



## **GOOD PRACTICES IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIETY**

### **STATE FUNDING FOR VET AND HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS**

Fostering Student Engagement through AI-driven Qualitative Quality Assurance Practices

*A Project Developed by:*



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MCAST



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**Project:** Fostering Student Engagement through AI-driven Qualitative Quality Assurance Practices

### **Consortium Partners**

Riga Technical University  
University of Twente  
Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)  
European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)  
Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities (ACEEU)

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Title:** State Funding for VET and Higher Education Students

**Organization:** Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)

**Country:** Malta

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**One liner – essence of the case study:** Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education courses are free for all Maltese and EU students.

**Short Summary:** The case study outlines the student engagement opportunities provided by MCAST by providing programmes at different entry points and levels for free to all local and EU students. This approach provides an enriched learning environment for students by engaging with peers from different locations within Malta, as well as diverse backgrounds from European Union countries.

**Abstract:** The aim of this document is to outline state funding which is providing to all students that have finished their secondary educations, and are not in either a post-secondary or tertiary education in Malta. Such state funding in Malta helps students to continue their studies after they finish their compulsory education, and to also help students in moving to industry areas which are needed by industry stakeholders. In this document several examples of such initiatives are given, together with an ample description of such initiatives. A special focus is placed on MCAST, which is the leading government vocational institution in Malta.

**Target group:** students, government organizations, educational institution and society stakeholders

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

### Short description

**Established in 2001**, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology is the country's leading vocational education and training institution. **Six Institutes** in Malta and the Gozo Campus, MCAST offers **180 full-time** and over **300 part-time vocational courses** ranging from certificates to Master's degrees (MQF Level 1 to Level 7). There are also **76 different nationalities** enrolled in the courses offered across all institutions.

**The six MCAST Institutes** namely the Institute of Applied Sciences, the Institute for the Creative Arts, the Institute of Engineering and Transport, the Institute of Business Management and Commerce, the Institute of Community Services, the Institute of Information and Communication Technology and the Gozo Campus provide all the technical and professional expertise towards the delivery of the programmes at MCAST. They also maintain the aim of driving forward all the areas of study under their respective responsibility. This corporate structure enables focused strategies, which address the specific needs of students at each level while maintaining a healthy dialogue with all interested stakeholders in order to provide the best programmes for the needs of the local economy and society.

**MCAST's relationship** with industry stimulates the College's success – its programmes are flexible, relevant and responsive to the aspirations of the students and to the needs of industries which are constantly evolving to meet the challenges of a changing global economy. The College supports small and medium-sized enterprises through a multidisciplinary approach. This encompasses work-based learning through the Apprenticeships Programme, the various entrepreneurship initiatives and through MG2i (MCAST's commercial arm) services whereby it provides training courses tailor-made to their needs. The College is focusing on increasing the portfolio of MG2i by developing new programmes in Life Long Learning, accrediting new programmes at different levels, including Master's degrees, and introducing more professional development programmes. It is working on the internationalisation of MG2i through the Training and Professional Development Programmes and joint-venture opportunities in different vocational areas.

### Background Information:

Before MCAST was setup there were several vocational Institutes that worked independently in a fragmented fashion. One of the major issues that existed was the fact that all courses which were available were not recognized. Students had to sit for examinations which were setup by external bodies, which MCAST had no control on. This used to cause several issues such as the ability to keep abreast of new technologies in certain course content which was not updated. Thus, one of the problems which MCAST had to address, was to ensure that each, and every course which is offered would be recognized through a notional framework. This allowed MCAST to stay abreast with latest technologies in the course content which is offered to students, and a strong link would be maintained with Industry.

The need for fulfilling vocational training to students on the diverse fields of practice was outlined within governmental agendas to support the upskilling of students on the island.

In order to ensure comprehensive availability of the programmes running within MCAST, the government has aimed to subsidize the courses offered across all the institutes, enabling and attracting students towards the opportunity to upskill their vocational profession whilst ensuring that barriers of entry and potential financial discrimination were eliminated.

## Aims and Motivations

The main objective was to provide students with the appropriate knowledge to several industries around Malta, in all sectors which MCAST provides courses. MCAST invested in new campuses, and latest resources for students to work on technologies which are currently being used in Industry.

Before MCAST was setup there was only one path that students could take, which was the Academic route. Nowadays, through MCAST courses, students can either take the academic, or vocational route. This helped the country to have the necessary expertise in several sectors of the economy. Through such skilled workforce, several companies invested in Malta, such as Pharmaceutical, Information Technology and Engineering companies, because adequate human resources were made available.

