



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty for Social Wellbeing

Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024
Faculty for Social Wellbeing

Our Mission

Promoting social wellbeing across society through knowledge and action, together with our stakeholders and service users.

Our Values and Vision

Our Faculty aims to promote wellbeing across society. We are committed to pursuing and promoting scholarship that responds to social trends and knowledge gaps. In doing so, we partner with stakeholders while privileging the voice of service users. Our Faculty is a catalyst for public debate, informing policy and service development. We give priority to engaging students and to building their capacity for reflexivity and critical thinking.

Our vision is based on a commitment to the following core values: honesty, respect, democracy, solidarity and sustainability. For the Faculty, honesty implies personal and professional integrity. Respect signifies our commitment to human dignity, to fostering mutual trust, to the free exchange of ideas and to the principle of user involvement in our work. We uphold democracy as a fundamental value, affirming human and civil rights and freedoms, participation, and collective and individual responsibility for the common good. Through the value of solidarity, we recognise our interdependence and the importance of cooperation in the pursuit of social justice for all. The Faculty is also committed to advancing sustainability for the benefit of current and future generations.

Priorities

We have adopted four key priorities, which will guide the work of our Departments over the next three years.

Priority 1: To ensure the quality of our teaching

The Faculty offers a broad range of programmes through its Departments. It has the privilege of contributing to Malta's social development by offering its students a formative experience, and the knowledge, skills and values that will render them professional in their respective fields. To do so, we recognise the need to ensure that our evidence-informed teaching. Moreover, academics will strive to master the use of technology to guarantee the highest education standards in the current covid-19 situation. The Faculty is working at systematically increasing the input of service users in the online planning, design, delivery and content of all its programmes.

Priority 2: To increase our published research

Our Faculty is committed to reading and responding to the signs of the times. In order to inform policy and practice, we need to increase the number and range of our peer-reviewed and edited publications and text books. In doing so, the Faculty encourages and supports collaboration across departments and Faculties and will facilitate this collaboration through various initiatives. Staying in touch with the grassroots, especially with stakeholders and service users, will enable us to ensure that our research is relevant and timely. In addition, the Faculty encourages students' publications, especially at a Master and PhD level.

Priority 3: To promote an inclusive and collegial Faculty which promotes the wellbeing of all staff

Despite the current challenges, the Faculty will strive to keep connected with all members of staff. One such way of doing this is maximizing the use of technology to keep connected and finding alternative ways of being present. We will work to ensure that all staff; academics, RSOs and administrative teams, are happy within the Faculty and proud of their work. Greater openness in the composition of our working committees and boards, reflecting greater gender balance, will allow us to maximise the contributions of our staff and will ensure an equitable spread of administrative work. A sustained media presence, as well as online events (webinars) which showcase academic achievements and social engagement, will further contribute to the consolidation of our Faculty identity. A new Faculty building will also facilitate intra-Faculty synergy.

Priority 4: To promote the wellbeing of students

One of the Faculty's foremost commitments will be to continue to ensure the overall wellbeing of all students. We will continue to support and mentor our students throughout their academic journey. To do so, a variety of health and counselling services are being offered (without payment) to all those who need such support.

Priority 5: Supervision offered to students

Our Faculty will ensure the highest possible levels of supervision to students, especially to all the part timers. In this regard, various training sessions will be held to supervisors about research techniques,

including theoretical and methodological preparation and guidance on the general structure of a dissertation.

Strategies

1. Education

1.1 *Strengthen our Common Degree/s*

The B.A. (Hons) in Social Wellbeing Studies, launched in 2015, is the Faculty's common undergraduate degree. This degree which allows students to choose those study units that are closest to their academic interests and career plans, alongside a number of compulsory core units, will be reviewed in this timespan. Graduates are then able to pursue post-graduate studies in the vast majority of our Departments. Whilst seeking to increase our student cohort by 25% over this period, the Faculty aims to continue investing in social wellbeing studies and an intensive summer school/master classes in this area will be proposed.

In October 2020, an intra-Faculty undergrad was launched. This B.A. combines two programmes of studies from 2 different departments. Various combinations will be available in the next academic years. This undergrad allows students to have a grounding in 2 areas that intersect and can serve as a base for a postgraduate degree or for a professional career in the chosen areas.

1.2 *Improving our teaching skills*

All staff are to be encouraged and supported to continuously improve their pedagogical and lecturing skills. The in-service training offered by the University of Malta, on Designing, Delivering and Evaluating Online Study-Units is recommended.

