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GOOD PRACTICES IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIETY

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AT MCAST

RIGA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

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ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

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: Corporate Social Responsibility at MCAST

Organization: *MCAST*

Country: *Malta*

One liner – essence of the case study: *An overview of MCAST's CSR*

Short Summary: The main purpose of this case study is to provide an overview of how CSR was integrated within MCAST curricula across the different institutes. MCAST students, from different institutes, can provide their expertise to several NGOs and other stakeholders, and thus help such organizations.

Abstract: The aim of the MCAST Corporate Social Responsibility initiative is to provide MCAST learners with the opportunity to enhance their studies with life-enriching experiences that add value to their holistic knowledge base. The main objectives of the CSR programme are to equip MCAST students with the necessary skills, attitudes and values in order to engage in meaningful social relations and actively contribute to enhanced social well-being. In this context, MCAST CSR contributes towards the fostering of a responsible and active citizenship. Community work is carried out within local NGOs, sports associations and clubs and local councils. Furthermore, MCAST CSR provides a framework for all MCAST learners to have the knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal settings recognised and accredited.

Target group: students, Non-governmental organizations, Local Councils, Sports organizations.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

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:

MCAST, as an educational institution, across all its six institutes works on Curricula that are very technical in nature. For example, ICT Institute works on Curricula which

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focuses on Programming, Network design etc, Creative Arts focuses on design aspects, drawing etc, whilst Community Services focuses on elderly, and childcare. These are just a non-exhaustive list of the practical skills that users learn, whilst following MCAST courses. Such diverse skills are in much need in NGOs, and other similar organizations. For example, an NGO which focuses on animal care would want people who would be able to feed animals, provide pet grooming etc. In such case, for example, students at the Centre of Agriculture, within the Institute of Applied Science could definitely give a helping hand to such organization.

Before February 2019 MCAST did not involve itself much in Corporate Social Responsibility and if this was done it was normally done through Institutes' initiatives. For example, the Institute of Community and Care used to organize a Hair Marathon, and money raised through this marathon was then donated to NGOs.

In 2019, the MCAST administration, embarked on an initiative to bring together the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology and interested stakeholders to form partnerships to develop and cultivate skills, attitudes and values for the real world and empower young and adult learners to become active citizens and be employable in a dynamic democratic society and economy. MCAST launched its official Corporate Social Responsibility programme in February 2019, with the support of the Minister for Education. And the Parliamentary Secretary for Sports, Youth and Voluntary Organisations.

Vocational education has been a significant indicator of social progress and has played a decisive role in achieving sustainable and equal development, while enabling young and adult learners acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences required by the labour market. Young and adult learners need to be prepared for the continuous radically changing world of employment. Their future needs to be secured through flexible access to education which includes integrated practical and technical experiences, two valuable assets in the world of work. Education is not only about securing a job but also a way by which individuals can be given the chance to shape their own future, as well as their cultural and social lives. In this regard, the launch of the MCAST CSR initiative primarily encourages personal development among students at MCAST while having a positive impact in the local community. The initiative has enhanced relationships with the CSR partners thus supporting public value outcomes. The CSR component includes 20 hours of community work at either non-governmental organisations and local councils, among others as part of the students' training programme.

Aims and Motivations:

The main aims and motivations of the CSR initiative were

To cultivate student engagement and motivation.

- To promote high aspirations in learning.

- To accredit and certify experiential learning.

- To strengthen the links between the words of education, work and active citizenship.

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Stakeholders:

The main stakeholders in such initiative were mainly

1. NGOs – The MCAST CSR Department continuously meets with various local NGOs to build relationships and understand better their needs. Most NGOs require help and assistance in the work they do in and for the local community. The NGOs are thus the main stakeholders in this initiative
2. Local councils – Local councils are very important part in the Maltese community, through their as they have strong relationship with organizations, and thus they prove to be a critical player in finding organizations that need to be helped
3. Sports associations – As locally, many sports associations work on voluntary basis, they require people who could help them in their daily tasks.

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IMPLEMENTATION

In order for such case study to be implemented Human Resources had to be deployed to the CSR team to identify the needs of the not for profit organisations leading to the identification of how MCAST can support these organizations in their activities and initiatives.

For example, at one point, when COVID-19 was at its initial stages, and MCAST had to close its doors for physical lessons, and deliver lessons through remote learning, some students had problems because they did not have computers at home. Thus, MCAST provided these students computers from its campuses. For this to happen, however several MCAST employees were deployed to deliver such computers to students' homes.

