



ISSUE 68

A Vibrant
International
College

M C A S T L I N K

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Editorial

Over the recent years, MCAST has undergone significant growth, welcoming a diverse community of international students. The presence of over 102 different nationalities not only enhances the social and cultural fabric of our Campus but also leaves a meaningful imprint on our academic landscape. Embracing students from different corners of the globe introduces a rich tapestry of perspectives, traditions, and ideas, enriching our learning environment and preparing students for the multicultural reality of the global workforce. This edition seeks to celebrate the vibrant melting pot of cultures within our community.

MCAST stands as a hub for global learning and collaboration, fostering partnerships. This edition highlights the international research projects that the College is working on as well as various other international programmes across Institutes. One important collaboration with nine participating Universities is the EU4Dual Project. The College is gearing up for the first European Dual Studies Conference to be hosted in Malta. With over 200 confirmed participants, the conference is set to bring together academics, policymakers and industry leaders in a collaborative effort to establish a comprehensive agenda for the alliance, fostering dialogue and strategic planning among diverse stakeholders.

MCAST is preparing students to become global citizens who comprehend the interconnectedness of the world and possess the skills to navigate its complexities. The ability to collaborate with individuals from diverse backgrounds, communicate effectively across cultures, and adapt to different environments is an invaluable skill set in today's interconnected world. The various Erasmus+ exchange programs outlined in this magazine serve as a testament to the College's dedication to providing global opportunities.

This issue features an insightful interview with Dr. John Bartolo, shedding light on MCAST's commitment to the well-being of international students. Dr. Bartolo underscores the College's role as a secure haven, emphasizing the array of services available to support our diverse student community.

Our Journalism students at MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts delved into the theme of internationalization, contributing articles that explore the significance of fostering a global mind-set and shedding light on the challenges our students may face. Their insights provide a first-hand look into the experiences of those navigating the complexities of an increasingly interconnected world.

We hope you enjoy this edition and wish all a peaceful Easter!

Message from the Principal & CEO

PROFESSOR JOACHIM JAMES CALLEJA

A quick glance at the topics covered in this edition reveals that MCAST is increasingly becoming the first choice for brilliant minds from Malta and overseas. This is evidenced by the success stories across various training and research fields, alongside the growing number of foreign students, who now constitute over 18% of our college's total student body. Internationalisation is evidently taking root as a new culture within MCAST.

Whether it is in the students' canteen, a lecture room, or during campus activities, international students are among the most vibrant participants. This augurs well for the cross-fertilisation of ideas, living modes, and the international understanding between cultures. It also offers our Maltese students



opportunities to connect with peers from similar institutions abroad and enjoy ERASMUS+ mobility programmes in various countries.

Our research and innovation initiatives, through international partnerships, signal that the College is recognised as a research centre on a wide array of subjects important for environmental and social development, 3D printing and digital competencies, among others. The global experiences of our students are not only enriching for the individual learner and lecturer but also for MCAST's overall profile. Experiences in fields like early years education, architectural heritage, language learning and journalism allow learners and lecturing staff to expand their horizons and networks, and create platforms for international projects.

The internationalisation of the College is yielding tangible results. The achievements of our engineering students, as highlighted in this edition, speak volumes. MCAST has significantly evolved, transforming vocational education into a key sector of further and higher education. Our educational and training programmes are increasingly seen as exemplary models of dual education. A glance at the new prospectus reveals that courses at Level 3 are set to offer apprenticeship programmes akin to those at higher levels, including bachelor's degrees. Work experience and research excellence are driving MCAST's learning ethos forward. EXPO 2023 and the qualitative research conference held last December showcased a broad selection of research topics undertaken by students at all levels, as well as the current focus areas of our research and lecturing staff. This strategic direction is equipping MCAST with the infrastructure for growth, such as the specially developed AR platform for aircraft maintenance training, which is set to attract more learners to this field and bolster the sector's development in Malta.

Research has also led to the publication of the Fun Fit 5 project's results, where over 90 students participated in a pilot project demonstrating that physical activity can enhance academic success. This project paves the way for a national initiative aimed at boosting physical activity in primary education, fostering a balance between healthy minds and bodies. Another highlight in this edition is the crucial field of aerospace technology, where MCAST's collaboration with Khalifa University and the University of Padova is exploring the essential safety and sustainability measures for space missions,

in response to the increasing challenges of space debris.

However, MCAST is not primarily a research-focused higher education institution; our commitment to internationalisation and staying abreast of global employment and technology trends has prompted us to invest in international projects and partnerships. These efforts enhance our teaching and make our curricula more relevant to our students, attracting new partners to the College. MCAST's participation in the EU4DUAL project underlines the College's evolving profile of excellence and commitment to dual education. In April 2024, a conference organised at MCAST with nine other European higher education institutions, led by Mondragon University, will delve into the future structure of dual education. This model, which favours work-based learning and real-world experiences, is increasingly appealing to students who value practical learning and the use of technology to produce quality outcomes.

These new directions necessitate additional investment and flexibility in our daily operations. The recent MCAST Act of July 2023 provides our students and staff with the legal framework needed to achieve higher levels of excellence. It is incumbent upon all stakeholders to support the College's development and solidify MCAST's position as the premier choice for post-secondary and higher education.

Internationalisation





EU4DUAL Rectors' Meeting in Graz

One year after the inaugural meeting in Kuopio, EU4Dual Rectors of the nine higher education institutions met in Graz, Austria to discuss the operational aspects of the strategic goals of this alliance. The key objective of the project is to create a European Dual Studies University in which industry will play a key role in the provision and awarding of post-graduate degrees. MCAST, through its Principal and CEO Professor James Calleja, is playing a key role in this alliance.

The network is made up of nine participating Universities namely, MCAST, Mondragon University in Spain, FH Joanneum University of Applied Sciences in Austria, Ecole Supérieure des Technologies Industrielles Avancées in France, Koszalin Technological University in Poland, Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg in Germany, PAR University College in Croatia, Savonia

University of Applied Sciences in Finland, and John von Neumann University in Hungary.

The meeting in Graz saw the completion of the initial process of this initial phase with the appointment of the Advisory Board and the Industry Consultative Council. MCAST nominees, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs and Education Evarist Bartolo and Michael Seifert, President and CEO of Seifert Systems, have been elected on the Advisory Board and the Industry Consultative Council respectively. Marisa Xuereb, another MCAST nominee, was also elected on the Regional Council. All Councils are made up of distinguished persons coming from the academic and industry worlds and will give strategic direction so that the alliance can create a new brand of higher education qualifications.

The meeting also launched a Centre of Excellence on Dual Studies, and appointed Professor Georg Nagler as its director, with the intention of setting up a world-class cluster of expertise in the field.

In Graz Rectors also agreed to set in motion the following three milestones:

- EU4Dual will launch its course catalogue, giving opportunities to study with the alliance for the first time. 5 Joint Master's degrees, and over 120 micro-credentials are in various stages of planning, with the first Master's degree a tranche of 50 micro-credentials and a summer and winter school due to launch in time for next September;



- 10-11 April 2024 will see the organisation at MCAST of the first European dual studies conference in Malta. With over 50 papers submitted and over 200 participants confirmed at this time, the conference will bring academics, policymakers and industry together to set the agenda for the alliance. The EU4DUAL Governing Board and Councils will also meet in Malta for the first time;
- On the basis of the intercultural and institutional experiences of Rectors in their respective partner countries, EU4DUAL will define strategic priorities for the future of the alliance in the context of dual education and the important role that employers and their Chambers will play for the sustainability of the European University of Dual Studies.



During the Graz meeting, Rectors have also appointed a working group to start designing work on the first European Joint Industrial Ph.D. The working group will spend the next few months working with heads of studies and industry leaders across the continent to propose a model for a multi-country work-integrated programme that can prepare students to manage, research and create innovative findings at the highest levels across the continent. It is mandatory in the alliance that research is industry-driven.

Rectors are committed to being standard-bearers for the dual education model globally and have begun planning an outreach strategy to work with other HEIs and governments to strengthen this as a new pillar of Higher Education in Europe.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union







MCAST Early Years lecturers at the E Mr Stephen Vella at Guangdong College of Business And Technology in China ECERA conference

A Vibrant International College

**BY STEPHEN VELLA, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND
COMMUNICATIONS**

The Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MCAST) has evolved into a melting pot of cultures as an increasing number of international students opt for this institution for their higher education. This surge of diverse perspectives has not only enriched the academic environment at MCAST but also cultivated a sense of global camaraderie among students.

MCAST's dedication to offering world-class vocational education has drawn students from various corners of the globe. From Europe to Asia, Africa to the Americas, MCAST's international student body embodies a diverse array of cultures, languages and backgrounds. This profound diversity infuses a distinctive flavour into the campus atmosphere, fostering an environment where students can glean knowledge not only from textbooks but also from one another's experiences.

International students contribute a wealth of knowledge and diverse academic backgrounds, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and collaborative projects within the classroom. The College's dedication to educational excellence is further strengthened by incorporating global perspectives, equipping all students to face the challenges of an interconnected world.



Visit to Osaka University accompanied by HE Andre Spiteri, in preparation for Japan Expo 2025

MCAST recognises the importance of cultural exchange in promoting understanding and breaking barriers. The College actively promotes cultural exchange programmes that enable international students to share their traditions and customs with their Maltese peers and vice versa. These programmes enrich the cultural fabric on campus and help students develop a global mindset - an essential skill in today's world.

MCAST provides an optimal setting for language learning with its diverse student body. International students can enhance their English language proficiency, as it serves as the primary medium of instruction at the College. Simultaneously, Maltese students can expand their linguistic horizons through interactions with peers from various language backgrounds. This language exchange not only enhances communication skills but also fosters intercultural understanding.

MCAST recognises international students' unique challenges and has established comprehensive support services to ensure a smooth transition and a positive academic experience. These services include orientation programmes, language support, counselling and cultural integration activities. By providing a supportive infrastructure, MCAST aims to make the College experience rewarding for all students, regardless of their cultural background.

After graduating, international students at MCAST become part of an extensive and diverse alumni network. This network facilitates professional contacts and proves the College's global reach. Local

and international alumni events provide networking opportunities, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas, creating a lifelong connection between MCAST graduates worldwide.

The presence of international students at MCAST has transformed the College into a global centre of learning and cultural exchange. As these students bring their unique perspectives and experiences to the academic community, MCAST continues to evolve into an institution that prepares students for the challenges and opportunities of globalisation. The vibrant and inclusive environment at MCAST is a testament to the College's commitment to promoting diversity, understanding and global citizenship.



Visit to Design Technology Institute in Accra, Ghana

Europe on the Move: A Leap Towards Inclusive and Accessible Learning Mobility

**BY FRANCESCA ATTARD, DEPUTY
DIRECTOR POLICY ANALYSIS**

In a bold move to transform the educational landscape of the European Union, the Education Committee is actively engaged in discussions on the 'Proposal for a Council Recommendation: 'Europe on the Move' – fostering learning mobility for all.' This proposal signifies a substantial departure towards enhancing educational mobility throughout the EU, with the objective of reaching a wider spectrum of learners and addressing the changing needs post-COVID-19 crisis.

Central to this proposal is the aspiration to elevate the current mobility targets within higher education and vocational education and training (VET) sectors. By 2030, the proposal envisions a higher education mobility target of 25%. This enhancement is not just quantitative but also qualitative, expanding the scope to include outbound degree mobility and short-term mobility with no minimum duration, alongside the existing outbound credit mobility criteria.

The VET sector is also set to witness a transformative shift, with the proposal setting a mobility target of 15% by 2030. This ambitious goal underscores the EU's

commitment to making VET an attractive and equitable pathway for learners, aligning it with the aspirations of the higher education sector.

Malta's current mobility rates, standing at 5.59% for VET and 17% for higher education, exemplify the diverse challenges and starting points among EU member states. These figures highlight the importance of setting realistic, adaptable targets that respect national contexts while striving for EU-wide educational excellence and inclusivity.

OVERCOMING MOBILITY CHALLENGES: A COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOUR

Achieving these targets is not without its challenges. MCAST sheds light on several critical obstacles that must be addressed:

FUNDING: There is a pressing need for enhanced financial support to cover the comprehensive costs associated with mobility, including living and accommodation expenses in partner countries.

VISA AND BREXIT REPERCUSSIONS: The aftermath of Brexit and visa complications have significantly impacted mobility trends, necessitating strategic support and guidance for students.

CURRICULAR RECOGNITION: Integrating international mobility experiences within existing curricular frameworks remains a challenge that requires innovative solutions.

CULTURAL AND PARENTAL INFLUENCES: Overcoming insular mentalities and parental apprehensions about studying abroad is crucial for broadening student participation in mobility programmes.

In response, MCAST has developed a mobility action plan that encompasses a variety of measures aimed at addressing these challenges and aligning with the EU's mobility targets.

It is essential to note that the EU proposal and its targets are still under discussion, with the final objectives to be fine-tuned in accordance with the mobility rates and capacities of member states. This process underscores the EU's commitment to creating a flexible, adaptable framework that respects the diversity and specific needs of each member state, ensuring that the ambitious vision of 'Europe on the Move' is both achievable and beneficial for all learners across the EU.

The 'Europe on the Move' initiative represents a forward-thinking approach to educational mobility, emphasizing inclusivity, accessibility, and adaptability.

By setting ambitious yet flexible targets, addressing key challenges, and fostering a collaborative EU-wide effort, this proposal aims to create a European Education Area where every learner has the opportunity to study across borders, enriching their educational experience and preparing them for a globalized future. As discussions continue and plans evolve, the hope is to pave the way for a more interconnected, inclusive, and dynamic educational landscape across Europe.



Fostering Cultural Awareness and Internationalisation at MCAST

BY THEA GAUCI, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

In the contemporary global landscape, embracing diversity is pivotal for creating an educational environment that goes beyond borders.

These are some of my ideas to foster cultural awareness at a College -

Curriculum Integration: One effective strategy is to infuse diverse perspectives into the curriculum. This involves incorporating literature, history lectures, and social studies materials from various cultures and regions. The focus is on presenting authentic narratives that avoid stereotypes, including books written by authors from diverse backgrounds. Displaying flags from different countries creates an inclusive atmosphere, making students feel more at home. Regular check-ins and monthly meetings between educators and students contribute to their integration into a new cultural environment.

Celebrating Diversity: Organizing events and activities that celebrate diversity is another essential approach. Cultural festivals, heritage months, international days, and sharing traditional food, music, dance, and art provide platforms for students to showcase their unique backgrounds. Such initiatives not only instil pride in one's heritage but also promote cross-cultural

exchange, preparing students for a diverse workplace.

