

GRID FOR A STRATEGY

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

1 VISION

- Analytical dimension: challenges, identification of drivers of change

These last ten years have witnessed a constant increase in the student population of the University of Malta, the only public university on the island, particularly in the number of students engaged in part-time, post-graduate studies. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that the country has reached a stage where a Bachelor degree is perceived by many as insufficient in the context of a highly competitive society and economy. The most important employers in the country are also pegging specialised courses and postgraduate studies with higher salaries and promotions, thereby increasing the demand for short, specialised courses and postgraduate studies. Moreover, graduate, Maltese citizens, more than ever before, are venturing abroad. This need is encouraging Maltese citizens to equip themselves with postgraduate degrees in order to competitive in the international labour market.

The government's decision to continue to consider education as a social good, despite a slowing economy, meant that free, stipended education at Bachelor's level has been maintained together with reasonable and accessible fees for postgraduate studies.

Given the social commitment towards higher education, courses which are perceived as socially and culturally significant are generally maintained despite their apparent financial unsustainability.

The context of a public university operating in a small state is generally very different from that of a university located in a large state. In our context, the typical academic is expected to perform multiple tasks at different levels. In fact, in the literature dealing with small states we often refer to academics as multifunctional intellectuals. One of the 'symptoms' of such a fact of university life in a small state is the academics' teaching load. If one takes the Faculty of Education as an example, it is not uncommon to find academics teaching and supervising at Bachelor's, Master's, PGCE, diploma, certificate and Ph.D levels. In other words, the mallness of the institutions does not allow for division of labour by academics.

- Strategical dimension:

- Missions/statements

To develop and sustain a dynamic relationship between education, democracy and work, by bringing analysis and empirical research to bear on issues that are topical in Malta and elsewhere.

The University is also committed to maintaining a high national and international research profile.

There is a clear commitment on the university's part to expand access to LLL. This commitment is fuelled by the government's vision 2015 which includes a substantial increase in the number of citizens following post-secondary and tertiary education.

- Motivations
- Values

2 OBJECTIVES

The degree courses at the University are designed to produce highly qualified professionals, with experience of research, who will play key roles in industry, commerce and public affairs in general.

The main challenge in the LLL sector is for university to venture deeper into recognising prior learning as a legitimate qualification for furthering one's studies. Many faculties are still sceptical in this regard.

3 ORGANISATION

To date, the university does not have a formal structure that is fully dedicated to the promotion of LLL. The impetus for LLL provision often comes from individuals within faculties.

4 ACTORS

- Internal/external

The internal actors are generally individual members of academic staff who are sensitive to the immediate needs of the market or, in certain cases, to the social and individual needs of participants.

The external actors vary from ministries to para-governmental authorities to local and foreign, private investors. The different commissions of the EU exert ongoing pressure on LLL of the various sectors of the economy and society. Institutions of higher learning are particularly under pressure to widen their repertoire, vertically and horizontally, in order to increase the number of adult attendees.

- Isolated actors/teams/ collective approach

The collective dimension of LLL is generally evident when specific clients, such as ministries, collaborate with the service providers, Faculties and departments in particular, in the conceptualization and design of the curricular experiences. Collaboration is also evident in the bidding for funding, in the planning of logistics and in the marketing phase of the course. This is the typical modus operandi of the many courses that respond to public needs; courses which are subsidized through public or a mixture of public and EU money.

5 DISCUSSIONS

- Risks vs. benefits

Being a public university, the institution at times is slow on the uptake. In certain areas, where private institutions are acting on the same playing field, non-public institutions are faster and more creative than their public counterpart.

Unfortunately, the university is running the risk of becoming a supermarket of services and educational products rather than a seat of true learning.

- Strengths vs. weaknesses:

Commitment towards LLL, education still treated as a social good, LLL = a national vision

But

Over-dependence on state funds is perceived by many as a major weakness, slow in recognition of prior learning for access, no separate infrastructure or coordinated action for the promotion of LLL

- Debates, conflicts

The main conflict is the pressure exerted by the EU and government to increase numbers, on one side, and the discourse of quality pushed by academics.

6 DECISION

- Priorities

to increase the number of students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels;
to serve industry, commerce and public affairs through custom-made continuous professional development courses;
and to reach out to the community through its commercial wing (MUHC)

7 IMPLEMENTATION

- Key elements: infrastructure, human resources, organization
- Roadmap, workplans, timing
 - The current trend of extending the repertoire of post-graduate studies and of short, specialised and custom-made courses will continue.
 - The university will exploit its excellent, digital infrastructure to offer digital and blended courses, targeting local as well as international LLL needs.

- The university will venture further into popular education, reaching out to communities through its radio (Campus FM), the virtual environment and through courses within the community.
 - The University of the Third Age (U3E) will continue to service the educational needs of the post-60 category and to hopefully popularise part of its curriculum.
 - Industry, services and the public sector will continue to create demands for LLL at university.
- Budget: costs – resources

There is no separate funding for LLL activities. Public funds are administered by council which has a majority of government nominees sitting on it. The allocation is based on projections made by the different faculties and entities operating within university.

Over-dependence on state funds is perceived by many as a major weakness.

University will be pressured into generating more alternative funding to supplement public funds

- Evaluation: courses are audited academically. They have rarely been stopped for financial reasons.

8 PERSPECTIVES

- Next steps

The Malta University Holding Company has a section within it dedicated to LLL activities. Structurally, it is weak and lacks the capacity to develop into a proper LLL institution within University. A LLL strategy is an important first step in changing the current LLL culture, from one which is largely ad hoc to one which is informed by a proper vision and the right infrastructure.