



SOCIAL POLICY COMMISSION 18/19

Meeting #5

University of Malta, NALR (New Anatomy Lecture Room)
10th October 2018, 17:00

MINUTES

Maria Carmela Borg (Representative from Agenzija Zghazagh): My role in Agenzija Zghazagh is to support youth organisations with the aim of encouraging youth organisations to operate and grow in numbers and in the quality of services that one gives. We encourage young people to become active citizens in society. You are the epitome of what active participation should be. With regards to registration and updating of registration details, organisations that are on the Agenzija Zghazagh register are within our information network and can benefit from a range of opportunities and schemes for the organisation itself and its members. Unfortunately, if our register has data of past members, the link between the agency and your organisation is not a functional one albeit being a registered organisation with the agency. You may register or update the information with details of current members by filling in the form found in the following link:

http://www.agenzijazghazagh.gov.mt/Categories/864/Register_your_Youth_Organisation/

We also have some equipment made available for organisations, which we suggest you ask us for whenever you need anything. We also have houses in Had-Dingli and in Marsaxlokk that can be used as conference spaces, meeting points, and residential spaces. On the Agenzija Zghazagh Youth Information page on Facebook, you may find support to access European and Erasmus opportunities for yourselves as youth leaders and for the young people you work with through the Eurodesk service. With regards to funding for youth organisations, if you have a VO registration number and your organisation is compliant you are eligible to apply for funding. The deadline to send proposals for such funding is on the 22nd of October.

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact me by sending an email to maria-carmela.borg@gov.mt. Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

Nicholas Martinelli (Futsal): With regards to Agenzija Zghazagh funding, is it applicable to sports?

Maria Carmela Borg (Representative from Agenzija Zghazagh): Unfortunately, it does not apply to sports. However, Sport Malta offers a funding scheme which is applicable to what your organisation focuses on.



Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner):

- 1) Approval of the agenda - *Approved nem con*
- 2) Approval of minutes – *Approved nem con*

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): With regards to upcoming events, KSU is collaborating with JEF Malta, ESO, and the European Parliament Office in Malta on an event on quadrangle on the 15th of October related to the campaign “This Time I’m Voting”. KSU is also collaborating with the University of Malta to organise a blood drive on the 18th of October. A hackathon shall also be taking place, for which further details will be communicated to you. There is also going to be a radio opportunity made available in the near future. If you are interested in participating and would like to know more about the said opportunity, do not hesitate to contact us. We would also like to add that, from now on, when it comes to bookings on quadrangle or rooms on the University campus, one needs to apply for such services on the KSU website as KSU are the only ones who are to be in contact with Valletta Campus. Moreover, during Freshers’ Week, ESA had 6 laminated photos on their stand that belonged to their Professor which were not returned. Kindly contact us if you know where the said photos are. We are also aware of the problems that some organisations are facing when it comes to VO recognition. Thus, KSU will definitely be acting on this. If anyone has problems with VO recognition, do not hesitate to contact us for further guidance. We would also like to point out that there is going to be a small gathering under the rain shelter on quadrangle with free food and drinks. We hope to see you there.

Michael Piccinino (Council of the Voluntary Sector): On the issue of VO recognition, speaking from the perspective of a member of the Council of the Voluntary Sector and not of KNZ, a new commissioner has been appointed and he is looking at the issue again. He does not have many options when it comes to the law as he is abiding by the law. There will be a list of the organisations that are going to be delisted. Speaking from the perspective of member of such a sector, please approach me and we will see how to deal with it.

Daniel Zammit (JEF Malta): How long does re-registration take?

Michael Piccinino (Council of the Voluntary Sector): It take a maximum of three months.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We would also like to give a brief update with regards to the immigration focus group. We have already met up twice since the KPS meeting on immigration and we decided to meet up with Spark 15 to get an insight as to what immigrants have to say on the local scenario. We are also in the process of meeting up with stakeholders to further emphasise the points raised in the immigration focus group. If anyone is interested in participating in this focus group, do not hesitate to contact us. Moreover, kindly note that budget proposals were posted on the KPS group and they constitute the following:

- More schemes to be given for sports opportunities
- Improvement of public transport systems as well as alternative mobility measures, such as a direct route to Cirkewwa for Gozitan students; A subsidised *Tal-Linja* direct route; Free public



transport to University students which is to be extended to mature students as well; An extended park and ride system from Valletta to University AND Valletta Park & Ride stops at Valletta Campus;

- More opportunities of job shadowing for students in general;
- The 500 EUR grant per three months should be increased whereby it should be revised yearly and must match the economic situation in Malta;
- More support in kind to be given to students, in the form of food vouchers for instance; And
- Existent facilities are to be kept well-maintained and improved even further.

