

# THE UNIVERSITY GOZO CENTRE: FIFTEEN YEARS ON

Commemorative Publication  
to mark the  
Occasion of the 15th Anniversary  
of the  
Establishment of the University of Malta Gozo Centre  
1992-2007

Edited by  
**Joseph Calleja**



Published by the University of Malta Gozo Centre  
in collaboration with the Ministry for Gozo  
Malta, 2007

Published in 2007,  
by the University of Malta Gozo Centre  
in collaboration with the Ministry for Gozo

Printing:  
Portelli Print, Nadur, Gozo.

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*The facade of the University Gozo Centre premises.*



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## On Reaching Fifteen

### Professor Alfred J. Vella

*Pro-Rector, University of Malta*

On reaching fifteen, a human being would be on the threshold of adulthood, possibly more so for a woman than a man. I am not sure whether the University Gozo Centre is a he or a she, but I can say for sure that it has now reached adulthood. In fifteen years the Centre has done much more than was expected of it.

Many would have thought that the Centre would just offer a few evening lectures, with some possibly leading to a certificate or a diploma. In reality the Centre has done much more than this. Many degree courses have been offered in Gozo, including post-graduate ones. The Centre, as its mission obliges it to do, has logistically assisted University Departments in offering these courses in Gozo and has also offered its own short courses.

Between 1992 and 2007, the Centre has run an impressive number of degree or diploma courses. These are the Master of Arts in Islands and Small States Studies (2 courses), Master of Arts Qualifying course in History, Master of Arts in History, Master in Education, Bachelor of Arts (two courses), Bachelor of Commerce (4 courses), Diploma in Commerce (6 courses), Diploma in Lace Studies, Diploma in Education - Administration and Management (2 courses), Diploma in Information Technology, and Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education.

The Centre has made a very important contribution to higher education in Gozo. So far, about 300 students have graduated after having following courses in Gozo, and many more (running into almost a thousand) have followed short courses at the Centre.



*Professor Alfred J. Vella, Pro-Rector, University of Malta.*

At present there are about 162 students attending University courses. The following is a breakdown of such courses:

| Course   | Course Group | No. of Students |
|--|--------------|-----------------|
| Bachelor of Commerce                               | 2004-2007    | 12              |
| Diploma in Commerce                                | 2005-2007    | 14              |
| Diploma in Lace Studies                            | 2005-2007    | 12              |
| Master of Arts in ISSS                             | 2005-2007    | 5               |
| Bachelor of Commerce                               | 2005-2008    | 4               |
| Diploma in Commerce                                | 2006-2008    | 11              |
| Diploma in Education (Administration & Management) | 2006-2008    | 27              |
| Master of Arts in History                          | 2006-2009    | 3               |
| Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education        | 2007-2009    | 74              |

I am particularly pleased to note that the Centre also involves itself in publications.

Its publications include:

- *The Gozo Observer*, issued periodically (available at: [http://home.um.edu.mt/ugc/gozo\\_observer](http://home.um.edu.mt/ugc/gozo_observer));
- *From Vision to Reality*, edited by Professor Maurice Cauchi (2002). A booklet issued on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the University Gozo Centre. (available at: <http://home.um.edu.mt/ugc/booklet.pdf>);
- *Gozo Past and Present*, by Professor Maurice Cauchi (2002). A book about the history of Gozo;
- *Let's Go To Wied il-Lunzjata*, by Sylvia Haslam and Joseph Borg (2001). A book about the environs of Wied il-Lunzjata;
- *The Impact of EU Membership on the Island Region of Gozo*, edited by Prof Lino Briguglio (2000);

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*The Centre is administered by Mr Joseph Calleja (left), ably assisted by Mr Marvin Grech.*



*Four issues of 'The Gozo Observer', published by the University Gozo Centre.*

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- *A Focus on Gozo*, edited by Revd Dr Joseph Farrugia and Prof Lino Briguglio (1996);
  - *Gozo and its Culture*, edited by Prof Lino Briguglio and Rev Dr J Bezzina (1995);
  - *Tourism in Gozo*, edited by Prof Lino Briguglio (1994).

The Centre has considerable potential as a University Unit offering University courses in Gozo. It can also serve as a conference centre, but this potential is yet to be realized. The Centre offers part-time courses only, but there is potential for full-time courses in areas related to Business. The Centre is also equipped with a video conference system and sometimes this is used for the offering of lectures from the UOM campus in Malta, while students attend classes at the Centre in Gozo.

