



L-Università
ta' Malta

Centre for Labour Studies

Biennial Report

2019-2020



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Introduction

It is once again my great pleasure to introduce the Biennial Report for the Centre of Labour Studies at the University of Malta. This report covers the period 2019/2020.

I write this report just as the CLS celebrates its 40th anniversary. What started off as the first centre at the University of Malta, serving as a training hub in the dynamics of worker participation with the support of Malta's largest unions, has now expanded its scope to train a variety of adult women and men in various aspects of the world of work: gender and society, human resource issues, career guidance and occupational health and safety. It is correct to state that pioneering pedagogies in adult education – including residential weekend seminars – were introduced at the University of Malta by the Centre, then called the Workers' Participation Development Centre (WPDC).

The support of the GWU, UHM/CMTU and FORUM – all represented and active on the CLS Board – has been critical in helping to chart and monitor the mission of the Centre over four decades, and counting.

In spite of the constraints imposed by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic regarding public gatherings, an event was held at the Valletta Campus of the University of Malta on February 24, 2021, to celebrate both the CLS' 40th year milestone; as well as the 80th birthday of Prof. Edward L. Zammit, founding Director of the CLS. His inspiration has galvanised the CLS staff to produce a scholarly book also in his honour. But: that will be featured in a future Biennial Report.

Meanwhile, the research output of the CLS continues to impress: it is enough to mention the regular submissions on local industrial and labour relations to the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions.

These inform policy makers at the European Commission of the state of play of work related matters in the Maltese Islands.

The year 2020 saw the CLS participate voluntarily in an internal mock audit review, run by the University's Quality Assurance Committee. This was the Centre's first comprehensive audit of its programmes of study. The exercise highlighted the CLS' strengths in its operations and management, while suggesting a number of feasible improvements to take on board. During this exercise, both past and present students of the CLS spoke highly of the care and support received by CLS staff throughout their university student days. The Centre takes pride in this level of attention which reduces student attrition and helps build its high student retention and completion rates.

Finally, also in 2020, Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister, the Hon. Mr Carmelo Abela, has launched a full-scale review of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act (2002), the flagship labour legislation in the country. The CLS has been asked to contribute to this review by tabling its own recommendations.

I will stop here, and invite you to peruse these pages for evidence of how the CLS continues to make a positive impact on labour studies in Malta generally, and on dozens of university students particularly. Indeed, some observers often wonder how this is at all possible and sustainable, given that the CLS' core personnel involves three full-time academics and three administrative staff members.

May 2021

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.



Articles



Origins and Destinations: CAREER PATHS OF MALE AND FEMALE ACADEMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

ABSTRACT

35 individuals (23 men and 12 women) were recruited as full-time assistant lecturers at the University of Malta around thirty years ago. By looking at their administrative responsibilities, by following their career progression, as well as by exploring publicly available metrics about the quantity and quality of their scholarship, it can be argued that there is no significant difference among this cohort based on gender. This suggests that men and women in Malta can today achieve similar career destinations in academia; and existing gender gaps are therefore likely to close with the passage of time, on the basis of existing policies.

INTRODUCTION

During December 2020, I was informed that ten academics working in Malta had recently featured in a list of *the top two per cent* of the world's scientists. The database was curated by a team of experts at Stanford University, USA, and was published in October 2020 in one of the world's most reputed academic journals, *PLOS Biology*. The report lists some 100,000 scientists whose published research manuscripts have accelerated progress in their respective fields and influenced the productivity of other researchers. Their exceptional standing is a function of scoring on top after using a composite index that acknowledges scholarship, research leadership and citations (excluding self-citations) from Scopus data made available by Elsevier (Ioannidis, Boyack & Baas, 2020).

Seven of these scholars are employed full-time at the University of Malta (UM), another two at Mater Dei General Hospital (and part-time at UM), and one at the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST).

Table 1 below indicates the ten scholars involved, ranked in terms of their research impact as measured during the year 2019.

Table 1: Ten scholars, working in Malta, ranked among the top 2% of the world's scientists (based on 2019 data). Source: Ioannidis et al. (2020). (Names in the table are in alphabetical order.)

Name	Name of Institution	Field	Rank in the field	Total Scientists in Field
Baldacchino, Godfrey	L-Università ta' Malta	Geography	485	12879
Balzan, Mario V.	Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology	Entomology	527	25735
Borg, Michael A.	L-Università ta' Malta	Microbiology	1804	134369
Caruana, Albert	L-Università ta' Malta	Marketing	520	10464
Di Giovanni, Giuseppe	L-Università ta' Malta	Neurology & Neurosurgery	4399	227881
Gatt, Ruben	L-Università ta' Malta	Applied Physics	3405	224856
Grech, Victor	Mater Dei Hospital/ UM	Pediatrics	239	49820
Grima, Joseph N.	L-Università ta' Malta	Applied Physics	971	224856
Pace, David	Mater Dei Hospital/ UM	General & Internal Medicine	1740	106795
Yannakakis, Georgios N.	L-Università ta' Malta	Artificial Intelligence & Image Processing	1096	215114

What is, however, perhaps the most striking observation in this table is that ALL TEN scholars on this list are male.

GENDER GAPS

The matter of equity of gender representation on UM Boards and committees was brought up during a meeting of the Senate of the University of Malta held on 22nd October 2020. On that occasion, Senate decided that appointees to such boards and committees should be reviewed with an attempt at a better representation of men and women. In the context of this spontaneous discussion – the item was not on the Senate's agenda – reference was made to the glaring 'gender gaps' amongst full-time academic staff the University of Malta. Female representation was only higher than male at the entry (assistant lecturer) level, and the female-to-male ratio at this staff level (54:46) was almost in the same proportion as the female-male ratio of students studying at UM (60:40)¹. However, with every increasing higher scale in the occupational hierarchy of academics, the proportion of females in relation to males deteriorates. These statistics had been highlighted in an article published in the 2017-18 Biennial Report of the Centre for Labour Studies (Baldacchino, 2019), and which can be considered as the companion to this current article. The relevant statistics are reproduced here as [Table 2](#).

Table 2: Male and Female representation amongst full-time resident UM academic staff (as on 10 June 2018).

Rank	Male (N, %)	Female (N, %)	Total
<i>Professor</i>	84 (84%)	15 (15%)	99
<i>Associate Professor</i>	90 (77%)	27 (23%)	117
<i>Senior Lecturer</i>	129 (71%)	52 (29%)	181
<i>Lecturer</i>	97 (54%)	83 (46%)	180
<i>Assistant Lecturer</i>	43 (46%)	55 (54%)	98
Total	443 (66%)	232 (34%)	675

Sources: Office of Human Resource Management and Development, University of Malta; Baldacchino (2019).

A fresh snapshot of the gender gap among UM's resident academic staff was taken more recently, and almost 2.5 years after the previous exercise. There is clear evidence that female representation has improved across all five occupational scales of the academic class. These include the promotion and

1 There were 6,991 female and 4,753 male students registered at UM in the 2018/19 academic year (University of Malta, 2020, p. 19).

appointment of nine female full professors, which increased the complement of female full professors at UM by 60% in just 30 months. (The complement of male full professors increased by 21 [25%] during the same period.) See [Table 3](#).

Table 3: Male and Female representation amongst full-time resident UM academic staff (as on 10 November 2020).

Rank	Male (N, %)	Female (N, %)	Total
<i>Professor</i>	105 (81%)	24 (19%)	129
<i>Associate Professor</i>	107 (75%)	35 (25%)	142
<i>Senior Lecturer</i>	148 (65%)	78 (35%)	226
<i>Lecturer</i>	100 (50%)	100 (50%)	200
<i>Assistant Lecturer</i>	43 (44%)	54 (56%)	97
Total	503 (63%)	291 (37%)	794

Sources: Office of Human Resource Management and Development, University of Malta (2020).

This means that the representation of females across the occupational hierarchy that constitutes the academic class at UM is steadily improving. However, all things being equal, it would take decades before anything resembling gender equity is achieved.

The gender gap is especially wide when it comes to research. The *PLOS Biology* article referred to earlier is one that reaffirms the ongoing dominance of Maltese males when it comes to international recognition. Additionally, as of 2019, 92.8% of male resident academic staff at UM are holders of a PhD; but only 79.9% of female resident academic staff hold the same qualification (University of Malta, 2020, p. 18). Looking at the difference between male and female holders of a doctorate, Tabone (2015, p. 101) had concluded that “traditional gender roles which link mothers to caring and men to their breadwinning role are still impacting on the lives of women and men, even when these are highly educated, and are studying for a PhD”. Amongst the top UM academics who are most cited, as manifest via their public Google Scholar user profiles, one is female: retired medical professor Rena Balzan, who is the fourth most cited. The next female academic at UM to appear on these profiles when ranked by citation counts is chemistry professor Giovanna Bosica, at position No. 21 (Google Scholar, 2021).

And success tends to breed success: the four winners of the 2019 Research Excellence Awards at UM, valued at €60,000 each, were all men (University of

Malta, 2021). As it turned out, only men appear in the photo – including the two portraits of past UM Rectors hanging on the Council Room wall as backdrop – which memorialises the presentation of these awards. Here, the awardees are accompanied by the Rector, the Pro-Rector responsible for Research, and a sample of Directors (at UM, all except three of these are women) and Deans (at UM, all except two of these are women, at the time of writing). See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Prof. Alfred J. Vella (UM Rector) and Pro-Rector Prof. Ing, Saviour Zammit (Chair of the Research Fund Committee) - 7th and 6th from left, respectively – congratulating the 2019 Excellence Award Winners, accompanied by their Faculty Deans and other members of UM’s senior management (4th October, 2019).



Source: University of Malta (2020, p. 10).

THIS ARTICLE

The data at hand suggests that females and males experience somewhat different challenges as they attempt to move up the occupational hierarchy at the University of Malta. This short article is based on a recent attempt to shed some additional light on this topic, by using a longitudinal research methodology.

The idea is inspired by a study that looked at the eventual career paths of boys drawn from different social classes in the United Kingdom, and how their experience of education in particular had been influenced by their social class background (Halsey et al., 1980).

In my case, I wanted to explore if there are indeed different career trajectories of academics who start their academic career from the same occupational position and at the same time. Put differently, if you select a group of men and

women who are recruited in the same grade at the same time, would they still achieve different career paths and trajectories? Would, in other words, similar 'origins' not secure similar 'destinations'? And could 'gender' be the main, gross, explanatory variable for any such discrepancies?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

One way of testing these research questions is afforded by examining the Minutes of Council meetings that include the details of appointments and confirmations (after probation) of academics who joined the University of Malta many years ago. The length of time should be long enough to afford these academics ample opportunities to scale the occupational hierarchy at UM. Additionally, they should all have been appointed and confirmed at the same occupational level, and at around the same time.

Permission was sought and obtained from the Office of the Registrar to pore over Council minutes and therefore to be in a position to execute such an investigation. It was decided to go back approximately *30 years*: one should think that this a sufficiently long period of time to allow most recruits to have the chance to apply for promotion to the highest grades. Going back further in time might also have been compromised by the absence of available or complete records.

It was also decided to focus exclusively on new academic recruits to the *Assistant Lecturer* level: at that time, when most candidates to academic positions at UM lacked a doctorate, the main entry point would be at the grade of Assistant Lecturer, with any successful recruits then being afforded the possibility to start or complete their doctorate while in the employ of UM.

It was also decided to focus only on *full-time appointees*. It is understood that various academic appointments to certain faculties – such as Economics, Management and Accountancy, Dental Surgery or Medicine and Surgery – involve part-time resident academics who are loath to leave any current professional engagements or jobs and are prepared to offer services to UM only on a part-time basis. These individuals were not deemed to be interested in or capable of investing all their energy and career aspirations to the academic life, and were therefore excluded from this study.

Three bound volumes of Council minutes, covering the three academic years 1989/90 to 1991/92, were kindly made available to the author during December 2020. Notes were taken of the names of appointees and their eventual confirmation as UM employees after the successful completion of their probationary period, as indicated in the minutes of various meetings

of Council. Three academic years were chosen so that the crop of male and female academics appointed within this time window would be large enough to prevent individual cases from skewing results in any particular way.

It was also decided to maintain strict anonymity of the academics involved in this exercise, noting only whether they were referred to as men or women. The independent variable, in this case, was gender.

DATA DESCRIPTION

The first set of Council minutes perused referred to the meeting held on 25 October 1989. The last set of minutes perused referred to the Council meeting held on 15 July 1992. These minutes indicate that, during the three academic years of 1989/90, 1990/91 and 1991/92, 45 academics (29 men and 16 women) were appointed, or confirmed in their appointment, as full-time assistant lecturers at UM.

From this population, TEN appointees (six men and four women) did not take up the job offer, switched over to an administrative grade, or opted thereafter to resign from UM employment. If the latter, they did so mainly to take up a position in the private sector locally or overseas; landed a position with the Ministry of Education; and/or else switched to a part-time UM appointment. The proportion of female resignations is just around the same as that of male resignations; though the sample is too small to allow any bold suggestions of correlation or otherwise. Changes in these ten academics' family circumstances – such as pregnancy, parenthood, death of a spouse, or caring for an elderly relative – may have affected their decision to resign from a full-time post at UM. This warrants further investigation.

This leaves 35 academics (23 men and 12 women) who sought and pursued an academic career at UM. Some of these have already reached retirement age.

The 23 men, all recruited as assistant lecturers, occupy the following rank at the time of writing:

- 10 are full professors (43%)
- 7 are associate professors (30%)
- 3 are senior lecturers (13%)
- 2 retired as lecturers (9%)
- 1 retired as an assistant lecturer (4%).

The same crop of male academics include individuals who served as: Pro-Rector (1), Faculty Deans (2) and/or Heads of Department or Directors of

Institutes or Centres (12).

The 12 women, all recruited as assistant lecturers, occupy the following rank at the time of writing:

- 5 are full professors (42%)
- 5 are associate professors; 2 of whom retired as such (42%)
- 2 are senior lecturers (16%).

Same as with their male counterparts, these female academics include individuals who have served as: Pro-Rector (1), Faculty Deans (2) and/or Heads of Department, or Directors of Institutes or Centres (7).

TESTING FOR SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN PUBLICATIONS AND CITATIONS

Next, these 35 academics were compared in terms of the quantity and quality of their academic publications – the latter determined from the number of citations – both as evidenced from their Google Scholar User Profiles. Similar proportions of men and women - twelve out of the 23 males (52%), and seven out of the 12 females (58%) – had such profiles at the time of writing. The results are tabulated as [Table 4](#).

Table 4: Quantity and quality of scholarly publications (according to Google Scholar on 29 December 2020) (N=19). Males identified as M; Females identified as F.