Luca Arrigo (IASTE) left

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We are going to take a vote on these budget proposals.

Approved nem con

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): Moving on to the mental health discussion, we are going to use a different approach than usual so as to avoid taking up more time. In light of Mental Health Day, we are going to give you a bit of information with regards to mental health on a local perspective. The social realities in Malta include:

- 10-20% of children and adolescents experience mental disorders
- 50% of lifetime mental illness begins before the age of 14 years
- 80% of lifetime mental illness arise by mid-twenties
- When it comes to the % lifetime burden of chronic diseases, from 0-15 years of age, 60% is attributable to mental health and the rest is physical; from 16-30, 80% is attributable to mental health whereas the rest is physical whereas from 31-90, 20% is attributable to mental health.

At University, more importance is being given to mental health where organisations are focusing on organising initiatives and events tackling mental health. Very recently, the social well-being clinic was opened to extend the counselling services and helpline.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We can start with the first question, which is:

“Which aspect do you think mostly equates to mental health issues?”

Naomi Bugre (Insite): I think it has to do with everything. Mental health forms a big part of health and it has to do with a very big part of one’s life. You cannot function properly if you have mental health problems.

Nicholas Martinelli (Futsal): It involves various aspects of what a person goes through in life, such as relationships, losses, one’s family background and the like. It is not a particular aspect *per se* but it can be a multitude of things at the same time. Hence, I believe that there is no particular thing which equates to mental health issues.



Martina Aquilina (Betapsi): It starts from one aspect and it covers the rest of your life. Really and truly the starting point does not matter as it influences the rest of your life either way.

John Ebejer (SIERA): Are we talking about things that are worsened by mental health or that worsen mental health?

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): Both.

John Ebejer (SIERA): Anything stressful can create or worsen mental health.

Marcus Ciantar (Wolves): When it comes to University, exams are probably one of the main reasons why a number of students suffer from mental health problems. With this being said, the cause of mental health depends on a case by case basis and on the situation an individual finds himself in.

Mireille Caruana (DESA): Keep in mind that some mental health issues have a hereditary nature.

Michael Piccinino (KNZ): The biggest problem with regards to mental health is the service provided both at the University of Malta and at hospitals.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): From the points that you've mentioned, mental health issues exist and are worsened by stress. Moreover, it depends on how their lifestyle is.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We can move on to the second question, which is:

“Do you think that mental health is being tackled well enough within educational institutions and at the workplace?”

Katrina Farrugia (Betapsi): The fact that we do not have a lot of psychologists does not help us tackle mental health issues as effectively as possible. Workers tend to seek counselling due to problems arising at their workplace but, due to the lack of psychologists in Malta, it is easier said than done.

Naomi Bugre (Insite): More than 50% of the Maltese population is not health literate which means that they do not know what the symptoms of mental health are. Therefore, our educational institutions are not giving us the necessary info about them. They are there but we do not know about them.

Ylenia Attard (DESA): As Naomi rightly stated, services are there but we do not know about them. Apart from that, some people feel embarrassed about certain mental health problems that they might be facing, which in turn holds them back from seeking help.



Nicholas Martinelli (Futsal): It is also important to shed a light on the stigma present at the workplace, which has reached the point where you can be fired for no reason whatsoever. Moreover, with the older generations it is still a big taboo.

Julia Cini (The Yuppie): The times have also changed. The situation in educational institutions has changed and developed over the years. Educational institutions are currently sparking a bit more conversation on mental health problems so as to raise more awareness thereon. Hence, there has been progress. However, how has that progress been met by students within the workplace?

Marcus Ciantar (Wolves): As mentioned previously, the services are there. However, schools should educate the Maltese population about mental health issues and that there is nothing bad about having such issues.

Naomi Bugre (Insite): A friend of mine had to sit for an exam a few years ago and she was a wreck on the day so she could not sit for the exam. The faculty told her that it is not a justifiable reason because she did not have a certificate given to her by a professional in the field. The educational system is not catered for those who have something that is not necessarily diagnosable. We never talk about the positive aspect of mental health but we only talk about the problems related to mental health.