I wish to take the opportunity to congratulate Professor Lino Briguglio, who directs the Centre and Mr Joseph Calleja, who with Mr Marvin Grech, administer the Centre on a day to day basis, for their sterling work in promoting higher education in Gozo.

## The Ministry for Gozo and the University Gozo Centre

### **Hon. Giovanna Debono**

*Minister for Gozo*

The establishment of the University Gozo Centre is undoubtedly another achievement in which the Ministry for Gozo has been involved well before its foundation fifteen years ago. In fact, it was through the Ministry for Gozo's initiative that such an ambitious project was launched and promoted notwithstanding the difficulties and discouraging logistical problems such a proposal creates. However this proposal fortunately met with the approval of the then rector of the University, Rev. Prof. Peter Serracino Inglott, but most of all with the acceptance of Professor Lino Briguglio, who from the start believed that such a project could indeed succeed and flourish. There is no doubt that the Professor's particular attachment to Gozo was a determining factor in his decision to accept the important role of being the first founder/director of this centre.

Proof of the importance and validity of the decision taken fifteen years ago are the numerous courses and services which have been offered at this centre during these years, and most of all the number of Gozitan and also Maltese students who have graduated or benefited in some other way through these courses and services. Suffice it to say that since its opening, the University Gozo Centre has seen about three hundred students acquiring degrees or diplomas from the courses held within its premises, whilst hundreds of others have attended short courses dealing with a wide spectrum of subjects. One must mention amongst these, the recent courses which were co-financed under the European Social Fund and which attracted a considerable number of Gozitan participants. Another praiseworthy feat is undoubtedly the coordination of a Masters Degree in Islands



*Hon. Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo.*

and Small States, which has seen ten graduates successfully completing the first course while another five are presently in their final year of the second course held at this Centre.

Indeed since the day it was founded, the University Gozo Centre has never looked back, with regular increases being registered in the attendance to all courses and activities held. One must also laud the initiative taken by the centre's administration in the organisation of cultural activities which have by now become established as annual events. There is no doubt that the Centre is now firmly established in Gozo and is providing golden educational opportunities for those who would otherwise have been held back from furthering their studies. Through its

establishment, the University Gozo Centre has managed to create a link between the leading educational institution and Gozo, thus fostering and enhancing the educational services on the island. To this effect the Ministry for Gozo has always been at the back of this initiative constantly extending its support through the deployment of staff, the provision of equipment and materials required for maintenance of premises and other matters as necessary.

It is with pleasure that we note the success story of this truly esteemed Centre in Gozo. Thus we look forward to continue with our incessant support and collaboration required for the administration, maintenance and development of this Centre, in order for it to keep giving the prestigious services and facilities as it has been doing during the past fifteen years.

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*The graduates who followed the course leading to the degree of Master of Arts in Islands and Small States Studies with Professor Lino Briguglio, Director of the University Gozo Centre, just after the conferment of the degree, on 28 November, 2006. The course was offered at the University Gozo Centre between 2003 and 2006.*



*The Offices of the Ministry for Gozo at St Francis Square Victoria Gozo. The University Gozo Centre finds ongoing support from the Ministry for Gozo.*

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# The Gozo Centre Story - From Vision to Reality\*

## **Professor Lino Briguglio**

*Director, University Gozo Centre*

Fifteen years ago, in August 1992, Revd Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, then Rector of the University, asked me whether I was interested in coordinating university courses in Gozo.

I had the reputation of being a Gozo lover, and I think that was the reason why I was asked to undertake this task. Coordinating part-time courses is not an easy task in the best of circumstances – but the Gozo assignment was even more difficult, since it required finding Maltese lecturers to teach in Gozo. I presume that Revd Professor Peter Serracino Inglott (or Fr Peter, as he is more familiarly known) thought that the prospect of frequent visits to the Island, involved in this assignment, was enough of an attraction for me.

At first I was inclined to refuse the offer. I was sure that very few lecturers – if any – would want to offer their services in Gozo, given the time and discomfort involved in travelling to and from the Island. Relying on Gozitan lecturers was not an option, since there were very few of them and in any case, most of them worked in Malta. Finding a solution to this problem was a major challenge for me. After giving some more thought to the matter, I decided to accept the offer. Looking back, I am very glad I did so.

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\* This is an updated version of an article carried in the commemorative booklet *From Vision to Reality*, published by the University Gozo Centre on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its establishment.