M1 - (now a full professor)	182 articles	11307 citations
M2 - (now a full professor)	57	252
M3 - (now a full professor)	86	336
M4 - (now a full professor)	122	602
M5 - (now an associate professor)	47	1633
M6 - (now a full professor)	16	296
M7 - (now a senior lecturer)	22	86
M8 - (now an associate professor)	61	293
M9 - (now a full professor)	99	1012

M10 - (now an associate professor)	63	907
M11 - (now an associate professor)	27	197
M12 - (now an associate professor)	34	281
F1 - (now a full professor)	76 articles	831 citations
F2 - (now a full professor)	66	484
F3 - (now a full professor)	114	517
F4 - (now an associate professor)	58	166
F5 - (now an associate professor)	25	210
F6 - (now a full professor)	63	719
F7 - (now an associate professor)	27	531

This data was subjected to statistical testing by determining p -values. A p -value is a measure of the probability that an observed difference – in this case, between male and female academics – could have occurred just by chance. Hence, the lower the p -value, the greater the statistical significance of the observed difference, and so the stronger the claim that the two sets of data are indeed qualitatively different from each other. A p -value of 0.05 is often taken as a useful threshold: at that value, there is a 5% chance that the difference between two populations is not random.

Both the Independent samples t-test and the Mann Whitney test were used in order to compare the average number of published articles and average number of citations between males and females. Both tests yielded p -values larger than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating NO significant difference in the average number of published articles and average number of citations between male and female lecturers. These summative results are described in some detail below.

The average number of articles published by the seven females (61) is marginally less than the average number of articles published by the twelve males (68). Indeed, the difference is not significant since the p -value (0.745) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance.

The average number of citations of the male authors (1434) exceeds considerably the average number of citations of the female authors (488). However, the difference is not significant since the p -value (0.446) exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. Despite the difference between the two means, the lack of significance may have been caused by the small sample sizes and the large dispersion (spread) in the measurements; the latter is mainly an effect of the large number of citations by M1. (See [Table 5](#)):

TABLE 5: MEASURES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS AND NUMBER OF CITATIONS BY MALE AND FEMALE ACADEMICS (N=19).

Number of published articles					
	Gender	Sample size	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-value
Number of articles	Male	12	68.00	48.138	0.745
	Female	7	61.29	30.341	

Number of citations					
	Gender	Sample size	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-value
Number of articles	Male	12	1433.50	3141.223	0.446
	Female	7	494.00	243.047	

DISCUSSION

The above exercise suffers from the limitations of small numbers, so any attempt at generalisation is dangerous. However, the exercise is based on the total population of scholars who were recruited to UM as full-time assistant lecturers in the period 1989-1992.

In any case, when judged from the data available, one is correct to conclude that there is no significant difference between male and female academics who started their professional career as UM assistant lecturers at around the same time, some 30 years ago. This observation holds, whether in terms of (1): professional rank; (2) administrative responsibility; (3) number of publications; or (4) quality of publications. For those recruited in 1989-1992, the men and women in academic grades at the University of Malta have fared equally well. The data also suggests that the difference in the number of male and female professors (10 versus 5) and associate professors (7 versus 5) amongst those recruited at UM as assistant lecturers 30 years ago is essentially a function of

the fact that many more males than females were recruited into the position of assistant lecturer during that same time period: 23 men as against 12 women; a gender ratio of just under 2:1. Indeed, and in spite of the relatively small numbers involved, the same gender ratio holds for those occupying both full professorial and associate professorial rank from the 35 academics that find themselves as the focus of this study.

One factor that may merit further investigation concerns the resignations from full-time academic employment at UM of those recruited in the 1989-1992 time period under scrutiny. As reported above, the proportion of female resignations is also somewhat similar to that of male resignations. Nevertheless, identifying the reasons for such resignations might illuminate any gender specific variables.

CONCLUSION

On July 23rd 2001, Minister of Education Dr Louis Galea provided a written reply to a parliamentary question number 27616, tabled by Dr Helena Dalli. Dr Dalli wanted a breakdown by gender of: (1) academics at the University of Malta who had applied for a promotion in 1998; (2) how many academics had obtained a promotion; and (3) how many were still awaiting a reply. Minister Galea replied that 10 applicants and 9 applicants had been promoted to (Full) Professor and Associate Professor respectively; all these 19 applicants were male. There had also been 60 promotions to senior lecturer: of these, 48 were male and 12 were female. Three other applicants had been promoted to lecturer; of these, two were male and one was female. There were 77 other academics still waiting for a decision on their promotion application: 68 were male and nine were female. This means that there were only 22 females within the cohort of 159 scholars applying for a promotion at UM in 1992: just under 14% (Kamra tad-Deputati, 2001, p. 40). The gender gap was most palpable.

Just four years before, in 1997, Marie Therese Camilleri Podestà was the only full-time female academic at UM promoted to the rank of full professor. There were 49 other women employed as resident academics at that time, none of whom held the rank of associate or full professor. This situation contrasts with the 312 male resident academics at UM at the same time, 47 of whom were full professors (Schirih, 1999).

Writing in 2019, after having interviewed nine female full professors at UM, Vella Azzopardi (2019, p. 5) argues that “matters have improved over time, however not rapidly enough”.

This study, while indicative, confirms the improvement in closing the gender gap and breaking the glass ceiling amongst professors at UM. It furthermore suggests that we may have turned the proverbial corner: given similar ‘origins’, the crop of male and female scholars recruited for an academic career at the University of Malta 30 years ago has progressed to rather similar ‘destinations’.

This is welcome news. Some of the stubbornly lingering discrepancies in gender – as manifest, for example, in Google Scholar User Profile rankings – may be largely based on the disproportionate number of men recruited to UM as against women in earlier decades. Additionally, it is well known that younger academics are more likely to set up and make public their Google Scholar Profiles than older ones (Kim & Grofman, 2020).

It will take its time; but it appears that the cadre of female appointees to the highest grades at the University of Malta is slowly but surely closing the gap with its male counterparts.

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Protecting Employment and Businesses in Malta during the First Twelve Months of COVID-19:

A CHRONOLOGY OF SUPPORT MEASURES

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 threw Malta into a sudden and unexpected recession and public health emergency. The following article describes state support measures designed to protect employment and organisations during the first 12 months of this pandemic, as well as their impacts. Key amongst these measures was the wage supplement which provided workers and self-employed individuals within the worst impacted sectors with a source of income. Whilst Malta's GDP dropped by around 7% in 2020 compared with 2019, unemployment remained low suggesting that support measures were effective.

INTRODUCTION

On March 7, 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Malta. The victim was a 12-year-old Italian girl who resided in Malta and was in self-quarantine at the time of her diagnosis. Later the same day, both her parents also tested positive, with all three being isolated within Mater Dei Hospital. Contact tracing was resorted to for the first time. Social partners called for the Malta Government to support businesses as the effects of COVID-19 started to bite (e.g., Costa, 2020).

This article offers a timeline of the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic in Malta as they impacted on work, employment and industrial relations. It identifies the ongoing consultations and negotiations between

the Malta Government and the various social partners, including employer associations and trade unions, as different measures were rolled out to respond to the many impacts of COVID-19. The bulk of the references are drawn from the work that the staff of the Centre for Labour Studies (CLS) at the University of Malta perform on contract to the EU's European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). Through this work, the CLS is the main Malta observatory for developments related to the world of work and employment.

INITIAL SUPPORT MEASURES AND A PARTIAL LOCKDOWN

On March 13, childcares, schools, and other educational institutions, from primary schools to the University of Malta, closed their doors, with several of these institutions moving immediately to on-line provision. Following conversations with relevant stakeholders, on March 14, Government announced its first set of measures to support affected businesses. Amongst the measures were postponements of provisional tax, VAT and social security contributions for employers and the self-employed for the months of March and April. Refunds for organisations that invested in teleworking agreements were also announced. Dissatisfied by the level of support offered, social partners such as the Malta Chamber and the Malta Employers Association (MEA) expressed their disappointment, particularly criticising the manner in which Government had unilaterally decided to burden employers with the cost of quarantine leave by means of a legal notice. Consequently, social partners called for discussions within the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD) and the Employment Relations Board (ERB) (MEA, 2020; Vella, 2020). A survey of the first week of the pandemic by the Chamber of SMEs found that 35% of respondents would be unable to sustain employment levels beyond a few weeks, with the rest of the respondents unable to continue beyond a couple of months. The Chamber thus called for government to cover two-thirds of businesses' wage bill, for moratoriums from banks for loans and overdrafts, and guarantees for those coming to Malta with imports that they will be allowed to unload and return (Azzopardi, 2020).

On March 17, restaurants, bars and other entertainment venues were ordered to close. On March 18, Government announced a second package of support measures. Apart from pledging €35 million to health authorities to fight COVID-19, measures included a battery of economic and social measures. These included: a three month moratorium for residential and business loans; the provision of loan guarantees by the Government; a grant to employers of €350 for every full-time employee that had to quarantine; based on an €800

monthly salary, a grant of two days salary per week for enterprises that had closed down completely (the same was offered to self-employed individuals in such sectors, with self-employed individuals having their own employees offered three days salary per week), and a one day salary grant for organisations that had reduced operations by at least 25%; a temporary increase in unemployment benefit of up to €800 monthly for full-time employees that had lost their job since the onset of the pandemic; a grant for parents who needed to remain at home with a school-aged child, are unable to telework and work in the private sector; a grant for persons with a disability who stayed at home and were unable to telework (this and the latter measure were set at €166.15 per week for full-time employees); and increased government rent subsidies for those eligible who became unemployed during COVID-19 (Fiorini & Eurofound, 2020a-g).

In terms of third country nationals, the Government dictated that organisations that made such individuals redundant would not be allowed to hire third-country nationals in the future. Furthermore, with the exception of those who are highly qualified individuals, the country stopped accepting new applications from third-country nationals for work. A new department within Jobsplus, the government employment agency, was set up to help third-country nationals who lost their job to find a new one (PWC, 2020a).

Despite the improved bundle of support measures, the package was again criticised by employers, with the Malta Chamber describing it as “very disappointing”. The Chamber’s major issue lay with the level of financial support for salaries, which they calculated was “a mere subsidy of 20% of the employee’s salary at the level of the minimum wage” and thus concluded that this would lead to redundancies. Whilst more positive about the introduction of support for quarantine leave, this was also considered to fall short of expectations (Malta Chamber, 2020a). Similar criticism was expressed by the MEA, the Malta Chamber of SMEs, and the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA) (Times of Malta, 2020).

On March 20, all inbound commercial flights were suspended, as were outbound Air Malta flights, with only a limited number of ‘lifeline’ flights for stranded individuals taking place. By March 23, non-essential shops had been ordered to close; by which time many shops had already closed their doors, either out of fear or out of a lack of business.

On March 24, the Prime Minister, flanked by trade union and employer association members, announced an update to the aforementioned support package, with wage subsidies being announced for Malta’s most affected

sectors. In sectors most affected by the pandemic, workers would receive €800 a month from the government, whilst employers agreed to top up this wage with up to a further €400. Employers who were too highly impacted by the pandemic and could not afford their portion of the wage had to register with the Department of Industrial and Employment Relations (DIER). Lesser amounts were given to part-time workers and those in lesser hit sectors. It was announced that the package was the result of tripartite consultation, and subsequently unions and employer associations alike announced their satisfaction with the package (Fiorini & Eurofound, 2020h).

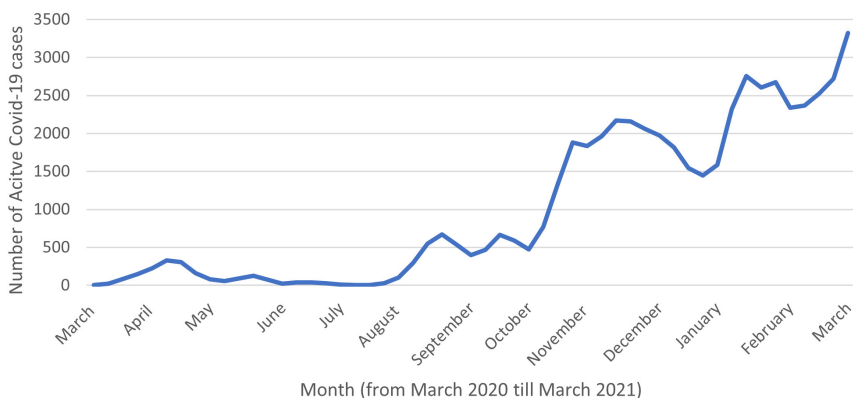
By March 27, those older than 65 as well as individuals certified as medically vulnerable to COVID-19 were ordered to remain home by public health authorities; such individuals could however leave home to buy food and attend medical appointments, amongst others. Healthcare workers and those in leadership positions were exempt from this rule. A government support measure of €166.15 per week was announced for such full-time employees who were unable to work from home and were not being paid by their employer (€103.85 a week was offered to part-time workers) (Fiorini & Eurofound, 2020i). On March 30, it was announced that public gatherings of more than three people were banned and fines were imposed. By April 3, leisure travel between Malta and Gozo was banned, whilst on April 9 the Government announced a subsidised voluntary repatriation scheme for foreign nationals who wished to return to their home countries.

MALTA RE-OPENS FOR BUSINESS

Following a period of negligible new positive cases, and several sectors at a standstill, the country slowly re-opened for business. On May 4 unrestricted travel between Malta and Gozo was re-commenced whilst certain non-essential shops were allowed to re-open; these were subject to new health-related procedures, such as the mandatory wearing of masks. Three days later, the government Wage Supplement was renewed for the months of May and June. On May 22, hairdressers and restaurants were allowed to re-open, a decision criticised by unions such as the Medical Association of Malta (MAM) and the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses (MUMN) since COVID-19 cases increased after the initial re-opening. The spike in new cases was short-lived, and by June 5, bars, gyms and the law courts were allowed to re-open. In view of this re-opening, several support measures designed to protect workers ended. On June 5, both the Medical Benefit, a grant for vulnerable individuals unable to work from home, and the benefit for persons with a

disability, came to an end. The parent benefit, for those that had to stay home with a school-age child, and the additional benefit for individuals who lost their job during COVID-19, both ended on July 3 (Fiorini & Eurofound, 2020a,d,e,i). Simultaneously, summer programmes in state schools opened to support those returning to work.

IMAGE 1: COVID-19 ACTIVE CASES IN MALTA (FROM MARCH 2020 TILL MARCH 2021)



On June 8, a new set of support measures were announced during a mini-budget which aimed to regenerate the Maltese economy. It was announced that the tax deferral for companies in the worst hit sectors would be retained until August 2020, with organisations able to pay till May 2021 without incurring penalties. Other sectors, which benefited from deferrals on social security, maternity contributions and taxes would need to commence payments by July 1. Also announced was the retention of the Wage Supplement up until September 2020. However, whilst this would be retained in full for some sectors such as tourism, the amount disbursed decreased from €800 to €600 in some other sectors. Furthermore, working students and pensioners who were previously excluded from the supplement would now be eligible if impacted by COVID-19. Newly announced measures included rent and electricity subsidies for those businesses eligible for the Wage Supplement. Additional measures that targeted businesses included: a grant of up to €5,000 for organisations to re-engineer their business in view of the new business climate; a Skills Development Scheme for small businesses to support training; the waiving of trade licenses that should have been paid to the Commerce Department and Malta Tourism Authority for businesses forced to closed down; refunds

for organisations participating in international fairs that had been cancelled due to COVID-19; a fund to assist business to promote their products; and the conversion of part of a tax credit into cash where business had invested in their businesses during 2019. It was also announced that the Malta Development Bank would act as an underwriter for private companies where bond roll-overs fell due (Fiorini & Eurofound, 2020h, j-n; PWC, 2020b).