1.3 *Ensuring high-quality supervision*

The process of writing a dissertation under supervision is one of the students' most important experiences at University. We recognise that it is a privilege and a responsibility to be part of students' development in this way. Continuing professional development for supervisors will be organised.

1.4 *Developing excellence in research*

The Faculty encompasses a wide range of research expertise. The establishment of a post-graduate level research methods study unit consolidated resources and expertise in the area. The sharing of methodological expertise will be systematically encouraged. The Research Scholarship Committee consistently holds various activities that foster the culture for research, publications and scholarship.

1.5 *Making the most of technology*

The Faculty requires its members to make the best possible use of the technology available, together with the Virtual Learning Environment. The development of e-learning within our Faculty will be actively pursued, including online courses.

1.6 *Increasing accessibility*

Our Faculty is firmly committed to rendering the University of Malta an inclusive environment. We will seek to offer and mobilise particular support for those students and staff who need it to ensure that they meet the required academic and professional standards. Moreover, the Faculty adheres to the [guidelines regarding the use of inclusive language](#) known as *Good Practice in Inclusive Language*. The Faculty's and Departmental websites will also be improved and will be updated regularly to increase access to information.

1.7 *Towards more critical thinking*

A Dean's Forum was set up to serve as the intra-Faculty debating society. Each year, topical themes are chosen by students and a debating society is held. This helps to encourage critical thinking and cross-disciplinary collaboration encouraging students to take a leading role.

A further under-graduate study unit that deals with minority issues will be developed for all students.

1.8 *Showcasing students' achievements*

The Faculty hosts a number of research symposia on a variety of topical themes, such as the LGBTIQ Research Symposium. Research findings are presented by students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, alumni and other researchers. The Faculty further commits to creating events that showcase the research of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The Dean's Award ceremony is an annual event established in 2015. The Dean's Award branches into Social Commitment Award and the Social Engagement Award. Another two awards are the Christa Formosa Alfred Miss Foundation Award and the Special Award sponsored by the Ministry of Gozo.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students who have been listed for excellent attainment in their studies are put on the Dean's List and receive an award during the Dean's Award ceremony.

1.10 *Promoting the wellbeing of students*

The Faculty strongly encourages a systematic programme of Academic Mentors in each department to serve undergraduate students. Academic Mentors support the academic development of the student, serving as their main contact on academic affairs and supporting them to reflect on their skills and experience. Academic Mentors listen to students, provide encouragement and support, and refer students for further assistance where required. A mindfulness programme has been made available for students and staff as well as a programme in pet support for students during the weeks preceding the exam period would be considered. Training in public speaking and direct-action skills will also be offered to students and the setting up of a student Faculty Federation is imminent.

The relationship with student organisations, including KSU will be strengthened, whilst creating opportunities for students to engage in intra-Faculty dialogue. The Faculty also aims to make Freshers feel welcome; to support and celebrate students; and to give graduands a merited farewell.

2. **Research**

2.1 Recruiting and supporting M.Phil / Ph.D. candidates

We will continue to encourage the pursuit of doctoral studies within our Faculty, aiming to double the number of candidates and introducing a number of PhD scholarships during this period. The Faculty commits itself to ensure that all proposals are responded to in a timely manner without sacrificing the diligence required in reviewing such proposals. Furthermore, work in progress seminar for MPhil/PhD candidates will be organised as well as an MPhil/PhD candidates' writing retreat.

2.2 Increasing funds for research

The Faculty will increase its memoranda of understanding with potential partners to help increase resources available for research. These will include both statutory authorities as well as private sector operators. International and EU research funding will also be sought. A grant will also be introduced for student/s willing to develop a research project outside their studies.

2.3 Strengthening our research agenda

Through the wide-ranging mapping of our research areas and identification of research gaps, a database will be developed on those areas of research that require further study, and the possible resources that can be drawn upon for this purpose. It will bring together research interests brought to the Faculty's attention by various stakeholders. The database may also serve to inspire students at all levels who are seeking relevant topics for their research. It may also foster collaborative research across Departments.

By showcasing research conducted, the Faculty Research Magazine and the Faculty Journal further contribute to the strengthening of the Faculty's research agenda.

2.4 Sharing our competencies

Our Faculty boasts of a very broad range of expertise and experience, and various initiatives are underway to facilitate further collaboration, such as the *societas.expert*, Professorial Lecture Series. The Faculty Seminar, the newsletter *Connect* and the weekly *Digest* as well as the Vlogs are amongst these initiatives. In addition, we will develop a database of areas of competence to maximise synergy among staff. This initiative will include resident full- and part-timers, casuals and visiting lecturers.

