



Walking the Walk ...

Research and innovation are crucial to securing a better future, one which is built on knowledge valorisation. Science has, through the centuries, helped us develop the solutions to the challenges of the present and the future. One must not only acknowledge the commitment of governments in defining research and innovation as a priority and investing in such a fundamental sector, but also the relentless work of researchers - who are inspired by inquisitiveness and exploration.

This year has been a particularly challenging one for us all. World economies have been tested and thwarted with respect to resilience and growth respectively. At the same time, it is widely known that economies that invest in research and innovation tend to be more effective in sustainable growth and development of societal benefits. In fact, it is evident that such investment in research and innovation is largely unaffected by external factors. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance in research and innovation investment resilience. It has taught us that scientific foundations and evidence are key to drive policy making, and that it will be scientific discoveries that lead us out of this pandemic. It is already evident that the scientific advances that are evolving on disease containment and potential treatments in relation to the current pandemic, have already lifted spirits across the business communities - albeit the road to general recovery being a long and arduous one.

Locally, we have seen continued investment in research and innovation, with corresponding research budget increases for local research ecosystem enablers, such as the Malta Council for Science and Technology. The Government of Malta has pledged €5.3M for a COVID-19

R&D Fund, administered jointly by the Malta Council for Science and Technology and Malta Enterprise, boosted the national R&I research funding programme FUSION and new support measures for early stage research, as well as providing for increased internationalisation incentives in the field. However, the recent news of a fully-fledged Ministry dedicated to the sector is a momentous development. A development that will see the establishment of a dedicated public sector structure to further support research and innovation. This will not only further concretise research and innovation as a priority in Malta, but will enable us to think beyond our traditional economic strongholds and move towards developing and incentivising other knowledge-intensive sectors within which we can leverage new opportunities and develop capacity and critical mass. The Malta Council for Science and Technology's ongoing work on *Malta's Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027*, that has been based on extensive public consultation, has harnessed such a focus.

The future does look challenging, an unprecedented pandemic has changed various aspects of national economies and our everyday lives. However, there is a common thread that loops through the past, our present, and into the future - resilience within the research and innovation sector. It is through this sector, that we can continue breaking new ground, whilst developing the solutions to societal and technological challenges.

This mindset and ambition will undoubtedly help create a better and more sustainable future for us all.