Michael Piccinino (KNZ): The faculty officer which gave that information is wrong because the University of Malta accepts such excuses.

Naomi Bugre (Insite): What I meant to focus on is the insensitive way in which the faculty spoke to her. That was the biggest problem she faced. The way they spoke to her shows that there is a lack of awareness on mental health.

Martina Aquilina (Betapsi): I agree completely. It is important to point out that some people take advantage of the situation. They do not want to sit for the exam because they are lazy. If we are going to educate people about how serious mental health is, we have to show people that it is something serious and not simply a scapegoat. Educators do not believe students when they say that they are suffering from a mental health problem because people start using this excuse for nothing, therefore not allowing educators to see the importance of mental health as an excuse.

Nicholas Martinelli (Futsal) left

Naomi Deguara (MHSA): When it comes to mental health awareness, I suggest that one should listen to their friends. Listening to someone is very effective. When you listen to people, even if it takes a long time, it leaves a huge impact on their life. You can make a difference to people who find themselves struggling.



Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We can move on to the third question, which is:

“There has been an increase in measures which have been introduced, however, is there enough help available and are there enough measures in place at the university to help tackle mental health issues?”

Michael Piccinino (KNZ): A year ago, the facilities were different and now the facilities are more suitable. I think there should be an assessment of how the University of Malta tackles mental health issues. At the moment, the University of Malta offers help with regards to counselling sessions as it provides each individual a number of hours of counselling free of charge. With this being said, after the number of hours offered free of charge by the University lapse, if you are still facing a problem that is burdening you, you still cannot make use of the sessions.

Katrina Farrugia (Betapsi): If you do not attend all twelve hours, they cancel the rest of the hours as if you did not need to go. The University of Malta restricts us from becoming psychologists. Most of us need to go abroad to study a masters course as the University of Malta limits the amount of students reading a master course in this area. Hence, it limits the amount of psychologists in Malta.

Marcus Ciantar (Wolves): I think that it is not the University of Malta's duty to help you through mental health issues. The sessions offered by the University of Malta free of charge help. However, it is not the University's job to help students tackle mental health issues. It is enough for you to get the first step. If you need more help you can go to someone else and if the problem is solved then it would have helped you.

Mireille Caruana (DESA): Private counselling is much more flexible than free sessions offered by University as, for the latter, students would be placed on a waiting list until slots are made available. When it comes to private counselling sessions, due to the price of such sessions, your stipend is not sufficient.

Michael Piccinino (KNZ): I disagree with what Marcus said because I think that it is the University of Malta's role to cater for such situations. Even the University of Malta agrees with my point. The University of Malta has a duty to cater for the stress caused by it by providing sufficient services for students.

Luanne Grima (Betapsi): Acknowledging mental health issues would help you do well in certain subjects.

Marcus Ciantar (Wolves): So it basically falls under the remit of the University of Malta to take care of the matter?

Luanne Grima (Betapsi): Stress contributes a lot, which is why the University of Malta should cater for it.



John Ebejer (SIERA): When I was studying abroad, I got severely sick and I needed to see a doctor. When you are living abroad and you do not have any family, you cannot be blamed for needing the University's services. If one mentions "elsewhere", it is not necessarily the case that "elsewhere" is available.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): Do you think that student organisations should assist in this matter? And if so, how?

Mireille Caruana (DESA): I think that student organisations should assist in this matter because we have a strong link to university students. But many of us need support too, which is why it is not the best way forward. As such students need professional help and not help from students who are suffering from the same mental health problems.

Julia Cini (The Yuppie): We are not professionals either so if students need help, then students in student organisations should be aware of the services offered by the University of Malta and we should refer students with mental health problems to such professionals.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We would like to point out that this year KSU will be collaborating with the President's Trust and with Richmond Foundation to provide a number of students with the opportunity to participate in a Mental Health First Aid course offered by Richmond Foundation.

Edward Attard Selvagi (S-Cubed): It is not our literal role but we can help find a link with the students.

Antonia Julia (CSA): We are not professionals but some student organisations can reduce stress. For instance, GhSL organised a course to help students choose their electives. These are methods of how one can reduce stress a bit. So to a certain extent we can help.