2.5 A Research Academic post

The University's Collective Agreement provides for the possibility of recruiting Research Fellows or Research Associates. With input from all Departments, we will draw up a request once again for at least one Research Academic, who will support data-driven research and thus help strengthen our social wellbeing research portfolio. Furthermore, the support of academics by Research Support Officers will keep on increasing.

2.6 *Increasing our publications*

All academic members of staff are to be encouraged to increase their submissions to peer-reviewed journals, including writing summaries and reviews of published papers and text books. Further, members of staff are encouraged to develop publications that contribute to knowledge in our respective areas and that may serve as set texts for our students whilst engaging in international research collaborations. The Faculty, through its Research, Publications and Scholarship Committee shall launch the online journal to create a platform for Faculty research.

2.7 *Support for Research Ethics*

Our Faculty Research Ethics Committee merits gratitude and support for their contribution to the quality of research in our Faculty. FREC will receive further administrative support and will be assisted to develop ethics guidelines for all supervisors within our Faculty to ensure a common standard is upheld and to avoid repeated resubmission for ethical clearance. An information session for external supervisors will be planned.

2.8 *Improving our international collaborations*

We will create a database which allows us to share our international contacts, with a view to making best use of international links.

2.9 *Sharing our research outputs*

While the Brown Bag seminars organised by the *Research, Publications and Scholarship Committee* have proven highly successful, a Faculty library showcasing publications of the Faculty's academics, will further highlight our research outputs. As already noted, the Faculty will also organise a Research Festival once a year, allowing students to showcase high-quality research. Similar to the staff seminars, the Research Festival will also be broadcast on Campus FM radio and Facebook Live, with a view to sharing our knowledge with the community.

3. **Community Engagement**

3.1 *Raising our profile and presence*

The Faculty needs to be at the forefront of the national social agenda. Good quality media products are an important part of raising our Faculty's profile. The Dean's Office is responsible for public relations, to promote the work of lecturers and the Faculty's image, and to promote courses for the

subsequent year. Students will be encouraged to be part of this marketing campaign. This office will also organise book launches, round-table conferences, workshops and other public events.

The Faculty video that was designed for *Discover University*, and other audio-visual promotions of each Department's work, will be improved every year and circulated more widely. Other products will also be developed, including leaflets, pop-ups and other publicity material. Furthermore, the Faculty's presence in the local media continues to be strengthened by reacting to social issues expediently through press releases, position papers and opinion pieces. All Departments have developed and will keep updating their Facebook pages. The Faculty will strengthen its Socials and regularly update its website page.

3.2 *Keeping contact with the grassroots*

The Faculty has set up a Stakeholders' Forum made up of current or past service users. An annual Stakeholders' Meeting will be held, where we listen to policy makers' and service providers' opinions on social issues and trends, with a clear commitment to remain grounded and in touch with social realities in real time. Furthermore, a national social welfare conference after a wide-ranging consultation process with students, staff and stakeholders will take place.

A programme of collaboration with the Cottonera Resource Centre and the Fawwara Centre will be implemented to ensure ongoing community engagement. Faculty Board will also consult service users in the design and improvement of our programmes and study units. The Faculty will also develop targeted national campaigns, involving stakeholders such as Agenzija Zaghzagħ, the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability and Agenzija Support amongst others, that will address minority issues and will organise events that will encourage our students to develop a stronger sense of activism.

3.3 *Taking our research back to the community*

Our Faculty will increasingly democratise our knowledge and will enable research to be taken into the community and to inform practice. The Faculty will reach out to NGO networks and offer to present research that may be of interest to them. Models of practice as witnessed in the *Cottonera Resource Centre* and the *Centre for Resilience and Socio-Economic Health* are structures of democratised knowledge. Participatory action research projects that involve members of the community as co-researchers should also be fostered. An annual conference that deals with a Faculty agreed theme will be held with this aim. The CPD accredited courses to private and government entities will be increased.

3.4 *Celebrating social engagement*

The Dean's Awards Ceremony for outstanding academic achievement, and social commitment, will continue and will also become an occasion to celebrate the talents of our staff and students through their art, music and literary abilities. An award has been introduced in honour of our late colleague Dr Jacqueline Azzopardi, to recognise individuals who champion a social issue at national level.

3.5 *Keeping in touch with our alumni*

One way in which community engagement may be strengthened is by keeping in touch with our alumni. We will invite them to engage with us from their respective professional settings. Once a year, an event will be held that allows them to showcase and share their professional growth and the community needs and issues that they perceive to warrant attention. Efforts will be made to include as many alumni as possible, including through the use of group activities *such as an alumni forum*.