Cross-Cultural Collaboration: Collaborative projects that involve students from different cultural backgrounds encourage teamwork and mutual respect. Facilitating visits to each other's schools in native countries promotes knowledge of diversity and multiculturalism.

Empowering Students for Social Justice: Multicultural programmes, workshops and guest speakers sharing their experiences of adapting to new cultures contribute to this goal. Interactive lessons exploring topics of privilege and identity provide a platform for students to express their thoughts and feelings.

Language Courses beyond the Standard Curriculum: Introducing language courses such as Arabic, Spanish, Italian and more enriches students' understanding of different cultural values. These courses also facilitate communication among students from diverse backgrounds.

Embracing multiculturalism and diversity is crucial for personal growth and fosters a deeper understanding of the world around us. These practices create a learning environment that prepares students for a globalised and interconnected future.



Global Horizons: MCAST's International Success through TradeMalta Collaboration

BY RICHARD SCERRI, HEAD TRADE PROMOTION, TRADEMALTA LIMITED

TradeMalta, the National Trade Promotion Agency, plays a crucial role in supporting locally based companies and entities on their internationalisation journey. Since its establishment in 2015, MCAST has been a regular beneficiary of TradeMalta's services. This collaboration has seen MCAST actively participating in business missions to diverse regions, including the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and notably, the United Arab Emirates.

In a proactive effort to enhance international engagement, MCAST has not only explored opportunities for foreign student enrolment but has also pursued various forms of collaboration, leading to successful overseas business ventures with partner institutions.

To be successful, participation in overseas business missions requires meticulous planning. MCAST's business development officials are well-versed in the necessary actions, starting with thorough desk research and the identification of potential customers. This process culminates in a matchmaking phase where international partners align the specifications of MCAST's programmes with the specific requirements of customers in the chosen market.

Leveraging the diverse services offered by TradeMalta, MCAST has established itself as a regular client, contributing to its sustained success on the international stage. The ongoing collaboration between TradeMalta and MCAST underscores the importance of strategic partnerships in fostering global opportunities for educational institutions.



Trade Mission to Ghana



Visit to Chiba University accompanied by HE Andre Spiteri, in preparation for Japan Expo 2025

A Coordinated Approach to International Partnerships for Research Initiatives, Sustainable Development and Ethical Excellence

BY DR TATJANA CHIRCOP, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION, DR LORNA BONNICI WEST DIRECTOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION, AND DR JUDITA TOMASKINOVA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) at MCAST has been dedicated to establishing strategic international networking to enable collaboration and professional association with other scholars and key stakeholders. These partnerships not only facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices but also nurture mutually beneficial relationships. In the quest for the next innovation, during the past year, ARIC submitted proposals and was awarded five International Partnership Awards part-financed by the International Partnership Awards Scheme Plus (IPAS+) 2023 of the Malta Council for Science and Technology. Through these awards, ARIC actively sought collaboration with globally recognized international institutions and experts.

STRENGTHENING MCAST'S R&I INITIATIVES THROUGH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

During the past year, through an IPAS+ award (GA: IPAS-2023-029), ARIC actively sought collaboration with Dublin City University (DCU). DCU, acknowledged for its international excellence, consistently ranks among the top young universities globally and has been awarded several EU-funded H2020 projects. The School of Computer Science at DCU hosts the ADAPT Centre, a world-leading SFI Research Centre for AI Driven Digital Content Technology, fostering collaboration among academics, researchers, and industry partners. The overarching objective of this partnership is to establish a robust research collaboration between DCU's ADAPT Centre and MCAST's ARIC to promote collaborative R&I initiatives. Through exchange visits and joint seminars, the aim is to streamline grant application processes, replicate successful strategies from DCU, and boost MCAST's involvement in Horizon Europe, aligning with Malta's Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027.

During July 2023, Dr Tatjana Chircop (Deputy Principal Research and Innovation), Dr Lorna Bonnici West (Director Research and Innovation) and Dr Tomaskinova (Deputy Director Research and Innovation), visited DCU to establish a collaboration in R&I, translating in the submission of a transnational Horizon Europe R&I proposal, aiming at AI Mastery for Empowering Education Excellence.

In the coming months, ADAPT will conduct a seminar at MCAST to present its research and innovation portfolio, allowing MCAST staff to familiarize themselves with ADAPT researchers. This event aims to facilitate discussions, explore collaboration possibilities, and discuss opportunities for academic secondments between MCAST and ADAPT. The anticipated benefits for MCAST include establishing connections and gaining insights from a globally renowned university, allowing advancements in leading Higher Education R&I actions.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The policy framework of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) 2016-2025 emphasizes the need for policies and measures that integrate sustainable development into national and regional strategies. ARIC acknowledges the significance of networking and internationalization in advancing R&I development towards sustainability at the local level. During the period September to November 2023, ARIC sought collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature – Mediterranean Cooperation

November 2023, ARIC sought collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature – Mediterranean Cooperation Centre (IUCNMED), recognizing the wealth of opportunities it offers for collaboration and knowledge circulation towards SDGs in Malta (GA: IPAS-2023-030). The strategic partnership with IUCNMED positions MCAST to gain insights from a globally recognized R&I institution, fostering advancements in European R&I actions with a focus on the Mediterranean Region.

The objectives of this partnership range from collaborative initiatives to long-term aspirations, aiming to establish a robust partnership, drive innovation, and contribute to sustainable development in the Mediterranean Region. Through networking and collaboration, MCAST endeavours to play a significant role in international R&I efforts, contributing to a smarter and more sustainable Europe.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP TOWARDS ROBUST ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RESEARCH

In our interconnected and knowledge-driven world, robust ethical standards in research are imperative. To strengthen the research ethics base, ARIC established a partnership with leading international experts from Mendel University in Brno (MENDELU), Czechia. This team includes Assoc. Prof. Sona Hermanova, Ph.D., who serves as the Vice-Rector of Research, Development and Innovation; Prof. Milada Stastna, Ph.D., a Full Professor and Head of the Department of Applied and Landscape Ecology at the Faculty of AgriSciences as well as the Head of the Research Ethics

Committee at MENDELU; Assoc. Prof. Hana Stredova, Ph.D., the Vice-Dean for HR at the Faculty of AgriSciences; and Assoc. Prof. Eva Mrkvicova, Ph.D., an expert in Animal Nutrition and Forage Production at the Faculty of AgriSciences. The collaboration also includes Mr. John Shaddock from the UK, who brings extensive experience as both a practitioner and adviser at local, regional, European, and Council of Europe levels.

The main aim of the partnership is to elevate research ethics standards, developing efficient research ethical review processes. A workshop was delivered between

29th January and 1st February 2024 (GA: IPAS-2023-053), which delved into the vital dimensions of 'Research Ethics and Integrity' and provided the Research Ethics Committee the possibility of understanding and evaluating ethical challenges in research. Additionally, it facilitated an understanding of frameworks for ethical decision-making and fundamental ethical principles. In addition to promoting ethical research practices, the workshop also fostered enduring international relationships and a support network for the MCAST Research Ethics Committee.



'NETWORK OF NETWORKS' APPROACH

Through these partnerships, ARIC aims to adopt the renowned 'network of networks' approach by supporting MCAST researchers to build connections not only within their immediate network but also across various international networks. This extensive web of collaborations expands research opportunities, facilitates participation in diverse R&I projects, and contributes to the overall enhancement of the researchers' professional profiles. It emphasizes the idea that a robust and expansive international

partnership can lead to increased knowledge sharing, resource access, and collaboration potential. This highlights the notion that a resilient and extensive international partnership can foster greater knowledge exchange and improved accessibility to resources.



A Collaborative Journey in Elevating Trade Education with The Malta Chamber and MCAST

**BY CHRIS VASSALLO CESAREO,
PRESIDENT OF THE MALTA CHAMBER**



Mr Chris Vassallo Cesaro with visiting students at MCAST

In the dynamic landscape of global business and intense competition to attract and retain a skilled workforce, collaboration between educational institutions and The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry is indispensable for fostering economic growth and innovation.

The partnership between The Malta Chamber and MCAST has undergone a transformative journey in the realm of trade courses. This collaboration has not only fortified the educational framework at MCAST but has also played a pivotal role in aligning trade education with the dynamic needs of the Maltese business community, ensuring courses remain relevant and up-to-date.

In the inaugural year of collaboration, The Malta Chamber and MCAST embarked on a journey to establish robust foundations for trade courses. Workshops, roundtable discussions, and collaborative curriculum development sessions were organized to identify key industry needs, skill gaps, and emerging trends in the trade sector.

The Chamber's profound insight into the local and international trade landscape proved invaluable in shaping relevant and forward-thinking course content. Together, the institutions launched pilot programmes, introducing students to real-world trade scenarios through industry-relevant practical exercises. Industry experts were invited to deliver presentations, providing students with real-world insights and fostering a practical understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the trade sector. Additionally, apprenticeships were established with local businesses, enabling

students to gain hands-on experience and develop a profound understanding of trade operations beyond the classroom.

This experience ensures that MCAST graduates possess the competence necessary to thrive in this rapidly evolving trade landscape. The Malta Chamber leveraged its extensive network to make it easier for MCAST international students to join.

Throughout this journey, success stories have emerged, showcasing the tangible impact of the collaboration on students and the trade sector. Graduates equipped with the enhanced trade education framework have entered the workforce, contributing to the success of local businesses engaged in various initiatives such as aviation, carpentry, M&E, and air-conditioning installation and repairs.

Through continuous innovation, industry integration, and a commitment to staying ahead of the curve, this collaboration will continue to elevate trade education to new heights. As the journey persists, the impact on students, businesses, and the broader trade community promises to be a lasting legacy, fostering a skilled and globally competitive workforce for Malta's trade sector.



At the launch of the Diploma in Joinery and Furniture Making

Cultivating Curiosity: MCAST Academics Attend the 31st EECERA Conference

BY ELIZA CACHIA, ROSE PICCININO, DR SHIRLEY ANN GAUCI, VALERIE RUTH SCERRI, AND HEATHCLIFF SCHEMBRI, EARLY YEARS LECTURERS AT THE INSTITUTE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

In the spirit of fostering international collaboration and knowledge exchange, five academics from the Early Years team within the MCAST Institute of Community Services embarked on a journey to Lisbon, Portugal,

to attend the 31st annual conference of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) held from 30th August to 2nd September 2023. This gathering, known as the largest and most significant Early Years research conference in Europe, attracts over 900 researcher delegates from across the globe, offering a platform for scholarly exchange and networking.



MCAST Early Years lecturers at the EECERA conference

The EECERA conference, which is celebrated for its unique blend of local charm and consistent quality, is hosted yearly by a different European city. The 31st conference, organised by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood in partnership with APEI and the CRIANCA Childhood Association at the Estoril Convention Centre, was no exception. It offered attendees an experience that included a programme designed to encourage cross-national collaboration and foster a community of practice among Early Years professionals.

At the heart of EECERA's mission is the commitment to sustaining and developing the rich tradition of European early childhood thought. The conference honours the legacy of pioneers such as Pestalozzi, Froebel, Steiner, Vygotsky, Piaget and Malaguzzi while embracing new paradigms, methodologies, concepts and applications in response to current early childhood studies.

The theme of the 2023 conference, 'Children's Curiosity, Agency, and Participation: Challenges for Professional Action and Development', posed critical questions about the role of curiosity and agency in learning and well-being for both children and adults. It explored how these elements could be encouraged in play and learning environments and discussed the challenges and benefits of prioritizing curiosity and agency in the Early Years sector.

Representing MCAST, Eliza Cachia, Rose Piccinino, Dr Shirley Ann Gauci, Valerie Ruth Scerri and Heathcliff Schembri, joined their international peers to delve into these pressing questions. Their participation

underscored MCAST's commitment to professional development and its dedication to enhancing the educational experience for Early Years students and practitioners alike.

Upon their return, the MCAST delegation brought back not only the knowledge and insights gained from their interactions with fellow researchers, policymakers and practitioners, but also a renewed energy to infuse their teachings and practice with the latest developments in the field. The experience at EECERA has equipped them with new perspectives and strategies to nurture curiosity among MCAST's Early Years students, preparing them to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing educational environment.

The impact of the academics' participation in the conference extends beyond the immediate academic community; it signifies a step forward in MCAST's internationalisation efforts, highlighting the institution's role in a global network dedicated to advancing early childhood education. By engaging in such international fora, MCAST not only contributes to the global discourse on early childhood education but also brings valuable insights back home, enriching the local educational scenario.



MCAST lecturers before the closing gala night



Visiting Esslingen: The Heart of German Engineering Excellence. An ERASMUS+ Mobility Experience at Esslingen University in Germany

BY ING CLAIRE SEGUNA AND ING BERNARD BRINCAT, MCAST SENIOR LECTURERS

In November 2023, Ing Bernard Brincat and Ing Claire Seguna, both senior lecturers from the Institute of Engineering and Transport, embarked on an enriching Erasmus+ mobility programme hosted at Hochschule Esslingen, the University of Applied Sciences located in Esslingen am Neckar, Germany. This picturesque town boasts a rich engineering heritage, and its university is renowned for its exceptional standards in engineering education, state-of-the-art laboratory facilities, and strong affiliations with leading engineering giants such as Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, Bosch, Festo, Trumpf and others situated in the Stuttgart area.

ESSLINGEN AM NECKAR

Nestled in the heart of Germany, Esslingen is a captivating town that seamlessly blends its rich history with a vibrant contemporary atmosphere. The well-preserved Altstadt (Old



Erasmus+





Town) stands as a testament to the town's heritage, adorned with striking examples of Gothic and Renaissance architectural styles. Strolling along its cobblestone streets is like stepping back in time, where one can admire the half-timbered houses, vibrant facades, ornate fountains and awe-inspiring medieval architecture. The iconic Esslingen Castle, situated on top of a hill, is a majestic medieval fortress boasting formidable walls that command breath-taking panoramic views. From this vantage point, visitors can behold the sweeping vistas of expansive vineyards and the meandering Neckar River that gracefully winds its way through the landscape.

AN INTERNATIONAL “BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMME” WEEK

Esslingen University hosted the week-long “Blended Intensive Programme” focused on Materials Technology. This event welcomed students and lecturers from diverse nations to delve into this field. Emphasising a hands-on learning approach, the university integrates industry collaboration and real-world applications to ensure that students' practical skills align closely with industry demands.

During the programme, participants engaged in lectures and practical laboratory sessions employing cutting-edge equipment for experimental measurements on metal components produced through additive manufacturing, also known as 3D printing. The adoption of this technology for mass-manufacture of everyday items is a new and exciting frontier for industry, prompting ongoing research into the physical attributes and performance of these components.