The re-development budget also included industry-specific support measures such as reductions in tax when transferring residential property, refunds of port charges and container discharge fees incurred on import and export, a grant for those operating in the construction industry to facilitate the modernisation of their machinery and equipment, as well as financial support for homes for the elderly and NGOs. Finally, further individual-specific measures included the provision of €100 in vouchers for all individuals resident in Malta, €80 of which could be spent at hotels, restaurants, bars and €20 in retail outlets. Furthermore, a special supplement of €250 was provided for low-income working families (via the state's In-Work Benefit Scheme) (Fiorini & Eurofound, 2020o-r; PWC, 2020b).

The reaction of the social partners to the regeneration budget was largely positive. They had remained in close contact with the government throughout the lockdown, with several having drafted regeneration policies themselves. The UHM – Voice of the Workers, Malta's second largest trade union, however, criticised the budget, stating that not enough had been done for workers. In particular, it claimed that some workers on the Wage Supplement had never received the €400 due from their employers (Malta Independent, 2020a).

COVID-19 CASES RISE AND THE REIMPOSITION OF SOME RESTRICTIONS

On July 1, the seaport and airport opened to welcome individuals from countries deemed to be safe. On July 15, the flight roster was expanded to include several other countries. The timing of these decisions caused disagreement amongst the social partners. The health sector unions urged caution; whereas the MHRA, which had lobbied strongly for the airport to reopen, felt that the dates were too late, having pushed for a June opening.

Following several mass events in mid-July, COVID-19 cases spiked again, causing much consternation, with the MAM issuing industrial action demanding that mass events be stopped. As COVID-19 cases continued to rise, by August 7 restrictions were reintroduced, with mass events being restricted and dancefloors being closed. By August 17, bars and nightclubs were closed

(but bars where food is served and restaurants were excluded), wedding receptions were restricted, mask wearing was enforced in closed public spaces and travellers from certain countries were asked to provide negative COVID-19 certification (Cuschieri, Balzan, Gauci, Aguis, & Grech, 2020). Schools, however, re-opened physically at the end of September.

During the October 2020 budget, it was announced that the wage supplement was to continue until March 2021, with this expected to cost €40 million a month. Other measures included modifying the threshold of the In-Work Benefit so that more families would be eligible, and the announcement that €100 vouchers for the general population would again be issued, this time to be split as €60 for accommodation and restaurants and €40 for retail. No date for the re-issuing of vouchers was provided. Social partners, such as the Malta Chamber, welcomed these updates but highlighted that more support would be needed if the pandemic dragged on. The MEA, also positive about these measures, highlighted a lack of long-term vision (Galea, 2020).

The budget was set against a backdrop of ever-increasing COVID numbers. On October 16, the use of masks was made compulsory in almost all places, including outdoors and in workplaces (prior to this, masks only had to be worn in specific situations only; for example, on public transport). On October 29, bars were ordered to close (this excluding snack bars and kiosks, which were not allowed to sell alcohol and also had to close between 11pm and 5am), with the date of the re-opening constantly being pushed back as COVID-19 prevalence increased over the Christmas period.

In January 2021, as the first COVID-19 vaccines were administered, it was also announced that the Wage Supplement would be means tested for the first time. Businesses which made a profit or only a slight loss in the first six months of 2020 when compared to 2019 would no longer be eligible, whereas the amount disbursed for those eligible would now depend on the level of losses made by the organisation (Malta Enterprise, 2021a). While COVID-19 cases continued to rise, the re-issuing of government vouchers, as announced in the October budget, was delayed; whilst bars and other entertainment venues were ordered to remain closed until February 1 2021. This date was extended indefinitely as February neared.

On March 3, almost a year from the first known COVID-19 case in Malta, active cases reached and then surpassed 3,000 for the first time. This resulted in several groups including Public Health experts, the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses (MUMN), the Medical Association of Malta (MAM) and Forum Unions

Maltin (For.U.M), all calling for greater enforcement and measures (Calleja, 2021; Times of Malta, 2021). On March 5, restaurants were closed once more (however they could continue to provide takeaways). On March 9 it was announced that the state's Wage Supplement scheme would continue until the end of 2021 (Malta Independent, 2021a), whilst by March 10 greater measures were announced, including that schools, non-essential shops and services, places of entertainment, and organised sport were to close. Schools moved online whilst non-essential travel between Malta and Gozo was restricted once more (Malta Independent, 2021b).

USE AND IMPACT OF SUPPORT MEASURES

A total of €17.5 million was disbursed to 8,360 beneficiaries as part of the four schemes designed to protect workers during the initial phase of the pandemic. These included benefits for those that had to remain home and could not telework, including parents, persons with disability, and medically vulnerable individuals, as well as added benefits for individuals who lost their job during COVID-19 (Fiorini & Eurofound, 2020a,d,e,i). The negligible number of COVID-19 cases up until July 2020, by when these measures came to an end (Image 1), suggests that they served their purpose.

The NSO (2021) announced that compared with 2019, Malta's 2020 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased by 5.7%. In Volume terms, GDP fell by 7.0%. By September 2020, €233 million had been distributed to 85,000 workers via the state wage supplement, supporting just under 17,000 business units (Malta Chamber, 2020). This amount rose to around €360 million by the end of 2020, with another €200 million expected to be spent on the first nine months of 2021 (Cocks, 2021).

For the months covering July till September, 6,422 applications (covering 7,274 bills) were received for the Electricity Refund Scheme (Malta Chamber, 2020). The first payments for verified applicants of this scheme occurred during December 2020, with 3,280 companies and 1,860 self-employed individuals benefitting. The total expenditure for this scheme is expected to be €6 million (Malta Enterprise, 2021b). In terms of the Rent Refund Scheme 4,405 applications (covering 4,954 lease contracts) were received for the period covering July till September (Malta Chamber, 2020). Following a verification process, the first tranche of assistance under the Rent Refund scheme was distributed in March 2021. 850 organisations and 874 self-employed people benefitted. This cost of this first payment was €5.5 million, with the total

scheme expected to reach €12 million (Malta Enterprise, 2021c). Furthermore, 662 applications had been received for the telework scheme, with just under €1 million being disbursed (Malta Chamber, 2020).

At the time of writing (March, 2021) it is unclear how many applications had been approved by means of the Quarantine Leave scheme. By October 2020, €1.8 million had been approved for 2,664 applications by means of this scheme (Malta Chamber, 2020). During January and February 2021 however, intermittent public health updates highlighted that the number of individuals in mandatory quarantine regularly exceeded 7,000 individuals.

In terms of loans, 7,327 were subject to a moratorium by the end of April 2020, for a value of €1.3 billion (11% of all loans); the vast majority of these were household loans. By September 2020, this had increased to 8,335 (total value of €1.8 billion), however by the end of 2020 it was reported that the number of loans subject to a moratorium had decreased to 2,373 (value of €0.7 billion or 6.4% of outstanding loans). During all periods, the greatest number of commercial loans subject to a moratorium were in the accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail, and real estate sectors (Malta Central Bank, 2020a,b, 2021). The reducing number of moratoria in all sectors provides an indication that business units are recovering.

Despite the rising number of cases and the re-introduction of partial lockdowns, it could be debated that, from an employment point of view, the support measures had the desired impact. The unemployment rate rose marginally from 3.3% in February 2020 to 4.2% in May and June 2020, dropping to 3.9% in September but rising again to 4.8% in November 2020 (NSO, 2020-2021). The seasonal adjusted unemployment in December 2020 was 4.5% (Central Bank, 2021), whilst the unemployment rate had not risen above 3.5% during 2019 (NSO, 2020-2021). In fact, 2,765 were unemployed in December 2020, an increase of 1,123 when compared to December 2019 (Central Bank, 2021). The Minister of finance noted in March 2021 that around 5,000 workers had lost their job because of the pandemic, however only around 400 of these had failed to find alternative employment and were registered as unemployed (Cocks, 2021). Despite this increase in unemployment when compared to pre-COVID-19, unemployment in Malta remained amongst the lowest in the EU. Labour market slack, which represents an unmet need for work, also rose slightly from the beginning of the pandemic: from 6.4% in Q1 2020 (6.4% in 2019) to 6.9% in Q2 (5.5% in 2019) and 7.5% in Q3 (6.2% in 2019). This remained considerably lower than the EU average (14.5%) in Q3 (Eurostat, 2021).

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 had a sudden, unexpected and unprecedented impact upon the Maltese economy. The government rolled out several support measures. These were initially deemed inadequate by the social partners; but were improved upon following tripartite discussion and agreement. Measures initially focused on reducing transmission, protecting employment and commercial units; by June 2020, the focus had moved away from halting disease transmission and shifted to regenerating the economy. Inevitably, as the country opened up, COVID-19 cases increased, first spiking due to several mass events, and later being driven by increased interaction over the Christmas period as well as the introduction of more transmissible COVID-19 variants. The economy contracted substantially during the initial phases of the pandemic. However, organisations and employment were largely protected.

Managing the effects of the pandemic continues at the time of writing (March 2021). Vaccinations have started, with Malta being the EU country with the largest proportion of its citizens being inoculated. If the current rate of vaccine administration is maintained, Malta could reach herd immunity, where 70% of its eligible population is inoculated, by October 2021 (Farrugia, 2021). Whilst the impact of the vaccines on the novel COVID-19 variants remains unclear, it is hoped that life and work could then return to a state that more closely resembles a pre-pandemic way of life, but that preserves the benefits and knowhow gained during this uncertain period.

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Challenges in Implementing Transferable Skills in Malta

ABSTRACT

Transferable skills are internationally acknowledged as an important tool to reduce the friction generated through skills mismatch between education and the labour market. While over the years, the notion of transferable skills has gained ground both within and outside the formal educational system in Malta, the country lacks a comprehensive policy that unites and guides the promotion of such skills. This paper examines some challenges in implementing transferable skills in Malta.

INTRODUCTION

There is international consensus around the need to promote transferable skills (International Labour Organization, 2007; European Commission, 2011). Several educational and employment policies in Malta include references to transferable or similar types of skills (e.g. Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, 2015; The Working Group on the Future of Post-Secondary Education, 2017). Such inclusion in policies since the 1990s has facilitated the incorporation of elements of transferable skills into educational curricula in Malta. In recent years, in line with trends in other developed countries (Cornford, 2005), transferable (or similar) skills gradually increased in importance within Malta's economy through the growing awareness of their utility by both employers and employees. However, no policy focusing specifically or comprehensively on transferable skills exists in Malta. This means that there is no holistic vision in the effort to promote transferable skills, resulting in conflicting ideas, assumptions, definitions, goals, agendas and efforts. This paper discusses

some major challenges impeding the proliferation and uptake of transferable skills grouped under three categories, namely: ongoing research; transferable skills within formal education, and; transferable skills outside the educational system.

ONGOING RESEARCH

There is a need for reliable and up-to-date information about skills demand and supply in Malta. Very few national skills audit studies have been carried out (Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, MCCEI, 2014). The most comprehensive recent study is the “National Employee Skills Survey” (Jobsplus & NCHFE, 2017) which shed light on transferable skills required by employers. While the list of skills mentioned is generally similar to international ones, the level of importance of specific skills might be different due to the particular characteristics of the country and its economy. In line with international findings (Hayward & Fernandez, 2004), a number of factors such as the size of the organisation may affect the type of the most required generic skills. For example, unlike the overall trend in Malta, medium-sized companies consider written communication and problem-solving as the most important transferable skills (Jobsplus & NCHFE, 2017).

The little existing research on transferable skills in Malta tends to focus on the demand side, that is, on the needs of employers, while leaving out the supply side. However, knowing which transferable skills are important for employers (sometimes described as the skills that make vacancies more difficult to fill, or the employees’ skills that are in most need of improvement), does not shed light on the availability of specific transferable skills within the population. Identifying the specific transferable skills required by particular groups of people would lead to better targeted training interventions.

On the other hand, understanding which groups of people are more likely to hold specific transferable skills could lead to more effective recruitment strategies. For example, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (2012) revealed that inactive women tend to possess transferable characteristics such as responsibility, reliability, and general communication skills, but tend to have moderate levels of English proficiency, while lacking numeracy and creativity skills. Inactive women tend to be proficient in teamwork, time management, customer handling, problem solving and general ICT skills, but are often weak in project management and entrepreneurial skills among others. The scarcity of research about skills is made worse by government decisions to keep some potentially useful reports under lock and key. A case

in point is the Human Resources Strategy for Gozo based on an analysis of human resources supply and demand that was carried out in 2012.

The need is felt to monitor transferable skills requirements and supply. However, due to the lack of economies of scale and limited financial resources among others, organising a permanent monitoring system of skills is difficult and might not be viable. For instance, a recent attempt to set up a Skills Bank to monitor the skills possessed by young persons was shelved due to its impracticality (Ministry for Finance, 2016).

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS WITHIN FORMAL EDUCATION

Transferable skills need to be taught consistently and ideally from an early age in order to be assimilated by individuals. It has been argued that “frameworks of twenty-first century skills have attained a central role in school development and curriculum changes all over the world” (Ahonen & Kinnunen, 2015, p. 395). They have been promoted under different names by stakeholders such as academics, employers and policy makers in various countries at least since the 1970s (e.g. Howieson et al. 2012). The growing use of resource-based learning within formal education requires (and at the same time has the potential of cultivating) transferable skills critical for living and working in the digital era, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and self-direction (Hill & Hannafin, 2001).

However, while generic skills appear to have been widely recognised in curricula, the main emphasis in standards and assessment is still on the traditional “hard” skills and “hard” factual knowledge² (Ahonen & Kinnunen, 2015). In line with this observation, Voogt and Pareja Roblin (2010) point out that there is “a large emphasis on the need for and the definition of 21st century skills, whereas only a few frameworks explicitly deal with more practical issues related to...[their] implementation and assessment” (p.i). According to these authors, the positioning of transferable skills within existing curricula might be one of the most complex and controversial issues relating to their implementation.

