

A Campus to be Proud of

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The Gozo Campus of the University of Malta has certainly managed to find its feet and establish itself as an important institution over the past twenty years of its existence. And it is now most appropriate that the people who run it want to celebrate its twentieth anniversary in a fitting manner. This occasion gives all those of us who were involved in its initial stages the opportunity to look back with great satisfaction at the beginnings of the experiment and feel proud of what has been achieved since then. More importantly it gives us the opportunity to look ahead in order to discover further ways and means by which this University Centre may extend its services by providing more lectures, increasing the number of days for their delivery, and organizing courses relevant to Gozo's current and future needs.

As we reminisce on past years, we cannot forget the difficulties faced by the whole venture in its initial stages. The odds against us were great. The whole project, to those less familiar with Gozitan affairs, seemed preposterous at first. Many considered it a bad joke. This lack of faith in the project had prompted me to say in my speech as Minister for Gozo, delivered on the occasion of the inauguration of the present premises, that often on your way to Gozo you were likely to meet many doubting Thomases who could turn faint-hearted people from potential achievers to outright failures. However, in spite of such attitudes, the Island once more showed its potential, and the political will prevailing at the time managed to overcome all the hurdles.



The press conference, in February 1993, announcing the launching of the first BA Course offered in Gozo.

In my long experience in public life I cannot remember a single instance when a new initiative earmarked for Gozo by clear-sighted and level-headed individuals turned out to be a white elephant. The ongoing success of the Gozo Campus proves my point. The Centre has filled a gap by providing access to tertiary education for the people of Gozo on the Island itself. In so doing it has also highlighted the regional significance of the Island in the Maltese Archipelago, precisely by applying and implementing a regional policy where it was due.

The Gozo University Centre was set up way back in 1992 through the publication of a Statute, later incorporated in a Legal Notice, stating the aims and obligations inherent in the running of the institution. Another milestone in the history of the Centre was the recent appointment of Professor Joe Friggieri

as Pro-Rector for Gozo on 26 April 2012. The University Council unanimously welcomed the Rector's decision to appoint Professor Friggieri to the new role and thanked Professor Lino Briguglio for his pioneering work and sterling service over the last twenty years.

Alongside his other duties, Professor Friggieri will be in charge of the running of the Centre as part of the overall plan to develop the Gozo Campus into a fully-fledged and vibrant extension of the University of Malta. The aim is to offer a wider range of services to all Gozitan students and to better cater for their needs. A pilot project to organize some of the degree examinations in Gozo itself was launched in June of this year. This should enable the University to gain a better understanding of the logistical and infrastructural changes that would need to be made in order for this facility to be extended to as many degree programmes as possible. A livelier campus would also serve as a meeting point for the launch of new ideas and projects within the community.

At this point I would like to take the opportunity to heartily congratulate Professor Friggieri on his appointment. I have always counted Professor Friggieri among those who genuinely love the Island, a love he manages to express so beautifully and so well in a number of poems. He has been consistently involved in the Gozo Centre since its beginnings, twenty years ago, and he has never faltered in his firm resolve to turn the Gozo experiment into a worthwhile and joyful experience.

As to Professor Briguglio, I will remain indebted to him all my life for his pioneering role and total dedication in running the Centre as its director ever since it was set up, and for winning, in a very short time, the all-round respect it deserves as an institution of higher learning. I always admired the way in which, in those early days and beyond, he skillfully managed to navigate the stormy seas, not only in his frequent crossings

of the Gozo channel, but also in bringing about the necessary logistical, infrastructural and cultural changes in the face of initial resistance to the project. Professor Briguglio's contribution to the success of the whole venture is truly monumental.

After a gestation period of twenty years and as a result of its new status, the Gozo facility should now be rapidly moving in the direction of becoming an institution on a full-time basis, with a specific budget shared by the Gozo Ministry and the University, providing regular, full-time courses with the help of video links and other means of communication. Emphasis must be placed on the need to provide courses that are relevant to Gozitan society and beneficial to Gozo's economy. In order to achieve this objective, there must be an ongoing and close collaboration between all the players involved in the project. Without in any way diminishing the great merits of all the previous Gozo Board Members, and while expressing my gratitude to all of them for their work over the years, I envisage a period of renewed vigour and the generation of new ideas, with frequent and regular meetings held throughout the academic year and beyond.