*Professor Lino Briguglio, Director of the University Gozo Centre.*

## **The Establishment of the Centre**

I was of the opinion that the operation should be organised in the form of a University Institute, with a specific statute, and a Director appointed by Senate and Council. Rector agreed, and he asked me to draft the statute, which I did. The Centre started to operate in late summer 1992, although the statute was formally approved about six months after.

Fr Peter, who, as I learned later on, was being prodded by Mr Anton Tabone, then Minister for Gozo, to open a University

branch in Gozo, was himself very enthusiastic about the idea, and he asked me to start the operation by coordinating a BA course. Unfortunately, such enthusiasm was not shared by many members of the Faculty of Arts – they did not relish the prospect of commuting to Gozo after normal office hours. So it was obvious that some sort of incentive had to be devised to attract University lecturers to teach in Gozo.

The solution – like most good solutions – was a very simple one.

We decided to hold the lecture sessions on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. This arrangement worked, because it did not unduly disrupt the work schedules of the lecturers involved.

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*The Hon. Anton Tabone, inaugurating the first BA course in Gozo. His vision led to the setting up of the Centre and to the transformation of the former isolation hospital into a University premises.*



Additionally, this permitted them to combine work with leisure. Crossing over to Gozo every weekend or every other weekend still involved discomfort for the lecturers, especially due to the fact that a two-hour lecture required about four hours travelling and, as often as not, a long wait at the Cirkewwa Quay on Friday afternoons. This, not to mention the frequent inclement weather during the winter months.

The response of the lecturers was however satisfactory, and the Gozo Centre took off, with the first BA course commencing in February 1993.

### **The Protagonists of the Story**

The Gozo Centre story would not even have been conceived had it not been for the initiative taken by the Hon. Anton Tabone and Revd Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, who shared a vision which they wanted to put into practice. Obviously, the Centre would not have been established without their seminal role and their encouragement during the initial years of the existence of the Centre. When Professor Roger Ellul Micallef became Rector, he continued to extend excellent support to the Gozo Centre.

The lecturers who accepted the Gozo assignment also played a major role in this regard. It goes without saying that without them, classes would not have been held, and the whole project would have floundered. It is not possible to name the lecturers who have given a contribution to the Centre one by one – because in the course of these fifteen years, the Centre utilised the services of more than 200 different lecturers. As stated, travelling to Gozo from Malta on a regular basis involves discomfort and requires dedication, and I take the opportunity to thank the lecturers concerned for their ongoing commitment.

The first administrator of the Centre, Mr George Aquilina, was my assistant on the ground during the initial years. I could only



visit during the weekends, so the day-to-day administration was in his hands. The Centre owes a lot to George's dedication and enthusiasm. Before taking over the Gozo University Office, he was a guidance teacher and he used his skills to help students who followed courses at the Gozo Centre to adjust to the rigours of University courses. I must say I also made use of his guidance skills, especially when I needed to understand the Gozitan psychology. George was also an accomplished carpenter – his contribution to the Centre extended beyond office administration and guidance, and included free furniture repair and maintenance.

However, the star protagonists of the initial years of the Gozo Centre story were the students. The first students that were accepted to join the BA course had made it possible for the Centre to come to life. It is true that these students were the main beneficiaries of the service offered by the University, but it was thanks to them that an idea was transformed into an institution.

I will accept the compliment that mine was an important role in the success of the Centre. I wanted the project to succeed and I really felt I had a mission to fulfil, namely that of promoting university education in Gozo. But the crucial driving force was that I loved (and of course still love) Gozo.

### **The Xewkija Premises**

As is well known, the Centre moved into its current Xewkija premises in 1996 – four years after it was established. Again the University Authorities and the Ministry for Gozo backed the move and provided the necessary support towards this end.

The Ministry for Gozo was particularly generous in this regard, and made available materials and labour, which, within a few months, led to the transformation of a dreary mental hospital



*Revd Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, former University Rector, addressing guests during the inauguration of the Xewkija premises, May 1996.*

into a beautiful cloister-like building, bright and airy and brimful with good feeling.

Prior to moving into the Xewkija premises, lectures used to be held at the Post-Secondary School at Victoria. We were offered different options as to which buildings to move in. One was a convent, partly inhabited by friars, which I considered to be unsuitable as University premises, for many reasons, not least among which was the incompatibility between short-skirted female students and the inhabitants of the hallowed convent cells and corridors. I thought that a more mundane building would be more appropriate.