The situation in the Maltese compulsory educational system might be more challenging than the international trends mentioned above. The Working Group (2017) asserted that there is little recognition of such skills in the curriculum. The re-writing of the Personal and Social Development (PSD) subject to include career education (now called Personal, Social and

2 Hard skills are job-specific or technical skills. Hard knowledge is factual, uncontested knowledge.

Career Development) is a step in the right direction. The change in name was accompanied by a renewed emphasis on transferable skills. However, Malta has a rather traditional educational system that does not thoroughly promote such skills. Besides, the overall rate of basic skills attainment³ (in subjects such as Maltese, English and science) among young students in Malta is still low (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016). Indeed, 15-year olds continue to perform below the EU average in science and in reading (European Commission, 2017). The government appears to acknowledge this challenge and as part of the ongoing educational policy improvements, the 'My Journey reform' proposes that all students are exposed to and learn key competences and behavioural skills (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016).

"Adult learning is increasingly associated with entrepreneurship, human skills development and the processes that enhance people's skills and make them more employable, including continuing professional development (CPD) and the acquisition of soft and communications skills" (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015, p.9). It has been argued that "formation at post-secondary level should be holistic, and not exclusively academically- and exam-oriented" (The Working Group, 2017, p. 10). However, beyond these positive policy signals, the situation in practice is unclear. The level of acquisition of transferable skills in post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions in Malta is unknown and is likely to vary considerably not only from one institution to another, but also from one course to another within the same institution. The friction caused by the mismatch between the skills learnt within the formal educational system and the job requirements can never be totally eliminated. However, in cases of a 'formal' mismatch, graduates could still be able to adequately fill many roles with the help of effective transferable skills and their ability to learn new knowledge and skills through CPD. Indeed, employers in Malta sometimes give more importance to the level of qualification rather than the subject studied, acting upon the assumption that students who reach certain academic requirements are of better quality (Jobsplus, 2015). While this practice is based on the implicit assumption that such graduates have relevant transferable skills, the extent to which this practice is effective and sustainable is unclear.

3 Basic skills are the essential skills required to function properly in society.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS OUTSIDE THE FORMAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

While it is essential to stimulate the educational system to focus more on transferable skills, this approach cannot reach all citizens as most adults are outside the formal educational system. Indeed, Malta has one of the highest early school leaving rates, a relatively low tertiary educational attainment rate, and insufficient participation of low-skilled adults in lifelong learning when compared to other EU countries (Eurostat, 2019; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016). Besides, transferable skills learned during formal education require to be refreshed and upgraded over time. It is also relevant to point out that in line with the situation abroad (Hayward & Fernandez, 2004), employers in Malta tend to provide training in job specific rather than transferable skills, despite acknowledging that employees require more transferable skills (Jobsplus & NCHFE, 2017). Different reasons might contribute to this situation, such as the fear that transferable skills may facilitate employees in quitting their job. Indeed, according to the Malta Employers Association (MEA), the country currently has an ‘employees’ market’ in which the increasing facility of employees to switch jobs is causing employers to hesitate to train their employees, out of fear of losing them to other employers (Costa, 2019). One should also point out that training is not distributed evenly across employees. For example, Eurostat (2019) data indicates that educational level, gender and size of organisation are all related to the amount of training one receives at work.

On the other hand, it is assumed that many adults develop or at least improve some transferable skills throughout their work and life experiences. However, such skills are not formally recognized. It has been noted that “the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that people acquire in day-to-day experiences outside formal education are valued by employers, and yet are not necessarily recognised as ‘valuable’ since they often lack accreditation in the form of acquired, legally-regulated certificates” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015, p.9). This situation inevitably increases the level of friction between the demand and supply of transferable skills.

Malta is experiencing social tensions deriving from the weakening of traditional values, a growing culture of self-indulgence, increasing population density, and multiculturalism derived from the rising number of foreign workers. These social challenges find their way into workplaces and have been noted by employers who highlighted the growing employees’ unrealistic work expectations, lack of discipline and diligence, culture of entitlement

and opportunism, and deteriorating work ethic (e.g. MCCEI, 2014; MEA, 2015). Employers have also voiced their concern that despite the increasing need for English language proficiency, “the excellent command of written and verbal English as well as the ability of commanding a foreign language which has traditionally provided Malta with an added edge over competing countries is being forfeited” (MCCEI, 2014). Thus, despite the growing number of workers with post-secondary and tertiary qualifications, employers feel that workers’ basic skills are declining. One should also emphasise that transferable skills, including digital literacy, are increasingly being required not only to perform work well, but also to have access to the labour market, for example by searching online for vacancies and filling in application forms (Targeted News Service, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This brief paper sheds light on a number of challenging aspects relating to the effective implementation of transferable skills in Malta. Such challenges need to be taken into consideration in the eventual design of a transferable skills policy that would unify and direct efforts meant to promote transferable skills in the country.

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The Impact of the Coronavirus on the World of Work with a Focus on Teleworking

ABSTRACT

This article first gives a brief overview of how the Pandemic affected the local labour market and employment. It then moves to focus on the issue of Telework and looks at the challenges and opportunities this brought on both employers and the employees who were working from home through ICT due to the restrictions. The final part of the article explores how Telework can continue to evolve beyond the pandemic in ways that bring benefits to all, whilst ensuring that flexibility and adaptability will not be used as a pretext for exploitation.

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE MALTESE LABOUR MARKET

The world as we knew it before the 11th of March 2020 when the first Covid 19 lock down was imposed in Malta and in many parts across the world, is unlikely to ever be the same again. On that day schools, restaurants and non-essential shops were forced to close and travel restrictions were imposed, amongst many other measures to help protect against the spread of the virus in Malta.

The pandemic had a mixed impact on the labour market and a survey conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in April 2020 shows that 62% of employed persons indicated that their job was affected as a result (NSO, 2020). Whilst the real GDP in 2020 in Malta, fell significantly by 9.9% in annual terms (Central Bank, 2021), overall employment did not seem to be as adversely

affected by the pandemic. In December 2020, the unemployment rate at 4.5% rate was lower than the EU average of 7.5% and only a percentage point (0.9%) higher than it was in December a year before the start of the pandemic (NSO, 2021).

During the early stages of the lockdown, three out of ten workers were experiencing a reduction in their working hours which fell from an average of 37 hours per week in 2019, to 29 hours in April 2020. However, the majority of workers (62%) managed to work normal hours and 7% worked more hours during this period. Some industries took a bigger blow than other, with the biggest hit being felt in the accommodation and food service activities. This sector had a 10% share of all employed person (NSO, 2020) working in it.

Since many restaurants were closed, many grabbed the opportunity to start offering their food in take-away form or through delivery through the digitalised platform economy. This phenomenon saw a big increase in the number of foreign third-country nationals, mostly males hailing from South-East Asia, employed in the gig economy in the home delivery service. Unions have flagged their concerns that some of these workers do not even have a formal work contract and do not enjoy work-related benefits like overtime pay rates, sick leave or injury leave. There are also suggestions that such workers are losing half of their entitled wages in illegal employment practices with the recruitment agencies taking up around 50% of their earnings (Meilak, 2020; Meilak, 2021).

The closure of many workplaces during the pandemic challenged the outdated notion that work must always be carried away from home, at fixed hours. Across the globe, many people for the first time experienced home working. In the next section I will be focusing on Teleworking and analysing it both from the employers' and employees' perspective in the context of the Pandemic.

TELEWORKING

Telework, Telecommuting, remote working, and virtual work are often used interchangeably and imply that a person can work from anywhere as long as it has good internet connectivity. More recently, 'distributed work' has also been added to this list implying that team members can work through ICT from different locations within the same country or even across borders or continents.

A study conducted by the Central Bank of Malta (Debono, 2021) shows that before the pandemic, the uptake of telework in Malta was rather low when

compared to the EU, however from an average of 12% working remotely in 2019, this went up to 33% by April 2020, during the first lock down. Of course not all work can be done from home, and not all work done at home can be carried out through Teleworking. However, around a quarter of the jobs (25%) lend themselves to that the possibility to Telework (MEA, 2021).

TELEWORKING FROM THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE

Teleworking raises a number of opportunities and brings benefits as well as challenges to employers. When employees are working remotely away from their normal place of work, employers do not need to invest in expensive buildings and they can cut down on their electricity and maintenance costs. This reduces overhead costs and increases the profit margins and can bring inexpensive desirable benefits in the form of lower worker turnover and more loyal employees, when it is done by consensus. Teleworking also increases their labour supply and opens up a greater talent pool for employers to choose from. On the other hand, employers who are not accustomed to remote working and who have a low level of trust in their workers, struggle since they tend to assume that workers can be better 'controlled' if they are present at the place of work. Remote working can also raise concern about productivity and security issues when employees are dealing with confidential data (ILO, 2016).

During the pandemic, the Malta Employers Association (MEA) carried out a series of surveys amongst employers between March and September 2020 on the issue of Telework. The study found that 65% of respondents in Malta indicated that they have some sort of teleworking system in place. Companies operating in the IGaming, finance and the Insurance sector reported the highest incidence (91%) of having teleworking systems in place. Nearly a third (29%) of companies in these sectors indicated that they may increase teleworking in the future, whilst in their majority, companies are envisaging a decline in teleworking after the pandemic.

Teleworking in Malta varies according to the company size, with only 35% of the micro businesses having some element of telework, whilst entities employing 500+ employees all made use of teleworking arrangements. When probed about the level of productivity amongst Teleworkers in Malta, 60% of the employers indicated the level of productivity remained the same. However, a worrying 33% reported a drop in productivity, whilst 7% saw an increase in output amongst those teleworking (MEA, 2021). It is not known what metrics were used by the employers to arrive to these conclusions.

REMOTE WORKING FROM THE EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE

As with employers, Teleworking likewise brings both benefits and challenges to the employees for a number of factors. Telework is often presented as a better means for workers to integrate their paid work with their personal life allowing them more autonomy and a reduction in their travelling and parking costs, amongst others. Teleworking can also reduce barriers for people to connect, for example those with a disability and older workers, as it sets them free from rigid time based management and having to commute to work.

On the negative side, Telework tends to blur the boundaries between work and home and may make it difficult for some people to disconnect. This can lead to more work life conflicts and stress and a reduction in the mental well-being of the workers. Some also find it hard to disconnect even during weekends or whilst they are on holidays. People working exclusively online are also reporting screen fatigue with many of the meetings now being held through Zoom or Teams rather than face-to-face (BBC, 2021). Without proper planning, many are working in makeshift offices at home, or from their sofa or on their bed, thus risking injuries if they are not working from properly adjusted desks and chairs in line with ergonomic standards (BBC, 2021 Wilser, 2020).

Mothers with young children trying to work from home may feel more stressed if they are trying to combine caring with their paid work. An online study conducted by National Commission for the Promotion for Equality (NCPE) in Malta between June and July 2020, found that the distribution of unpaid household and caring responsibilities during the Pandemic between women and men, widened and exacerbated the already existing gender inequalities. The findings suggest that women spent more hours doing household tasks and childcare, whilst their time for leisure, personal care and sleep decreased more when compared to that of men due to the pandemic (NCPE, 2021).

When many workplaces were closed, some found working constantly from home isolating and they missed the social aspect of work. For those who lack space and privacy, interruptions by family members and pets made it hard for them to concentrate and focus on their work, or participate in virtual meetings and calls. The problem seems to be aggravated when young children are present in the family, especially during periods when the schools are closed or if they are in quarantine (BBC, 2021; ILO, 2020).

Telework is not restricted to people who previously worked from offices. During the pandemic many small business owners managed to keep their business afloat through video communication, for example by offering cooking lessons, Pilates, keep fit classes, and even music and art lessons. In developed

countries, many people saw their doctor or their clinical psychologists and even their psychiatrists online for the first time. This means that technology has allowed a broader number of people to keep offering their services and to increase their possibilities in some instances (BBC, 2021).

LOOKING AT TELEWORK BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

Whilst bringing many challenges, the pandemic has given many organisations the opportunity to experiment, innovate and redesign the way we organise work with mixed success. A global survey carried out with 4700 knowledge workers in the UK, Germany, France, the US, Australia and Japan found out that only 12% of the workers who had experienced Telework want to return to the traditional ways of working full time from the office. Nearly three quarters (72%) want a hybrid more flexible system that allows them to work both from the office and remotely thus bringing out the best of both worlds (Elliott, 2020).

This suggests that workers want to depart from the old rigid ways of working and want something more tailor-made to suite their work-life needs according to the life course stage they are in. This implies that more customisation and adjustments will be needed in the future and a one size fits all approach is unlikely to work or be enough to attract workers to the organisation. This raises challenges for the management who have to keep tabs on productivity whilst ensuring that workers feel they are being treated fairly. Employers and employees need to draw on well planned policies and updated legislation that provide a good framework for both to operate within. At the same time, rather than rigid and blanket provisions that often do more harm than good, there needs to be enough room for flexibility and adaptability to allow for customised solutions within organisations. In parallel all data must be available from anywhere on clouds and security needs to be embedded in all work processes in order to allow for successful virtual collaborations within organisations (Deloitte, 2020).

This means that Managers will now be faced with more challenges as they need to continue to learn how to manage virtual teams and to evaluate performance remotely. They obviously need to have the right tools in place to evaluate performance without much intrusion on the workers and without hampering their flexibility. Since working from home may lead to some feeling more isolated, managers will also need to hone on new skills that allow them to spot workers, who for example are experiencing mental health issues or are facing family crisis. This calls for increased sensitivity in people in management and may open the door to having many more women in leadership posts,

since women tend to apply emotional and social competencies related with effective leadership and management more effectively than men (Boyatzis, Goleman & Ferry, 2017; BBC, 2021).

For maximum flexibility, instead of having one big office in one location where all the workers congregate, there is a push to have distributed workers operating from various locations. These can be smaller satellite offices to allow employees to work from there on certain days, or to work from home on other days, depending on the nature of work and whether they need to conduct face-to-face meetings.

All this suggests that we have to find new *modus operandi* and new effective ways of working in order to evolve. It is hoped that with looming recessions when job security is likely to decrease, we will not witness a return to rigid and outdated ways of working where workers will be expected to work solely from the office rather than be allowed to work flexibly and remotely. We need to continue to stress that the focus should be on the output, rather than on face-time and how many hours are spent at the office (BBC, 2021). So whilst continuing with innovation and experimentation and hybrid forms of work, we need to keep a careful eye to ensure exploitation is not allowed to rear its ugly head under the guise of flexibility and adaptability, due to the demands brought about by the pandemic. Furthermore, we need to ensure that paid work does not take over our private lives as the boundaries between paid work and private life continue to blur, thus making the discussion around the right to disconnect a more urgent one.

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COVID-19 in Malta: A New Reality of Working Life

ABSTRACT

The economy of Malta, heavily dependent on the services, could not remain unscathed from the adverse effects of COVID-19. The disruptions caused by this pandemic and the subsequent new realities in the world of work proved to be a testing ground for the social partners. Indeed throughout the pandemic, by being highly active at the level of tripartite national social dialogue, they attempted, and managed, to act as effective brokers about the measures and policies being adopted by government in its policies to cope with the nuances of the pandemic. The most vociferous trade unions were those representing the workers, who due to work-related social interaction, tended to be more exposed to the risks of infection. These comprised the doctors, teachers and nurses together with other hospital employees. In their actions and vocal protests these trade unions tried to assert their political weight by brandishing the professional know-how of their members and the high discretionary power inherent in their work practices.

