

Impact of COVID-19 on MCAST Gozo Campus's courses provision and operations

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The impact of online lectures for MCAST lecturing staff and students

- ▶ Closure of educational established brought in a new reality for MCAST staff and students
- ▶ The switch to online teaching and learning involved a learning curve for all parties involved
- ▶ Although challenging for many, after an initial period of adaptation (circa two weeks on average, even less for some lecturers/student groups), we adapted to this new reality
- ▶ The use of online platforms at MCAST did not start with the COVID-19 closure. Systems such as Moodle, Unichack, etc have been an integral part of our operations for years.
- ▶ The substantial progress that had been achieved by the Gozo Campus in the changeover to the new MIS system actually facilitated matters in relation to online assessment-handling which became a necessity with the closure.
- ▶ MCAST is effectively moving towards a paperless approach at a much faster rate than originally envisaged. Assignments are being developed, verified (moderated), issued to students, submitted by students to the assessor and corrected digitally.
- ▶ When this is not possible (physical projects, bulky placement files, etc), alternative methods for the submission and correction of work have been and are being made

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IT Support for Staff and Students

These positive achievements would not have been possible without a considerable amount of IT support which needs to be highlighted:

- ▶ Provision of support to both lecturing staff as well as students for the use of online platforms, emails, the new MCAST MIS (Classter) through:
 - ▶ Provision of detailed online guidelines, videos and FAQs
 - ▶ Direct support from our IT personnel for technical and access problems issues
- ▶ Secure remote access to MCAST computers in cases where staff and students need to use software packages which cannot be installed at home due to licencing issues

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Student Support Measures

- ▶ Continuous monitoring of '*silent*' students, through the effective deployment of support staff particularly for students in lower-level programmes, which are more prone to quitting their studies
- ▶ Contact with students made through all possible means – electronic messaging on the new college MIS (Classter), email, bulk-smses, individual telephone calls, etc
- ▶ Loaning of computers and equipment to students in need
- ▶ Provision of ongoing support by student mentors and student support coordinator
- ▶ Counsellors' support is still ongoing, using various modes, including videoconferencing to assist the clients.

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Student Attendance

- ▶ Overall student attendance has not been severely impacted
- ▶ Similar attendance trends for the same students before and after the start of the schools shutdown
- ▶ At the lower levels, this has partially been possible through the level of student monitoring and incessant communication with students
- ▶ After the schools shutdown, the absenteeism of students with a history of high absenteeism in the previous months became more accentuated.
- ▶ However, student dropout rate is in line with past years' levels. At the Gozo Campus, student retention rates have been quite high over the last years.
- ▶ For some student groups, we have even registered an improvement in student attendance.

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Student Assessment

- ▶ In some instances/units, assessment modes have been reconsidered – Some assessments originally intended as written Time-constrained Assignments (TCAs) have been redesigned and issued as home assignments
- ▶ A number of Time-constrained Assignments (TCAs) have been / will be administered online through the moodle platform
- ▶ Some assessment deadlines have been reviewed, especially during the initial stages of the COVID-19 schools shutdown which was a period of adaptation for everyone. Assessments in the form of presentations, follow-up interviews (vivas) and similar are being held online and both the assessor and the internal verifier (second assessor) are normally present.
- ▶ Access arrangement provisions are being retained in online assessment.
- ▶ The assessment of practical components is postponed to September 2020 or the earliest possible period:
 - ▶ For missed vocational placements in health, social care, childcare as well as in school settings, this does not depend exclusively on MCAST.
 - ▶ For missed laboratory/workshop practical sessions, these are currently planned to be held in September.
- ▶ The only examinations – which are Computer-Based Examinations anyway, but usually held at MCAST as an accredited examinations centre – are those pertaining to AAT and ACCA. These have been suspended until further notice. Both AAT and ACCA are envisaged to launch a system of 'remote invigilation', enabling candidates to sit for examinations remotely.

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Work-based learning components (apprenticeships, placements, etc)

- ▶ Apprenticeships and placements were suspended concurrently with the announcement of the schools' shutdown
- ▶ Apprenticeships are resuming from week starting 25 May 2020
- ▶ The minimum apprenticeship % attendance is being retained but this will be calculated as a relative percentage based on the actual hours of apprenticeship that is applicable after taking into consideration this suspension period.
- ▶ Vocational placements are still on hold. The resumption of placements will depend on the nature of the vocational sector and this is not completely within MCAST's controls (placement in health settings, elderly homes, childcare settings, school settings etc)

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Closure of current academic year

- ▶ The current academic year will end as scheduled on 10th July 2020 for the majority of the study programmes
- ▶ Most academic programmes will be finalised with all assessments and synoptics (resits) completed in line with the original academic calendar timeframes.
- ▶ The only programmes that will not be finalised are those involving practical components which cannot be carried out in the current circumstances.
- ▶ Partial unit (subject) results are already accessible to students through the new MCAST MIS system
- ▶ Their full results will be accessible to them on the MIS system at the end of the academic year and/or (where possible) end October 2020 (in case of practical components which cannot be completed by July)

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Students' continuation of studies and new applicants

- ▶ The requirements of existing students' progression from one year or level to another have been marginally relaxed to enable students to continue their studies in 20-21.
- ▶ This is a one-time concession given under clear terms and conditions
- ▶ MCAST will be maintaining the quality standards for its programmes at all levels
- ▶ Due to COVID-19, entry requirements for level 4 and higher programmes have been reviewed so that, in line with the general stand that will be taken by all post-secondary and tertiary institutions, students who do not possess the full entry requirements for these levels will be taken on as *provisional* students under established conditions.
- ▶ For new student registrations, applications will be accepted online through the MCAST MIS, same as in July 2019.
- ▶ MCAST is currently considering support measures for prospective applicants who will encounter difficulties in applying online
- ▶ Career guidance services are ongoing and are currently being provided through telephone and videoconferencing, by the Gozo Campus Student Support Services Coordinator.

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Planning for our return to (the new) normality

- ▶ The new academic year 2020-2021 is planned to start on Monday 19th October.
- ▶ MCAST is currently submitting detailed information and feedback to MEDE for the formulation of the framework for the reopening of educational institutions under different scenarios, including:
 1. A conditional re-opening as originally planned but in phases
 2. Reopening as originally planned (academic year starting on 19 Oct 2020)
 3. Reopening in Q1 2021 or later

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Considerations in MCAST's Contingency Planning

- ▶ Key elements being considered are:
 1. Safe Operations (including well-being and protection)
 2. Capacity building (including staff CPD and re-training)
 3. Measures needed to ensure **Quality Learning** (irrespective of mode – remote, blended, practical, lecture room learning)
 4. Inclusive and Equitable learning (learning material, platforms, information, support, methods of learning, modes of assessment)
 5. Financing
- ▶ Contingency planning is ultimately dependent on the evolving circumstances and in conformity with directions issued by government and health authorities

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Thank you

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