

DR LUKE A. FIORINI

Director, Centre for Labour Studies



Foreword

I write this Foreword to the *2019-2020 Biennial Report of the Centre for Labour Studies (CLS)* with great pleasure. This is my first foreword, having taken over the reins of the Centre from Dr Anna Borg in the latter months of 2020; I would thus like to commence by thanking Dr Borg for her sterling work and dedication over the last six years as Director of the CLS.

The year 2020 was like no other in modern history. The impacts of COVID-19, both domestically and internationally, were substantial, far reaching and unprecedented. Like all other organisations, the CLS was forced to respond swiftly to the new reality that surrounds us. Lectures and other interactions with students that traditionally took place physically were switched to run remotely. Administrative tasks that often made use of hard paper copies and physical meetings were carried out digitally. Research efforts, such as the regular reports which the CLS produces for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), were transformed to focus on the occupational and social impacts of COVID-19. Whilst a sizable task, the efforts of the CLS staff were fruitful: an internal survey of our students highlighted that the vast majority were satisfied with the online lectures (less than 4% were dissatisfied), whilst the Centre's Eurofound research efforts were ranked highly by the aforementioned organisation.

Despite the considerable challenges, the CLS core workforce remains that of three full-time academics and three administrative members of staff. Currently, the CLS offers three undergraduate courses and one postgraduate course, all of which are offered part-time. During 2019-2020, a total of 11 different cohorts of students followed one of our courses. Two groups studied for a Diploma in Gender, Work and Society (offered in conjunction with the Faculty

for Social Wellbeing); three cohorts studied for an Honours Bachelor Degree in Occupational Health and Safety; a further four cohorts of students read for an Honours Bachelor Degree in Work and Human Resources (offered in conjunction with the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy); and two groups of students read for a Master in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development (held in conjunction with the Faculty of Education). During this period, 209 individuals studied with the CLS, with three cohorts graduating. A further 28 students completed a short course in 'people management and industrial relations for public officers' which was held in conjunction with the Institute for Public Services which trains public officers to deal effectively with issues relating to people management and industrial relations.

Other achievements during the past two years include the submission of 59 reports to Eurofound, and the organisation of an international conference, 'The 8th International Community, Work and Family Conference – Malta'. Both are detailed within this biennial report. The CLS also offered its first serviced units to other Faculties within the University of Malta during this period, with a unit on ergonomics and design being offered within the Bachelor in Technical Design and Technology (Faculty of Education). Other serviced units are to be offered in the coming years.

Complementing this biennial report are five informative articles written by the CLS academic staff. Professor Godfrey Baldacchino, CLS Board Chair, complements the article he wrote for the 2017-2018 biennial report by further exploring vertical segregation among academics in 'Origins and Destinations: Career Paths of Male and Female Academics at the University of Malta'. Dr Anna Borg, Senior Lecturer at the CLS, focuses on the sudden change in working methods during the pandemic, in particular the growth in remote home working, in 'The Impact of the Coronavirus on the World of Work with a Focus on Teleworking'. Dr Manwel Debono, Senior Lecturer at the CLS, argues that transferable skills are essential for the development of a flexible labour market and discusses how these could be further fostered in Malta in 'Challenges in Implementing Transferable Skills in Malta'. Mr Saviour Rizzo, a Research Support Officer with the CLS, first reviews and then discusses the implications of industrial relations during the pandemic in 'COVID-19 in Malta: A New Reality of Working Life'. Finally, I discuss the government support measures taken to limit the impact of COVID-19 on employment and organisations in 'Protecting Employment and Businesses in Malta during the First Twelve Months of COVID-19: A Chronology of Support Measures.'

This report highlights the efforts and commitment of the Centre's staff over the last two years. I would therefore like to take the opportunity to thank the CLS Board, its Chair Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino, and my colleagues Dr Anna Borg and Dr Manwel Debono, without whom this edition of the Biennial Report would be very brief! Special thanks also goes to the administrative staff of the CLS including Ms Josephine Agius, Ms Caroline Chetcuti and Ms Stephanie Muscat, without whom all this work would not be possible.