PROCEDURAL ISSUES

During the pandemic, the cause of the trade disputes tended to be about procedural rather than substantive issues. Indeed, in 2020, most of the trade disputes were about the policies being adopted or the measures taken to control the spread of the pandemic. The most active in this regard were the trade unions representing workers, who due to the social interaction that characterises their work, are exposed to greater risks of being infected with the virus. These were the Medical Association of Malta (MAM) representing the

doctors, the Malta Midwives and Nurses Association (MUMN) and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT).

The industrial actions taken by these trade unions, very often partial, do not lend themselves to measurement in terms of workdays or hours of work lost. The disruption of services offered by primary health clinics caused by the industrial action taken by MAM may be an apt example of an industrial action which cannot be measured in statistical terms such as workdays or hours of work lost. Nevertheless, whilst not reflected statistically, it appears that due to COVID-19, industrial action was more frequent in 2020 than in 2019.

An apt example of a trade dispute about procedural issues was the dispute between the MUT and the Ministry of Education over the reopening of schools after the summer recess. As September reopening approached, the MUT insisted that on-line schooling adopted during the second phase of the pandemic should continue to be the practice for the 2020/2021 scholastic year. The Minister for Education, Owen Bonnici, did not agree with this suggestion and declared that schools were to reopen during the last week of September. The MUT stated that it would oppose this reopening unless the restrictive measures and their enforcement are guaranteed (Times of Malta, 2020a). Following intense discussions between the Ministry of Education, MUT officials and the Superintendent of Public Health an agreement was reached on the protocol which schools were obliged to follow. This protocol included clauses related to the wearing of masks, physical distance, sport activities and alternating timetables (Office of Superintendent of Public Health, 2020). Following an agreement about the provisions of this protocol, the opening was delayed by a week and staggered over a seven-day period. Church schools were bound to follow the same protocol.

TRADE DISPUTE AT AIR MALTA

This prevalent trend wherein procedural rather than substantive matters had been the cause of a trade dispute issues was not prevalent in Air Malta. The lock down policy announced by the government proved to be a prime mover for a trade dispute between government and Air Malta employees. As the operations by Air Malta dwindled to a mere two flights a day in contrast with the normal 20 a day, the pilots were asked to accept a reduction in their pay. However, an agreement with the Malta Airline Pilots Association (ALPA) could not be reached. While insisting that the burden must be borne by all employees, ALPA stated that it wanted to know the airline's plans for a post COVID-19 future (Times of Malta, 2020b).

In the meantime, Government announced that an agreement was reached with the union representing the cabin crew which waived all rights listed in the 2016 collective agreement. As part of the agreement the cabin crew agreed to be paid a guaranteed sum and could earn more on the basis of the hours flown (see section below). Another agreement was reached with the engineers which stipulated that a review of the situation will take place every 28 days. This mood of compromise was lacking between ALPA and the government. Air Malta stated that it was not in a position to accept the “unreasonable demands” made by ALPA. On sixth June 2020 the government announced that half (69 out of 134) of Air Malta pilots have been declared redundant. The economy minister, Silvio Schembri, accused ALPA of attempting to place a stronghold on Air Malta’s existence “at a time when it operations had been dealt a severe blow by the pandemic” (Times of Malta, 2020c). On the other hand, ALPA accused the airline that it used the pandemic as an excuse to settle all scores and bring to a premature end the collective agreement which was due to expire at the end of 2022 (ibid).

CONCESSIONARY BARGAINING

It is to be noted that in this trade dispute between Air Malta and the Airline pilots an attempt was made by government to resort to concessionary collective bargaining in the negotiation process among the social partners. In this type of collective bargaining employees are generally asked to forfeit some of the benefits listed in the collective agreement in exchange for protection against layoffs. Given the precarious situation of Air Malta, due to the closure of the airport, the government assured the employees of this company that their job would be retained if they were to acquiesce to the benchmark wage of €1,200 per month which other workers in the same precarious employment had accepted.

In this concessionary bargaining government established a new benchmark in its wage policy. This new wage benchmark formed part of the COVID-19 Wage Supplement, a state support measure aimed at boosting the industries which had been badly affected by the pandemic crisis. One of the measures included in this aid package was a grant of €800 per month to employees operating in sectors that had been suffering drastically during the crisis or had to temporarily suspend their operations. The employer was bound to pay the remaining amount (up to €400) to ensure a higher level than the statutory minimum which for the year 2020 was €724,32 for four weeks of work. This measure by government constituted a benchmark of a monthly

wage packet of €1,200 (€800 + €400) which was to be applied in the collective bargaining process throughout the period of the pandemic. The Malta Airline Pilots Association (ALPA), representing the pilots employed by Air Malta, refused to accept this benchmark wage as it claimed that the government failed to give a plan of the new scenario in the post COVID-19 period (Times of Malta, 2020b). It therefore kept on insisting that the provisions of the last collective agreement should be honoured.

DIGITALISATION OF WORK

These episodes and events were taking place in a labour market characterised by new employment relations. One of the most glaring changes in the Maltese labour market brought about by the pandemic was the acceleration of the digitalization process at the work place and in the daily life of the Maltese citizens. Although home-based teleworking has very often featured in the agenda of the social partners, attempts to implement it had been few and far between. Empirical data clearly point out that the onset of COVID-19 pandemic accelerated its developments. The Malta National Office of Statistics (NSO) in its finding of the survey of the labour market noted that many employers had made the necessary arrangements for their employees to work remotely from home. Indeed the NSO data indicate that in the last two weeks of March 2020 about one third (33%) of the employed persons were working from home. This marks an increase of 21% over the same period in 2019 (NSO, 2020).

The increase of this work trend was also confirmed by another survey conducted by PwC Malta in May 2020. According to the data of this survey the majority (71%) of the 850 respondents confirmed that they were working remotely while 61% stated that this was their first experience of remote working (PwC Malta, 2020). Two out of three employees taking part in this survey expressed positive views about teleworking.

In order to encourage remote working, government issued a scheme to assist employers to invest in technology to provide teleworking arrangements for their employees. The benefits of this scheme could be availed of by all the undertakings which had employees who did not have an active teleworking agreement prior to 15th February 2020. The benefit to employers consisted of a grant of up to €500 per teleworking agreement limited to a maximum of €4,000 per undertaking. This toll, which government had consented to pay to address the adverse effects of COVID-19, brought about a higher degree of sensitivity to a consensual ethic among the social partners. This does not however mean that consensus was total

THE POLITICAL WEIGHT OF TRADE UNIONS

The trade unions representing the workers defined as front liners, such as doctors, nurses and teachers, were very active in this new industrial relations scenario. As has already been noted, during the pandemic crisis the trade unions which made their presence strongly felt were the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses, the Malta Union of Teachers and the Medical Association of Malta. In their actions and vocal protests these trade unions tried to gain political weight by brandishing the professional know-how of their members and setting themselves apart from the other trade unions with which they are affiliated. The policy adopted by government to incorporate the social partners within its decision making policy in order to enhance the legitimacy of its actions prompted these trade unions to demand a higher and more direct form of consultation about anticipatory measures.

Conversely, the lack of these skills among the immigrant workers, especially the third country national, rendered them expendable. These foreigners were the first category of workers who had to bear the brunt of the COVID-19 crisis. Many of them had to be repatriated to their homeland (Times of Malta, 2020d). At one time these foreigners made up 25% of the Maltese labour force. The drastic decrease of these foreign workers caused by this repatriation is likely to affect the multi-cultural set up of the Maltese labour market which had become a visible feature of the Maltese society. The relative small decrease registered in the unemployment figures suggest that the adverse effects of the epidemic have created a reserve army of Maltese workers who have been pushed to fill the gaps caused by the departure of foreign workers.

CONCLUSION

One of the conclusions that can be reached from the events and episodes that unfolded during the pandemic crisis in Malta is that timely intervention by the state is vital as it provides a prop to enable ailing companies to sustain their survival and resilience. Without the state's financial aid to industry many firms would have succumbed to what may be perceived to be the inevitable or unavoidable.

These measures were complemented by the practices of flexibility among the actors and stakeholders engaged in the labour market. The practice of this type of flexibility has been made possible by an educated workforce that possesses the necessary computer literacy skills. The implementation of this flexibility by several work organisations operating in the Maltese labour market has given proof that the discourse about the benefits of investment in

education is far from being mere glib talk. Malta is far from being a model of a flexible education system that caters for a diversity of skills and knowledge. The number of early school leavers in Malta which averages one in six is still high by European standards. The Maltese government has pledged to bring down the figure to 10 per cent by 2020. The fewer opportunities for new recruits in the Maltese labour induced by the pandemic may compel pupils who reach the compulsory school leaving age to prolong their school experience and thus decrease the relative high Maltese rate of early school leavers.

These interventions by the state in the labour market were sustained through the mechanism of social dialogue and consultation practices. The Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD), the tripartite national institution for social dialogue, acted as an effective brokerage agency in the designation of the remedial measures that had to be taken to cope with the nuances of the pandemic. This however does not mean that there was total convergence about the strategies and policies being adopted to combat the nuances of the pandemic. Indeed the pandemic may have caused an alteration to the power relations between the actors involved in industrial relations.

In this instance the Superintendent of Public Health proved to be additional actor involved in the social dialogue mechanism. In its quest to assert the logic of its decision making and the formulation of its policies, Government was consistently claiming that its actions were based on the expertise and knowledge of the health sector whose professional advice it was always seeking and heeding. Due to their lack of expertise on this matter the trade unions generally acquiesced to the measures taken and the policies adopted by government. This convergence was not however total as the Medical Association of Malta (MAM) claimed that among its members it has a repertoire of knowledgeable persons with the same level of expertise in health matters. Thus the main divergence of opinions among the social partners stemmed from the conflict between MAM and government. Indeed MAM was vocal in its disapproval of the decision taken by government to reopen the airport on the 1st of July. It also ordered a partial industrial action as a protest against the decision by government to sanction an event of social gathering which eventually was the cause of increase in the number of infections. These actions by MAM might have caused a dent in the trust relationship among the social partners. This dent did not however undermine the mechanism of social dialogue.

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A photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The laptop screen displays a document with text. In the background, other people are seated at a table, some holding papers. The image is framed by a large red semi-circle on the left side.

Organisation and Staff

SECTION 4.1

Centre for Labour Studies Board (AS AT OCTOBER 2020)

CHAIRPERSON

Professor Godfrey Baldacchino (as Rector's delegate)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON

Dr Luke Fiorini (Director, Centre for Labour Studies)

MEMBERS

Appointed by Council

Mr Reno Calleja

Appointed by Senate

Professor Peter Mayo

Representatives of the Academic Staff

Dr Anna Borg

Dr Manwel Debono

Representatives of the Students

Ms Isabella Camilleri

Ms Roberta Cilia

Appointed by the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy

Professor Peter J. Baldacchino

Appointed by the Confederation of Malta Trade Unions

(of whom one is by the Union Haddiema Magħqudin)

Mr William Portelli

Mr Josef Vella

Appointed by the Forum Unions Maltin

Mr Colin Galea

Appointed by the General Workers' Union

Mr Josef Bugeja

Mr Victor Carachi

Appointed by the Malta Employers' Association

Mr Joseph Farrugia

Appointed by the Ministry responsible for Labour Relations

Ms Diane Vella Muscat

Secretary to the Board

Ms Caroline Chetcuti

HONOURARY MEMBERS

Professor Gerard Kester

Dr Francis La Ferla

Mr Saviour Rizzo

Professor Edward L. Zammit



IN MEMORY

Mr Anthony Busuttil (1931-2020): Secretary of the GWU Metal Workers' Section (Dockyard) (1977-1992); Secretary of the GWU Pensioners' Section (2013-2020); first Mayor of Tarxien (1994); long-serving member of the WPDC and then CLS Board, first as a member and then as an honorary member. Firm believer in worker education, participation and empowerment.

Centre for Labour Studies Staff

FULL-TIME LECTURING STAFF WITH THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR STUDIES



DR LUKE FIORINI Ph.D. (Nottingham), M.Sc. (Derby), P.G.Dip., B.Sc (Hons), S.R.P. is a lecturer in labour studies and holds degrees in physiotherapy, ergonomics, occupational health psychology and management. He became Director of the Centre for Labour Studies in 2020 and coordinates the Bachelor in Occupational Health and Safety course. Dr Fiorini lectures in areas related to occupational health and safety, human resource management and ergonomics. He has been involved in a number of the Centre's projects, primarily contributing to the Centre's Eurofound commitments. Dr Fiorini represents Malta on the European Trade Union Institute's (ETUI) Worker Participation Network and is the country ambassador of the European Network Education and Training in Occupational Safety and Health (ENETOSH).



DR ANNABORG Ph.D.(MDX), M.Sc.(Manchester Met.), Dip. Soc.St.(Melit.) is a Senior Lecturer and former Director of the Centre in October. She lectures in the area of equality and diversity in the labour market, HR-related topics, work-life issues and qualitative research methods. She coordinates the Diploma in Gender, Work and Society and the Bachelor in Work and Human Resources.



DR MANWEL DEBONO Ph.D., M.Sc.(Hull), B.Psy.(Hons), C.Psychol is an Occupational Psychologist and Senior Lecturer at the Centre, where he served as Director (2009-2014). He coordinates the Masters in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development and the Bachelor Honours in Work and Human Resources. Dr Debono lectures in organisational psychology, human resource management, the labour market, career guidance, and research methods. He also manages the Centre's research projects with Eurofound. In 2020, Dr Debono was appointed as the Rector's Delegate to the Adjunct Office for the Institute for Public Services

VISITING FULL-TIME LECTURING STAFF WITH THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR STUDIES



During the 2018-2019 academic year, the CLS full-time staff was also complemented by **DRS THEO KONING**, a visiting lecturer from the Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen, in the Netherlands. Mr Koning holds a Bachelor degree in Social Work and a Master degree in Social Economic History. During his time with the CLS, Mr Koning contributed to a number of CLS units. Mr Koning, an avid cyclist, also contributed to other UM projects such as the Doctoral School's Healthy Work and Lifestyle Programme.

PART-TIME LECTURING STAFF WITH THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR STUDIES



PROF GODFREY BALDACCHINO Ph.D. (Warwick), B.A.(Gen.), P.G.C.E (Melit.), M.A. (The Hague) is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Malta and the Chair of the Board of the Centre (as Rector's Delegate) since 2010. He spent ten years (2003-2013) as Canada Research Chair (Island Studies) at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada. He lectures in Globalisation, Work and Development; Employee Involvement and Participation; Organisational Design; Work Design and Job Classification. He also served as a Pro-Rector of the University of Malta (2016-2021).