As soon as I saw the Xewkija building, I immediately felt that it was the right place. There were some who were not so keen about the idea of moving into a former mental hospital. The rooms seemed too narrow, the windows were barred with metal

mesh for security reasons, the central courtyard was mostly used for dumping old mattresses and broken beds; the floors had an acrid smell. The place was obviously not very inviting. But I, together with other members of the Board of the Centre, saw the potential of the place. We were of course aware of the predictable joke that the place was going to change from one mental institution into another – but this was a very small price to pay for acquiring such a beautiful building. Admittedly, it requires ongoing maintenance, and the shapes of the rooms are not ideal, but we are very happy with this place and are very grateful to the Ministry for Gozo for making it available to the University.

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*Professor Joe Friggieri lecturing during the early years of the BA course offered in Gozo. Before moving to the Xewkija premises the Gozo Centre was housed at the Sir Michelang Refalo Post-secondary School, Victoria.*



## Life at the Centre

The University Gozo Centre is not an ordinary University Institute. We organise a variety of courses on different disciplines, prepare time-tables, organise lecture rooms, approve payments of lecturers, act as the University Office when it comes to applications for admissions, organise logistical support for courses, including travel and accommodation arrangements for lecturers, keep records of students' progress, administer tests and examinations, run the library and liaise with the Ministry for Gozo.

Over and above, we have to undertake the maintenance and upkeep of the building and of the grounds surrounding it. We also look after the welfare of the students and act as a guidance office. As if this were not enough, we also carry out research on Gozitan affairs, publish books on same, and cooperate with Gozitan organisations on matters of mutual interest. And, in addition to all this, we organise social activities, which I am glad to say, are considered as part of the cultural calendar of Gozo.

Of course, life at the Gozo Centre, of course, goes beyond lecturing, administration and maintenance. We have seen many things happening here. Students have got married during their studies, others have had babies (one student had two). Many found their partners in marriage at the Centre.

The Centre has experienced sad and joyous events, especially when students graduated. We have seen students on the verge of desperation on learning that they failed a study unit and others in a state of jubilation after getting an A, especially when they expected a lower grade.

I presume this is normal for an Institution of higher education – but in the case of Gozo, it became normal because somebody had a vision and found it possible to turn it into reality.

## Expression of Gratitude

There are many people, apart from the ones I have already mentioned, who merit appreciation and gratitude for their contribution to the Centre.

The Centre finds excellent support from the University authorities, including the Rector, Professor Juanito Camilleri and the Registrar, Mr Anthony Gellel. We also receive assistance from various University personnel and I take this occasion to thank all those who service the Gozo Centre.

The current Minister for Gozo, Hon. Giovanna Debono, never fails to support the Gozo Centre whenever her assistance is needed. We are also serviced by the staff of the Gozo Ministry. I also wish to thank all those who provide the services we require.

The Centre is being very efficiently run – and I often get the credit for this. In reality, the credit should mostly go to Mr Joseph Calleja and Mr Marvin Grech, who administer the place in a very professional manner. They are diligent and well-organised, and have made the success of the Centre their own success. They are very respected by the students, lecturers and the staff of the Centre. They know the meaning of flexibility – in terms of tasks and working hours. They have to work on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings and afternoons, and sometimes even on Sundays. I am very grateful to them for their contribution to the Centre.

The staff members of the Centre also include a cleaner, Antoinette Farrugia, and two handymen, Philip Zerafa and Paul Hili. They double (triple, quadruple) up as gardeners, janitors, coffee and sandwich makers, waiters, photocopier operators, errand boys, flag raisers, and drivers.



*The Hon. Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi “virtually” talking to Professor Lino Briguglio during a video lecture session. Also present are the Hon. Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo, and Mr Joseph Calleja, administrator of the University Gozo Centre.*

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Thanks are also due to the persons who served on the Board of the Centre and to the secretary of the Board, Mrs Maryrose Vella.

## Epilogue

The Gozo Centre is fifteen years old. It has helped hundreds of Gozitan students to graduate from a tertiary institution. The vision has turned to reality and we are now living this reality.

I feel confident that, for many years to come, the University Gozo Centre will continue to offer its much needed services for the promotion of higher education in Gozo.

