

Editorial:

Tertiary Education in Gozo

It was a red-letter day for Gozo when for the first time a new University campus was opened in Xewkija, promising new courses, combined with easy access and obviating the need for time-wasting travel and unnecessary expenses for students undertaking courses in Msida.

This campus was set up in 1992, largely through the vision of the late Prof. Fr Peter Serracino Inglott, the continuing interest in the project of the then first Minister for Gozo, Mr Anton Tabone, and the energetic work of the first director, Prof. Lino Briguglio. It was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister in May 1996: 'with the aim of assisting in the logistical aspects of degree and diploma courses which are from time to time offered in Gozo by the University of Malta', to offer short term courses and caters 'for the needs of Gozitan students following courses in Malta and in Gozo.' It currently offers part-time courses at undergraduate level, part-time post graduate courses and some short courses.

Was it too much to expect? Was there sufficient interest among the population to justify the financial burden commitment for such a project?

There is no doubt that this centre has proved to be a boom to Gozo and Gozitan students. Very few of those living in Malta can understand the inconvenience involved in daily travel to attend courses in Malta, or the equally punishing expense and other disadvantages involved in renting accommodation on the mainland.

On the other hand, one can understand that being isolated on a tiny island leads to major challenges which are not financially negligible.

The number of Gozitan students who have to undertake studies in Malta is not negligible: last year there were 1,120 Gozitan students studying at the University in Malta, of whom 878 were full-time students and 38% were female.

The idea that the Gozo campus is meant primarily for Gozitan students is already a minus. While most universities throughout the world these days have several campuses, and while one of the aims of such

campuses is to provide local facilities for students who live within reasonable distance, it is also essential that such campuses specialise in certain topics to become attractive to a wider audience, and help maintain sufficient support.

It is therefore disappointing to note that the Gozo University Group (GUG) claim that, compared to other institutions, the Gozo campus was 'always being put aside' and that it is not being used to its full potential.

They believe the Campus could be energised through expanding its scope by the institution of daytime courses, specialising in courses relating to agricultural studies and other niche courses, which would be available not just for Gozitan students, but for anyone in Malta or even overseas.

In the wider context of tertiary education in Gozo one cannot but bring to mind the one bright light on the horizon, namely the planned medical school by London's Queen Mary University. This will no doubt have flow-on benefits on health services in Gozo, but also would, one hopes, stimulate an increased investment and interest in health education in Gozo. It is a great opportunity for the development of synergy and cooperation between the two institutions to provide a first class health education centre on this tiny island, where overseas as well as local experts can attract an audience from a wide perimeter.

Interesting also is the experiment referred to as *Café Scientifique* in Gozo which is meant to 'provide a forum for debating science issues and keeping up to date with latest developments'. It aims at providing 'exploratory discussion on the contested nature of science itself and will lead to a shared understanding of the kind of topics and debates that will be explored in the future'.

Any efforts aimed at increasing intellectual involvement within the community are welcome anywhere, but particularly welcome in a small island which has always suffered from double isolation.

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