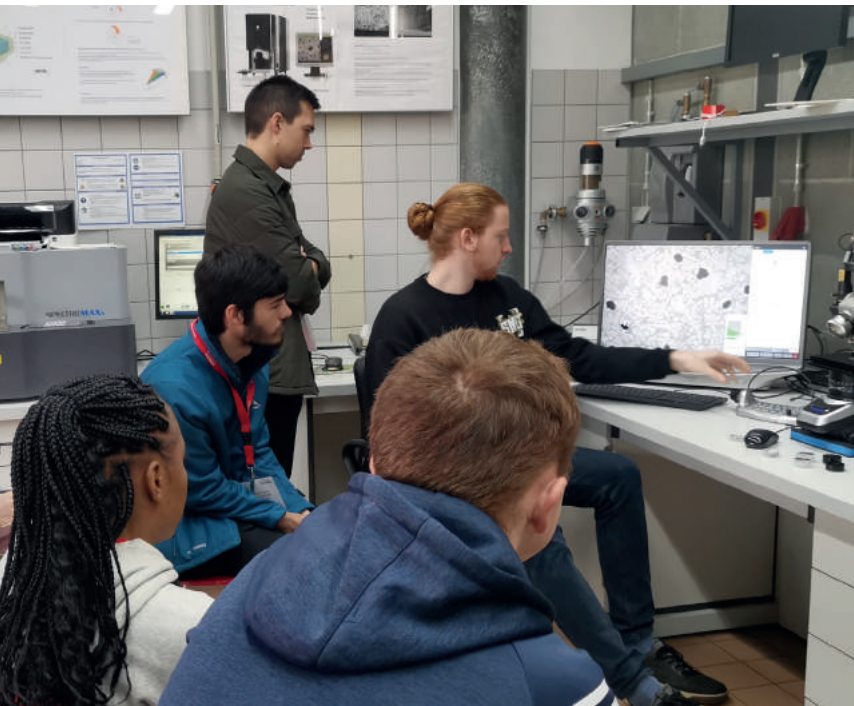
Esslingen University fosters strong relationships with industry partners, offering students valuable opportunities through collaborations and internships with leading companies. The institution's state-of-the-art facilities, laboratories and research centres create an ideal setting for innovative exploration and groundbreaking research. Industry support, including equipment donations and real-world case study analysis, further enriches the academic experience.

The week also featured social events, visits to industry partners, and cultural excursions like wine tasting and the Swabian dinner, highlighting regional delicacies like Maultaschen and Käsespätzle.

EXPLORING LABORATORIES AND INDUSTRY INSIGHTS: A PRACTICAL-APPROACH JOURNEY

The educational programme combined theoretical classes with laboratory sessions, some of which were led by the students themselves. The learning-by-doing approach was found most captivating by the participants. By emphasising the tasks at hand, recording data, and verifying it with standard datasheets or sampled images, a deeper understanding of how theory aligns with practical aspects was gained.

Learning was complemented by organised visits to partner industries. At the Porsche factory, the group witnessed the impressive automation lines that produce 400 Porsche vehicles daily. These lines integrate the expertise of human operators, robots and automated guided vehicles, in a harmonious collaboration between advanced technology and skilled craftsmanship. Another



industrial visit was at Trumpf LaserTechnik Manufacturing, a world-leading company in solutions for sheet metal processing, industrial lasers and electronics. With a legacy spanning several decades, Trumpf is at the forefront of innovation, providing cutting-edge solutions that empower businesses to enhance their manufacturing processes.

UNIVERSITY PRESENTATIONS AND PEER DISCUSSIONS

A crucial element of the BIP programme was the staff seminar, where participating lecturers presented insights into their respective countries, their universities and the courses they run. Despite hailing from diverse nations, the staff members of these universities were collectively addressing shared themes encompassing current trends, social considerations and strategies for inspiring greater student interest in engineering as a compelling career path for the future.

SUMMING UP A SUCCESSFUL EVENT: ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FUTURE ENDEAVOURS

The staff exchange proved immensely valuable, allowing for observation of diverse teaching methodologies, active participation in laboratory sessions, being cordially hosted to see the university's state-of-the-art engineering facilities and visiting esteemed industrial collaborators. This experience has forged new professional connections, fostered meaningful discussions and enabled the exchange of valuable insights and shared work experiences at European level. These encounters tackled the ongoing

challenge of setting higher teaching standards, aiming to refine techniques for a more engaging and productive learning experience for our student engineers.

Esslingen University cultivates a supportive and inclusive community, offering various student services and extracurricular activities to enhance the overall student experience. It stands as a highly proficient and renowned institution that combines academic excellence, practical relevance and industry connections to prepare students for successful careers in engineering. It is indeed a terrific destination for aspiring Erasmus+ exchange engineering students!

Empowering VET Students for Industry 4.0: MakeMyFuture Transnational Meeting in Málaga

BY ING DAVID MIFSUD, SENIOR LECTURER AT THE INSTITUTE OF ENGINEERING AND TRANSPORT

FOSTERING ADVANCED DIGITAL COMPETENCES THROUGH MAKER EDUCATION UNDER THE ERASMUS+ KA2 PROJECT

In the vibrant city of Málaga, Spain, in October 2023, educators, project coordinators, and experts from various European countries converged for the final transnational meeting of the Erasmus+ KA2 project MakeMyFuture. This project, officially launched in January 2022, aimed to enhance digital competences for advanced manufacturing industries through Maker Vocational Education. In collaboration with my colleague Damian Brincat, who served as Project Coordinator, I participated in this project representing MCAST.

BRIDGING THE GAP: MAKEMYFUTURE AT A GLANCE

MakeMyFuture addresses the evolving landscape of Industry 4.0 by supporting Vocational Education and Training (VET)

teachers in implementing maker-based activities. These activities aim to equip VET students with the advanced digital competences required by the industry. The project focuses on bridging the gap between VET students and advanced manufacturing companies, enhancing their employability and aligning curricula with industry needs.

TARGETING EXCELLENCE: PRIMARY GROUPS AND BENEFICIARIES

The primary target groups of MakeMyFuture include secondary VET school teachers, educators and individuals involved in the school-to-work transition process. The ultimate beneficiaries are secondary school and VET students, including those who may feel not catered for with the traditional educational paths.

PROJECT RESULTS

The following deliverables are the results aimed for by this project:

1. MakeMyFuture Competence Framework

Profiles needed by Industry 4.0, aligned with standard VET curricula:

The application of the Learning Outcomes approach ensures a tangible link between acquired digital competences and real industry needs.

2. MakeMyFuture Modules

Maker-based educational modules designed to nurture VET students with advanced digital manufacturing competences: Alignment with Fablabs technologies and company needs, bridging the gap between education and industry.

3. MakeMyFuture MOOC

An open web-based training course for VET teachers and trainers:

A focus on implementing maker-based educational modules, promoting synergy with local companies and emphasizing advanced digital competences.

LEARNING BEYOND BORDERS: MAKEMYFUTURE LTTA

Prior to the final meeting in Málaga, a Learning, Teaching, and Training Activity (LTTA) was held in Munich, Germany in September 2023. Participants delved into integrating maker-based activities into educational settings through lectures, workshops and visits to local Maker spaces and VET schools.

MÁLAGA'S FINAL TRANSNATIONAL PROJECT MEETING

The picturesque city of Málaga provided the backdrop for the culmination of the MakeMyFuture partners' personal meeting. The team engaged in fruitful discussions regarding the remaining project activities, emphasizing shared experiences during the testing phase of project results. Special attention was given to ensuring the project's sustainability beyond its 24-month duration.

As the Erasmus+ KA2 project MakeMyFuture moves towards its completion, the legacy it leaves is one of collaboration, innovation and empowerment. Through transnational meetings and collaborative efforts, MakeMyFuture stands as a testament to the transformative potential of Maker Education in preparing VET students for the challenges and opportunities of Industry 4.0.





Erasmus+ Mobility Enhances Early Years Education at MCAST

BY ELIZA CACHIA AND VALERIE RUTH SCERRI, SENIOR LECTURERS AT MCAST

In January and February 2024, nine students in their final year of the Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development embarked on a transformative placement experience at a childcare centre in Bologna, Italy, as part of the Erasmus+ mobility programme. Francesca Aquilina, Leah Bongailas, Alessia Castorina, Tatiana Catania, Courtney Chetcuti, Britney Chircop, Lara Thea Farrugia, Karla Spiteri and Malcolm Zammit engaged in various activities with toddlers aged two to five for a five-week period.

Senior Lecturers Eliza Cachia and Valerie Ruth Scerri from the MCAST Institute of Community Services conducted assessment visits for the Level 4 Early Years students during their work placement at childcare centres in Bologna. These visits included Asilo Nido d'Infanzia Nonna Elide, Asilo Nido Albicoccole, Nido e Scuola dell'Infanzia I Passerotti, Nido d'Infanzia La Nuvola, and Scuola dell'Infanzia La Pentola Magica.

The outdoor and learning environments, the teaching approaches and communication methods observed during these visits facilitated a fruitful exchange of ideas and best practices between the students and lecturers. This collaborative experience significantly enriched the understanding of early childhood education for all involved.

For lecturers Valerie Ruth Scerri and Eliza Cachia, the Erasmus+ mobility experience not only broadened their perspective on methodologies implemented in Bologna's childcare centres but also equipped them with international approaches and strategies in Early Years education. This comprehensive insight into varied *modus operandi* in Bologna's childcare centres has enhanced the quality and effectiveness of their teaching methodologies.

Furthermore, this Erasmus+ experience strengthened connections between Malta and international Early Years organizations. The knowledge and strategies observed will be shared during lectures with students enrolled in the Advanced Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development, fostering familiarity with diverse international approaches.

The Erasmus+ experience contributed to professional growth for both students and educators and sparked personal reflections on the richness of pedagogical approaches beyond Maltese shores.



Exploring Architectural Heritage: A Journey to Brussels and Beyond



BY KYLE INCORVAJA AND FRANCESCO BONELLO, MASONRY HERITAGE STUDENTS

In late November 2023, four students from the Masonry Heritage Skills (Kapumastru) programme, along with four lecturers, embarked on an educational visit to Brussels. The focus of the visit was to explore Gothic, Neo-Classical and Contemporary architecture, providing a unique opportunity to witness these structures in person rather than through slides and videos.



Arriving at Brussels airport in the evening of Sunday, 26th November 2023, we proceeded directly to our hotel, where we had a meal at a nearby restaurant. On Monday, 27th November, we took a train to Leuven, and explored the town hall which is adorned in Gothic style, and St. Peter's Church which showcases a blend of Gothic and Baroque elements. The visit extended to the University Library, characterized by its eclectic architecture incorporating Gothic, Classical and Art Deco features. The day concluded with visits to two churches before returning to Brussels.

On Tuesday, 28th November, we explored Ghent, visiting St. Nicholas Church, the cathedral dedicated to St. Bavo, and the medieval Gravensteen castle. The train station in Ghent, like others in Brussels, stood out with its Art Deco decorations and wall paintings.

Wednesday, 29th November, was dedicated to St. Michael and St. Gudul's cathedral in Brussels, which highlights medieval Gothic architecture. Our exploration continued to the churches of St. Nicholas and St. Catherine respectively, which both contribute to the diverse architectural panorama of Brussels. The day concluded with a visit to the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, with its extensive collection of paintings, including works by Peter Paul Rubens.

On Thursday, 30th November, we visited Antwerp and marvelled at the highly decorated train station before exploring the church of St. Charles Borromeo. The day continued with a visit to the Gothic cathedral of Our Lady and the Plantin-Moretus Museum, housed in the residence

of early modern printer Christophe Plantin.

On Friday, 1st December, we travelled to Bruges, where we visited the church of Our Lady and St. Salvator's cathedral, and explored the Christmas market in front of the medieval Gothic city hall.

We spent Saturday, 2nd December, at leisure in Brussels. Here we did some shopping and explored the Contemporary architecture associated with the European Parliament and the European Commission buildings. The day ended with a discussion on town planning, emphasizing the integration of open spaces into urban landscapes.

On Sunday, 3rd December, our final day, we visited the Atomium, symbol of the post-war European coal and steel industry. During the week we also visited the Brussels Christmas market and a light show at the Gothic town hall of Brussels.



The entire trip was made possible through the funding provided by MCAST's Erasmus+ Projects and Mobility Office. We wish to express our gratitude for this opportunity and extend our thanks to the lecturers who joined us, transforming Brussels, Ghent, Leuven, Bruges, and Antwerp into our open-air classroom.



Personal Awakening: Julia's Erasmus+ Journey

**BY FRANCESCO SANTOSPAGNUOLO,
MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT**

Within the bustling world of academic life, opportunities for personal and professional growth often come in the form of exchange programmes. Julia Cipriott, a final-year Product Design student at the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts, embraced such an opportunity through the Erasmus+ exchange programme, by embarking on a transformative journey to Portugal. Julia's story is not just about her academic journey but also about her self-discovery, cultural experiences and professional development.

Before sharing her experience, Julia talked about her pastimes and aspirations. She expressed her love for design and creativity and pointed out various hobbies such as upcycling clothes and reading books. Her diverse interests show that she is curious and eager to learn new things.

Julia embarked on her Erasmus+ journey to Portugal and stayed for two months in the culturally vibrant city of Espinho, located inside Porto. During her stay, she interned for the FEST Film Festival. "As a student of graphic design, I helped the FEST team to create compelling layouts for posters or adverts," said Julia.

Julia's internship in Espinho gave her great professional insights whilst also exposing

her to a new culture. Working with peers who welcomed her, Julia entered the field of graphic design and skilfully handled the pressure to meet deadlines and overcome creative obstacles.

What Julia found surprising was how much more relaxed the workspace environment was. Like in any other workplace, deadlines had to be met; however, Julia noted how much more lenient locals were, stating "The people I worked with made it a point to spend quality time with each other, even if it meant being a bit late with deadlines. They believe that prioritising relationships positively affects their workflow."

During her initial days in Porto, Julia faced minor language hurdles, despite learning some basics of the language. Still, while she had basic Portuguese language skills, some locals struggled with English. However, after weeks of spending most of her time with English-speaking locals, the language barrier broke down.

Julia participated actively in local traditions, such as the daily sunset gatherings at Villa Nova de Gaia, where a busker played music in the background. Joining young locals in such activities made her feel 'as one of their own'.

Reflecting on her personal growth, Julia acknowledges the profound impact of her



Erasmus+ experience. “Living abroad gave me a new perspective of what the world is actually like,” she shared, emphasising the transformative power of stepping out of one’s comfort zone. Having never lived abroad, Julia felt she had a narrow view of what the world has to offer. Her Erasmus+ journey allowed her to “experience a new level of empathy” and gain a deeper appreciation of the diverse cultures around the world. This profound perspective enabled her to see the world through a different lens, sparking a deeper sense of compassion.