## A Mum and a Student at the University Gozo Centre

### Caroline Camilleri Rolls

*Working mother of two young children and former student at the University Gozo Centre*

A dream almost impossible to contemplate? What were the odds of being accepted into a degree course? The opportunity was there. A centre in Gozo, a branch of the University of Malta was offering me the chance to follow a part-time course leading to the Bachelor of Arts Degree on a part-time basis. Was this too good to be true?

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*Caroline Camilleri Rolls*



In 1999, I was twenty-eight years old and a full-time mum of a three year old boy - Nathan. When I got to know of the chance of being able to read for a degree in Gozo, I grabbed the opportunity. I figured I had everything to gain by trying so I applied. When I was called for the interview I went with much trepidation, fearing that I was not going to be considered eligible to join the course. I was thrilled when I received a positive reply. I started to rally myself up for the upcoming challenge – for a challenge it really was!

### Back to the Classroom

Sitting in the classroom with my fellow students on that first day, I had to fight away the impression that I was in the wrong place. Some of them were much younger than myself. Others had children almost my age and I admired their determination. This heightened my feelings that I could actually succeed.

I had not been in a classroom situation for ten years. At first it was full of the usual 'first day of a new school' feelings. It felt like I was back in Secondary School getting to know my fellow students but eventually we all grouped off into twos and threes as everyone found their niche. After a while, attending class became something to look forward to on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. The camaraderie between the group was always present and there was always a feeling of disappointment when the holidays were upcoming because we would not be meeting for a while.

I felt privileged that so many lecturers were sharing their wealth of knowledge with us. I was taught by some of the best people I could ever hope to meet. They were always there to offer advice and encouragement.

## A Major Challenge

But if I believed such an undertaking was going to be a challenge, I was right! Learning to manage time was the major obstacle in the whole experience. At the end of the first year, once Nathan had started pre-kinder, I went back to work in a Primary School. Now I had to juggle a full-time job, a child who could go for hours without sleeping, keeping the house from becoming a major disaster zone and my studies.

The major problem was finding enough time to get the assignments done, to study for the end of semester tests and at the same time to avoid chaotic situations in the house! Keeping a four-year-old busy while trying to mentally sort out aspects from the Iliad and understanding microeconomic theories could wear you down, especially if you are hanging out the washing or cleaning the ever present mound of plates in the kitchen at the same time.

Moving into our new house during the first year was probably not a good idea but unfortunately it was better than paying rent on the flat we were occupying. Digging out my lecture notes and assorted books out of unlabelled boxes and onto a make-shift desk under the stairs to get on with my work was my first priority as my first exams were looming. As I had not sat for an exam in over twelve years it was not something I was particularly looking forward to. However, the determination to succeed was there, and so the exams came and went and the time slowly, albeit hectically, went by.

## Managing Time

Eventually I became an expert at managing time. Trying not to deny quality time for Nathan and allocating time for studying and other school work is not an easy task. I had a lot of support from my husband who would make me coffee at all the right



*A lecture in progress at the University Gozo Centre.*

times and the cooking was totally within his domain. I would meet some of my fellow students at either their house or mine and we would study together, encouraging each other. And so it went on.

During the third year, the routine had become much easier to handle. However this all went pear-shaped when I became pregnant with our second child. Jamie was born on the 25th of May 2002, during the exam session of the second semester. The day before I went into hospital to give birth, I sat for an hour and a half revising History of Mediterranean Civilisation for the exam, absolutely terrified that the baby would arrive a day early! Thank God he did not! I gave birth the next day and I also passed the exam.

## Life After School

We sat for our finals in June 2003. A really frightening prospect - but I put a lot of energy and determination into preparing for them. The exams came and went as do most things in life.

The problem now was that it was all over. Suddenly my life seemed rather empty without the constant occupation of studying and writing assignments. It is true that I had two young children which took a lot out of my time, but when they went off to bed I found myself wondering what to do with myself. I missed the whole experience – my friends, the lectures, even the assignments and studying. I would sit at the computer wondering what to do!

### **Once a Student always a Student**

During my first year, my Economics lecturer and the director of the Gozo Centre, Professor Lino Briguglio, had said to me that once I started studying I would always be eager for more and would find it difficult to stop. And he was so right! When the Gozo Centre offered a Masters of Arts Degree in Islands and Small States Studies, I jumped at the chance and went in head-first. Many of my fellow students had also caught the bug and we once again found ourselves going through another three hectic but wonderful years together.

### **Multiple Graduation**

Initially I never expected to go the whole length. I imagined it would be too much and I almost gave up after Jamie was born. However since then I have graduated twice. Something I never expected to do even once!