Staff from the Curriculum departments were also engaged to provide an accredited unit which students would follow, whilst performing tasks related to CSR. MCAST CSR is a compulsory component across all levels.

Inputs:

Please mention all resources that went into the creation of the case at hand (financial, staff, external). List all tangible and intangible inputs with a short description so that these can be easily identified.

> Computers given to IICT and other students that did not have such equipment at home, especially in view of the need for home-based learning stemming from COVID-19 restrictions and online/blended learning.
>
> Human Resources support from the team of CSR were allocated towards identifying the needs of the local organisations, leading to the identification of how MCAST could support them in their activities and initiatives.

Strategies and Activities:

One of the main strategy defined in **MCAST strategic plan** is to

1. **Launch and continue expanding the Corporate Social Responsibility initiative as a means of engaging students in community service projects, also as part of their accredited study programmes.**

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As explained in previous sections the main strategy to start this initiative was to

1. Initiate contact with various NGOs from different sectors
2. Discussions were also held with the Malta Council for The Voluntary Sector set up within the Ministry of Education
3. A formal launch was done, with the support of the Minister for Education and the Permanent Secretary for Sports, Youth and Voluntary Organisations.
4. An accredited 20 hour component which students would have to follow across all courses.

Coordination with the Target Groups:

The CSR departments identified a number of target groups and NGOs, and also other similar organizations came forward to request their support. Several meetings were held with different organizational sections such as

- *Animal Welfare*
- *Sports Clubs / Associations*
- *Local Councils*
- *Care for the Elderly*
- *Environmental NGOs*
- *Childcare*
- *Religious Entities*
- *Youth organisations*

Please define the coordination process of the organization with the mention target groups in order to implement the case. How did the organization maintain all level of communication?

A number of target groups and NGOs were identified through the CSR department which came forward to request support. Once such NGOs were identified students had a list of CSR opportunities to choose from.. In order to ensure quality assurance, students had to ask contact person at organization to sign an attendance sheet. The CSR Department ensured students' attendance by calling the NGOs. After registering for the NGO of their choice, students received a confirmation email. Also, as part of their assignment, students had to submit the attendance sheet together with photos of themselves carrying out the community work.

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Deliverable Outputs:

The impact of CSR initiatives has seen widespread effect in the community, supporting the unique needs of the NGOs. These vary from fund-raising events through gaming marathons, support for the community through caring for elderly, disability communities, creation of awareness campaigns.

Intangible Outputs:

A non-exhaustive list of how students helped organizations can be found underneath

1. **20 Hours gaming marathon to raise funds for various organisations**
2. **Updating of social media**
3. **Paintings**
4. **Upgrading workshops**
5. **Maintenance works**
6. **Cleaning up sites**
7. **Helping those in need**

> I helped the electrician to upgrade the workshop's electrical system to support three phase electrical power.
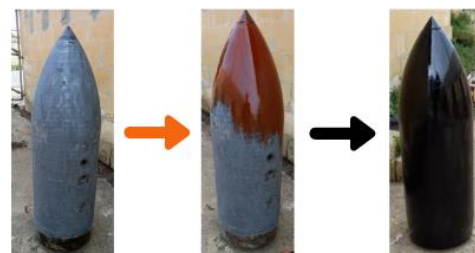>
> I have an interest for vintage engineering and machinery, so I took on the task of stripping, prepping, painting and restoring an old vintage bomb shell.
>
> **My experience was very positive and I learned more about engineering and electrical work. I really enjoyed it and made some new friends as well.**

VELLA ANTHONY LEON,
DIPLOMA IN AUTOMOTIVE REPAIR (BODY AND PAINT)

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MCAST Students doing maintenance on a marble tablet

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Once again I had the opportunity to dedicate some of my time to children receiving treatment at the Rainbow Ward. Since this year I could not be physically present at the ward because of the pandemic, I still tried to get the best out of this situation. I uploaded a post on my news feed for whoever wanted to contribute by sending a small donation which will eventually be passed on to Puttinu Cares. We managed to raise the beautiful sum of **€245** within just a few days thanks to the generosity of everyone who donated. Also, I made some crafts and bought some sweets which were distributed to the children and parents at the ward.