Julia shared how she discovered her true passion for product design while participating in the Erasmus+ programme.

As an intern studying graphic design, she had the opportunity to explore her interests in different areas and found that her true talents and strengths lay in product design. The Erasmus+ experience helped her realise her potential and inspired her to pursue her career in this field.

Passing along her wisdom to aspiring MCAST students contemplating going on an Erasmus+ exchange programme, Julia’s advice resonates with steady conviction: “Just do it. You’ll thank yourself later.” She urges students to embrace the unknown, confront challenges head-on, and savour every moment of growth and exploration.



Promoting Innovation and Exchange: MCAST's Armenian Erasmus+ Experience



Erasmus+

**BY HEATHCLIFF SCHEMBRI, MCAST
SENIOR LECTURER**

MCAST's Erasmus+ Projects and Mobility Office has long promoted staff professional development and international knowledge exchange. Reflecting on this commitment, I had the opportunity to participate in a Staff Mobility for Teaching (STA) trip to Armenia. This was facilitated by an Erasmus+ initiative focused on continued professional development and inter-institutional collaboration.

As a Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Community Services and Coordinator of the part-time Inclusive Education programmes, the experience gained during this visit, which took place from 22nd May to 26th May 2023, was enriching. I visited the Yerevan State Institute of Theatre and Cinematography (YSITC), a prestigious institution known for its creative and educational excellence. The YSITC combines theatrical experts and academics to inspire Armenian creativity and education. My visit started with an interactive tour of the institution's departments. Engaging with YSITC academics provided me with insights into their pioneering work, as well as considerations on how such creative approaches may be integrated into

educational and pedagogical techniques at MCAST.

Pedagogical and professional discussions with the international team, coordinators, professors and students at YSITC helped me to identify ways in which both entities may collaborate. These conversations were more than just an exchange of teaching information and approaches; they were collaborative sessions in which common goals for global education standards and inclusive practices were reaffirmed.

The participatory workshops to establish an MCAST-YSITC collaboration were the highlight of this trip. It was crucial to involve students in this process so as to give the people at the core of our mission a voice in building the bridge between our institutions. Their insights and ideas helped us imagine a collaborative venture that met our academic communities' needs and goals.

My brief stay in Armenia was a mix of cultural immersion, career growth and intellectual discovery. It reaffirmed MCAST's commitment to internationalising education and seeking possibilities to improve staff and student learning.

Scania Ravi's Journey: From South India to Malta - A Decade of Work, Education, and Professional Growth



**BY SCANIA RAVI, FINANCE MANAGER,
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

My name is Scania Ravi, a 34-year-old Indian citizen residing in Malta for the past five years. I come from a middle-class South Indian family, with my father working as a driver and my mother a primary school teacher. Despite financial constraints, my parents harboured the dream of sending me abroad for higher studies.

After graduating in 2008, I understood the financial challenges involved and opted to work full-time to accumulate savings for future education. I reassured my parents of my commitment to pursuing higher studies abroad and vowed to return with a foreign degree.

It took a decade for me to build the confidence to revisit my dream. In the interim, I worked in Finance/Accounting across India, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. In 2018, the time was right, and educational consultancies were abundant. A career adviser recommended Malta and MCAST, and after positive feedback from

friends already studying here, I decided to pursue my post-graduation.

Arriving in Malta in April 2019, my one-year course faced delays due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Nonetheless, in November 2020, I graduated from MCAST. During my studies, I honed my skills through Jobsplus training schemes, obtaining certifications in Sage 50 Accounting, Advanced Business Accounting and Payroll Processing.

Securing a job at MCAST was a cherished dream. In July 2021, I was appointed Finance Manager responsible for the financial aspects of externally funded research projects at MCAST's Applied Research and Innovation Centre. In my third year at MCAST, the institution continues to foster my professional growth.

Additionally, I worked as a part-time project manager on an Interreg Italia-Malta project, contributing to the publication of three dissemination booklets. Representing MCAST in Sicily during the project's closing conference, I delivered a concluding speech highlighting our successful outcomes.

This new role as a project manager ignited my interest in the technicalities of project management, prompting me to embark on my journey for a second master's degree. Currently, I am pursuing a Master's in Operations and Project Management from UCAM, Spain, while continuing my role at MCAST.

International Research Collaboration for a More Sustainable and Resilient Future

BY DR TATJANA CHIRCOP, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION, AND DR LORNA BONNICI WEST, DIRECTOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Amidst global challenges, MCAST endeavours to foster international collaboration through research or other coordination and support actions in order to contribute towards a more sustainable tomorrow. During the past year, this collaboration through the MCAST Institutes as well as the Applied Research and Innovation Centre, has taken the form of bilateral partnerships or larger international consortia that have come together, merging diverse expertise and resources, intending to achieve specific objectives. A selection of these collaborative projects, all of which have secured external funding, are highlighted below.

RESEARCH BILATERAL COLLABORATION WITH TURKEY

MCAST collaborates in bilateral calls with Turkey on three projects, all funded by the Malta Council for Science and Technology and the Scientific Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) through

the MCST-TÜBİTAK Joint Call for R&I projects. This initiative is part of the PRIMA Programme supported by the European Union.

ANTIVIRAL-MEDHERBS (grant agreement: MCST-TÜBİTAK-2021-01), in collaboration with the Scientific and Technology Research of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) Marmara Research Centre (MAM), delves into the realm of culinary medicine to investigate antiviral activity and immuno-modulatory effects of Mediterranean herbs and spices against COVID-19 infection. Simultaneously, OPoBiCell (grant agreement: MCST-TÜBİTAK-2021-04) is in the final stages of collaboration with Middle East Technical University (METU). OPoBiCell aims to utilize the olive pomace generated from olive oil processing with maximum efficiency to produce bioactives by using different extraction methods and to utilize the remaining pulpy biomass to produce nanocrystalline cellulose as an anticaking agent.

MCAST is also collaborating through the UNIMED project (grant agreement: MCST-TÜBİTAK-2022-04) with a local industry partner—Integrated Resources Management (IRM) Company—and Docuz



Eylul University Industrial Application and Research Centre, a Turkish University. This collaboration aims to develop a survivability-of-droughts index in the context of the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus. UNIMED pioneers a novel approach to drought resilience by quantifying perception, vulnerability, adaptability, and recoverability. Positioned within the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus, this project contributes to a comprehensive understanding of drought impact.

RESEARCH BILATERAL COLLABORATION WITH CHINA

MCAST is currently collaborating with a local industry partner—AquaBioTech Limited—and Chinese stakeholders, including China Agricultural University and Beijing

Information Science and Technology University, as well as the Chinese industry partners MingBo Aquatic and CRSC Research and Design Institute Group Co. Ltd. This initiative seeks to develop a lightweight, low-power monitoring module, based on an underwater bionic robot platform, thus providing a solution for realizing high-efficiency and high-quality comprehensive monitoring of deep-water cages. Project AMBULANT receives funding from the Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST) and the Ministry for Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China (MOST), through the Sino-Malta Fund 2021 (Science and Technology Cooperation) under grant agreement SINO-MALTA-2021-18.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR RESEARCH OR COORDINATION AND SUPPORT ACTIONS

MCAST has been actively engaged in larger consortia, with one notable example, modernAKIS, involving 37 partners from various European countries. To address the evolving landscape of agriculture, modernAKIS aims to foster a European network of AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems) actors. By enhancing capacities and promoting knowledge sharing, the project charts a course towards more sustainable farming and forestry practices. modernAKIS project receives funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe HORIZON-CL6-2021-GOVERNANCE-01 under grant agreement No. 101060527.

Another project in the agricultural sphere, MED-WET, relies mostly on a Mediterranean collaboration with a partnership between six higher education institutions—Hochschule Wismar University from Germany, Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development from Egypt, Sultan Moulay Slimane University from Morocco, University of Beira Interior and the Municipality of Fundão from Portugal, and two public entities, Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Maroc from Morocco and the local EcoGozo Directorate, Ministry for Gozo. The objective of MED-WET is to enhance irrigation efficiency for smallholder farmers in the Mediterranean. MED-WET takes a holistic approach to water conservation, testing three groundbreaking irrigation technologies—Self-regulating, Low Energy, Clay-based Irrigation (SLECI), Solar Desalination, and

Productive Constructed Wetlands. The project equips farmers with hands-on skills while engaging local authorities to overcome institutional barriers. Project MED-WET is funded by the Malta Council for Science and Technology through the PRIMA initiative of Member States, Associated Countries and Participating Countries under grant agreement PRIMA-2020-02A.

A collaborative initiative spanning 17 partners across 10 countries, ProxiMed is revolutionizing the Mediterranean food system. Addressing climate change, population growth, and food security, the project introduces sustainable proteins, including plant-based sources and novel foods. Using eco-friendly processing, ProxiMed aims to create tailored products for diverse regions, promoting a resilient Mediterranean lifestyle. This project is part of the PRIMA programme supported by the European Union.

MCAST is also the Coordinator of a partnership between eight international higher education institutions across Europe, including Mendel University in Brno (MENDELU) from Czechia, Univerzitet U Nisu from Serbia, Dokuz Eylul University, Industrial Application and Research Centre from Turkey, Università degli Studi Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria from Italy, Norwegian University of Life Sciences from Norway, Tarun Ammattikorkeakoulu Oy from Finland and the University of Exeter, UK. The objective of this collaboration is to establish a European digital water higher education institution alliance. This project, WATERLINE, is also conducted in collaboration with three international industry partners and four associated

partners, including the Maltese Energy and Water Agency and the Water Services Corporation. Utilizing the quadruple helix model, WATERLINE combines research, education, and entrepreneurship capacities, paving the way for transformative learning and innovation in the water sector. This project receives funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-05 under grant agreement No. 101071306.

PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATION FOR ENHANCED SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

In conclusion, MCAST is unwavering in its commitment to fostering international collaborations that transcend borders

and address pressing challenges. The showcased bilateral projects with Turkey and China, supported by external funding, epitomize MCAST's dedication to research, innovation and sustainable solutions. Additionally, MCAST's active participation in larger consortia highlights its pivotal role in shaping the future of pertinent areas such as agriculture, water conservation and food systems. As the coordinator of WATERLINE, an alliance of international higher education institutions and industry partners, MCAST exemplifies the potential for transformative learning and innovation in the water sector. With these endeavours, MCAST not only contributes to a more sustainable tomorrow but also sets the stage for collaborative research excellence on an international level.



A Dutch Intern's Perspective on Work and Culture in Malta

BY LYNN VAN DER KAA, INTERN AT THE COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

I am Lynn, an intern from the Netherlands currently working in the Communications Office at MCAST, and I must say, I am thoroughly enjoying my experience!

In my role, I handle a spectrum of tasks, from smaller responsibilities to more substantial projects. One aspect I particularly value is the flexibility that allows me to pursue personal projects alongside my assigned duties. What distinguishes the work environment in the MCAST Communications Office is the unique balance – despite being part of the team, I am not treated as a conventional full-time employee.

One standout feature is the attentiveness of my internship supervisor, who not only values my contribution to MCAST but also prioritizes my personal growth. This holistic approach to mentorship has significantly enhanced my experience. Moreover, the collective willingness of the team to assist whenever needed creates a warm and welcoming atmosphere, making collaboration a seamless and enjoyable process.

Interning abroad has proven to be an exceptionally enriching educational experience for me, providing the

opportunity to compare work cultures across different countries. One notable observation is the inherent directness prevalent in Dutch communication compared to the generally more indirect approach of the Maltese people. In addition to gaining insights into Malta's culture and work environment, this experience has played a pivotal role in enhancing my proficiency in the English language.

Malta has been a delightful surprise, offering a wealth of activities and historical sights that defy its small size. What particularly stands out to me is the ubiquitous friendliness and warmth of the people, evident everywhere I go. While I initially perceived the Netherlands as multicultural, Malta has surpassed my expectations, proving to be an even more diverse and culturally rich environment.

My internship abroad has been instrumental in fostering my independence. Navigating public transport and figuring things out on my own have become second nature, contributing significantly to my personal growth. Additionally, the experience has enhanced my social skills, making it easier for me to engage in conversation in English and, consequently, leading to a noticeable improvement in my language proficiency.





An International Odyssey in Journalism at MCAST Mosta

BY EMMA BROWNRIGG FENECH, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

The Institute for the Creative Arts in Mosta has become a nexus for innovation, practicality and diverse enrolment. In this interview featuring Alice Milne, an international student pursuing a B.A. in Journalism at the Institute for the Creative Arts, we delve into her distinctive journey. The article navigates through the factors influencing her choice of MCAST, cultural adjustments, academic experiences and her aspirations shaping her educational narrative.

Starting with her decision-making process, Alice elaborates on selecting MCAST Mosta over other institutions. The hands-on and multimedia approach of MCAST's journalism programme aligns seamlessly with her career aspirations, setting it apart from the conventional nature of a Bachelor's in Communications.

The interview sheds light on the cultural contrasts Alice encountered, transitioning from the structured environment of the UK to Malta's laid-back atmosphere. The shock of cultural differences, coupled with a nostalgic yearning for the familiarity of UK school dinners, adds a personal touch to her narrative.

As the conversation explores the roots of her journalism pursuit, Alice credits magazines like Polyesterzine and Cosmopolitan. The comprehensive course, covering print journalism, media tools and creative thinking lectures, not only resonates with her aspirations but also fuels her passion to apply acquired skills in real-world scenarios.

Acknowledging the greatness of the learning environment and unwavering support from lecturers at MCAST Mosta, Alice notes the language barrier as a challenge, with the use of Maltese in conversations posing a potential obstacle to meeting deadlines.

Reflecting on memorable experiences within the journalism course, Alice fondly recalls a unit titled 'Reading the Image', taught by Dr. Ian Attard. This experience not only led to a close friendship but also opened doors to an internship, marking a pivotal moment in her academic journey.

Engagement in extracurricular activities, including an internship for an underground music review website and contributions to a British feminist movie magazine, has enriched Alice's understanding of writing. These experiences, applied in her studies and assignments, highlight the practicality of MCAST's journalism programme.

Alice discusses the unique focus of her journalism course tailored for students aspiring beyond basic office journalism jobs. The active promotion of placements and opportunities abroad fosters an environment encouraging unconventional journalism techniques and prepares

students for new job opportunities in journalism.

Amidst the challenges of learning Maltese and instances of xenophobia, Alice reflects on the strength derived from her differences. While acknowledging the unlikelihood of full integration into Maltese society, she leverages her unique outlook as an advantage in her professional endeavours.