## Stakeholders

*The key stakeholders for this case study are the following:*

- *Maltese Government*  
The local government supports MCAST through the provision of the necessary funds for the running of the programme. Furthermore, it provides the students with a stipend as a financial aid to encourage student learning as well as an allowance for academic-related expenditure.
- *MCAST*  
MCAST is a key player given that it brings together all the stakeholders. As a higher education institution MCAST provides quality education and supports the administration and operationalization of the funding mechanisms. MCAST utilizes both national funding together with European Regional Development Funds to provide the infrastructure for learning at no cost to the student.
- *Employers*  
The employers play an important role as they provide the facility for work-based learning to occur. They further support students by offering students sponsorship during their internships.
- *Students*  
These are the ultimate beneficiaries of the financial incentives. The funding is utilized to support them through their journey as a student. Such funds are key to enabling the courses to attract more students and aid in student's engagement.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The establishment of MCAST necessitated the establishment of both tangible, intangible and human resources to provide a scalable and feasible solution towards the offering of free programmes to students. The main resources can be summarized hereunder:

- Infrastructure: Through national and EU/ERDF funding, the construction of campus facilities together with institution-specific laboratories was undertaken over a 20-year period in order to equip the necessary tangible resources for the provision of higher educational vocational training.
- Human Resources: MCAST undertook a holistic recruitment of key academic experts from both national and international employment to ensure a level of quality education is provisioned towards the execution and sustainability of these programmes. Together with academic resources, the need for administrative and managerial positions was simultaneously fulfilled so as to provide the necessary supporting and directing services to the effective execution of the campus in order to reach the target groups.

### Strategies and Activities

This is a nation-wide initiative governed by the Maltese Government.

#### **Coordination with the Target Groups:**

A lot of collaboration was undertaken between the stakeholders mentioned in previous sections mainly

1. Key Experts
2. Industry experts
3. Government
4. Student bodies

MCAST employed several lecturers when it originally started, and they had the task of developing curricula which are industry relevant. To do this several meetings were held with Industry leading experts, together with lecturers, and MCAST Administrators where sharing of ideas was given importance. In such meetings Industry gave their ideas on the main technologies which were currently being used, and then curricula were devised according to the technologies or Industry needs.

One real life example of how the above worked was when Lufthansa Technik wanted to invest heavily in Malta to open one of their centres in Malta. At the time when

Lufthansa were thinking of such project, Malta did not have the necessary human resources, to be employed. In such case Lufthansa, the government, and MCAST had several meetings, for new courses to be launched, to allow prospective students to join such courses, and to be then employed by Lufthansa.

Such process, and coordination, is continuously ongoing to ensure that all MCAST courses are continuously kept up to date, and ensure that such courses, in all its institutes, are industry relevant.

## Deliverable Outputs

The need to provide industry-related programmes of study for all students through vocational training led to MCAST designing, developing and implementing programmes with a strong focus towards the skills and competences required in industry. A quality assurance process in course creation ensures that the contribution of students and industry partners are embedded within programme design, allowing MCAST to consistently offer programmes which enable students to engage into vocational and academic careers within their area of study.

Through legislation, students at MCAST are also appointed to represent on a variety of academic, management and steering committees, ensuring that the direction of the campus and its deliverable outcomes are consistently aligned towards promoting student engagement and opportunities. This is further solidified through operational boards and committees, whereby the revision of academic and administrative processes enables student members to contribute towards the refinement and redesign of MCAST's outputs.

## Intangible Outputs

The intangible outputs stemming from the provision and successful offerings of free vocational training and programmes across the industry enables MCAST to secure a very strong relationship with stakeholders; including government, society, students, industry and employers. This output provides a fundamental avenue to acquire insight into the diverse needs for knowledge, experience, skills and competences that are shaping the country and thus supports MCAST towards redefining its mission to support these needs.

The successful undertaking of such a mission over the last 20 years has led MCAST and its graduate students to obtain a well-renowned recognition for the skills,

knowledge and practical experience which they are able to contribute too, strengthening in tandem the ability for MCAST to suit societal needs, whilst at the same time providing fruitful knowledge experiences to students in support of their professional careers.

## EVALUATION AND IMPACT

### Strategical Initiatives for Evaluation & Monitoring

To ensure that the impact of MCAST is constantly well evaluated and monitored, MCAST outlines a rolling set of strategic goals for 3-year terms, relating to fundamental pillars based on:

- Providing a learning space and an outstanding education experience for every student, leading to our graduates being competent, resourceful, critically conscious and innovators in preparation for their future vocational and professional careers.
- Providing students and staff with a high-quality landscaped setting while maximizing the use of investment made in the past years and ensuring financial sustainability.
- Promoting and sustain our position as leaders in providing vocational professional education and training through internationally recognised qualifications valued by industry; while working in partnership with employers and other stakeholders to continuously improve the relevance of our curriculum.
- Ensuring that all qualifications are informed by industry, while based on community-oriented curricula and impact research.

These are monitored on a bi-annual basis through the establishment of a KPIs across the various dimensions of the college, ensuring that the strategy targets are carried into the operational and individual plans of the college.

