

# Editorial:

## Commercialising Education in Gozo

It must be admitted that nobody in their wildest dreams ever expected to have a medical school set up in Gozo, hosted by no less an institution than the Queen Mary University (Barts Hospital) and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry. So there is no question about the credentials of these institutions. It is expected that over a five-year period up to 300 students will go through this education process in Gozo.

This announcement was met with expressions of welcome by most Gozitans, including the Gozo Business Chamber.

This development involves:

- The building of a new 250-bed hospital,
- Transformation of the current Gozo hospital into a 175-bed geriatric hospital,
- Provision of private facilities for treatment of patients from overseas as well as local patients,
- Setting up a medical school to take in 60 students per annum,
- Creating several new jobs for the local population, and hopefully reduce the need for young Gozitans to travel to Malta to find a job,
- Help the tourist industry and the financial situation in Gozo,
- Improve the standard of medical care in Gozo.

What this development will not do is increase facilities for obtaining a medical or dental degree by Maltese students, unless they are prepared to pay what one expects to be exorbitant tuition fees.

As is often the case, the devil is in the details. We know very little as to what precisely would be involved in the integration of the current medical and nursing staff within the new development. We know next to nothing about how staff will be recruited and what impact this would have on the staff at the University of Malta, Mater Dei and Gozo hospitals.

The opening of campuses overseas by established universities and colleges with the primary aim of

reaping an economic bonanza has become common practice. Some of these campuses have proved successful, others disastrous. The attraction of selling education is hard to ignore. It is a lucrative industry. In Australia, for instance, education brings in over 27 billion dollars annually.

Criticisms have been raised about the maintenance of standards in such institutions. Are these going to be of the same standard as those required by the alma mater? Is ability to pay the fees going to trump academic requirements? Institutions which depend so heavily on student fees would be very reluctant to dismiss the golden goose on whatever pretext. One worry is that such institutions might degenerate into what has been referred to as the 'TRK' syndrome, namely, institutions for 'Thick Rich Kids'.

In institutions where considerations relating to economic viability and profit are very high, if not actually top of the agenda, there is often great pressure to ensure that students do not drop out of the course for any reason. One understands that the responsibility of maintaining standards will rest entirely with the administrators of the new campus, but it is of crucial importance to the standing of the education in Malta to ensure that academic standards will not become diluted because of economic considerations. This would reflect not only on the individual institution but on education standards in Malta in general.

It remains to be seen how a privately run hospital would fit in the general health provision of the island. Would it help raise standards, acting as a stimulant in a synergistic sort of way?

It is hoped that these and related issues will be resolved, at least for the economic, if not the academic benefit of Gozo.

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