Looking ahead, Alice boldly envisions her career, aiming to become the Sex + Relationships Editor for Cosmopolitan España in a decade. She attributes her confidence in achieving this goal to the comprehensive units provided during her course, specifically tailored for the 'out of the box' approach in the B.A. (Honours) Journalism course.

This interview explores the educational journey of an international student named Alice. The hands-on, multimedia approach, combined with an inclusive and innovative environment, propels her towards a future where she not only aims to be prepared but to be ahead in the dynamic realm of global journalism.



Education Malta: Nurturing Global Educational Partnerships and Attracting International Talent

**BY CHARLES ZAMMIT, CHAIRMAN
EDUCATION MALTA**



Education Malta was established in 2016 as a public-private partnership between the Government of Malta through the Education Ministry and The Malta Chamber of Commerce. It is the national agency tasked to: (a) promote Malta as an international education hub, to attract foreign direct investment from international education institutions of repute and standing to establish a presence in Malta either through a stand-alone campus or branch or in partnership with an existing licensed education institution; (b) to support licensed local public and private education entities to attract international students to pursue studies in Malta at all levels of the education sector, in particular at Higher Education Institutions and Universities.

Education Malta is the official national agency within the European Union Directorate for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture - Study in Europe platform which is composed of the twenty-seven EU member states. To ensure that Malta's internationalisation of education policy is showcased and promoted internationally, it is also a member of Global Education Network Europe (an EU-funded agency) and the European Association for International Education. Through the association of these international networks, Education Malta participates at a number of conferences, students' fairs and education-related fora. It is also active at events which are organised by these prestigious institutions to promote the mobility of students internationally. At these students' fairs, Education Malta is accompanied by a number of Malta-based education institutions vying to attract foreign students. These benefit from their logistical presence on the Malta national stand.

Over the past years since Education Malta came into effect, a number of joint initiatives were taken with MCAST in the endeavour to attract students from countries such as China, Ukraine, India, Dubai, Morocco and other target countries. During the two-year Covid-19 pandemic which drastically disrupted all overseas in-person promotional campaigns, our efforts had to switch to a virtual and digital presence. It is of satisfaction to note that these joint campaigns have produced satisfactory results both in the number of students that MCAST so successfully attracted to pursue studies at their campus, as well as in partnering with education institutions of repute to conduct joint courses and thus attract students from a wider spectrum. This besides enriching the College's own curricula of courses it provides.

Education Malta is pleased to note that over the past eight years since its inception, over thirty international education institutions with foreign shareholding have established a presence in Malta, either as a stand-alone operation offering their niche courses to international and Maltese students, or in partnership with local Maltese-owned licensed education institutions offering University courses as transnational education. Currently, over three thousand international students are pursuing studies at Maltese Higher Education Institutions and Universities. Over one thousand international students graduated in 2023 after successfully completing their courses in these education institutions.

A clear advantage that Malta has, is its network of Memoranda of Understanding

on the mutual recognition of academic qualifications with a number of countries. This ensures that students who graduate from Maltese HEIs and Universities will have their academic qualifications (degrees and diplomas) recognised by their country of origin.

While satisfied with the results achieved, Education Malta, through its now well-established international networks, is resolved to continue to assist local education institutions to attract foreign students to study in Malta as well as to promote Malta as a centre of quality and excellence in the international education sector.

The Insights and Experiences of Two Foreign Students at MCAST

BY JULIANA ZAMMIT, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

In an era of global education, the presence of international students on campuses is increasingly common. In a conversation with Emiel Lambrechts, a Journalism student from Belgium, we gain a glimpse of his school experience in MCAST Malta during his one-semester stay.

We also gained insight from Marianne Camilleri, a Bachelor student in Photography from Lebanon, who started her journey back in 2021 in the Advanced Diploma in Photography course.

Despite having to adjust to a new location, both Emiel and Marianne described their experience at MCAST as wonderful. Marianne is currently navigating her first year of a Bachelor's programme in Photography with many conceptual projects in production, while Emiel is in his final year and is working on his thesis.

Both Emiel and Marianne suggest that the experience for international students at MCAST could be further enhanced with



dedicated stipends to foreigners, like those provided to local students. Emiel wished to strengthen his knowledge by joining the MCAST Mosta academic year 2023-2024, and experiencing beautiful weather and a different culture. He shared with us his successful experience with balancing both academic and social life since he had way more free time than he usually had at home due to the flexible schedule given to him by MCAST.

He was able to visit different Maltese towns, participate in many fun activities with other international students and still have more time to himself. He also mentioned that he was quite surprised to find that the Maltese education system does not have examinations unlike education in his country. He also found that normal things in his country are surrounded by a huge controversy in Malta.

As already stated, Marianne Camilleri is currently a first year Bachelor student in Photography. She joined MCAST back in the

academic year 2021-2022 as she discovered the Advanced Diploma in Photography course and felt that it suited her passion for photography. For Marianne, language was a challenge as her English was not that great, but over time, she was able to practise her skills and even adjusted well to the environment and culture of the Maltese islands.

Marianne lives with her family in Malta. This made it easier for her, however she shared that it was hard being away from home. Her motivation for balancing the academic and social aspects of student life here in Malta is being disciplined and giving everything its own time.

Emiel and Marianne praised the potential for international students to thrive at MCAST

as it provided them with the necessary support. The students they encountered at MCAST made them feel included and they were approached with a good spirit and open mind. They also stated that they liked the weather in Malta and the fact that Malta is an island.

The stories of both Emiel and Marianne attest that studying abroad, while initially challenging, evolves into a transformative and regret-free experience. It becomes a journey of self-discovery, fostering independence and discipline amidst the backdrop of a new culture. This underscores that pursuing education at MCAST is not solely about academics but also a profound voyage of personal growth.



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VideOptic

A Foreign Student's Educational Journey in Malta: Insights from Hamza Bensallam

BY JAMES BATES, MCAST JOURNALISM STUDENT

Introduction: In my quest to delve into the lives of MCAST students, I had the privilege of interviewing Hamza Bensallam, a Moroccan student pursuing an Undergraduate Diploma in Auto Electronic Technology at MCAST's Institute of Engineering and Transport in Paola.

28-year-old Mr. Bensallam has a profound interest in physical activity, having practised taekwondo since the age of 14. His diverse educational background includes a Diploma in Auto-electric Vehicles and a Bachelor's degree in Management. With aspirations for a future career in vehicle maintenance, he chose to pursue his Diploma in Malta due to the absence of such institutes in Morocco.

Despite other options globally, Bensallam opted for Malta, citing its cultural and climatic similarities to Morocco. His experience has been comfortable, seamlessly integrating with the local community. He highlights the ease of understanding Maltese and sees Malta as an ideal setting to enhance his English language skills.

Bensallam commends MCAST's educational system, emphasizing the alignment with the hands-on approach he experienced

in Morocco. Recognizing the growing popularity of electric and hybrid vehicles in Morocco, he foresees significant opportunities in the automotive technology industry.

Outside MCAST, Bensallam navigated independent life, appreciating the absence of family support. Despite the challenges, he views the experience positively, enhancing his self-reliance and cultivating invaluable day-to-day skills. Independence has not only contributed to his personal growth but also made him more outgoing in social situations.

Bensallam's exploration extended beyond MCAST as he engaged with industry professionals like bus drivers and local companies, delving into the intricacies of automation.

In summary, Bensallam expresses immense satisfaction with his time in Malta, particularly at MCAST, where he had no complaints to share. He encourages prospective foreign students to consider education abroad, particularly in Malta, emphasizing the comprehensive learning experience beyond formal education. According to him, spending time abroad provides invaluable insights into oneself, diverse communities, businesses and cultures.





Learning Languages

BY ALICE JENNIFER EILEEN MILNE

ᄀellow!

Hola!

Ciao!

Hallo!

Bonjour!

أب حرم

If you are reading this, most likely you are in Malta. Not only that, but you will be able to understand at least one of the above - I hope.

Malta, our 'diamond of the Mediterranean', is in the perfect position to absorb as many languages as possible. The Maltese language and culture themselves are a soaked sponge of European and African countries, making it a beautiful blend of the best of the Mediterranean.

Malta's national languages are Maltese and English, but why not take it one step further? Being bilingual is great, but maybe it is time to expand your horizons and become a polyglot!

Why should you?

There is an abundance of reasons: more career prospects, more people to communicate with, makes it easier to travel, and – let us be honest – it makes you so much more interesting.

But there is one reason that may surprise you: learning new languages has psychological benefits! It has the ability to increase cognitive abilities, defend your mind against ageing, boost your creativity and help your self-esteem.

So now you want to get started on learning a new language.

First pick up a language - maybe of somewhere you want to travel, or whose films you enjoy - and get started!

If you want to teach yourself, you can find an app (Memrise is great) or download free PDFs of certified language learning books (Internet Archive has a lot). You can also always splurge on the physical edition of the books, but I would recommend checking out the free version before you commit to your journey as a polyglot.

Or, perhaps you want to go old school, and follow the MATSEC syllabus - which you can download from online - and use the units as study topics for yourself, and to track your progress.

But you work better with a tutor...

Where to start... Italian or French? Spanish or German? Maybe you want to try your hand at Arabic? MCAST has got you covered with their Foreign Language Proficiency courses that, as a student at MCAST, you can sign up to for free! You will be studying at SPA Level 1 or 2 - which is roughly equivalent to Level A (not 'A' Level!) of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

You can send an e-mail to languages@mcast.edu.mt or call 23987518 / 23987527 to apply or shoot any queries you may have!

Integration

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

“Integration is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most. The concept is individualized, contested and contextual.” (Robinson, 1998:118)

Other terms that are occasionally used interchangeably with integration include assimilation, insertion, inclusion, and adaptation. However, it is important to note that, theoretically, the meaning of these terms can vary considerably.

Integration refers to the attempt to facilitate a sharing of resources – economic and social, an equalising of rights – political and territorial, and the development of cultural exchanges and new cultural forms between migrants and all other members of a society. (Stubbs, 1996)

Ager and Strang (2010) developed a framework to operationalize and measure integration processes;

- **Means and markers – employment, housing, education, health**
- **Social connections – social bridges, social bonds, social links**
- **Facilitators – language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability**
- **Foundation – rights and citizenship.**

According to Garces and Penninx (2016), other means of measuring integration aspects may include:

- **Legal-political (rights)**
- **Socio-economic (access to institutional facilities)**
- **Cultural-religious dimensions (acceptance/otherwise).**

Integration can be a challenge both for host communities and for migrants and refugees themselves. The lack of integration can lead to violation of basic human rights, as well as a number of social, political and cultural rights.

It is important to highlight the fact that migrants and refugees can contribute to the country's well-being, where they have equal access to employment and education, live in security and dignity with their families, become active citizens and are protected against discrimination. On the other hand, leading migrants to a state of vulnerability would actually be adding another burden on the receiving country. The lack of access to fundamental rights also causes social tensions between migrants and members of the receiving country.

It would be interesting to explore what migrants think about integration, how they define it and what it means for them, what they feel about 'getting integrated', about their human security, safety and stability in the receiving country. Referring to rights and integration, a migrant student once said, "What the Maltese have, I want to have". After involving the protagonists themselves and obtaining first-hand information, one can talk of 'successful' integration and measure it.

Embracing diversity is emphasizing equal opportunities for all and applying a bottom-up approach for a humanitarian treatment of migrants in receiving countries – regardless of the economic, political and socio-cultural circumstances.

Applying this to MCAST – opening its doors to all interested parties is a step in the right direction, but in order to answer to the present needs of its diverse cohort of students, the College must invest in a revision programme to provide a multicultural infused curriculum. This will promote integration and cultural intelligence which facilitates the learners' capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse situations and settings within our society.

The College must also equip lecturers with training on multicultural education, monitoring and evaluating the quality of what is taught; embark on inclusive teaching methods to serve culturally and linguistically diverse students; and create multi-stakeholder learning communities with the involvement of employers, health, social services and providing adequate services to students.

MCAST's role is to assist and support lecturers in addressing any misconceptions about specific racial minority groups, thus ensuring that such groups are not portrayed in a negative manner but as an integral part of the learning community.

A promoter of integration is Work-Based Learning. The apprenticeships and placements experience is a vehicle for migrants to attain a higher level of integration in society and can actually

provide a smooth transition from education to the place of work which may lead to a higher level of integration.

It is part of MCAST's civic role to provide a socially just and equitable education for all learners whilst producing the necessary social networks to serve as mechanisms that integrate migrant students into the College's social structure, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging to the College community and to society at large. Whilst considering the economic benefits of migrants' integration, it is a collective responsibility to acquire a deep understanding of the main integration issues at stake. Developing the capacities to address further the issues discussed afore, all parties of the equation would benefit from migration and experience a sense of belonging and fulfilment.





Erasmus+ Student Mobility for VET Traineeship – an Experience of two MCAST Gozo Campus Students



Sarah Galea and Saviour Buttigieg, two Gozitan students, embarked on a two-month Erasmus+ Student Mobility for VET Traineeship in Coimbra, Portugal, during the summer recess of 2023. This traineeship followed the successful completion of their Advanced Diploma in IT (Software Development) at the MCAST Gozo Campus, marking the culmination of a four-year educational journey that began at the Foundation Level. Currently, both students are pursuing Bachelor's degrees in IT, with Sarah specializing in Digital Games Development and Saviour in Software Development, at the MCAST Paola Campus.

In the academic year 2022-2023, Sarah and Saviour attended an Erasmus+ briefing session designed for Level 4 and higher-level students at the Gozo Campus. Without much hesitation, they decided to apply for a traineeship mobility opportunity. Upon receiving acceptance for their application, they acknowledged the need for careful consideration.

As young individuals from Gozo, accustomed to a protected environment, the prospect of this experience seemed novel. However, the realization that the mobility was fully funded became a significant incentive. Despite contemplating the challenges of stepping out of their familiar surroundings, especially considering their upcoming move to Malta for further studies, the students recognized the unique nature of the opportunity. With the understanding that such experiences are valuable and should not be missed, they ultimately chose to embrace the opportunity.

In Portugal, the Gozitan students integrated with a cohort of ICT students who had recently finished their Level 4 studies at the MCAST Main Campus. Their collective assignment was with G9 Telecom, and from their office space, they relished breathtaking views of the city and the river. Sarah's responsibilities involved developing a database to monitor public holidays in Portugal, while concurrently managing the firewall for the entire website. On the other hand, Saviour undertook the task of constructing a website from its conceptual design phase through to its ultimate implementation.

The traineeship proved to be a profoundly enriching experience for the two Gozitan students, as well as for their Maltese peers, fostering growth both personally and professionally. The hands-on work experience played a crucial role in refining and enhancing their technical skills, as well as their intra and interpersonal abilities in collaborating with other employees of the company.

