



FACULTY FOR SOCIAL WELLBEING

STRATEGIC PLAN 2018 – 2020

...scholarship of service by which I mean the direct involvement of the academic with the life of the working community and that of the general community in outreach activities.'

Prof. Alfred Vella, Rector, Installation speech, 30/6/2016

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PREFACE: DEAN

This first ever Strategic Plan is another loop that will ensure our Faculty has a clear direction where it is heading. The principles and values that guide this document are embodied in what Slavoj Zizek refers to as; *'universities [that] should serve real people's needs'*. On the other hand, Zizek also states that we shouldn't *'[turn] Universities into factories producing experts and expert knowledge'*. I am comforted in knowing that the all in this Faculty believe in these principles. Zizek continues to argue that, *'We should be doing stuff that we might not know what it will serve for'*, referring to the intrinsic values of academia, namely those of liberty, freedom, and autonomy.

A Strategy is there to provide direction but our Faculty cannot just be solely focussed on achieving targets and KPIs as if life just depends on that. The *Alma mater*, this *'nourishing and kind mother of ours'*, is much more. As public intellectuals, the impact we have on our communities through our respective disciplines is second to none. We are indeed embedded in the transformations that are happening around us and what need to drive our passion are ideas. The success factors are equally shaped by the academic prowess of our graduates, the force of destiny and their involvement with the people. This is a Faculty founded by the differences that bring us together, a Faculty rooted in generosity, commitment to the community and scholarship.

I am comforted knowing that beyond what we believe and notwithstanding our own personal value scales we come together to make it *better for others*. Finally, this Strategy will only make sense if our focus remains the *'common good'*.

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi

Dean

INTRODUCTION: DEPUTY DEAN

The Strategic Plan 2018-2020 was drafted by a team of academics from various departments within the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, namely Dr Sue Vella, Dr Albert Bell, Dr Janice Formosa, Dr Claire Azzopardi Lane, Dr Jeannie Wright, Prof. Andrew Azzopardi, myself and supported by Ms Charlene Fabri, the Secretary to the Board. The board drafted the strategic plan on the basis of a 'triangulation' of sources - 1) Prof Andrew Azzopardi's mission statement (2016) which, in turn emerged from data collected from 85 academics, the full body of administrative staff, all student representatives and 30 representatives from institutions (stakeholders from the social field). 2) A consultation with Pro-Rector Prof. Sammut Bonnici and 3) Adherence to the Rector's vision.

Our mission statement articulates the principal aim of the Faculty, namely promoting social wellbeing across society through knowledge and action, together with our stakeholders and service users. The vision of our Faculty emerges from deep commitment to 4 core values: Respect, which subsumes human dignity and user-involvement; 'Democracy' and the upholding of human rights; 'Solidarity', with a focus on interdependence and social justice; and 'Sustainability'. The strategy targets the following domains: Education, with a focus on improving the quality of teaching; Research, and increased priority to the increase of evidence-based publications; creating an inclusive environment that fosters staff wellbeing and upholds student well-being by means of support and mentorship; Community Engagement by means of continuing to hold annual stakeholders' meetings with an aim of incorporating feedback from stakeholders into our programmes in order to better respond to social needs.

Given that the Faculty for Social Wellbeing has been, for the last 6 years, since its inception, establishing its identity, it is now in a position to devote itself to 'generativity endeavours'. This ethos prioritizes the mentorship of students and aims to foster stronger links with the community. This is in-line with current frameworks and movements that seek to promote service-user and stakeholder involvement.

Dr Greta Darmanin Kissaun
Deputy Dean/Chair, Faculty Strategy Committee

FACULTY STRATEGY SUB-COMMITTEE

Dr Greta Darmanin Kissaun, Chairperson

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi, Member

Dr Claire Azzopardi Lane, Member

Dr Albert Bell, Member

Dr Janice Formosa, Member

Dr Sue Vella, Member

Dr Jeannie Wright, Member

Ms Charlene Fabri, Secretary

A. OUR MISSION

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

B. 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 thought.

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.

C: 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 is of the very highest quality. In the three years to come, we will strive for excellence in our lecturing and supervision, and to listen closely to students' views of their experience in our Faculty. The Faculty will work at systematically increasing the input of service users in the 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 will strive to increase the input of service users in the planning, design, and execution of its research programmes.

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

Social wellbeing starts at home. We will work to ensure that all our staff, academic and administrative, are happy within the Faculty and proud of our work. Greater openness in the composition of our working committees 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

events which showcase academic achievements and social engagement, will further contribute to the consolidation of our Faculty identity. A new Faculty building, and improved use of our common room, 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.