In 2003 I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Sociology and again in 2006 I graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Islands and Small States Studies.

I never felt prouder than at that moment when I walked up the aisle of the Jesuit Church in the Old University Building in Valletta to receive my certificate, with my family watching, including my two boys who both wanted to be present.

### **Gratitude and Appreciation**

Gozo has various limitations due to its small size, and higher education opportunities are not easy to come by – the Gozo Centre has lifted many obstacles which stood in the way of so many people just like myself who, with so many other obligations, would not have dreamt of travelling backwards and forwards to Malta to further their studies, no matter how tempting the end result was.

I have a lot of people to thank for that. First and foremost the director of the Gozo Centre, Professor Lino Briguglio who, through an unimaginable amount of work and sacrifices, made a success of the Gozo Centre thereby opening the door for so many Gozitans to obtain a tertiary education, and in doing so changed a dream into a reality.

I am also very grateful to the many lecturers who had to travel frequently from Malta to Gozo, even in bad weather. They always gave us the best they had to offer.

The administrators of the Gozo Centre, Mr Joseph Calleja and Mr Marvin Grech, so efficient and helpful in all aspects, have done, and continue to do, such a wonderful job in the running of the centre.

I am particularly grateful for the support I received from my family who had to put up with the lousy housekeeping, baked beans on toast on a good day and arguing over whose turn it was on the computer.

And finally thanks are due to my fellow students, the friends I made during our eight year journey together.

# Reflections of a Lecturer at the University of Malta Gozo Centre

## **Nadia Farrugia**

*Department of Economics University of Malta*

I have been engaged as a lecturer in Economics at the University of Malta Gozo Centre for the past two years. As I will show in this brief write-up, the Centre is a great place for students and lecturers alike.

### **Location**

The Centre is housed in a building in Xewkija. Most lecture rooms are reached from corridors which overlook a relatively large internal courtyard. This courtyard is really beautiful, with well kept colourful plants and wooden benches. The place is full of light and is very welcoming.

### **The Ferry Crossing**

As a lecturer at the University Gozo Centre, I cross over to Gozo very frequently. This has its pluses and minuses. Lectures are usually held on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. When I have lectures in Gozo, I generally try to take the 3.45 pm ferry on Friday. During the winter months the weather is often windy and cloudy, which means that I have to stay inside the ferry during the channel crossing and in inclement weather this is not always a nice experience. However, when the weather is fine, I stay on the deck and admire the breathtaking sea views. Unfortunately nice weather often means long car queues at Cirkewwa, and I usually have to be there at around 2.30 pm, thus spending an hour or so in the queue.



*Nadia Farrugia*

### **Good Organisation**

The Centre is very well organised and efficiently run, even when it comes to details. For example, as soon as a lecturer or a student enters the main door on a Friday evening or a Saturday morning, he/she is greeted by a board with a printed list of all the lecture themes, the name of the lecturers and the room numbers. No time is therefore lost wandering around looking for the lecture venue.

When a lecturer enters the lecture rooms, he or she finds all the student chairs neatly organised in place and the students' attendance lists on the lecturer's desk.

What struck me when I started lecturing at the Gozo Centre is that the white boards are always wiped clean and board markers in different colours are made available near the

board. So a lecturer need not remember to bring markers with him or her or to wipe the board before the start of the lecture. If equipment is needed, such as a computer projector or a video player, all one has to do is advise the Gozo Centre Office beforehand, and this is invariably prepared for the lecturer. All rooms are connected to the internet, so there is access to web resources during class.

Another example of good organisation relates to the manner in which lecturers are advised of their time table. At the beginning of the semester, the administration of the Gozo Centre sends a schedule to all lecturers, with lecture dates and time. The lecturer is asked to confirm whether he/she will be available on the dates assigned. A few days before the lecture is due, the lecturers are reminded of the arrangement and asked as to

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*Some of the University of Malta lecturers who offer their services at the University Gozo Centre.*



whether they wish to have a hotel booked for Friday night. Paradoxically, even though most lecturers have to travel from Malta, lectures are very rarely missed, even when the Ferry service is suspended. In such cases, arrangements are made to have the lectures postponed. In certain instances, when the lecturer finds it difficult to cross over to Gozo, video-conference facilities are utilised.

The Gozo Centre has a small library which is also very well organised. It permits students to borrow textbooks or to browse the literature. The book collection is not large but it contains up to date titles related to the courses offered in Gozo. The library assistants interact with the lecturers to order recent publications, if funds permit.