3.6 *Recognising community engagement*

We will continue to push for University recognition of the vast community engagement work undertaken by our staff, which work is so central to the mission of our Faculty. Such recognition of community engagement work, should be given greater consideration for academic promotions.

3.7 Greening the faculty

The Faculty also engages with environmental issues thus making the Faculty more environmentally friendly and greener. Activities such as Graduands go Green will continue to highlight the Faculty's commitment to the environmental cause.

4. **Administration**

4.1 *A robust Dean's Office*

The Dean's Office is central to the coordination and development of the Faculty. The Dean has appointed two delegates to facilitate working relationships, lobby and negotiate in the best interest of our Faculty.

4.2 *A new building for the Faculty*

An overwhelming majority of Faculty members believe that we need a building of our own, to help foster our distinct identity and to improve synergy between our departments and disciplines

In anticipation of the move to a new Faculty building, the first history of the Faculty, based on narratives, facts and anecdotes as a development from the Faculty Video Biography will be published.

4.3 *Bringing our Heads together*

While each Department has its own priorities, we will work to increase synergy between departments and their members, creating an internal debate to look at the interface in our disciplines. The Faculty will continue to foster opportunities where Departments work together, for example when negotiating practical placements and Erasmus programmes. To this end, all Heads of Department, as well as the Faculty Officer will continue to meet regularly prior to Faculty Boards, to shape the agenda and discuss students' requests among others. Inter-Faculty meetings will be pursued to continue to improve our relationship and draw from each other's expertise and possibly develop tangible collaborations.

4.4 *Making best use of Faculty Board*

Efforts will be made to free up the Faculty Board to focus more on policy and strategy. Heads of Department continue to ensure that all administrative work in preparation for Faculty Board is submitted in a timely manner. The Faculty Board agenda will continue to be circulated amongst all members of staff to allow for their feedback and recommendations, allowing for greater openness and inclusion.

4.5 Making best use of Committees

The Faculty commits to rationalising and consolidating the Faculty Committees. Guidelines for the appointment of statutory and non-statutory committee members will continue to be drawn up, to include both full- and part-timers. These guidelines will help ensure that a gender balanced representation is based on interest and expertise, and that the administrative burden is spread as equally as possible. The opportunity to contribute to Committees should be open to all, and committee membership should be on a rotating basis.

4.6 Developing our performance

Departments will continue to submit their Annual Reports in a timely manner, outlining their various teaching and research outputs in the preceding year. In addition, Departments will ensure that due consideration is given to student feedback.

Administrative staff will be encouraged to increase attendance to training programmes.

5. Staff Wellbeing

5.1 Monitoring staff satisfaction

Every academic year, a questionnaire will continue be circulated to all academic, RSOs and administrative staff to gauge the general mood and to understand how effective The Dean's Office and the Faculty operations are perceived to be. Results will be made available they already are – at fb and in the public domain and necessary actions will be taken accordingly.

5.2 Strengthening our Faculty Seminars

Our annual Faculty Seminar will continue to take place and will include all members of the Faculty, that is, full- and part-time, visiting lecturers and administrative staff. Furthermore, Academic Fora will take place on an ongoing basis.

5.3 Coming together more often

We will furnish our common room with a library that will house our publications. We will also earmark a given time every month where staff can meet informally in the common room.

5.4 Creating an app to connect

Our Faculty will seek to develop an app for all Faculty staff that is accessible on smartphones and tablets. This app will contain a broad range of information, including the location of all University facilities, contact details for all staff, lecturers' profiles, administrative and regulatory information and staff publications among others.

5.5 Staff support

Departments will be expected to continue to prioritise the wellbeing of staff at all levels, including through the introduction of a mindfulness programme. The Dean will continue to meet with each department and will staff members, including visiting staff and casual lectures.

A working group made up of senior professors to mentor junior staff on how to prepare towards applying for professorships has already been set up.

Conclusion

The work of this faculty is based on its core values. Honesty, respect, democracy, solidarity and sustainability are amongst these values. While democracy, human and civil rights and freedoms will always be values our faculty upholds.

Ultimately, the Faculty for Social Wellbeing aims to promote wellbeing across society. In doing so it pursues and promotes scholarship that responds to social trends as well as knowledge. As it does this, it keeps stakeholders and service users as partners, it engages in public debate, whilst informing policy and service development. The Faculty for Social Wellbeing will work to maintain its strong foundations and strategic pillars. The quality of our teaching and supervision, our engagement with research and the community, as well as the wellbeing of staff and students are thus central to our faculty.