Promoting active citizenship in TVET institutions

Promising Practice

Implemented by: Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)

Where: Malta

Status: Started in October 2020

Summary: This initiative introduces all TVET students at MCAST to community work and promotes active citizenship among young people.

Overview

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) is the largest VET institution in Malta and offers qualifications pegged at Level 1 to Level 8 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). MCAST students following courses pegged at Level 1 to Level 6 of the EQF are offered a number of key skills modules, which complement their vocational modules in their respective programmes. The key skills modules are intended to equip students with the necessary skills that will eventually support them in their studies, work and personal lives. One of these modules provides an opportunity for students to become active citizens through 20 hours of community work of their choice.

Community Social Responsibility Department

The community work is facilitated by the lecturers responsible for the key skills modules and the Community Social Responsibility (CSR) Department at MCAST. Non-governmental organizations, charitable organizations and groups that work in the community approach the CSR Department on a regular basis and inform them about different opportunities for MCAST students. An online list with all the opportunities is constantly updated by the department. Students can choose their 20 hours of community work from the online list or they can come up with their own projects.

Community improvement

Students can decide to do the community work on their own or with their peers. At the end of the semester, they need to submit a reflection on the work done and present this in class. The assessment of the module is based on this presentation, together with other tasks that students complete on an individual basis or as part of a group.
A few examples of the community work undertaken by students include:

- beach clean-ups
- supporting animal shelters
- embellishment work at the college
- helping in local food banks
- teaching arts to young students
- organizing a car wash to raise funds for MCAST students in need

Objectives

The objectives of this initiative are to promote active citizenship among MCAST students and to support the local community through the work done. Students tend to mostly focus on learning technical skills and increasing their chances of employability. While this is indeed important, students should also be continuously reminded about the important role that they play in society.

The module on Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Skills was developed after feedback from industry partners indicating that MCAST students were technically prepared for the world of work but lacked certain soft skills. Through this initiative, students improve their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, contribute to improving their communities and help to build green and inclusive societies.

Supporting TVET students to become active citizens

Students participating in community work are being taught an important lesson in life – that of using their talents, skills and energy to help others. At the same time, non-governmental organizations, charitable organizations and other groups are benefiting as they receive hands-on support to reach their objectives. An innovative aspect of this initiative is that MCAST brings together students and external stakeholders to support the local community and this element of volunteerism is integrated into the course curriculum.

Outcomes and impact

During the first two years of the initiative (2020-2022):

- MCAST students collectively made a significant contribution of about

200,000
hours of work

in hundreds of projects within the community.

- Up to

10% of students

have continued with community work after finishing the mandatory 20 hours.

- Around

500 NGOs, local organizations and charitable entities

have showed interest in the initiative and have stepped up to offer students opportunities to do community projects.

Challenges and insights

Matching community work requests with student volunteers

MCAST created an online database to solve the issue of organizing the hundreds of requests coming from different entities. The database is updated regularly and students can access it to find a community work project, if they do not already have a specific project in mind.

Changing perceptions about volunteerism and community engagement

Initially, students lacked enthusiasm about the community work. They voiced their concerns that this component was not related to their studies, and that it took up too much of their time. The various lecturers of the unit made a point of explaining the importance of being active in society and of sharing their skills, talents, and energy with those in need. Furthermore, the lecturers encouraged the students to work in groups to make the activities more enjoyable and enhance their teamwork skills. The lecturers collaborated with the Institute Directors to create community work projects that students could

relate to more. An example of such a project was embellishment work at the college, where students could immediately see its benefits as the work was carried out in close proximity. Disseminating examples of the community work on social media also helped students to understand what their peers were doing and to take more pride in their community.

Next steps

This initiative has proven to be successful since it was introduced and MCAST is looking forward to supporting students in becoming active citizens. The institution is continuously working to improve the current processes in place related to the community work – from the online application process to the confirmation that the work has been done. In the meantime, MCAST will promote this initiative further to attract more organizations that can offer new community projects for the students.