Living independently in a foreign country, adapting to a new working environment and cultural nuances, and establishing connections with colleagues, contributed to a unique and valuable learning experience. In addition to their professional growth, the students made new acquaintances and friends, further broadening their personal networks.

During their free time and weekends, the group seized the opportunity to explore various cities and locales, making the most of this transformative experience.

Sarah and Saviour consider this traineeship as one of the pinnacle experiences during their time at MCAST. They emphatically recommend fellow students to actively engage in Erasmus+ mobilities. These opportunities, readily available, offer both challenging and enjoyable learning experiences that should not be overlooked. Participating in such programmes is a fulfilling endeavour that enriches one's educational journey and personal growth.



The Well-being of International Students at MCAST

BY ALEXANDRA ALDEN

At MCAST, the well-being of international students takes centre stage, guided by the dedicated leadership of Dr. John Bartolo, Director of Outreach and Student Affairs. Dr. Bartolo, who holds a doctorate in the Integration of Migrants in Education, brings a personal passion for the subject to his role, going beyond administrative duties to actively engage with students. Recognizing the complexity of integration, he conducts interviews with students to understand their aspirations and challenges.

With 17% of MCAST's student population being non-Maltese, Dr. Bartolo acknowledges the unique hurdles faced by these students. Integration, he emphasizes, spans beyond academic realms into social and cultural domains.

Dr. Bartolo acknowledges the nuanced challenges faced by these students, emphasising that integration is a holistic process that extends beyond the classroom into social and cultural spheres.

Under Dr. Bartolo's leadership, MCAST has implemented a comprehensive range of support services tailored to address the unique needs of international students. A cornerstone of these efforts is the i-Belong programme, partially funded by the EU and coordinated by the Human Rights Directorate, which plays a pivotal role in facilitating the integration journey for non-Maltese citizens. Mandated by law for non-EU citizens, this programme offers a holistic approach to integration, encompassing essential components such as IT training, language courses in both Maltese and English, and cultural lessons. Through



initiatives like the i-Belong programme, MCAST ensures that international citizens receive the necessary support to thrive academically and culturally within the institution and the broader Maltese community. Mentorship programmes and support groups, nurtured by Dr. Bartolo's commitment, aid international students in navigating academic and social challenges, fostering a collaborative environment.

Cultural integration is a priority, with initiatives reflecting the diverse backgrounds of students. The i-Belong programme's cultural lessons progressively introduce students to Maltese culture, facilitating effective communication and understanding. Recognizing the pivotal role of mental health, MCAST offers counselling services and mental health resources under Dr. Bartolo's direction. Practical assistance, including accommodation support and accommodating religious practices, further enhances inclusivity.

Dr. Bartolo encourages community engagement, assigning each student a contact person and course coordinator for personalized assistance. Feedback mechanisms ensure continuous improvement, with student input guiding enhancements. Post-graduation support

is provided to aid students in transitioning into the workforce or further education. Dr. Bartolo has led MCAST in adapting support services during the COVID-19 pandemic, with lessons learned informing future strategies.

MCAST extends comprehensive support to international students beyond their academic pursuits, aiding their transition into the workforce or further education. This support includes an emphasis on apprenticeships, providing invaluable hands-on experience that facilitates a seamless integration into society. Moreover, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Bartolo spearheaded MCAST's adaptation of support services to assist international students. The insights gained from navigating this challenging period are poised to shape future strategies, enhancing the institution's resilience and flexibility in addressing unforeseen circumstances.

Looking ahead, Dr. Bartolo envisions initiatives like reintroducing Diversity Day to showcase cultural richness and promote inclusivity. Through these efforts, MCAST, under Dr. Bartolo's leadership, ensures that international students feel valued, supported, and seamlessly integrated into Maltese society.



*Data mentioned in this article refers to November 2023

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Triumph in Engineering Excellence: MCAST Shines at Malta Engineering Awards 2023

MCAST, in collaboration with the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET), actively participated in the esteemed Malta Engineering Excellence Awards 2023. This event, organized by the Chamber of Engineers and held under the patronage of the President of Malta, aims to bestow national recognition upon individuals and organisations that have accomplished remarkable feats in engineering, thereby making a significant impact on Maltese society.

Throughout the event, outstanding engineering graduates from both MCAST and the University of Malta (UoM) were

honoured with awards in acknowledgement of their notable contribution to the field. The three most commendable projects in mechanical and electrical engineering were nominated. The nominated graduates presented their projects to a judging panel and the top performers from each category were revealed and honoured during the event.

Among the recipients, MCAST alumna Kim Gatt secured the award in the Mechanical Engineering sector, while Salvin Magro received recognition in the Electrical and Electronics Engineering section.



Addressing the audience during the award ceremony, MCAST's Director at the Institute of Engineering and Transport, Ing Stephen Sammut, remarked, "Today, we are acknowledging the dedication, hard work, and accomplishments of all the students who have received these awards. To these students, I extend my heartfelt congratulations. Their commitment to academic excellence, innovative thinking and perseverance has truly set them apart in a field that demands nothing short of excellence. This celebration holds deep significance for MCAST, recognizing the achievements of the Institute of Engineering and Transport's students and faculty by the Chamber of Engineers and the broader engineering community."



New MCAST Prospectus for Academic Year 2024-2025 Launched

On Monday, 19th February 2024, MCAST officially launched its latest Prospectus for the academic year 2024-2025. The launch took place during a seminar dedicated to career guidance and attended by practitioners and teachers on the Paola campus.

Around 90 guidance teachers, career advisers, and PSCD teachers attended the event organised by MCAST's Outreach and Student Affairs Department. This helped strengthen the already existing collaboration between the College and education professionals within State, Church and Independent schools.

Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation Clifton Grima said, "This initiative uncovers the important role that career guidance practitioners play within our education system by providing the necessary guidance and information to students, which enables them to succeed in their future careers. MCAST has always been at the forefront of developing and nurturing talent by providing inclusive and lifelong learning opportunities."

The new prospectus features 202 full-time courses that will be offered from October 2024. Courses offered span a range of sectors, including Engineering, Science, ICT, Business, Community Care and

Creative Arts. Panel discussions made up of industry partners, students, and College representatives were held, during which various themes were discussed. These included the importance of apprenticeship programmes, the link between the College and industry partners, courses offered at MCAST and the application process.

During the launch, MCAST Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja explained, "Witnessing students, alumni and industry partners stating the relevance of vocational careers clearly shows the importance of the education and training offered at MCAST to both students and the industry at large. This new prospectus offers a glimpse into the unique experience offered to students at MCAST as a centre of excellence in vocational education and training. The prospectus and course offer keep evolving as we want to ensure that the learning is relevant to the world of work."

Courses range from entry-level courses up to Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees, and a Professional Research doctorate. The vocational qualifications offered by the College include a strong element of work-based learning for students to enjoy a practical, hands-on learning experience which will help them land on the path to success in their future careers.

This year, MCAST announced that four new courses will be offered from October 2024 in response to industry needs:

DIPLOMA IN AVIATION, FLIGHT AND CABIN OPERATIONS;

BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS) IN ANIMATION;

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS) IN CIVIL & STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING;

MASTER IN CREATIVE MEDIA AND ENTERPRISE

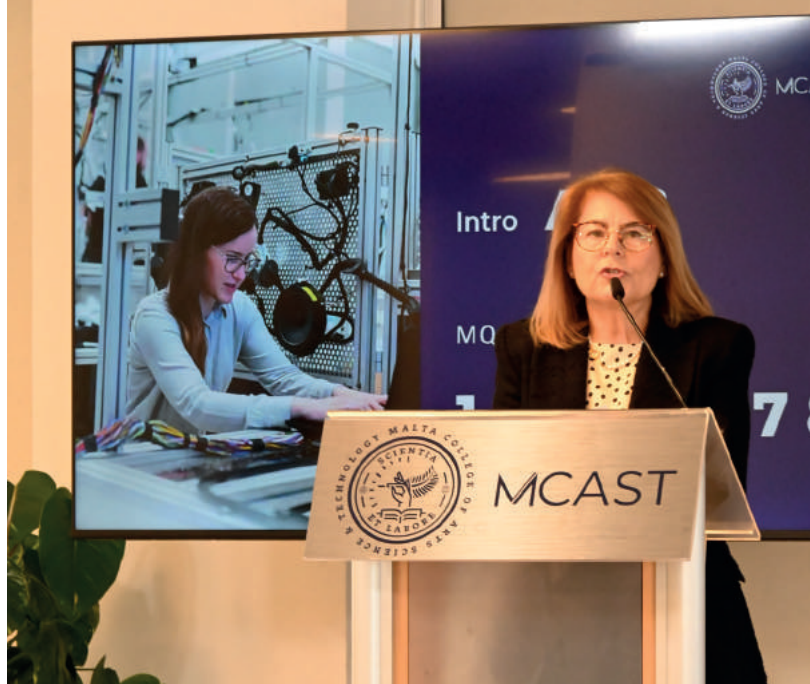
The event helped place guidance teachers in a better position to guide their students in choosing their educational journey after finishing secondary education by equipping them with the latest information about studying at MCAST, courses offered and facilities for students on campus. As a community college for all, MCAST is committed to providing a supportive learning environment and ensuring all students achieve their career goals.

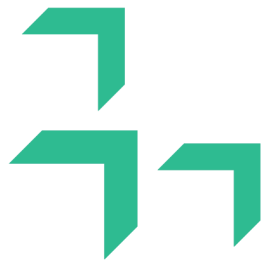
PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND GUARDIANS CAN DOWNLOAD THE PROSPECTUS DIRECTLY FROM THE COLLEGE WEBSITE: [MCAST.EDU.MT](https://mcast.edu.mt).



MCAST

PROSPECTUS 2024-2025





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**GOVERNMENT
OF MALTA**



**Co-funded by
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Empowering Learning Journeys: MCAST Showcases Innovative Tools and Practices in Education Enhancement Event

MCAST recently hosted an event titled 'Dissemination and Sharing of Good Practice for the Closure of ESF 02.058 Adding Value: Nurturing Learning Journeys in IVET and MCAST.' During this event, the College showcased the project activities undertaken over the past few years and facilitated the exchange of best practices acquired throughout the project.

Dr. Tatjana Chircop, the Project Leader and MCAST Deputy Principal for Research and Innovation, spoke about how the project enabled the College to develop innovative tools and services dedicated to enhancing

student engagement and the overall learning experience.

In addition to the creation of several short courses, through the project MCAST successfully developed cutting-edge learning tools. The research component identified and implemented support systems and online tools to promote more effective learning, providing students with the opportunity to fully engage in their studies and derive enjoyment from the learning process.

At the event, three online platforms were presented. Firstly, the 'Operational Tools and Information System' featured a Chat Communicator, a Smart Board for interactive learning, and the integration of Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality to facilitate topic comprehension. The second platform, 'Trail Map,' served as a preventive measure, allowing the College to identify students at risk of dropping out and provide timely support. Lastly, the 'Gamification Learning

Management System' offered students the chance to learn specific topics through engaging games, with the flexibility to create games tailored to the evolving needs of MCAST's curricula.

As part of the project, the role of student mentors was established. These multidisciplinary mentoring teams focus on ensuring the well-being of each student, empowering them to navigate their learning journey successfully. This service, which MCAST has committed to sustaining, has received positive feedback from over 3,200 students throughout the project's duration.

The event highlighted the transformative impact of the project in advancing learning methodologies, creating a supportive environment and reinforcing MCAST's commitment to providing an enriching educational experience for its students.



MCAST Holds Gozo Campus Graduation Ceremony

MCAST recently concluded its series of graduation ceremonies, marking the culmination of a successful academic year. A total of twenty-six ceremonies were held to honour the achievements of the graduates of the 2022-2023 academic year.

The final ceremony took place at the MCAST Gozo Campus on 1st December 2023, and was attended by the Minister for Gozo, Hon. Clint Camilleri, who congratulated the students on their success.

Minister Camilleri imparted words of encouragement, saying, “Never give up as you persevere in your studies and career

development. Work gives us value and dignity and I encourage you to keep looking for opportunities where you can fulfil your potential. As the train of life passes you by, I encourage you to take the leap and make the most of that opportunity for your growth and the benefit of society.”

Gozo Campus Director Ing Godwin Grech encouraged students to take the lead in empowering themselves and shaping their future. He stated, “Your success encourages us to keep working with determination. The decisions you take now will shape your future. The best way to predict the future is to create it.”





Qualitative Research Conference held at MCAST

MCAST hosted the 2nd edition of the Qualitative Research Conference on its Paola Campus in December 2023. Under the theme, 'Engaging Innovative Knowledge through Applied Qualitative Research', the conference spotlighted qualitative and mixed-methods research, emphasising the practical application of such research to address real-world challenges in Malta.

Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Research, and Innovation, Keith Azzopardi Tanti, highlighted the conference's significance, stating, "This Qualitative Research Conference is important as it focuses on the innovative application of qualitative and mixed research methodologies to address real-world challenges within the context of Malta."

Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja emphasized the crucial role of applied research at MCAST and asserted that, "In an education environment in which the role of workplaces and technology is increasing, it is paramount that at MCAST research is applied with positive tangible impacts on the labour market and the quality of life of all citizens."

Deputy Principal Research and Innovation





Dr. Tatjana Chircop described the conference as an opportunity to bring together academics, researchers and practitioners from diverse backgrounds, fostering the exchange of ideas and perspectives. She emphasized, "This conference gives us the opportunity not only to showcase some of the current research at the College but also gives us the opportunity to cross-fertilize ideas, to make the most out of the diverse sectors we come from and discuss qualitative methodologies and analytical tools."

The conference aimed to introduce novel approaches to methodology implementation in qualitative research and explore the practical application of applied research within industry and society. Participants, including MCAST academics, industry partners, international academics, and students, presented their research projects during the event.