Another sign of good administration relates to the upkeep of the premises. They are well maintained, and kept really clean. The rooms and facilities are very well signposted.

### **The Students**

The students at the Gozo Centre are different from the ones I usually teach at the Malta campus, in more ways than one. For a start they are part-time students, meaning that they work during the days and very often come to the Gozo Centre straight from work. They also tend to be older than the full-time students who attend the University in Malta, with many of them being married and with families to look after. In fact, I am younger than many of the students I teach at the Centre.

But it is not age that really characterises the Gozitan students. It is their motivation and drive for learning and knowledge. They are very eager to learn, and very interested in the subjects taught. They really appreciate the value of knowledge, the importance of life-long learning in today's competitive world and the benefits one reaps from acquiring new skills.



These students dedicate most of their weekends to attending lectures and spend a considerable proportion of the free time during the week to study and prepare assignments. They are generally very cooperative students. They are very much aware of and grateful for being given the opportunity to follow University courses in Gozo.

### **Weekend Lectures**

The success of the University Gozo Centre experiment is of course mainly due to the work and creativity of its director and the administrators of the Centre.

Another reason is that lectures are organised during the weekends. Had it not been so, very few lecturers would have been willing to offer their services in Gozo. This “weekend University” arrangement does not disrupt the weekly lecturing routine of Maltese visiting lecturers. It would be difficult for most lecturers to travel to Gozo and back on a weekday evening, given that a normal working day ends late afternoon or early evening.

When the lecture is over on Friday evenings, lecturers usually stay overnight at a hotel booked for them by the administration of the Centre, to enable them to continue with their lectures on Saturday morning.

### **A Lovely Experience**

Even though crossing to Gozo repeatedly and very frequently has its downsides, overall lecturing in Gozo is a lovely experience. It provides the right combination for every lecturer: excellent administrative facilities, well-organised premises, attentive and motivated students and nice colleagues, with whom I often share dinner on Friday nights.



*Gozitan students just after the conferment of the Diploma in Commerce in November 2004.*



*With the introduction of new ferries, crossing over to Gozo has become less time-consuming for lecturers.*

## The University Gozo Centre – Some Historical Notes\*

### Revd Dr Joseph Bezzina

*Board Member of the University Gozo Centre*

A dream come true! That was how the Hon. Anton Tabone, then Minister for Gozo, described in a nutshell the story behind the Malta University Gozo Centre, officially inaugurated by the Prime Minister Dr Eddie Fenech-Adami on 4 May 1996. An event that is a fulfilment of what has been mere wishful thinking for almost two hundred years

*Revd Dr Joseph Bezzina*



### The First Proposal

As early as 1815, the Colonial Office in London was deliberating to make Gozo the seat of a “a considerable university which may attract the young men of the most enterprising Greek and Italian families and become at the same time a lasting instrument for the extension of our [British] moral influence through the Levant and at least the south of Italy.” This proposal was made by Henry E Bunbury, Under-Secretary of State, on behalf of Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies. In a despatch of 12 February 1815 to Sir Thomas Maitland, the first British Governor of Malta, he dwelt at length on the argument. Yet the Governor was not the person to promote projects that were not his brainchild and he seemingly paid little or no attention to the suggestion of the Colonial Office.

One might assume that Bunbury’s proposal was a very fantastic suggestion – a University on a remote unknown island in the middle of the Mediterranean – but time proved that it was not far-fetched at all. When fifty years later, on 4 November 1866, the Gozo Seminary opened its doors as a secondary boarder and day-school for boys under the able direction of the Jesuit Fathers, a number of distinguished Sicilian families did send their sons to Gozo.

It was at the Sacred Heart Seminary, as the institution was called from 1881, that tertiary education was first imparted on the Island. Students preparing for the priesthood followed the course of the Scienze Sacre, studying Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Sacred Scripture, History of the Church, and Canon Law. Several attempts to obtain the authorisation from Rome to confer first degrees failed not because of a lack of intelligent students and knowledgeable professors, but because some quarters in Malta were afraid of competition from the smaller island.

\* This article appeared for the first time in *From Vision To Reality* (2002), the commemorative booklet to mark the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the University of Malta Gozo Centre.