PART-TIME RESEARCH STAFF WITH THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR STUDIES



MR SAVIOUR RIZZO M.Ed. (Melit.), B.A.(Gen.) has been associated with the Centre since its establishment in 1981. He served as the Director of the Centre between 2003 and 2009. He lectures in Sociology of Work, Education and the Labour Market; and Gender and Sociology. At present he works as a research support officer with the Centre.

Additionally, **64 individuals** (37 males and 27 females) contributed to the CLS' courses as part-time lecturers during 2019 and 2020. In view of the Centre's limited in-house human resources, these part-time lecturers provide an invaluable service, without whom the courses detailed in this Biennial Report could not have been offered.

4.2.2 ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF



MS JOSEPHINE AGIUS has been employed at the University of Malta since 1995 and joined the Centre's staff in January 2000. She works as an Administration Specialist and provides administrative support to the Diploma in Gender, Work and Society, Bachelor in Work and Human Resources Cohorts 2018-2023 and 2020-2025 as well as the Masters in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development.



MS STEPHANIE MUSCAT Dip. Soc. St. (Melit.), Ms Muscat works as an Administration Specialist and provides administrative support to the Bachelor in Work and Human Resources Cohort 2016-2021 and Cohort 2020-2025. She is currently reading for a B.A (Hons) in Social Wellbeing Studies at the University of Malta.



MS CAROLINE CHETCUTI B.Comms (Melit.) has been employed at the University of Malta since 2015. She handles the administrative work related to all the cohorts of the Bachelor in Occupational Health and Safety (Hons) as well as that of the Bachelor in Work and Human Resources Cohort 2014-2019. She also handles the work related to design and photography of the Centre.

Academic Programmes Offered in 2019 – 2020

5.1 DIPLOMA IN GENDER, WORK AND SOCIETY

**Course Coordinator: Dr Anna Borg (till-2019/20);
Dr Luke Fiorini (since-2020/1)**

INTAKE:

(COHORT YEAR 2017-2019)

Females	Males	Total
14	1	15

(COHORT YEAR 2019-2021)

Females	Males	Total
10	0	10

The course aims to give students an introductory overview on gender issues and how these impact on the individual within the social, cultural, economic and political behaviour.

Its objectives are to:

- Sensitise participants into the importance of gender as transversal theme in appreciating social, cultural, economic and political behaviour,
- Facilitate the effective participation of men and women in decisions which invariably affect their lives,
- Empower women and men to request, develop and maintain gender friendly and gender sensitive policies in the home, at work and in society.

COURSE PROGRAMME

YEAR ONE

GDS1004	Introduction to Gender Studies and Public Speaking
GDS1009	Gender, Sociology and Politics
CLS1209	Gender and Economics
CLS1225	Gender and the World of Work
GDS1005	Gender and Psychology
GDS1010	Gender and Law

YEAR TWO

CLS1230	Gender and Research Methods
CLS1226	Gender and Health
CLS1229	Gender and Social Policy
GDS1003	Gender, Poverty and Development
GDS1002	Gender and Culture
CLS1227*	Gender and Organisational Behaviour
CLS1228*	Gender and Labour Economics
GDS1007	Media Literacy and Gender Issues
GDS1008	Violence Against Women

*In order to be eligible to join the third year of the Bachelor in Work and Human Resources (Honours) course, students will need a pass in study-units CLS1227 and CLS1228.

2019 AND 2020 CLS GRADUATES

During the 2019 and 2020 graduations ceremonies, 17 students of the CLS awarded their certificate or degrees, as follows:

2019 GRADUATE

CERTIFICATE IN GENDER, WORK AND SOCIETY

Females	Males	Total
0	1	1

**2019 GRADUATE
DIPLOMA IN GENDER, WORK AND SOCIETY**

Females	Males	Total
14	1	15

**2020 GRADUATE
CERTIFICATE IN GENDER, WORK AND SOCIETY**

Females	Males	Total
1	0	1

Bachelor in Work and Human Resources

(HONOURS)

**Course Coordinator: Dr Anna Borg (till 2019/20);
Dr Manwel Debono (since 2020/1)**

INTAKE:

(COHORT YEAR 2014-2019)

Females	Males	Total
30	7	37

(COHORT YEAR 2016-2021)

Females	Males	Total
13	7	20

(COHORT YEAR 2018-2023)

Females	Males	Total
12	3	15

(COHORT YEAR 2020-2025)

Females	Males	Total
24	9	33

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As organisations strive to adapt to the ever increasing challenges of globalisation, the need for skilled and qualified human resource professionals increases. This course, offered in collaboration with the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy, aims to fill a gap in this much needed area of specialisation. The curriculum provides students with sound underpinning knowledge and the necessary skills that will enable them to work professionally in settings related to human resources.

COURSE PROGRAMME

YEAR ONE

CLS1107	Sociology of Work
CLS1108	Occupational Psychology
CLS1111	Introduction to Social Science
CLS1112	Academic Skills in Work and Human Resources
CLS1102	Equality at the Place of Work
CLS1103	Employment Law in the Maltese and European Contexts
ECN1200	Introductory Economics for Work and HR

YEAR TWO

CLS1110	Labour Economics
CLS1114	Qualitative Research Methods
MGT1944	Human Resource Management
CLS1104	Organisational Communication
CLS1105	Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety
CLS1109	Industrial Relations
CLS1113	Quantitative Research Methods

YEAR THREE

CLS1106	The Evolving Labour Market
CLS2101	The Recruitment Process
CLS2102	Group Behaviour
CLS2103	Performance Management
ECN2213	Economic Growth and Development
ACC2941	Elements of Financial Management
CLS2104	Social Policy and the Labour Market
CLS2105	Education and the Labour Market
CLS2106	Motivation and Compensation
CLS2107	Collective Bargaining

YEAR FOUR

CLS2108	Training and Development
CLS2109	Work-Life Issues
CLS2111	Career Choice and Development
CLS3104	Employee Involvement and Participation
IOT2301	Ideas and Intrapreneurship
CLS3103	Topics in Occupational Health and Safety
CLS3112	Organisational Design
CLS3113	Topics in Employment and Industrial Relations Regulations
PPL2224	People Development in the Public Sector
CLS3101	Applied Quantitative Research Techniques
CLS3102	Applied Qualitative Research Techniques

YEAR FIVE

CLS3106	Personality at Work
CLS3109	Managing Abuse at the Work Place
CLS3110	Workplace Design and Ergonomics
CLS3114	Applied Topics in Work and Human Resources
CLS3115	Research Process in Work and Human Resources
CLS3116	Dissertation

2019 AND 2020 CLS GRADUATES

During the 2019 and 2020 graduations ceremonies, 45 students of the CLS awarded their certificate or degrees, as follows:

2019 GRADUATE**DIPLOMA IN WORK AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

Females	Males	Total
0	1	1

2020 GRADUATES**DIPLOMA IN WORK AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

Females	Males	Total
6	2	8

2019 GRADUATES**BACHELOR IN WORK AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

Females	Males	Total
30	6	36

LIST OF DISSERTATIONS FOR THE BACHELOR IN WORK AND HUMAN RESOURCES (HONOURS)

Cohort 2014 – 2019

The sick leave for parents proposal: An employer's perception within the igaming industry in Malta

Exploring empowerment amongst the millennial generation: A case study in a professional services firm

Working mothers and their experience of the Klabb 3-16 after-school service

Achieving work life balance: for workers on atypical work schedules

Employer branding: a look into the strategic approach of attracting talent. An employer's perspective

Sneak peek on the reality of Maltese vocational education and training efficacy in the emerging labour market

The effect of leadership on the retention of employees

An analysis of Maltese industrial tribunal decisions regarding unfair dismissals

Exploring paternity and parental leave policies from the perspective of fathers in Malta

Are employees aware of their employment rights? A study based on Malta Freeport Terminals Ltd employees

Drug preparation and administration: exploration of the training needs of nurses who work in a rehabilitation hospital setting

Fathers and work-life conflict in the Maltese banking sector

Work-life issues: The barriers mothers encounter throughout their career in the financial sector

Examination of reward strategies in an igaming affiliate organisation and their perceived impact

Exploring corporate social responsibility in the hospitality industry

The Maltese millennials at work - a sociological enquiry

Early school leavers: employability and the labour market

Breaking the glass ceiling: women in the boardroom

Stakeholders' response to the skills gaps: a study on the Maltese cultural and creative industries

The working conditions of the Malta police force: A generic perspective

Glass cliff: the Maltese perspective of women who went beyond the barrier

Exploring if flexible working arrangements can act as a retention tool

Exploring what impact millennials and generation X have on employee retention within the igaming industry in Malta

The challenges faced by working parents of children with disability

A healthy worker is a productive worker: A study on mental health policy at the workplace in the Maltese islands

The heritage Malta experience: Training and development in a governmental agency

The new world of work. Investigating what attracts to join the gaming sector

Exploring work life balance issues for mothers working in the financial sector who have children under ten years of age

Organisational justice perceptions and job outcomes: Examining unfairness at the workplace

Culinary sector: opportunities and challenges

Managing job demands by leveraging employee motivations

The use of psychometric testing focusing on personality tests during the personnel selection process within organisations based in Malta

The transformation towards a lean manufacturing organisation: The impact on industrial employees

Work-family conflicts of working fathers holding managerial positions in the hospitality industry

Women in academia - The case of female full professors at the University of Malta

The perspective of women who broke the glass ceiling in Malta's financial services sector

Bachelor in Occupational Health and Safety

(HONOURS)

Course Coordinator: Dr Luke Fiorini

INTAKE:

(COHORT YEAR 2016-2021)

Females	Males	Total
3	27	30

(COHORT YEAR 2018-2023)

Females	Males	Total
2	12	14

(COHORT YEAR 2020-2025)

Females	Males	Total
18	4	22

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course objectives are:

- To introduce the concepts and skills involved in the promotion and effective pursuit of health and safety at work;
- To develop the basic investigative and analytic competences necessary so that workplace hazards can be recognised, evaluated and minimised
- To inculcate the principle of risk reduction of workplace hazards and practices
- To identify and appreciate the psycho-social features of workers and working environments which have a bearing on the nature and incidence of occupational hazards and diseases.

COURSE PROGRAMME

YEAR ONE

CLS1314	Academic Skills in Occupational Health and Safety
CLS1315	Physical Sciences in Safety, Health and the Environment
CLS1316	Organisational Behaviour
CLS1317	Work, Industrial Relations and the Business Environment
CLS1318	The Promotion of Health and Wellbeing at Work
CLS1319	Biological Principles in Health, Safety and Occupational Toxicology
CLS1320	Risk Management and Principles of Control

YEAR TWO

CLS1321	Occupational Safety
CLS1322	Health and Safety Statistics and Epidemiology
PBL1020	Health and Safety Legal Framework
CLS1206	Research Methods and Design
CLS1323	Ergonomics and Human Factors
CLS1324	Fire Safety and the Management of First Aid
CLS1325	Investigative Skills and Occupational Safety Practice

YEAR THREE

CLS2301	Gender, Age, Race and Disability
CLS2302	Occupational Hygiene
PBL2016	Topics in Health and Safety Law
CLS2303	Occupational Health
CLS2304	Environmental Health Management: Policy and Legislation
CLS2305	Health and Safety Management and Supervisory Skills
CLS2306	Practical Skills and Application

YEAR FOUR

CLS2307	Properties of Materials, New Technologies and Technical Drawing
CLS2308	Health and Safety Audits
CLS2309	Applied Occupational Safety and Health
CLS3301	Supported Study-Unit in Occupational Health and Safety
CLS3302	Personal Development, Ethics and Ability to Train Others
CLS3303	Advanced Practical Skills and Application
CLS3101	Applied Quantitative Research Techniques
CLS3102	Applied Qualitative Research Techniques

YEAR FIVE

CLS3304	Topics in Applied Occupational Safety and Health
CLS3305	Occupational Incident and Accident Investigation
CLS3306	Occupational Health and Work Performance
CLS3307	Synoptic Study-Unit
CLS3308	Dissertation
IOT3100	Creative Thinking and Innovation

Master in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development

Course Coordinator: Dr Manwel Debono

INTAKE:

(COHORT YEAR 2016-2021)

Females	Males	Total
4	4	8

(COHORT YEAR 2020-2023)

Females	Males	Total
4	1	5

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Employment is becoming more flexible and careers less predictable. The problem of unemployment is a national priority debated at the highest levels of our society. At the same time, there has been an expansion of education with a particular focus on lifelong learning. People are thus seeking increasing amounts of career-related assistance throughout their whole lives. The Postgraduate Diploma in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development, offered jointly by the Centre for Labour Studies and the Faculty of Education, seeks to enhance professional career guidance services in Malta. The course is designed for applicants in possession of a graduate level of education who wish to work at a professional level in the career guidance field.

COURSE PROGRAMME YEAR ONE

CLS5101	Sociology of Work
CLS5102	The Labour Market
COU5401	Skills in Vocational Guidance and Counselling for Career Guidance Practitioners

EDS5602	Guidance Theories, Models and Strategies
CLS1206	Research Methods and Design
CLS5103	Placement in Career Guidance Settings
CLS5104	Career Guidance Tools
CLS5110	Service Provision for Different Client Groups

YEAR TWO

EDS5603	Professional Development
EDS5604	Career Guidance Management
EDS5606	Career Development and Lifelong Learning
EDS5608	Career Guidance Practice
CLS5107	The Workplace
EDS5605	Career Information Systems
CLS5111	Applied Quantitative Techniques for Career Guidance
CLS5112	Applied Qualitative Techniques for Career Guidance
EDS5609	Dissertation

2019 AND 2020 CLS GRADUATES

During the 2019 and 2020 graduations ceremonies, 7 students of the CLS awarded their master degrees, as follows:

2019 GRADUATE - MASTER IN LIFELONG CAREER GUIDANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Females	Males	Total
2	3	5

2020 GRADUATE - MASTER IN LIFELONG CAREER GUIDANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Females	Males	Total
1	1	2

LIST OF DISSERTATIONS FOR THE MASTER IN LIFELONG CAREER GUIDANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Cohort 2016-2019.

Career guidance in Maltese post-secondary institutions: Understanding young people's educational paths and career choices through narrative-based approaches

The small-scale syndrome: Career aspirations of Maltese and Gozitan secondary school children

Exploring the career guidance needs of male Sub-Saharan immigrants in the labour market

The use of ICT as an agent of change: A proposal for a career guidance programme for the University of Malta

Life beyond pregnancy: Career guidance through the eyes of teenage mothers - A qualitative study

Career Thoughts Inventory: Measuring the students' level of need for career guidance in state secondary schools

SECTION 5.5

CLS4000 - People Management and Industrial Relations for Public Officers

Course Coordinator: Dr Manwel Debono

This short course, offered in conjunction with the Institute for Public Services aims to train public officers to deal effectively with issues relating to people management and industrial relations.