Distinguished international guest speakers,

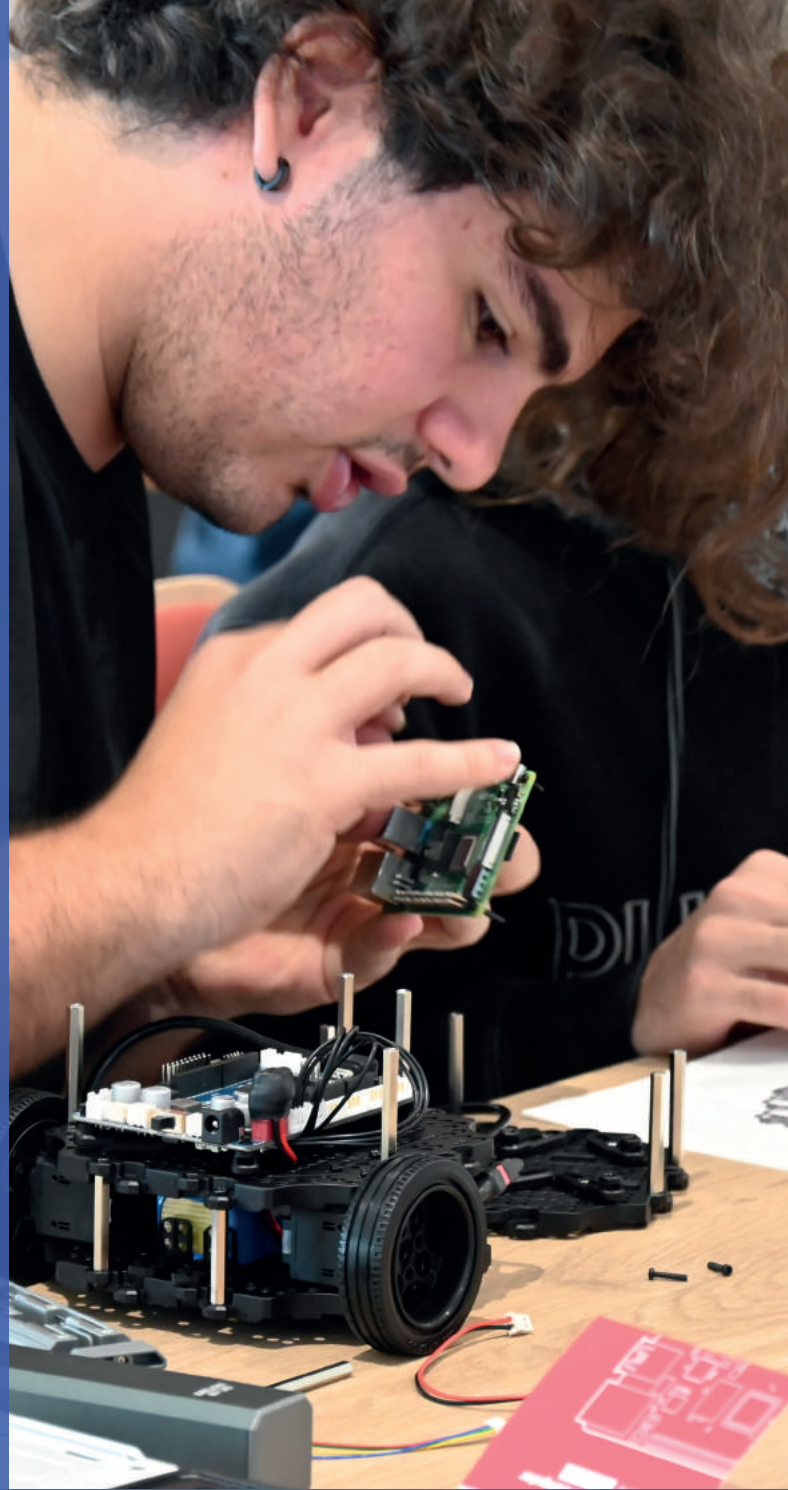
including Professor Karin Hannes from KU Leuven University in Belgium, Professor Shane P. Desselle from Touro University in California and Dr. Stefan Rädiker, a renowned consultant and trainer specializing in MAXQDA software, attended the conference.

The research conference featured over 35 presentations across three significant themes: 'education', 'methodology', and 'enterprise and industry'. Additionally, 18 research poster presentations were displayed, showcasing innovative qualitative research endeavours.

A specialised doctoral day was organized during the conference, dedicated to both active and aspiring MCAST doctoral candidates. Various sessions focused on diverse research themes and a panel discussion involved international guest keynote speakers, College industry partners, MCAST academics and aspiring doctoral students, exploring critical research projects for future doctoral degrees.

MCAST Research and Innovation EXPO 2023: Bridging Academia and Industry for Sustainable Solutions

MCAST, in collaboration with the College's Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC), launched the fifth edition of the MCAST Research and Innovation EXPO. The EXPO was held on the Paola Campus on the 15th December 2023.





This event was designed to foster an integrated environment where academic exploration aligned with industrial innovation. The initiative promoted research projects that were not only ground-breaking but also directly translated into practical applications benefitting both academia and industry.

Addressing the event, Clifton Grima, Minister for Education, Sport, Young People, Research and Innovation, declared, “It was a privilege to witness the development of the College’s research hub over the past years. The Government has prioritized its investment in research and innovation, recognising that this would continue to make us competitive. The EXPO served as an opportunity to celebrate success, share new ideas and encourage partnerships and visions of a future where innovation leads to tangible results for the benefit of society.”

Keith Azzopardi Tanti, Parliamentary Secretary for Youths, Research and Innovation, highlighted the EXPO’s significance in combining two major sectors of national importance—research and innovation. He stressed the importance of fostering an integrated environment where

fostering an integrated environment where academia and industry collaborated. The work done at MCAST, particularly through these research projects, was expected to help the country reach important milestones. Azzopardi Tanti observed that the EXPO motivated the Government to continue investing in research and innovation for societal improvement and a better quality of life.

The 50 presentations showcased at EXPO 2023 covered six thematic areas, reflecting a wide spectrum of research fields. These initiatives were aligned with ARIC’s collective research objectives, promoting the advancement of applied research and sustainable innovation throughout MCAST.

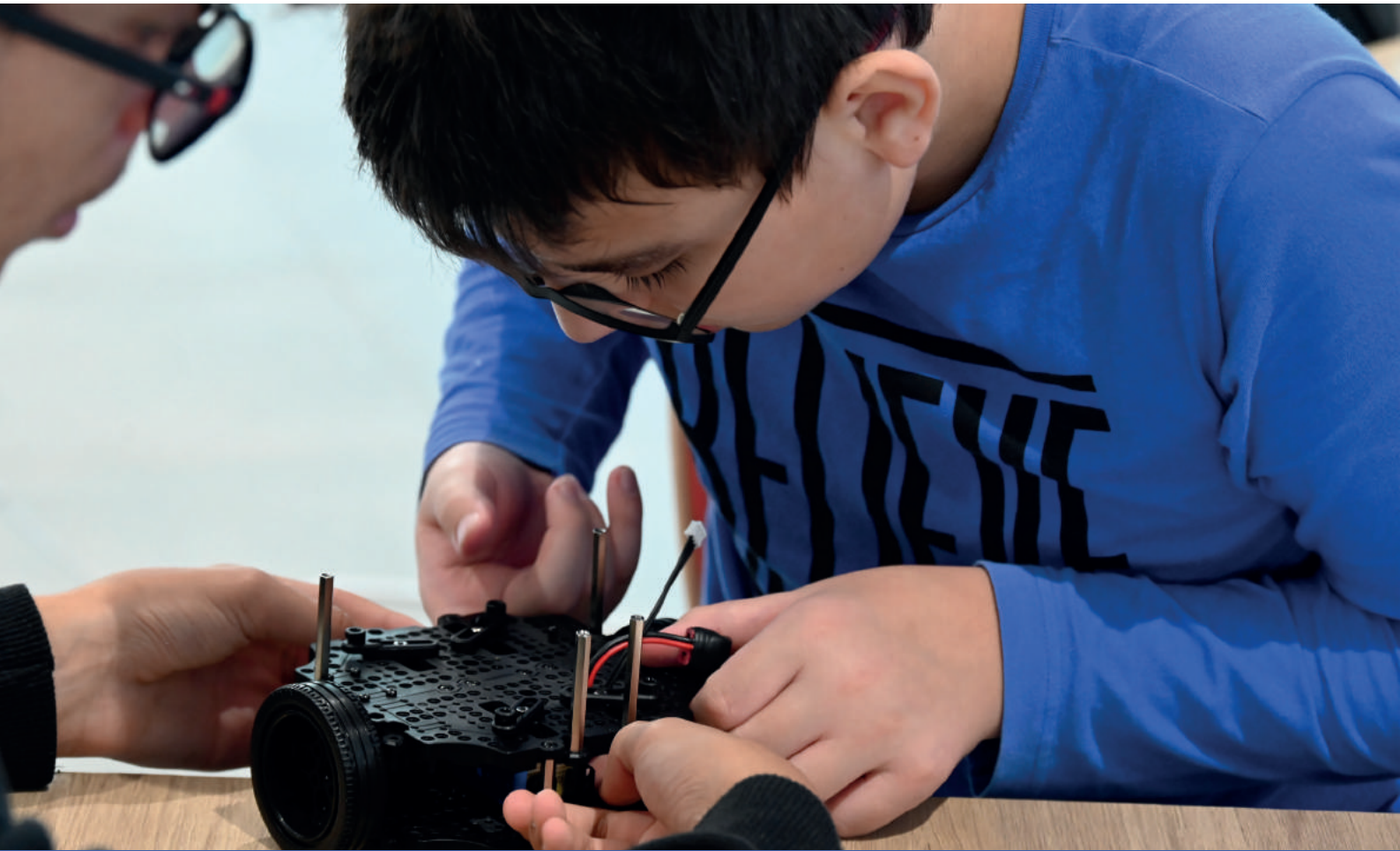
A panel discussion during the EXPO explored the potential and challenges of conversational AI in education and research. Researchers also presented on topics such as education and sustainability through EdTech and CleanTech, and vocational education and entrepreneurship, offering innovative insights

Professor Joachim James Calleja, MCAST Principal and CEO, highlighted the

importance of the research EXPO, stating, “Showcasing our research is part of the attraction to further projects focusing on issues of relevance to the quality of life of Maltese citizens. MCAST’s research increasingly focuses on various areas, and we aim to feed into vocational degree courses at Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral levels, addressing the needs of the industry with innovative ideas for sustainable futures. The College aims to create a community of vocational scholars providing research-

evidenced solutions to the well-being and development of our population.”

Four workshops, addressing diverse topics such as hydration promotion across the lifespan, effective research project management, benthic species annotation, and adult educator toolkits for front-line workers engaging with young people, were organized during the event. Approximately 150 participants registered for the EXPO.





Aircraft Maintenance Training: MCAST's Cutting-Edge Augmented Reality Platform

MCAST has become synonymous with the ongoing adoption of cutting-edge technologies and progressive learning techniques in vocational education. In its continuous commitment to provide the best and most innovative learning experiences, MCAST proudly announces the recent acquisition of a custom-developed Augmented Reality (AR) platform for aircraft engine maintenance training. This advanced system is poised to significantly enhance the learning journey for MCAST's students enrolled in various aircraft maintenance programmes.

The advantages and benefits of AR technologies across diverse applications are widely acknowledged, making their integration into the aviation sector, particularly in aircraft maintenance training, a natural progression. Recognising these benefits, MCAST initiated the acquisition process for this state-of-the-art system, reaffirming its position as a pioneer in local aircraft maintenance training.

It is worth noting that emerging technologies like AR are also making their mark in activities related to the

continued airworthiness of aircraft. Aircraft maintenance, a field at the forefront of engineering innovation, is evolving with AR platforms becoming indispensable tools in enhancing maintenance practices. This underscores the importance of training current aircraft maintenance students on such technologies to prepare them for the evolving demands of the aircraft maintenance sector.

MCAST recently showcased this innovative technology to representatives from local partner aircraft maintenance organizations. Academic staff guided attendees through various aircraft maintenance tasks in the AR environment, providing insights into the transformative impact of AR on the aircraft maintenance landscape.

The versatility of AR applications in aircraft maintenance, ranging from aiding visual inspections to real-time data analysis, is rapidly establishing AR as an invaluable tool. Particularly in Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facilities, where AR is utilized for diverse applications, it is proving itself as a game-changer in aircraft maintenance training. Trainees can now receive practical training without the need for an actual aircraft, offering cost-effective and continuous training on multiple aircraft variants throughout the year.

Conducting training in an AR laboratory, as opposed to an aircraft hangar, minimizes disruptions to ongoing maintenance operations and ensures a safer learning environment. The AR platform allows trainees to practise skills using virtual aircraft models, realistically simulating real-world scenarios. Simulated aircraft system faults provide opportunities for trainees

to enhance troubleshooting skills. The immersive learning experience offered by AR platforms accelerates learning curves and improves knowledge retention among trainees.

The recently installed AR system at the AR Laboratory in the Aviation, Transportation and Logistics Department at MCAST's Main Campus in Paola reflects the successful collaboration between MCAST academic staff and technology implementation experts. Students enrolled in Aircraft Maintenance programmes at MCAST are already reaping the benefits of this innovative learning experience. MCAST plans to conduct further sessions to showcase the advantages of AR technology to other stakeholders within the local aviation sector.



Enriching Upskilling Workshop for several MCAST Lecturers

In collaboration with EIT Urban Mobility, MCAST organized a comprehensive upskilling workshop for numerous MCAST lecturers from the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) and the Institute of Information and Communication Technology (IICT) on the 30th November 2023, at the MCAST Paola Campus.

The event, titled 'Urban Mobility Trends R&I and Curriculum Development,' concentrated on key areas such as Urban Air Mobility, Sustainable City Logistics, MaaS/SaaS and Future Mobility, and Electric Mobility.

Tailored to cultivate a shared understanding of new technologies and trends in urban mobility, the workshop aimed to showcase innovative market solutions, foster cross-disciplinary collaboration among educators from diverse backgrounds, and acquaint them with EIT Urban Mobility tools and concepts.

Facilitated by the Applied Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC), the workshop featured Mr. Emre Elmas as the keynote speaker, providing a comprehensive overview of emerging trends, research areas and best practices in urban mobility. The goal was to encourage lecturers to align their curricula with the rapidly evolving landscape of urban mobility.

This educational initiative was funded as part of the EIT Urban Mobility RIS Hub Malta. EIT Urban Mobility's commitment to promoting collaboration between academia, industry, and research institutions has played a pivotal role in expediting the development of sustainable and efficient transportation systems through innovation and education.

Given Malta's challenges in urban mobility, including congestion and sustainability concerns, the workshop underscored the critical role of education in preparing the local workforce for a transformed transport ecosystem. By updating curricula and embracing research and innovation, educators become instrumental in shaping a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of addressing Malta's evolving mobility needs.

The significance of this workshop lay in its visionary approach to education, where collaboration, innovation and a profound understanding of urban mobility trends converge. MCAST remains dedicated to pushing the boundaries of education, ensuring that Malta's workforce is not only prepared for the future but actively contributes to the advancement of urban mobility solutions.