## University of the Air

The idea of a University Centre in Gozo was revived once again in the 1960s, when the feasibility of a University of the Air was discussed between Dr Anton Tabone, then President of the Gozo Civic Council, and Professor Guzè Aquilina, at the time vice-Rector of the University of Malta. Gozitan-born Professor Aquilina began promoting the idea of University facilities for Gozitan students on the lines of the University of the Air, more precisely, on an adaptation of the British idea to the local situation. Through a sort of closed-circuit radio, students in a centre could listen to lectures imparted at the Valletta University with the facility to put questions and participate directly in the debate. He brought the matter to the notice of the University Council for approval of the idea which was fully supported by Dr Tabone, father of the above-mentioned Minister for Gozo. Yet, as often happens, the concept was not pursued further.

The idea was taken up again by the Ministry for Gozo soon after its establishment on 14 May 1987. The first Gozo Minister, Mr Anton Tabone, found full collaboration of the Revd Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, then Rector of the University, as well as of his colleagues in the Government cabinet.

Innumerable obstacles had to be overcome before the dream could come true. It was not an easy task to convince the University Council and Senate to open a Centre in Gozo. In the meantime, Professor Lino Briguglio became another promoter of such a foundation.

“When the idea of the Gozo Centre was first voiced, many thought it was just a nice dream and not practical,” explained the Prime Minister in the inauguration speech. “But the idea has become a reality because over the recent years we have come to appreciate two things: the importance of university education, and the opportunities for education in Gozo.”



*Former Prime Minister (now HE President of the Republic) Dr Edward Fenech Adami, inaugurating the Xewkija premises of the University Gozo Centre.*

## The Centre's Establishment

The University of Malta Gozo Centre was established in September 1992, although its statute was formally approved in February 1993.

Mr Anton Tabone, then Minister for Gozo, who was the principal promoter of the whole project, described the Centre as a dream come true.

The Centre has been established to stay. During the Labour Party administration between 1996 and 1998, Dr Anton Refalo, Parliamentary Secretary for Gozo, gave it his full support. In September 1998, upon the return of a Nationalist administration, the Ministry for Gozo was re-established. The new Minister, the Honourable Giovanna Debono, declared her interest in increasing and widening the scope of the Centre from day one. She has never ceased to give the Centre her full support.

The creation of a University Centre is a landmark in the history of education in Gozo, for many years consistently kept down to the secondary level. The Island can certainly pride itself, as Professor Briguglio pointed out, on being one of the smallest, if not the smallest island in the Mediterranean with a University centre.

### The Premises of the Centre

The Malta University Gozo Centre is located in a building best remembered by the people as il-Lazzarett, the Isolation Hospital of the Island. Located in an area known as Tal-Barmil, limits of the village of Xewkija, it was originally built as an experimental farm in the 1840s.

At that time, the economic depression that had hit the Maltese archipelago since 1813 was being slowly overcome. The British Colonial government, that for long had abandoned the people to their own destiny, began to take a closer interest in their plight. So it was decided to raise this experimental farm that had a section for fowls and rabbits, as well as a section for growing crops, both led by trained personnel. The results were

passed on to the local farmers to upgrade their products. They could also acquire chicks and rabbits as well as seeds from the farm. The premises continued to serve their original purposes until the early 1890s.

During the nineteenth century, regular outbreaks of plague, cholera, small pox, and fever made the establishment of an isolation hospital ever more pressing. Cases of infectious disease were previously treated in premises hired ad hoc by the Government but these were unsuitable for the purpose and often criticized publicly; hence the decision for the setting up of an isolation hospital.

Since the early 1890s, the experimental farm and the surrounding fields – all Government property – were being suggested for the purpose. When a final decision was taken, the farm was re-modelled on a traditional Maltese house, with rooms on two floors surrounding a central courtyard. After the building of a second floor and other alterations, the building was officially inaugurated as a hospital on 21 October 1897. The hospital, enlarged on more than one occasion, was not open on a permanent basis, but whenever the need arose, a situation that lasted till the 1960s.

Then the necessity of an isolation hospital was not felt any longer and it was closed down.

The building was left to rot, but in the beginning of the 1980s, it was rehabilitated and served as a mental hospital between 7 October 1983 and 26 January 1995.

After discussions between Mr Anton Tabone, the then Minister for Gozo, and Professor Peter Serracino-Inglott, then University Rector, an agreement was reached to refurbish the building and turn it into the University of Malta Gozo Centre. It was inaugurated on 4 May 1996.



*The plaque commemorating the inauguration of the University Gozo Centre Premises.*