Marcus Ciantar (Wolves): We can create opportunities to relieve stress and we can also hold seminars. MHSA can hold regular yoga classes such as those which they had organised in Campus Fest. GhSL can hold more seminars on electives and the like. We all can tackle the problem from a social point of view to reduce stress.

Naomi Deguara (MHSA): MHSA have a sub-committee that caters for those who have mental health problems. Along the year we are also planning to raise more awareness on the matter.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We can move onto the fourth question, which is:

"What more needs to be done at the university to help combat this issue?"

Katrina Farrugia (Betapsi): Sessions can be organised at University to combat stress. Such sessions may be strange for someone who does not know what mental health is. So maybe more information or more understanding can be given during the session to help attendees have a better understanding of what mental health is.



Michael Piccinino (KNZ): The University of Malta should hold an aggressive campaign on how the situation is.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): From KSU's point of view, we also promoted the mental health clinic offered by the University of Malta so we are definitely working on it.

Michael Piccinino (KNZ): It should also come from the part of the University of Malta.

Antonia Julia (CSA): Maybe there should be groups where students can talk about their problems, such as anonymous alcoholics group.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We can move on to the final question, which is:

"There have been proposed actions with respect to mental health which include the following:

- *Early detection and intervention*
- *Screening for mental disorders throughout school life up to tertiary education*
- *Investment in coping skills, resilience and support services for youth in difficulty to assess labour markets*
- *Wider agenda for better mental health awareness at the workplace*
- *And more.*

Thus, can you think of other measures which would be worthwhile and effective in this regard?"

Naomi Bugre (Insite): In terms of measures, the mental health hospital currently available needs a huge overhaul. The facilities offered at the moment are nothing short from shameful and disgusting. It needs to be a new facility where people can get help and not where people get worse.

Naomi Deguara (MHSA): There have already been discussions on constructing a new section in Mater Dei catering for such situations. There is also a psychiatric clinic where the nurses wear normal clothes for the patients not to feel discomforted. Therefore, progress has been made but I agree with you that more progress needs to be made.

Mireille Caruana (DESA): I know someone who was in hospital because of a suicide attempt and they told them that if they do that again, they will be sent to Mount Carmel, which is an outright threat. I do not think that patients with mental health problems should be treated in such a manner. Hence, the situation definitely has to improve.

Daniel Zammit (JEF Malta): There is also a big issue with security in Mount Carmel. There is a section for the criminally insane people in Mount Carmel. In fact, many of the best doctors do not want to go into psychiatry because it is quite dangerous for them over there.

Julia Cini (The Yuppie): I have family friends who are nurses there. Someone jumped out of a window once. They told us that they are doing their best. A decision has to be made by the



medical department to tackle the matter more efficiently because the nurses working in Mount Carmel are trying their best given the circumstances they find themselves in.

Julia Zammit (SHS): I know someone who is a patient at Mount Carmel who is not allowed to take simple things with him, such as watches. Although such things are simple, the inability not to have them on one's person is highly detrimental to such patient's wellbeing.

Luanne Grima (Betapsi): Someone mentioned that doctors are afraid of psychiatry. We can combat that by attracting more psychology students to push for more practice.

Martina Aquilina (Betapsi): There are some doctors who might be willing to take the extra risk. There are possibly many psychology students who would like to enter into this field. It would help if there is more collaboration between mental health practitioners and doctors, especially when there are cases in Mater Dei with patients who have been diagnosed with some kind of disorder. If you are suffering from an extreme mental health problem, such that surgery must be performed, there is a way and a way to say something. You would need a psychologist to help you convey a message without harming one's mental health.

Petra Grech (KPS Commissioner): We are going to take a vote on whether the following are the main points that featured in today's discussion on mental health:

- Stress worsens mental health issues whereas many factors contribute to the creation of mental health issues;
- There is a huge stigma surrounding mental health problems, especially in one's workplace and with the older generations. Hence, people should be educated on mental health issues and how to deal with such situations;
- The University of Malta is to adopt a holistic approach and is to make sure that it caters for situations where students suffer from mental health problems. Student organisations can offer help but there is a limit as to how much help a student organisation can help students;
- The University should embark on an aggressive campaign to help students who have a mental health problem; AND
- A new mental health facility for rehabilitation should be instituted. Although we already have proposals on this, a final decision should be made.

Approved nem con

We are going to set up a focus group or a task force to tackle mental health in more detail so, if any of you are interested in taking part, do not hesitate to contact us.

Meeting adjourned - 18:36