It was definitely a tough Christmas away from their relatives but at least we managed to put a smile on their faces. I can say it was an unforgettable experience and I will definitely continue to do the same in the coming years.

VELLA KAIA,
ADVANCED DIPLOMA IN ACCOUNTING

PUTTINU CARES
HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Puttinucares

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SEABED CLEAN-UP
ST PAUL'S BAY

INSTITUTE OF
ENGINEERING
AND TRANSPORT –
CENTRE FOR MARITIME
STUDIES STUDENTS

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EVALUATION AND IMPACT

Strategical Initiatives for Evaluation & Monitoring:

In order to ensure the success of such initiative MCAST monitors and evaluates what the students would be doing within the organisations, mainly through

1. Phoning entities to confirm that students were attending;
2. Once the unit starts, and a lecturer is identified to deliver the unit the students submit their preferences in which type of organization they would like to help. If a student would already be helping a specific organization, in his free time, the student would be allowed to help the same organization
3. Entities sign students' attendance sheets every time students attend;
4. Students produce video clips and photos of specific activities done at the organization.

It is also worth pointing out that students cannot opt to go to for profit organisations.

Analysing the Impacts of the Outputs:

Through several meetings that stem from these initiatives, a variety of further requirements were outlined from the outputs leading MCAST to identify the need for additional resources and support in research within these organizations, supporting their ability to widespread their reach within the community, attract support funding through local and international ministries?

Furthermore, students are further supported through their experience in engaging with societal needs, with various impactful outputs emerging from the feedback obtained through students in their ability to increase their skills and understanding/sensitivity of community requirements, providing a clear maturity process in line with the educational remit and scope of MCAST.

Defining major success factors:

One of the main success factors determined through the initiative is the ability to involve students across the various levels of academic engagement. This led the CSR department to engage all students from all Institutes within the various placements and communal support.

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Moreover, students are also getting experience within their field of study, whilst helping organizations, and people in need.

Lessons Learned:

We believe that the recently launched CSR initiative was a great success and it was clear that if students are given more time, they are willing to undertake such voluntary activities, and feel that they have contributed to something important in their society.

Of course, there are still some challenges which need to be overcome mainly the thousands of students that need to be placed. The Human Resources involved in such activity becomes a challenge because MCAST staff need to place and monitor students that go to these organizations.

SUPPORTIVE AND INFLUENCING ASPECTS

Identifying the major Strengths and Weaknesses:

The major strengths of MCAST CSR are that students

1. acquire skills and experience that enables them to be better equipped for their prospective professional career.
2. Obtain personal exposure towards their efforts and are able to showcase their involvement and contribution throughout their career and employment searching.
3. Obtain a set of life and transversal skills through such activities, which will then be used when students start their work journey.

The main weakness in the system is the dependence on provision of humanitarian resources within entities, which was impacted by COVID.

Further Challenges:

The mainly further challenges are mainly

1. **Human resources**

Several organizations are coming forward with their own initiatives. MCAST needs Human Resources to track such organizations. Most of these organization would request meetings, and thus people from MCAST CSR team have to go and discuss how students could help such organizations.

Moreover, MCAST CSR Staff have to ensure that organizations are indeed voluntary organizations and would not be doing something which is more inclined to a business venture, rather than a voluntary venture.

2. **Scalability**

Keeping track of the numerous activities, and diverse requirements in terms of engagement modalities and communal efforts is an ongoing challenge which the CSR team is constantly aiming to improve through new experiences and lessons learnt.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Sustainability Factors:

We have identified that a very valuable way of sustaining the initiative is where students are encouraged and enabled to identify a sector of personal interest to the individual, which leads the students to engage within the CSR initiatives which they feel a strong element of contribution towards.

Furthermore, the CSR team has also implemented a computerized system to support the identification of skills and interest of students, allowing for the more effective and efficient matchmaking of the student engagement with the role and need of the community entity. This enables the CSR team to effectively be able to scale up with a larger number of students and community entities by automating the placement and tracking of provision and needs stemming from a vaster amount of societal needs.

Transferability:

The continuous discussions held with community entities has led CSR to identify that rather than the amount of students provided, a successful factor which has emerged following experience is the need to identify the particular skills required by the students that are provisioned, which once outlined and matched are able to provide a more impactful impact on the NGO/Society, leading our students to contribute effectively in line with their competence, obtain professional experience as well as obtain a set of employability soft-skills which are critical towards the personal development of our students.

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