

Editorial:

Educational Developments in Gozo

It is always encouraging to hear about news relating to development of various aspects of education in Gozo. Over the past several months, a number of issues have been announced which reflect a positive development.

One such issue relates to the emphasis being made on learning languages. A recent report issued by the British Council pointed out that the ten most important languages for the UK included, in the first place, Spanish followed by Arabic, French, Mandarin Chinese, German, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Turkish and Japanese. While the needs of the UK might be different to ours, it is interesting to note that Spanish is quite a popular language learned in Gozo, where twice as many students study Spanish compared to Malta. It is also good to see that it is being taught in all secondary schools, and is now more popular than German, being second only to Italian and French.

A second issue relates to investment in MCAST in Gozo. Both the Prime Minister Joseph Muscat as well as the Minister for Education, Evarist Bartolo, referred to the need to improve on the facilities of Mcast in Gozo 'to give it dignity and visibility'.

Minister Bartolo said: "We don't want to give the impression we're investing in institutions and not in MCAST, while at the same time encouraging

students in Gozo to take up courses at MCAST." This is particularly relevant in view of the significant number of school leavers who could benefit from such an education.

Not to be ignored is the importance of a cultural education for school children, which provides the basis for future appreciation of the arts. It is crucial that the isolation imposed by living on a small island like Gozo should not result in the cutting off of cultural influences on our younger generation. One example recently of a good initiative is the Gaultitana Festival of Music where students were offered substantial discounts on tickets to the production of Tosca. Such initiatives should be encouraged.

At the other extreme has been the news that a medical school would be opened in Gozo.

The unexpected news that Queen Mary University (London) is negotiating to open a medical school in Gozo has been met with disbelief in some quarters and anxiety in others, based on the possibility of reduction of facilities at the current medical school.

There is no doubt that such a development would be a considerable plus for Gozo. In particular a link with such a prestigious university would no doubt have an impact on the practice of medicine at the Gozo Hospital, and on the staff there.

It is interesting to note that graduates from such a school would be given an MBBS degree (rather than the MD degree conferred by the University of Malta), emphasising a complete autonomy from the University of Malta. Teaching staff would be provided by Queen Mary University during the early (preclinical years), while Maltese hospital staff would run the clinical years.

This is an experiment, but it is bound to be of benefit to Gozitan students and to Gozo as a whole.

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