEN ACADEMIC COLLABORATION

MCAST hosted a delegation from Chiba University of Commerce (CUC), Japan, on 27 March 2025. The visit, led by MCAST Principal and CEO Stephen Vella alongside CUC's International Adviser (Professor Emerita) Yuri Takahashi and International Division Manager Naomi Takemura, focused on strengthening academic ties and exploring collaborative opportunities.

CUC, a private university in Chiba, Japan, specialises in business, economics and commerce education. With a strong emphasis on practical learning and international engagement, CUC offers programmes designed to equip students with global perspectives and industry-relevant skills. The university actively fosters partnerships worldwide to enhance cross-cultural academic exchanges.

As part of this collaboration, CUC will offer two scholarships for MCAST students to attend its summer school programme from 28 July to 7 August 2025. The programme covers topics related to the Japanese economy, finance, art, and culture.

This initiative reflects MCAST's ongoing commitment to providing students with enriching international academic experiences and raising awareness of the College's global engagement.



MCAST BAND PERFORMS FUNERAL BAND MARCHES

The MCAST Band performed traditional funeral marches in Attard square on Wednesday 16 April 2025, during the inauguration ceremony of the Holy Week exhibition of statues Redemptor Mundi by Steven Camilleri. Under the direction of Bandmaster Mro. Chris Bonnici, and with Reuben Mifsud serving as compère, the band delivered a moving performance. Special thanks go to all the musicians and to Yasmina Busuttil for her meticulous preparation of the music scores.

MCAST APPLICATIONS

2025/2026 INTAKE

14 JULY – 25 AUGUST