D: STRATEGIES

1. Education

1.1 *Strengthen our Common Degree*

In October 2015, the Faculty's first common undergraduate degree was launched – the B.A. (Hons) in Social Wellbeing Studies. This degree allows students to choose those study units that are closest to their academic interests and career plans, alongside a number of compulsory core units. Graduates are then able to pursue post-graduate studies in the vast majority of our Departments. We need to actively promote this degree, while learning from current students as to how the programme may be strengthened.

1.2 *Improving our teaching skills*

All staff is to be encouraged and supported to continuously improve their teaching skills. To this end, and in addition to in-service training by the University, the Faculty will organise internal Continuing Professional Development sessions by staff for staff, to allow for the sharing of best teaching practices.

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 also be organised.

1.4 Developing excellence in research

The Faculty encompasses a wide range of research expertise. With the development of a post-graduate level research methods study unit, headway has already been made towards consolidating and rationalising resources and expertise in the area. The introduction of a common undergraduate social science research study unit will also be explored. The Faculty will set up an intra-Faculty research methodology cluster.

1.5 *Making the most of technology*

The Faculty encourages its members to make the best possible use of the technology at our disposal. Better use is to be made of 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.

1.7 *Towards a reflective Faculty*

Our Faculty will continue to create opportunities for reflection for staff members. These will be spaces where academics have the time and opportunity to reflect on their research interests and scholarly work.

1.8 *Towards more critical thinking*

A Dean's Forum will be set up to serve as the intra-Faculty debating society. Each year, a topical theme will be chosen by students and a formal debate will be held. This will help encourage critical thinking and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

1.9 *Showcasing students' achievements*

Once a year, our Faculty will host a Research Festival where students can present their work to a broader audience.

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, providing encouragement and support, and referring students for further assistance where required.

2. Research

2.1 *Recruiting more M.Phil / PhD candidates*

We will continue to encourage the pursuit of doctoral studies within our Faculty. 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.

2.2 *Increasing funds for research*

The Faculty will facilitate a number of 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.

2.3 *Strengthening our research agenda*

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.

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. 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 for at least one Research Academic, who will provide support to data-driven research and thus help strengthen our social wellbeing research portfolio.

2.6 *Increasing our publications*

All academic members of staff are to be encouraged to increase their submissions to peer-reviewed journals. 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. The Faculty, through its Research, Publications and Scholarship Committee shall launch an 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. The Faculty commits itself to identify and pursue new pathways for attracting international students and bolstering its links with universities and learning institutions abroad in an effort to strengthen both the Faculty's and the UM's internationalization.

2.9 *Sharing our research outputs*

The Brown Bag seminars organised by the *Research, Publications and Scholarship Committee* have proven highly successful. 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, 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. 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 will be strengthened through press releases, position papers and opinion pieces. All Departments have developed and will keep updating their Facebook pages. The Faculty will strengthen its Facebook page as well as Twitter account, YouTube Channel and a regularly updated website page.

3.2 *Keeping contact with the grassroots*

We will hold an annual Stakeholders' Meeting 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. Faculty Board will also consult service users in the design and improvement of our programmes and study units.

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 exemplary structures of democratised knowledge. Participatory action research projects that involve members of the community as co-researchers should also be fostered.

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 create a database that allows us to trace them in 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.

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. A proposal will be put forward to University authorities in time for the forthcoming Collective Agreement to allow for the formal recognition of such work.

4. Administration

4.1 *A robust Dean's Office*

The Dean's Office is central to the coordination and progress of the Faculty. The Dean may appoint a delegate/s should the need arise. This would be done 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. The Dean will continue to seek extensive consultation with all Faculty staff, before presenting the Faculty's proposals to Senate and the Rector.

4.3 *Bringing our Heads together*

While each Department has its own priorities, we will work to increase synergy between departments and their members. 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.

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 will ensure that all administrative work in preparation for Faculty Board is submitted in a timely manner. The Faculty Board agenda will be circulated amongst all members of staff to allow for their feedback and recommendations, allowing for greater openness and inclusion. A procedure

is to be developed which allows for academic members of staff who are not Faculty Board members to attend as observers.

4.5 Making best use of 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 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 Monitoring 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.

5. Staff Wellbeing

5.1 *Monitoring staff satisfaction*

Every academic year, a questionnaire will be circulated to all academic 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 and necessary actions will be taken accordingly.

5.2 *Strengthening our Faculty Seminars*

Our annual Faculty Seminar will continue to take place in the second semester, 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.

CONTACT DETAILS

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