

Position Paper– National Conference on Performing & Visual Arts Education

30/10/25

Distinguished colleagues, esteemed guests,

It is an honour to contribute to this important national reflection. As Head of Mikiel Anton Vassalli College, I bring the voice of an institution that sits right at the heart of Malta’s arts education ecosystem. MAVC brings together four long-standing schools of art, music, drama, and dance across Malta and Gozo. We are a community of thousands of learners and educators, offering training from beginner to advanced levels, and supporting progression up to MQF Level 5.

Our vantage point is unique: we are close to the grassroots, yet deeply connected to higher education and the cultural and creative industries. We see, every day, both the extraordinary potential of Maltese talent, and the persistent obstacles that hold the sector back.

Why do these issues persist?

The challenges we face as a sector are well known: inadequate spaces, fragmented structures, cultural perceptions of the arts as “extra” rather than essential. But the harder question is: why do these issues persist?

First, structural gaps.

Malta still has no clear framework for specialised arts institutions. Generic recruitment policies are applied to us, but they don’t fit. A single category such as “music teacher” is not enough when a school needs a violin tutor, a conductor, or a vocal coach. The same applies across drama, dance, and the visual arts.

Second, resource deficiencies.

We lag behind international standards in infrastructure. A conservatoire abroad will have purpose-built recital halls, properly sprung dance floors, and digital media labs. Too often our students and staff are asked to create under conditions that simply do not meet their needs.

Third, policy misalignment.

National education strategies have recognised the importance of the arts, but too often only in passing. The sector is expected to operate within frameworks designed for general education, which leaves specialised schools like ours without the policies or governance structures we need.

And fourth, cultural perceptions.

Parents and learners still often see the arts as extracurricular rather than as a career. This cultural perception shapes demand, funding, and political attention. Contrast this with countries like Finland or Slovenia, where the arts are treated as strategic national assets.

So, these issues persist not because of lack of talent or will, but because structures, resources, and policies have never been properly aligned with the specialised nature of arts education.

What changes are needed?

The way forward is not to start afresh with yet another new institution. Rather, it is to strengthen and connect what we already have.

First, legislative reform.

Malta must formally recognise “specialised schools” as a distinct category. This would allow us to introduce tailored governance, recruitment, and funding models, aligning us with other EU states where conservatoires and academies have this status.

Second, targeted investment.

Infrastructure must be addressed urgently. Our students deserve the same professional-standard studios, theatres, and labs that their peers enjoy abroad.

Third, a rethinking of the Academy itself.

We support the vision of the Academy not as a single new institution, but as an *ecology*: an interconnected system of existing schools and colleges, retaining their identity while operating in synergy. Finland’s Uniarts Helsinki is a strong example: separate institutions merged into an ecology that shares resources, while each discipline retains its integrity.

Fourth, specialised recruitment.

We need to move away from “one-size-fits-all” teacher categories. A concert pianist in the final years of a student’s training is not interchangeable with a general piano tutor. Our recruitment processes must reflect this.

Fifth, strengthened pathways.

This is where MAVC has a pivotal role. At present, the pathways from secondary to tertiary education in the arts remain fragmented. Let me illustrate:

- A student might begin at the Malta Visual and Performing Arts School (MVPA) at secondary level, combining academic studies with arts training up to MQF Level 3.
- From there, (or concurrently as is the case at present times) MAVC provides the natural *post-secondary bridge*, with vocational and specialist training up to MQF Level 5. This stage is critical: it consolidates talent, deepens skills, and offers national qualifications that prepare students for higher education or industry.
- Beyond MAVC, learners can continue to MCAST’s Institute for the Creative Arts (up to MQF 7) or the University of Malta (up to MQF 8), specialising further in performance, fine art, or research.

MAVC’s role is therefore to **anchor the middle of this pathway** - ensuring that students from MAVC and other compulsory education schools have an accessible, high-quality, accredited route into tertiary education and the professional sector. Without this bridge, many learners risk falling through the gaps between compulsory schooling and advanced study.

To make this pathway truly seamless, we must also strengthen **accreditation recognition** across institutions, ensuring that qualifications earned at MAVC are consistently recognised

by MCAST and the University. This would prevent learners from being blocked or forced to repeat studies when they transition between institutions.

What values should guide this development?

Three guiding values must shape the academy we aspire to build:

Excellence with accessibility.

We must aim for the highest standards, but without losing sight of inclusivity. MAVC's tradition of accessible arts education - from children to adult learners - is something Malta should be proud of.

Collaboration over duplication.

The Academy must not replace existing schools but connect them into a coherent ecology. Each institution brings history, expertise, and identity: we should build synergy, not redundancy.

Future-facing relevance.

We must prepare learners not only for today's cultural industries, but for tomorrow's. This means embedding interdisciplinarity, digital skills, and entrepreneurship alongside specialised training. Our students should not only enter the industry - they should shape it.

Conclusion

Colleagues,

Malta does not lack talent. Nor does it lack dedication from our educators, artists, and students. What it lacks are the structures, policies, and resources that would allow this talent to flourish sustainably and competitively.

MAVC is ready to play its part in the Academy ecology. We see ourselves as the *essential bridge* between secondary-level arts education and tertiary professional training. With the right recognition, investment, and collaboration, Malta can create a world-class system that honours our traditions while preparing us for the future.

Our learners - and Malta's cultural future...deserve no less.

Thank you

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ⁱ Established in 2018, Mikiel Anton Vassalli (MAVC) is the National Network of Specialized Schools of Visual & Performing Arts Education in Malta and Gozo. The network comprises of: The Gozo Visual & Performing Arts School, The Malta School of Art, The Malta School of Drama & Dance and The Malta School of Music. It caters for c. 3,000 learners annually.