### Programme Cyclical Reviews

One of the critical aspects of ensuring Quality Assurance and Monitoring, is to ensure that there are continuous updates to the curricula, as mentioned in the previous sections. For such thing to happen Programmes, at MCAST, go through a Cyclical review every three years, where several stakeholders, mainly industry stakeholders, student bodies, and lecturers, come together. In such meetings the main aim would be to

1. Evaluate the courses being delivered.
2. Suggest new Programmes.
3. Suggest new units that need to be included in Programmes.

## **Institute Board of Studies**

Another ongoing initiative which helps MCAST evaluate existing processes is a Board of Studies meeting which happens in all institutes every 2 months. In this Board of studies, which is composed of a lecturer representative, Institute coordinators, the Registrar, Institute Directors, Student Representatives and Industry Representatives, discussions are held on ongoing issues in Institutes, together with discussions on changes to be adopted in courses.

## **Analysing the Impacts of the Outputs**

### ***Impacts on Stakeholders:***

- Highly skilled young workforce more readily available to employers.
- Upskilling workers made more economically feasible and accessible for stakeholders with the availability of state-funded courses.
- The inclusion of state-funded apprenticeships as a mandatory part of courses provides the industry with additional human resources who are at training phase and thus more easily integrated into the company's systems and procedures. Employers see apprenticeships as an investment to train the emerging workforce.

### ***Impacts on Students:***

- Through state funded VET and HE institutions, individuals from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds can receive the same education and opportunities to improve their prospective employment options.
- Enrollment of young mothers and early school leavers has been increased through the collaboration between the state and MCAST with initiatives that encourage and reward the return to education.
- Through state-funded apprenticeships, students gain valuable skills relevant to their field while getting acquainted with the real world of the workplace. Students often get employed by companies they have internships at.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Whilst financial investment helps the success of further education and training, it is not always equivalent to the education success.

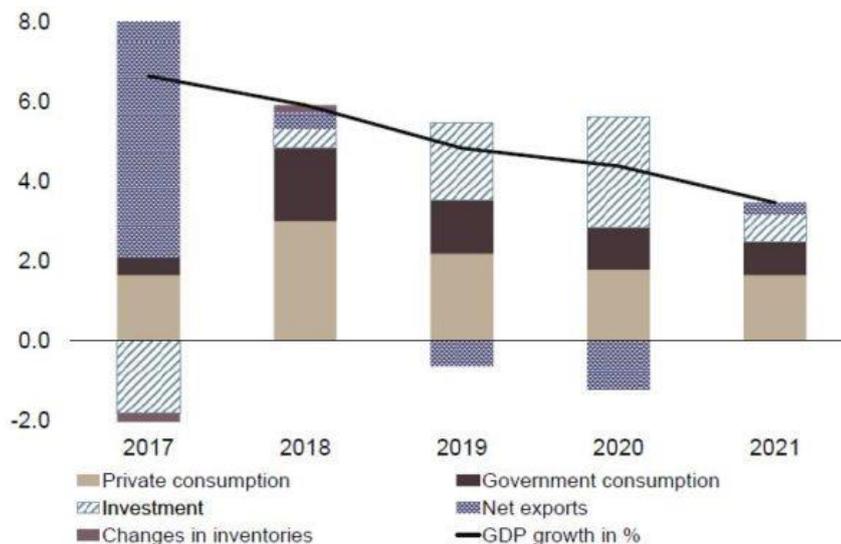
## SUPPORTIVE AND INFLUENCING ASPECTS

The provision of state financed vocational training enables the government to provide an overall up skilled national workforce. This is able to attract industrial investment to the country.

### Further Challenges

Funding for such schemes are dependent and supported through the economic growth of Malta. The projected growth for the forthcoming years as a result of the pandemic is not as positive as predicted. This might impact the financial aids provided.

**Chart 1: GDP growth over the projection horizon**  
(percentage point contributions; annual percentage change)



Source: Central Bank of Malta

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### Sustainability Factors

The sustainability of this initiative is driven by national incentives to provide post-secondary education to the local workforce and ensure the necessary upskilling of the working population. Albeit the funding investment is a substantial contribution from the countries national budget to education, this initiative is able to support the national landscape by reducing the rate of unemployment, expenditure in social benefits as well as generate larger income from employment taxation. Furthermore, this provides the country an additional overall level of citizen education, increasing the knowledge workforce and promoting a higher standard of living within Malta. To this extent, the holistic social benefits obtained through the sustainment of this initiative outweigh the recurrent investment and thus provide an effective and durable approach for the continuous sustainability of the defined initiative.

### Transferability

The results obtained as part of this case study can be used to entice other countries to adopt similar schemes in higher education settings both on a regional and national context. Given that this case study involves several national stakeholder's dissemination of result is complex. Nevertheless, results are collated and disseminated by the National Statistics Office on a regular basis and this ensures that most of the stakeholders are updated.

### Links

<https://www.mcast.edu.mt/>

<https://www.gov.mt/en/Life%20Events/Pages/Moving%20to%20Malta/Education.aspx>

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