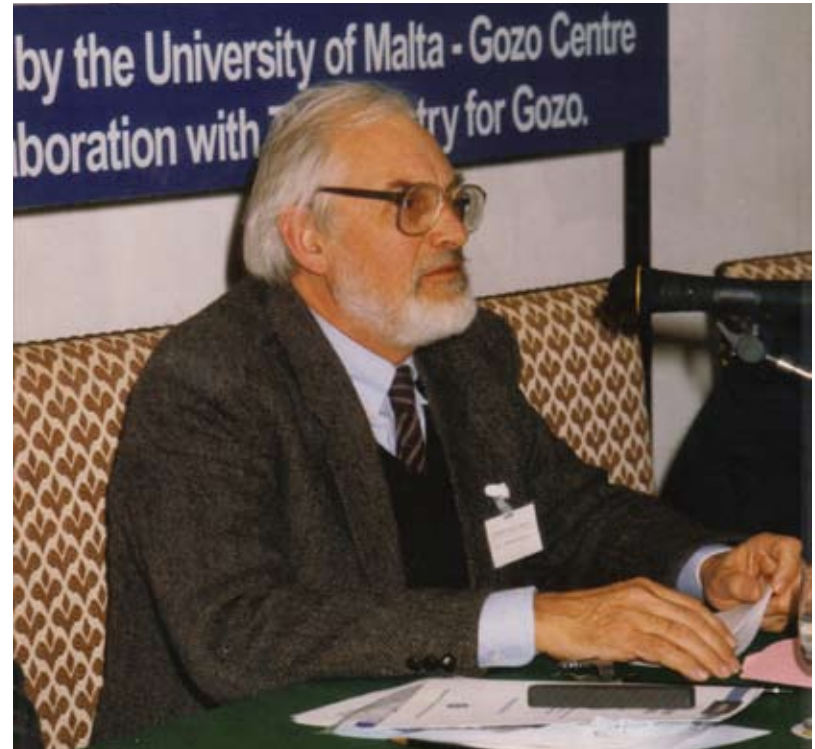
The success of this Gozo initiative fills us all with a deep sense of satisfaction for a job well thought out and diligently executed; but it also gives the lie to those whose knowledge of Gozo is manifestly lacking and who still consider the Island as no more than a Christmas crib (*presejvu*) and its inhabitants as its little clay figurines (*pasturi*). I write this because I strongly believe in Gozo's potential, which is ready to be tapped to turn disadvantages into opportunities, for its own sake as well as for the benefit of the whole country.

The Gozo Campus hosts an Atmospheric Research Laboratory, set up in 1996, which now houses five full-time employees, four of whom are qualified scientists within the Physics Department of the University. The laboratory is equipped with state-of-

the-art instruments acquired from funds made specifically available by German Institutions and the ERDF. Most of the instruments are located at the Giordan Lighthouse, limits of Għasri. The laboratory is currently contributing to a global data base on climate change. Once the data is collected and processed locally, it is then made available world-wide.

I am also eagerly looking forward to the day when the Gozo Campus will, as planned, offer a course leading to a diploma in Gozo Studies, preparations for which, I have been given to understand, are at an advanced stage. The history of lace-making, so intimately connected with Gozo's culture and people, has also, I hear, raised its profile through the presentation of a thesis on the subject by a lady student from Gozo who is currently reading for a PhD after acquiring an MPhil at the Mediterranean Institute of the University. This will hopefully lead to further research in the history and technical aspects of this traditional craft. It all started at the Gozo Centre through the setting up of three-year courses leading to a certificate, which was then extended to a Diploma in Lace Studies, catering for both Maltese and Gozitan students.

I would like to renew the appeal I made at the official inauguration of the present premises for other national institutions, corporations and agencies to follow the University's example by stepping ashore on Gozo so as to include the Island in their planning and strategies in order to help create more educational and employment opportunities for the local population, especially the young. I am sure that Gozo will not let them down. This is precisely what the then Rector of the University, Fr Peter Serracino Inglott, did when he gave his full support to the idea of establishing a branch of the University in Gozo. His recent demise was a sad loss for all of us. It was as a result of his vision that the highest educational institution of the land managed to gain a foothold on the smaller Island. Gozo and its people are eternally grateful to Fr Peter for his



Professor Jeremy Boissevain at the seminar on Tourism in Gozo, January 1994.

crucial role in giving birth to the Gozo project and for the way he inspired others to carry it through.

In conclusion I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those friends of Gozo whose support has made it possible for a dream to come true. As to the rest, I sincerely hope that the success of the Campus experience may make them realize that Gozo has the potential, and the Gozitans the ability, to host new and ambitious initiatives and bring them to fruition for the benefit of the national economy and the general well-being of the whole country.