(COHORT YEAR 2018-2019)

Females	Males	Total
11	3	14

(COHORT YEAR 2019-2020)

Females	Males	Total
4	10	14

SECTION 6

Dissertation Synthesis

The following section presents a dissertation synthesis from two students who obtained a First Class Honours degree in Work and Human Resources.

**STEVEN TERENCE
CAMILLERI**



TITLE

Fathers and Work-life Conflict in the Maltese Banking Sector

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This qualitative research sought to identify the main factors which cause work-life conflict amongst fathers who hold a managerial role in the Maltese Banking Sector. It utilises the gender perspective, together with the notion of the 'ideal worker', to look at the challenges these fathers face, as well as the cultural forces dominating their working environment. These forces tend to increase conflicts and impedes any improvement in this area. Thus, this study builds on Acker's Theory of Gendered Organization and the concept of the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990).

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the aim of this study, eight semi-structured interviews were carried out. The participants were fathers in a managerial role, working in seven different banks, all in the local banking sector. All participants had at least one child under eighteen years of age and living under the same roof. These participants were chosen on purpose; managerial roles come with higher and almost 'limitless' demands, which will make it more difficult to allocate time for family and oneself, thus increasing the possibility of conflicts. Moreover, the fact the participants worked in different banks, will give us a better view of

the cultures, ideas and practices adopted in this sector. A thematic approach was used to extract the information obtained during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

KEY FINDINGS

From the interviews conducted, several subthemes with regards to causes of work-life conflict emerged. These were then grouped into four major themes:

- Work and Family Responsibilities
- Cultural factors
- Psychological factors and
- Financial factors

The study highlighted that the above themes were the most likely to create work-life conflict for the studied fathers. Moreover, the findings shed light on another aspect which is important for this research. Both the work and life spheres are needed to support each other; they are mutually dependent.

Contrastingly, although they rely on each other, friction occurs between these spheres, due to the expectations both spheres impose on the studied fathers. Nearly all the experienced conflicts occurred from the work sphere to the life sphere. Thus, the spill over from the work sphere intrudes on the life sphere, and conflict ensues.

Interestingly, not one participant mentioned that conflict can derive from the life sphere to the work sphere. This can be attributed to several factors, for instance the support they have at home, which enables them to concentrate and dedicate most of their time to paid work, or else that they consider their work sphere as their main responsibility.

Although not explicitly expressed, the participants indicated that they are expected to prioritize work over life (Wilk, 2016). According to these interviews, managerial roles come with costs that would result in conflicts between spheres, and one must choose whether to progress in his profession, or else be more present in the life sphere, with negative consequences to his career. This is in line with Acker's Theory of Gendered Organisations (1990), where she states that the "ideal worker is the male worker, whose life centres on his full-time, life-long job" (p.149).

The responsibilities that these fathers have and the weight they put into these responsibilities are influenced by society, which in turn will influence organisations. Although more drive towards a greater contribution from fathers in the life sphere, especially family sphere, is gaining ground, the argument still

seems to be low on the studied organisations' and individuals' agenda. These interviews showed that the work sphere needs to be accommodated and the life sphere needs to adjust accordingly.

Furthermore, some of the participants stated that the banks they work for offer flexible work arrangements (FWAs) for all employees, however it is considered odd that a male applies for these flexible arrangements (Abendroth, 2017). Additionally, some banks seem to penalize such people who apply for managerial grades, since once in a managerial grade, you must forfeit these arrangements. The participants acknowledge that the work-life conflict they are experiencing is secondary to their role which limits them in how much they can intrinsically give to the life sphere, however they consider it as a norm, and accept it.

CONCLUSION

One of the main findings that this research uncovered is that, although fathers agree that they have other responsibilities apart from their work, they still tend to lean more towards the traditional idea; the work sphere falls more under their remit than the life sphere.

Also, culture plays an important role. Some of these managerial fathers, whose role permits them to start changing the culture prevailing at their workplace, still think that FWAs primarily target women. This is very worrying, because if these participants do not believe in the sharing of responsibilities, then how can there be an effort to start changing the existing culture?

Contrastingly, some of the participants complained that they were not given the support they needed to overcome such conflicts, and in some instances, they had to choose between their career progression (work sphere) or their life/family sphere. This shows the still prevailing 'macho' culture, where men are expected to dedicate their time and energy to work; all other issues are trivial.

Implications emerging from this research show a certain mentality when coming to work-life conflicts and gender roles. This mentality does not aid in surpassing the hurdles already in place because of gender stereotypes. Moreover, these managers can act as gatekeepers to such changes.

References

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- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organisations. *Gender and Society*, 4(2), 139 – 158
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 77 – 101
- Wilk, K.E. (2016). Work-Life Balance and Ideal Worker Expectations for Administrators. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2016(176), 37 – 51



TITLE

Early School Leavers: Employability and the Labour Market

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This qualitative study aimed to explore the challenges that Early School Leavers (ESLs) face in their employment prospects and the challenges faced by employers, in the context of the current economic climate. The study focuses on the employers' perspective, as related research is very limited.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted qualitative research methods to inquire, document and interpret the meaning-making process (Patton, 2015). Data were captured through nine semi-structured interviews, conducted with HR professionals.

The Thematic Analysis approach was used to identify, analyse and report on the emerging themes from the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

KEY FINDINGS

The study highlighted three key findings, these being: 1) Challenges faced by ESLs; 2) Economic and social factors; and 3) Challenges faced by employers.

Notwithstanding that the study was conducted by means of employer interviews, challenges faced by ESLs could still be identified; particularly the difficulties encountered in career advancement. This was evident when one analyses the roles that ESLs hold within companies. Very few managed to achieve managerial or senior positions and the few that did, only managed this after being in employment for a considerable number of years. With regards to training and development, whilst training was provided, this is predominantly on-the-job training, whilst personal development is very limited or even non-existent. ESLs already are at a disadvantage, albeit a self-induced one, of having low qualification attainment. With limited development prospects, it is very

difficult for them to gain the human capital needed to be relevant in an ever changing labour market (Taylor, 2013), where new trends and technologies are constantly being developed.

The current economic situation of full employment needs to be looked at from both sides of the spectrum. Firstly, this could be an advantage for ESLs as it is easier to find employment, where students could be easily enticed to leave school early due to the ease of finding employment, as also put forward by Gyönös, (2011). Secondly employers may regard full employment as a difficulty as this makes it much more challenging to attract talent, due to the increased competition and a plethora of choices for employees.

The economic situation is compounded by societal and educational factors. Employers referred to the perceived breakdown of the family, which could give rise to increased early school leaving and a lack of skills that were previously nurtured in the family. With regards to educational factors, it was identified that the school to work transition was often made harder by youths being unprepared for the taxing realities of employment (Brzinsky-Fay, 2006).

Finally, employers also faced particular challenges due to early school leaving. This ranged from the characteristics of the ESLs, which might not be aligned with the needs of the organisation, to difficulties in finding employees, staff retention and skills gaps. A particular concern was the difficulty in sourcing employees for basic roles from the Maltese labour market, which meant that employers had to resort to foreigners. This results in additional difficulties, due to the associated paperwork and permits that need to be provided for these workers. This has put an additional burden on employers, as it is also a lengthy procedure, taking anywhere from 10 weeks up to three months or longer, during which time, organisations have open vacancies which cannot be filled.

Staff retention is also a major issue, not only with regards to ESLs but also for the whole complement of employees. Poaching of employees is prevalent and job mobility is accepted as the new reality. This puts pressure on employers to give the best conditions possible, even though it is most often not possible to match the conditions of the new and emerging industries, such as the financial sector and gaming.

CONCLUSION

This study has brought to light potential challenges that effect both ESLs and employers, in the context of full employment. These challenges included less advantageous conditions of employment for ESLs, as well as reduced training and development opportunities, resulting in decreased prospects of advancement.

On the other hand, employers perceived the misalignment between ESLs' characteristics and the needs of the organisation as being one of the challenges they face. This is compounded by the increased expectations of ESLs and the difficulty in meeting organisational demands, in particular through skills gaps and culture fit, which impacts on the recruitment and retention of ESLs.

All the above is seen in context of the current Maltese economic climate, which brings with it other challenges, such as the lack of human resources.

In conclusion, the importance for being prepared for future challenges, through a talented workforce is critical, as otherwise an economy cannot grow and prosper (Borg & Camilleri, 2016). Thus, it is of paramount importance that the country not only focuses on reducing early school leaving, but also ensures that the ESLs who are already on the labour market have the necessary safeguards and are encouraged to re-engage in education, in order to improve their qualifications profile and bridge their skills gaps.

References

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Eurofound Contract 2019 – 2020

REPORTS

TITLE	DATE
Country update on latest developments in working life (Q4 18)	Jan-19
Contribution to EurWORK's annual review of working life	Jan-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Hospitals	Jan-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Education	Jan-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Local Regional Administration	Feb-19
EurWORK's Working life country profile - update	Feb-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Social Services	Feb-19
Topical update - Recent initiatives on work-life balance in the context working time flexibility and ICT use	Feb-19
Joint cross border labour inspections	Feb-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Paper	Mar-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Sea Fisheries	Mar-19
Topical update on Gender equality: Funding as tool for equitable social change	Apr-19
Country update on latest developments in working life (Q1 19)	Apr-19
Update of a database of national contacts	Apr-19
Mapping debt services	May-19
ERM restructuring related legislation database update	May-19
Measures to integrate people with disabilities in the open labour market	Jun-19
Country update on latest developments in working life (Q2 19)	Jul-19
Involvement of social partners in the design and implementation of reforms and policies in the context of the European Semester	Aug-19
Topical update on Improving job quality and making work more sustainable: recent developments	Sep-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Audio Visual	Oct-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Life Performance	Oct-19
Working conditions of workers with multiple jobs	Oct-19

Country update on latest developments in working life (Q3 19)	Oct-19
Update of a database of national contacts	Oct-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Civil Aviation (mobile workers)	Nov-19
Sectoral representativeness studies - Civil Aviation (Ground staff & ATC)	Nov-19
Access to social services of general interest - Long term care workforce	Nov-19
Topical update on Employee monitoring and privacy at the workplace	Nov-19
Fact Sheet – HSBC	Nov-19
Tackling discrimination at the workplace	Nov-19
Annual review of working life	Nov-19
Annual Progress Report	Dec-19
Country update on latest developments in working life (Q4 19)	Jan-20
Update on statutory minimum wages 2020	Jan-20
The role of social partners at national level in tackling discrimination at the workplace	Jan-20
The long-term care workforce	Feb-20
EurWORK database 2019 update	Feb-20
Country update on latest developments in working life (Q1) & COVID-19 measures database	Apr-20
Combined update of a database of national contacts	Apr-20
Tackling labour shortages in the EU Member States	May-20
Topical update on 'a right to disconnect'	May-20
Sectoral representativeness studies – Electricity	May-20
The involvement of national social partners in social and economic reforms	Jun-20
Topical update on New forms of employment - update 2020	Jun-20
ERM database on support instruments	Jun-20
Sectoral representativeness studies - Food & Drinks	Jul-20
Sectoral representativeness studies - Textile and clothing	Jul-20
Country update on latest developments in working life (Q2) & COVID-19 watch database	Jul-20
Transition to a low carbon economy including its distributional impact	Jul-20
Topical update: including input to COVID-19 EU policy watch database - social partner initiatives	Sep-20

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): some implications on employment and working life	Sep-20
Services for people with disabilities	Oct-20
Country update on latest developments in working life (Q3) & COVID-19 EU POLICY Watch database	Oct-20
Sectoral representativeness studies - Professional Football	Nov-20
Sectoral representativeness studies - Cross-sectoral	Nov-20
Annual Progress Report	Nov-20
NEETS 10 years after: Consequences of the COVID-19 economic crisis on young people: Policy context and responses in EU Member States	Dec-20
Topical update: including input to COVID-19 EU policy watch database - workplace practices	Dec-20

Research Work and Publications of CLS staff: 2019 – 2020

8.1 PROFESSOR GODFREY BALDACCHINO

EDITED BOOKS

(with Anders Wivel) *Handbook on the politics of small states*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2020, 448pp. ISBN: 978-1-78811-292-5.

(with Vincent Cassar and Joseph G. Azzopardi) *Malta and its human resources: Management and development perspectives*. Msida, Malta: Malta University Press, 2019, 550pp. ISBN: 978-99909-45-98-0.

PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES & BOOK CHAPTERS

Tourism, Malta and unusual kindness. In G. Cassar & M. Avellino Stewart (Eds.), *Tourism in the Maltese Islands* (pp. ix-xiv). Malta: Kite Publications, 2020.

(with A. Baldacchino & B. Ellis). Fun and formality in two multicultural choirs/song circles in Atlantic Canada. In R. Heydon, D. Fancourt & A. J. Cohen (Ed.) *Advancing interdisciplinary research in singing: Vol. 3*. (pp. 275-290). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

'Together, but not together, together': The politics of identity in island archipelagos. In Y. Martínez-San Miguel & M. Stephens (Eds.), *Contemporary archipelagic thinking: Towards new comparative methodologies and disciplinary formations* (pp. 365-382). Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2020.

A psychology of islanders? In R. Pine and V. Konidari (Eds.), *Islands of the mind: Psychology, literature and biodiversity* (pp. 1-13). Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2020.

Studiando il nostro mondo di isole: Fondamenti, storie, prospettive. In F. Sedda (Ed.) *Isole: Un arcipelago semiotico* (pp. 223-256). Milano, Italy: Meltemi Editori, 2020.

Writing from somewhere. In Firouz Ghaini & Helene Pristed Nielsen (Eds.), *Gender, change and continuity in island communities* (pp. 174-179). London: Routledge, 2020.

Geographies of hope and despair: Land cover and land use on islands. In S.J. Walsh, D. Riveros-Iregui, J. Arce-Nazario & P.H. Page (Eds.), *Land cover and land use change on islands* (pp. 1-10). Springer Nature, 2020.

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Small states: Challenges of political economy. In G. Baldacchino & A. Wivel (Eds.), *Handbook on the politics of small states*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2020, pp. 70-82.

Island versus region: Small states in the Caribbean. In G. Baldacchino & A. Wivel (Eds.), *Handbook on the politics of small states*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2020, pp. 278-292.

- How it feels 'on the ground': The experiences of residents from a subnational island jurisdiction. *Small States & Territories*, 3(1), 2020, 123-136. <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/56390>
- How far can one go? How distance matters in island development. *Island Studies Journal*, 15(1), 2020, 25-42.
- Near islands, remote islands: The effect of distance on island development. In J.A. Randall (Ed.) *The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Islands Economic Cooperation Forum: 2018 Annual Report on Global Islands*. Charlottetown, Canada: Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, 2019.
- (with J. A. Randall) Conclusions: Prospects for the future economic development of Hainan Province. In J.A. Randall (Ed.) *The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Islands Economic Cooperation Forum: 2018 Annual Report on Global Islands*. Charlottetown, Canada: Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, 2019.
- Island images and imaginations: beyond the typical tropical. In J. Riquet and M. Heusser (Eds.), *Imaging identity: Text, mediality and contemporary visual culture*. Amsterdam: Brill/ Rodopi, 2019, pp. 301-318.
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8.2 DR LUKE A. FIORINI

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8.3 DR ANNA BORG

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- Borg, A. (2019). *Work-life balance in the context of flexible work and ICT use*. Eurofound.

