

A Word from the Rector

ON 5 FEBRUARY 2003, EU Research Commissioner, Philippe Busquin and the EU Commissioner for Education and Culture, Viviane Reding, held a joint press conference to launch a debate on the role of universities in the Europe of knowledge. "If we want to be a leading player in the global knowledge-based society," Commissioner Busquin said, "Europe has to nurture its universities ... investing in universities is one of the best investments we can make for our future." This was further endorsed by Commissioner Reding who stated



unequivocally: "If we do not think now about how to support universities for the future, tomorrow it will be too late." They both underlined the fact that higher education is a public good and therefore a public responsibility. In the absence of adequate funding, the capacity of European universities to attract and retain the best talent and to strengthen the excellence of their research and teaching activities will, no doubt, be seriously compromised.

In addressing the *European Universities' Association* (EUA) meeting held in Graz in May 2003, Commissioner Reding insisted on the necessity for universities Europe-wide to conform to the Bologna process "Bologna cannot be implemented *à la carte*, it has to be done across the board and wholeheartedly." The University of Malta is in an advantageous position because the three cycle system proposed by Bologna has been in place for decades while this year saw the implementation of the *European Credit Transfer System* (ECTS) and the harmonisation of the structure of all courses campus-wide.

Economic growth is dictating much of the change in the nature and delivery of education. Human capital is critical for the future wealth and health of a nation. The nature of qualifications and degree equivalence are important issues both for employers as well as for students who need to know how their qualifications rate in the world scales. Their qualifications need to have maximum acceptability across the world. Only in this way, will they be able to participate fully in a knowledge-based society. Our University, over the past few years, has become increasingly aware of the complex interface between higher education and employment and has done its best to work in tandem with those sectors of business and industry which ought to benefit most from the expertise imparted to its graduates.

In this edition of the University of Malta's *Annual Report*, I welcome the contribution from Dr. Mark W. Smith from Trident Technical College, South Carolina, USA who was Visiting Fulbright Scholar in the Department of Information Systems, Faculty of Science, between February and June 2003. According to Dr. Smith, the University of Malta is in a unique position to assume a leadership role in higher education as a regional centre for distance learning.

Dr. John Abela looks at the future of ICT in Malta. He states emphatically that in order to survive, our ICT industry must be able to compete and excel in the huge, completely liberalized EU market.

In his article entitled: *Crisis and the social desire for history*, Dr. John Chircop explores the notion that history has a social purpose, the most significant being to ameliorate the quality of life of the people. The setting up of the *Oral History Centre and Archive* at the University of Malta has provided a new research framework through which invaluable data is being accumulated.

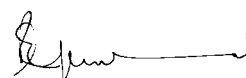
Dr. Irene Sciriha enthuses about the value of Mathematics as a creative discipline. She sees the “university campus [as] the cradle in which our students are encouraged to lead, to set their goals, to set policies and take decisions that affect society.”

The *Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research* is one of the University's more recently established entities. Highlighting the challenges that education systems in the Euro-Mediterranean region are facing, its Director, Professor Ronald Sultana, outlines EMCER's endeavours in its search to become a focus of excellence in the interdisciplinary study of Mediterranean and European issues.

Dr. Josanne Vassallo addresses the topical issue of the future of academic medicine in her paper. Even though basic scientists and clinicians working within the University's Faculty of Medicine and Surgery have traditionally been limited by the constraints plaguing academic medical institutions worldwide, they have persevered in spite of the odds.

Dr. Ing. Jonathan C. Borg, Head, Department of Manufacturing Engineering in collaboration with engineer Mary Grace Micallef from *WasteServ Malta Ltd.* reports on an EU project in which they are participating together with partners from Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands and Latvia.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the contributors who through giving of their time and expertise made this publication possible.



Roger Ellul-Micallef
Rector