

Editorial: The University Gozo Campus – Thirty Years On

Almost thirty years ago, in August 1992, I was asked by the University of Malta to coordinate courses which could be offered in Gozo. Later I learned that Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, then University Rector, was being very actively prodded by Mr Anton Tabone, then Minister for Gozo, to open a University branch in Gozo. At first I was inclined to refuse the offer. I was sure that very few lecturers – if any – would want to offer their services in Gozo, given the time and discomfort involved in travelling to and from the Island. Relying on Gozitan lecturers was not an option, since there were very few of them and in any case, most of them worked in Malta. Finding a solution to this problem was a major challenge.

The solution turned out to be a very simple one. We decided to hold the lecture sessions on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. This arrangement worked, because it did not unduly disrupt the work schedules of the lecturers involved. Additionally, this permitted them to combine work with leisure. Crossing over to Gozo every weekend or every other weekend still involved discomfort for the lecturers, especially due to the fact that a two-hour lecture required about four hours travelling and, as often as not, a long wait at the Ċirkewwa Quay on Friday afternoons. This, not to mention the frequent inclement weather during the winter months. The response of the lecturers was however satisfactory, and the first BA course commenced in February 1993.

The Gozo Campus story would not even have been conceived had it not been for the initiative taken by the Hon. Anton Tabone who had a vision which he wanted to put into practice. Professor Roger Ellul Micallef, Professor Juanito Camilleri and Professor Alfred Vella, who succeed Professor Serracino Inglott as University rectors, continued to extend excellent support to the Gozo Campus. We also found very useful support from the Ministry for Gozo.

I served as Director of the Campus between 1992 and 2002, and was succeeded by Professor Joe Friggieri (as Pro-rector for Gozo) and Professor Louis F. Cassar as well as Professor Philip Von Brockdorff

(as Rector's delegates), the three of whom continued building on and improved the work I had started. The lecturers who accepted the Gozo assignment also played a major role in the success story of the Gozo Campus. It goes without saying that without them, classes would not have been held, and the whole project would have floundered.

During its 29 years of existence, the Gozo Campus has seen many things happening there. Students have got married during their studies, others have had babies (one student had two). Many found their partners in marriage at the campus. The campus has experienced sad events, in particular when a death of a former student or lecturer was announced. It also had joyous events, especially when students graduated. We have seen students on the verge of desperation on learning that they failed a study unit and others in a state of jubilation after getting an A, especially when they expected a lower grade.

The Gozo Campus has helped hundreds of Gozitan students to graduate from a tertiary institution, thereby offering the much needed services for the promotion of higher education in Gozo. Most students at the UGC are mature students with a full-time job, and they would not have found it possible to travel to Malta to attend part-time courses.

I am of the opinion, that the campus has done much more than was expected of it. Many would have thought that the campus would just offer a few evening lectures, with some possibly leading to a certificate or a diploma. In reality the campus has done much more than that. Many degree courses have been offered in Gozo, including post-graduate ones.

The campus also involves itself in publications. Its publications include *The Gozo Observer*, issued twice yearly, and a number of books. The campus has proved itself capable of offering University courses in Gozo. It also has potential as a regional, national and even international conference centre, given that a well-equipped conference hall is in the offing.

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