8.4 DR MANWEL DEBONO

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- Camilleri, T., & Debono, M. (2020). The Small Scale Syndrome: Career aspirations of Maltese and Gozitan secondary school students. *Small States & Territories*, 3(1), 229-248.
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- Debono, M. & Baldacchino, G. (2019). Chapter 20. Malta: Moving away from confrontation. In Muller, T., Vandaele, K., & Waddington, J. (Eds.), *Collective bargaining in Europe: Towards an endgame Volume 2* (pp. 423-444). European Trade Union Institute.
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- Abela, F., & Debono, M. (2019). The relationship between psychological contract breach and job related attitudes within a manufacturing plant. *Sage Open*, January-March 2019, 1-10.

Other Events

9.1 EUROPE SOCIAL DAYS 2019

Between the 1st and 4th of April 2019, eight students from the Centre for Labour Studies who are following the Bachelor in Work and HR (Hons) course, together with Dr Anna Borg and Dr Theo Koning (visiting lecturer with the CLS) participated in the Europe Social Days held in Brussels. A number of different workshops were offered which focused on: superdiversity and social cohesion; poverty and social exclusion in Europe; more people at work; unemployment social benefits, work, and activation; recruitment and selection; digital economy and society; the future of work; healthy ageing; the gender pay gap-myth or real; climate and social work: people planet profit.

Emma Scerri representing the CLS students. participated in the House of Commons Debate which tackled the issue of legalisation of prostitution.



9.2 THE 8TH INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, WORK AND FAMILY CONFERENCE - MALTA

The 8th International Community, Work and Family conference took place at the Valletta campus of the University of Malta between the 23rd to the 25th May, 2019 with the theme: Community, Work and Family in Diverse Contexts and

Changing Times. Over 100 renowned experts, academics, and Ph.D. students from a broad range of countries and disciplines attended the conference in Malta. The conference was linked to the Taylor & Francis Journal, 'Community Work and Family'.

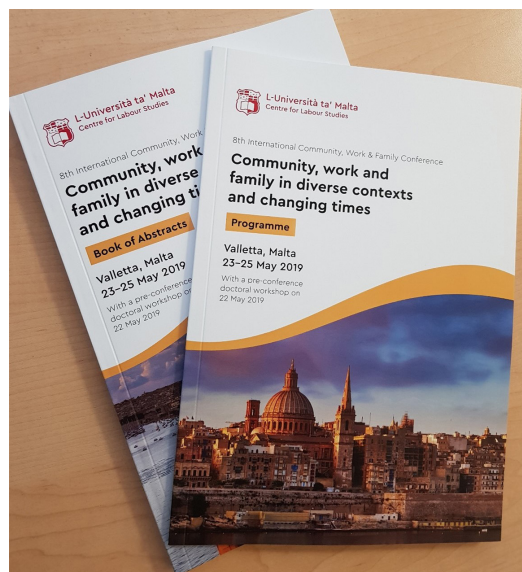
Dr Anna Borg led the organising team of the conference on behalf of the Centre for Labour Studies. The team included: Professor Suzan Lewis, Middlesex University; Professor Laura Den Dulk, Erasmus University Rotterdam; and Dr Clarice Santos, University of Lincoln.

During the three-day conference, the participants delved into some of the challenges that families, communities and organisations face in the 21st century across different parts of the world.

The papers presented during the event spanned across broad topics that analysed the work-life interface of various groups. These included parents, with a special focus on fathers, and other clusters that are generally less well-researched such as the police and the military, migrants, solo entrepreneurs, the LGBTIQ community and those who work with people with special needs.

The recurrent themes of the gendered division of labour within the family and work-life policies were discussed by various researchers, as were the issues of flexible work, family policy, and the impact of technology. The issue of peer, supervisory, management and community support was also tackled in relation to the work-life interface.

Ms Caroline Chetcuti, Ms Josephine Agius and Ms Michelle Muscat provided the administrative support for the conference.



9.3 APS TALK: THE GENDER PAY GAP

APS Bank organised a series of talks titled 'APS talks'. The fifth of these, held on May 30, 2019 was presented by Dr Anna Borg and was titled the Gender Pay Gap. Dr Borg highlighted that the gender pay gap is on the rise and discussed its context as well as potential solutions.

9.4 6TH ECADOC SUMMER SCHOOL: MALTA

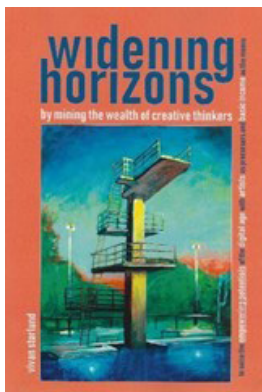
The CLS supported the '6th ECADOC Summer School 9-14 June 2019: Malta' organised by Prof Ronald Sultana (Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research), both financially by sponsoring some events, and by the participation of Dr Manwel Debono in the event. Among others, Dr Debono delivered a presentation entitled 'The Personal and Political in Career Guidance - Some Reflections about Malta'. The ECADOC summer school was a training event aimed towards doctoral students pursuing career guidance research. It involved three facets: (i) Deepening the appreciation and understanding of the links between career guidance and social justice; (ii) Discussions about doctoral theses; and (iii) Considering how early career researchers can develop their careers and contribute to the field.



9.5 PRECARIOUS ARTISTS' LABOUR: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

A book launch of Vivan Storlund's 'Widening horizons' was held at the University of Malta on Monday 21 October 2019. The event was organised and moderated by Dr Anna Borg together with Dr David Zammit from the Department of Civil Law, Faculty of Laws.

Storlund's book focuses on Artists' precarious labour. During her book launch, the author made a call for society to mine the wealth of creative thinkers by capturing their potential and ensuring that they can earn, at least, a basic income.



9.6 LAUNCH OF STATE-OF-THE-ART TEXT ON MALTA AND ITS HUMAN RESOURCES

Edited by Prof Godfrey Baldacchino, Prof Vincent Cassar and Dr Joseph G. Azzopardi, 'Malta and its Human Resources; Management and Development Perspectives' was launched on 6 November 2019. The book, which contains 550 pages, contains contributions from CLS academics including Dr Luke Fiorini, Dr Anna Borg and Dr Manwel Debono.



9.7 EUROPE SOCIAL DAYS 2020

Between the 11th and 13th of May 2020, due to COVID-19, Europe Social Days was held online through the University of Malta Platform. Students from the Gender Work and Society course participated in the online event and Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino was invited as guest speaker to celebrate the 20th anniversary since the network organising ESD was set up.

9.8 PEOPLE MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS FOR PUBLIC OFFICERS

This brief course (CLS4000, worth 6 ECTS) was jointly offered by the CLS and the Institute for Public Service. It aimed to train public officers to deal effectively with issues related to people management and industrial relations. It provided a conceptual framework through which students obtained a general appreciation of various important interconnected aspects related to such field. Through its practical component, this course aimed to help students deepen their understanding of the theoretical knowledge acquired during the lectures, and to make meaningful links between that and the complexities of industrial relations within formal institutional settings. Students were exposed to powerful learning environments in which they confronted their emergent understanding of the field of industrial relations in the light of both theory and practice. This brief course ran in both 2019 and 2020.

9.9 CONTRIBUTION TO MALTA EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION COURSE

Dr Luke Fiorini contributed to an award offered by the Malta Employers' Association in 'HR Management in Practice' (MQF Level 5). Dr Fiorini provided a lecture on the basics of occupational health and safety in Malta. The course was offered several times during 2019 and 2020.

9.10 MOCK EXTERNAL AUDIT

During 2020, the CLS took part in a mock audit conducted by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). The exercise allowed the CLS to reflect critically upon its capacity and performance. The CLS performed well and a few areas for improvement were highlighted. In turn, the exercise benefitted the QAC with its preparations for the UM's next external audit exercise. The exercise was concluded in 2021.

9.11 ATTENDANCE AND CONTRIBUTION TO OTHER INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

During 2019, Dr Luke Fiorini participated in two meetings organised by the European Trade Union Institute's Worker Participation Europe network (ETUI WPE) in Lodz, Poland (28-29 March, 2019) and in Brussels, Belgium (24-25, September 2019). During the same year he also attended, along with Ms Christine Farrugia, the Network of Eurofound Correspondents (NEC) Annual Meeting held in Dublin, Ireland (3-4 April, 2019). Dr Fiorini also attended the International A+A Congress for Occupational Safety and Health, as well as the European Network Education and Training in Occupational Safety and Health (ENETOSH) Network Meeting which both took place in Dusseldorf, Germany (7-8 November, 2019).

Dr Anna Borg attended a meeting in London to prepare for the Community, Work and Family International Conference (20-22 February, 2019). She also attended the European Social Policy Network meeting for national experts in Belgium (24 -26th March, 2019), and travelled with CLS students to Brussels to attend the Europe Social Days event (31 March to 4 April). Dr Borg also attended the doctoral viva of Ólöf Júlíusdóttir Olof in Iceland (16 August, 2019).

In April 2019, Dr Manwel Debono together with Professor Ronald G. Sultana (Faculty of Education) were guest keynote speakers at a conference and training workshop on career guidance organised by the German development agency GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) in collaboration with Helwan University in Cairo, Egypt. The activities focused

on North-South collaboration and knowledge sharing on career guidance and youth transitions in Egypt and the MENA region.

During January 2020, Dr Fiorini attended an ETUI meeting in Brussels, Belgium which aimed to lay the groundwork for an ETUI publication on trade unions in Europe; the book will contain a chapter on Malta, authored by Dr Manwel Debono and Dr Luke Fiorini. In February 2020, Dr Anna Borg attended a meeting in Bratislava on Gender Budgeting (3-5 February, 2020). International conferences were hampered in 2020 with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some meetings however went digital and later in 2020, Dr Fiorini also attended ETUI WPE network meetings which took place remotely.



9.12 QUALITY OF CLS' EUROFOUND WORK RECOGNISED DURING AUDIT

The Centre for Labour Studies (CLS) is Malta's contact centre for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. The Foundation is a tripartite European Union Agency, whose role is to provide information, advice and expertise on working conditions and sustainable work, industrial relations, labour market change, quality of life, and public services. It supports the EU institutions and bodies, member states and social partners in shaping and implementing social and employment policies, as well as promoting social dialogue on the basis of comparative information, research and analysis.

The CLS has been contributing research and reports to the Foundation since 2003, by winning five back-to-back contracts. The sterling work of the CLS has been recently recognised in a quality audit exercise in which the Centre received the third highest rating of all EU-28 countries plus Norway. The audit

investigated content quality, balance in reporting, style and presentation, command of English, and timeliness of delivery. The work of the CLS is promoted internationally through the Foundation's website



9.13 VISIT BY BACHELOR IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY (HONS) STUDENTS TO PALUMBO SHIPYARDS AS WELL AS OTHER ORGANISATIONS.

The Bachelor in Occupational Health and Safety (Hons) students visited the Palumbo Superyacht Facility in Cottonera on Saturday morning, December 5th 2020. This was part of their introductory study-unit dealing with work, safety, health and the business environment.

Guiding the students were Ing. Simon Zammit, Manager at the Facility, Mr Mark Grech Safety Manager at Palumbo Shipyard, and Professor Godfrey Baldacchino, who taught this study unit.



The photo was taken on the dock gate to Dock No. 3: the site of the tragic gas explosion of the Libyan tanker Um el Faroud on 3 February 1995, when nine

Malta Drydocks workers died. Prof. Baldacchino and Ing. Zammit are first and second from left in the photo respectively. (Photo taken with permission by Mark Grech.)

As part of their course, various cohorts of the Bachelor in Occupational Health and Safety carried out site visits. Other visits included to those to De La Rue, Crane Currency and Trident (image below).



Financial Statements (2019 – 2020)

GENERAL EXPENSES

10.1 GENERAL EXPENSES CLSSUPP-01

	Year 2019	Year 2020
Salaries Academic Staff	€153,352.02	€163,912.41
Salaries Support Staff	€60,980.96	€63,038.04
Operational Expenses	€2,197.69	€2,071.41
Total	€216,530.67	€229,021.86

Breakdown of Operational Expenses	Year 2019	Year 2020
Advertising	-	-
Books	€210.00	-
Computer Accessories	€139.00	€57.03
Computer Equipment	-	-
Course Other Expenses	€5.00	-
Fixed Assets Control Account	-	€647.86
General Expenses	€549.11	€202.75
Hospitality	€54.00	€121.25
Internal Ordering - Communications Office - Stationery	-	€27.20
Internal Ordering - IT Services - Sale of Software	€120.00	€60.00
Internal Ordering - Printing Unit - Envelopes	-	-
Internal Ordering - Printing Unit - Paper	€280.00	-
Internal Ordering - Printing Unit - Printing Services	€37.50	€117.00
Library Books	-	-
Meeting Catering	-	-
Other Equipment - Non Fixed Asset	-	€17.99
Other Professional Fees	€47.20	-

Postage	-	-
Printing	-	€640.00
Stationery	€667.38	€180.33
Subscriptions	-	-
Support Overtime	-	-
Transport	€88.50	-
Total	€2,197.69	€2,071.41

10.2 EXTERNAL EXPENSES

External Expenses

Breakdown of External Expenditure	Year 2019	Year 2020
Advertising	€562.86	-
Computer Upgrades	-	€502.50
Deferred Government Recurrent Income	-	€706.82
Departmental Funds	€3,091.70	€706.82
Employee Travel	€181.21	-
Fixed Assets Control Account	€174.64	€883.81
Fixtures and Fittings - Non Fixed Asset	€354.00	-
Hospitality	€897.01	€240.75
Internal - Sale of Software	-	€70.00
Meeting Catering	€230.00	-
Other Professional Fees	€6,750.00	€708.00
Patents and Trademarks	€13,500.00	-
Printing	€5,955.44	-
Research Funds	€365.00	-
Subcontracting	-	€13,450.00
Third Party Accommodation	€700.50	-
	€25,848.96	€15,855.06

10.3 EUROFOUND CONTRACT

FUND (88-207) E10LE12-01

	Year 2019	Year 2020
Income	€36,752.49	€39,046.26
Expenditure	Year 2019	Year 2020
Support Basic Salary	€16,415.00	€16,130.00
Support Others (Extra/Occasional Salaries)	€6,973.48	€11,161.74
Professional Fees	€118.00	€47.30
Travel	€495.30	-
Remaining Total	€12,255.41	€11,707.32



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