Innovating for a Greener Malta: Research and Innovation Action Plan

MCAST, The Energy and Water Agency and The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry have collaboratively released a Research and Innovation Action Plan for Malta under the Mediterranean Island Cleantech Innovation Ecosystem (MICIE) project. This strategic plan aims to enhance the coordination and expansion of Research and Innovation (R&I) initiatives to address local climate and energy challenges. Developed within the MICIE project framework, the plan is now poised to seek financial support and endorsement from the Maltese government.

The Malta R&I Action Plan outlines three cross-cutting actions identified through stakeholder engagement workshops on the theme of Energy and Climate. Stakeholders, ranging from policy makers and implementers to civil society groups, education and research institutions, funding providers, businesses and the public, actively participated in these workshops.

The first action presented involves the identification of R&I testing facilities. This encompasses core tasks such as pinpointing suitable locations, both onshore and offshore, for testing renewable technologies. Additionally, it involves assessing the necessary policy framework

for the establishment of these facilities and evaluating the need for a regulatory sandbox. Importantly, there is a proposal for collaborative efforts with Cyprus to jointly address common challenges and promote international collaboration within the realm of R&I.

The second initiative derived from stakeholder workshops proposes the establishment of an open science database. The initial task under this action involves the identification and engagement of potential data providers and users to determine database requirements, encompassing considerations for hosting and infrastructure. Additionally, there is a need to explore the most suitable structure for data warehousing in the context of an open science database and identify frameworks essential for data sharing, integration, and maintenance. Subsequently, the implementation phase will commence with the actual design and development of the database.

The final component of the Action Plan focuses on enhancing the local researcher workforce. This entails reinforcing collaboration among the public, academia, government and industry through dedicated events that promote Research

& Innovation (R&I) in the fields of energy and climate. Ongoing assessment and improvement of existing schemes are integral to this action. Furthermore, efforts are directed towards fortifying the local researcher workforce by establishing collaborative programmes with other EU member states, providing support to young researchers in their academic pursuits, and evaluating mechanisms to attract

international researchers for collaboration on priority projects in Malta. These tasks collectively underscore a holistic approach to advancing R&I and building a robust research community in the local context.

For additional details on the Action Plan and Guidebook, please visit the project's official website at www.micie-project.eu.

MCAST holds an Apprenticeship Onboarding Event

MCAST held the 'MCAST Apprentice Onboarding Event' on campus in Paola. The event aimed to facilitate networking opportunities between prospective apprentices and industry partners.

A total of 67 companies registered and attended the event, which generated huge interest among MCAST students and industry partners. This initiative enabled prospective employers to meet face-to-face with MCAST students currently following vocational courses that include an apprenticeship component, and hold recruitment interviews with them on campus aimed at providing them with apprenticeship opportunities.

Company representatives were able to present current vacancies and explain their respective company culture and career growth opportunities on offer to MCAST

students. Several question-and-answer sessions between employers and students were held.

Apprenticeships play a pivotal role within the vocational education and training system that MCAST endorses, providing students with an opportunity to gain hands-on industry expertise crucial for success in their future careers within diverse industries.

Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja stated, "Employers often voice concerns about lack of skill and talent in the labour market. The College is proactive in creating direct access to student apprenticeships. This apprentice onboarding event is a unique opportunity to offer more than the 350 apprenticeships already pledged to over 1,650 eligible students for work-based learning that will benefit the economy."



During the event, Deputy Principal for Quality Assurance and Student Academic Management Ing Pierre Dalmas said, “MCAST recognises that different students learn in different ways, and this is why apprenticeships are one of the values the College is built upon. An apprenticeship provides a win-win situation for the student to learn on the job and for the employer to develop a highly skilled workforce. Our target is to continue offering such opportunities for apprentice recruitment.”



Currently, MCAST has established partnerships with over 2,200 companies, but more apprenticeship opportunities are needed. The College remains committed to supporting employers in understanding the value of apprenticeships, how such an experience can be truly profitable for their respective company in the long run, and how individual apprentices can add value to the business itself.



Companies interested in the MCAST Apprenticeship Scheme can contact the College's Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning Department via the email address: apprenticeship.vacancies@mcast.edu.mt to learn more about the scheme and the registration criteria.

MCAST welcomes Delegation from Thailand on Campus

In January 2024 MCAST hosted a delegation from Thailand on its Campus in Paola. Chief of the Member of the Secretariat to the Deputy Minister of Education in Thailand Dr Kamol Rodklai, led the international delegation. College officials from the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET) including IET Director Ing. Stephen Sammut and MCAST Deputy Principals Mr Ronald Curmi and Mr Stephen Vella welcomed the delegation and together toured the Campus.

During the visit the delegation visited the premises and facilities for the fully accredited Centre for Maritime Studies (CMS), which forms part of the Institute of Engineering and Transport (IET). MCAST lecturers showed the delegation facilities used by students during their educational journey including three simulators: a Bridge Control, Global Maritime Distress and a Safety System in Radio Communication, and an Electronic Charts Display Information System.



The CMS offers a wide range of maritime programmes at different qualification levels, supporting both local and international demands in the maritime industry through proven, qualified, experienced lecturers and mentors.

During the visit the importance of different international vocational Colleges working together and encouraging growth through cultural exchange was highlighted. MCAST strongly believes in fostering international alliances which greatly benefit students.



Fun Fit 5 Project Results Presented at MCAST

In February 2024 MCAST hosted an event on campus in Paola whereby the results obtained from the research carried in the Fun Fit 5 project were shared and discussed.

The Fun Fit 5 project allowed students to participate in physical activities daily during school hours from Monday to Friday. Around 90 students participated in this pilot project. The terms 'fun' and 'fit' represented the original fundamental guiding principles underlying the project series, with the number five representing the goal of physical activity participation not less than five days a week.

MCAST researchers from the Institute of Community Services (ICS), namely Dr Melanie Darmanin, Dr Renzo Kerr-Cumbo, Dr Matthew Muscat Inglott and Mr Heathcliff Schembri, worked on an ethnographic research project back in October 2022 to inform the Fun Fit 5 programme. The research was commissioned by the Inġobb il-Futbol Foundation (IFF) within the Malta Football Association (MFA).

Research carried out by College academics was instrumental in unearthing the effect that students' participation in physical activity had on their academic performance,



their physical performance, and their well-being. The research included interviews with teachers, lecturers, LSEs, parents and the students themselves.

MCAST Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja explained, "During these past few years MCAST's Institute of Community Services (ICS) has been growing considerably, not only because of the quality of education provided and the increase in students, but also because of the research projects executed. Research aims to improve our community's quality of life. We are extremely proud of our lecturers for publishing their research projects in recognised international academic journals. I hope that we continue building on this project to provide a better educational experience which starts during the early years and progresses throughout an individual's lifespan."

The Fun Fit 5 project ultimately aspired to bring about change, through its innovative and evidence-based approach, in the way physical activity is understood, prioritised and organised in local schools.



MCAST Signs Collaborative Agreement with GEM16+

MCAST signed a new collaborative agreement with GEM16+ Education Programme Centre. This agreement will help to consolidate the relationship between the two institutions, aimed at developing and strengthening the diffusion of knowledge within the local sphere.

This renewed partnership will see the College enrol students who have successfully completed qualifications through the GEM16+ Programme in a more direct manner. The College will ensure that prospective students are admitted to the right educational programme to maximise the probability of their success.

Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation Dr Clifton Grima and Permanent Secretary Mr Matthew Vella attended the event.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by MCAST Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja and the Head of School Gem16+ Mr Innocent Aquilina.

Speaking during the signing ceremony, MCAST Principal and CEO Professor Joachim James Calleja explained how “such an agreement will benefit the goals of both institutions in creating successful educational experiences to prospective students.”

Moreover, the College will be moderating GEM16+ assessment in Mathematics, English, Maltese and other subjects, as required, to ensure progression towards MCAST. GEM16+ provides students who leave compulsory schooling without formal (MATSEC) qualifications with a second opportunity to succeed in an academic route.



Students Gather to Shape the Future of Urban Mobility in Gozo

Between the 12th February and 16th February 2024, students from across Europe gathered in Gozo to seek solutions to urban mobility challenges identified by the Gozo Regional Development Agency. The EXCEL Winter School was part of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Urban Mobility initiative. The event was organized in collaboration with MCAST, Cleantech Bulgaria and the Project Aegle Foundation.

The programme, which included an online preparatory week and an in-person

study visit in Gozo, focused on innovation, entrepreneurship and real-world problem-solving to improve urban mobility. In the Gozitan context, this involved the utilization of sustainable renewable energy sources in mobility, a modal shift towards sustainable travel and improvements in maritime connectivity.

The participants were students residing in more than 30 countries that constitute the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS). Their fields of study included Engineering, Information Science, Information



Technology, Computer Science, Computer Engineering, Statistics, Geoinformation Technology, Urban Planning, Geography, Economics, and Software Engineering.

Diana Miceli, EIT Community Officer for Malta, said, "The EXCEL Winter School was a fantastic opportunity for these students who could grapple with the urban mobility challenges facing Gozo and put forward innovative solutions to relevant stakeholders and authorities. I had no doubt that by the end of the week, we would have proposals that, if acted on, would have a positive impact on sustainable transport in Gozo and between Malta and Gozo."





MCAST Advances Aerospace Collaboration at Khalifa University Seminar

Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi hosted a seminar featuring Dr. Leonardo Barilaro, Senior Lecturer in Aerospace Engineering at MCAST. The seminar delved into key challenges in aerospace engineering and aimed to cultivate collaborative opportunities between the two institutions.

The seminar, hosted by Prof. Elena Fantino from the Department of Aerospace Engineering, provided a platform for Dr. Barilaro to present the SBORAEK project. This innovative initiative, funded by MCST (R&I-2022-002L), focuses on developing 3D printed shields for aerospace applications.

Dr. Barilaro's presentation underscored the urgent need for measures ensuring the safety and sustainability of space missions, particularly in light of the growing challenges posed by space debris.

The collaborative efforts were further strengthened by the support extended from Professor Cesare Barbieri of the University of Padova, who was visiting during the same period. This collaboration solidifies the partnership between the University of Padova, MCAST and Khalifa University, fostering synergies that propel aerospace research and development forward.

During his visit, Dr. Barilaro had the honour of meeting with H.E. Ambassador Maria Calleja, furthering the dialogue with world-class universities in the city. This interaction initiated an exchange of ideas and opportunities, contributing to the global dialogue in aerospace research.

This visit signifies a significant milestone for MCAST, showcasing its commitment to advancing aerospace research, development and collaboration on a global scale.



MCAST Creative Arts Students Redefine Drachma's Visual Presence through Innovative Branding

Students currently enrolled at the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts collaborated on and presented a fresh visual identity for the local NGO, Drachma. A total of 21 students pursuing a BA (Honours) in Graphic Design at the Institute for the Creative Arts actively participated in this initiative. The project was undertaken as part of a real-life case study unit, specifically titled 'Corporate Brand Creation and Communication'.

Drachma sought to revitalize the appearance of their NGO, aiming for a brand that portrays professionalism and appeal. The NGO comprises two distinct unit groups, Drachma LGBTI+ and Drachma Parents, which not only operate collaboratively but also function seamlessly as a unified entity. Initially, Drachma had separate logos for each unit, lacking a visual connection between them. Under the mentorship of Mr. Darren Duncan, Senior Graphic Design lecturer at the Institute for the Creative Arts, MCAST students undertook the responsibility of crafting a new visual identity for Drachma, one that symbolizes the harmonious unity between both entities.

All students engaged in creating a new branding project for Drachma, each crafting

a distinctive visual branding concept. Upon completion of the unit, students showcased their work to their lecturer, who curated the submissions to the ten most outstanding entries. Drachma then presented these final ten submissions to its members for evaluation, leading to the selection of the winning concept. The submission by Mr. Nathan Zerafa emerged as the victorious design and was publicly launched during an event on 2nd February 2024. At the event, Drachma unveiled its new visual identity and logo to the public.

The event provided Mr Zerafa with the perfect opportunity to present his work. He explained the process involved, including an in-depth research process, what inspired the new logo creation and what the thought process that finally led to Drachma's new brand identity entailed. This whole rebranding exercise involved research into Drachma's scope, mission and vision. Mr Zerafa explained how he carefully chose the colours, and how these aimed to represent the ethos of the NGO and its spiritual dimension. Moreover, the symbols chosen for the new brand identity were skilfully chosen to represent Drachma's idea of integrating one's own gender with spirituality, while also

expressing the core values of care and support. The project also included suggestions on how the new brand identity could be integrated into different scenarios.

Mr Zerafa was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation, as well as a small gift, by the coordinators of the Drachma LGBTI+ and Drachma parents.

This initiative enabled College students to gain real-life industry experience, offering them valuable insight and hands-on experience, while also creating opportunities for exposure. The College's objective of exposing students to practical work plays an important role in helping them excel in their future careers and in becoming industry-relevant practitioners.





MCAST's Progress in Empowering Women in Education and Beyond

MCAST marked International Women's Day on Campus with a series of activities aimed at fostering an inclusive environment where women are encouraged and empowered to excel. The commitment to gender balance within the student body has led to a more equitable distribution over the years. In 2017, male students made up 59%, while female students accounted for 41% of the cohort. By 2023, this distribution had improved to 56% male and 44% female.

Over the past six years, there has been a notable increase of 74% in full-time female registered students in STEM fields. Female STEM graduates also saw a significant rise of 48% from 2022 to 2023. The Institute of Applied Science (IAS) experienced a 68% increase in female graduates, while the Institute of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) saw a 53% increase. These achievements are the result of concerted efforts and various initiatives aimed at

promoting women in STEM and education overall.

The celebrations included various social activities such as networking opportunities, live music, readings, and a reflection discussion panel on the role of women in the community. Staff and students were encouraged to wear yellow as a symbol of joy, positivity, and innate creativity.

Edel Cassar, Chairperson of the Equality Consultative Committee and Director of Strategy Implementation, highlighted, “The theme for this year aims to capture the optimism that fuels our journey towards gender equality. It represents our commitment to creating a College environment where every girl and woman can thrive. Yellow is our pledge to raise awareness of gender discrimination. The increase in female STEM graduates recorded this year encourages us to continue our efforts to reach more girls, reminding them

that learning and career paths are open to all.”

For the second year in a row, MCAST and the Institute of Community Services (ICS) reached out to numerous local NGOs as part of the Women’s Week Initiative. Women were invited to campus and offered complimentary hair and beauty treatments by College students at the MCAST Hair & Beauty Salon. Additionally, various activities were held on campus in Paola to celebrate the accomplishments of women studying and working at the College.

As a community college, MCAST takes pride in its progress in promoting women in education and is dedicated to creating an educational community where gender equality, support provision, and opportunities for women are prioritized. These measures aim to provide females with the quality vocational and professional education that MCAST is renowned for.







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