



SHAPING THE FUTURE

NATIONAL ARTS EDUCATION CONFERENCE

30 OCTOBER, 2025 | MCAST CAMPUS, PAOLA

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Prof. Helena Gaunt

Principal, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

Professor Helena Gaunt is a musician, author and thought-leader on music education and professional practice, having been a professional oboist for many years, and founding member of the Britten Sinfonia. Principal of the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama (RWCMD), she sits on the Council of the Royal Philharmonic Society, Chairs the Advisory Board of the National Music Service in Wales, and has undertaken a leading role for the European Association of Conservatoire's project Strengthening Music in Society. She is also a qualified executive coach.

Helena joined RWCMD in 2018 after over 25 years teaching and in leadership roles at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London where she initiated and directed the international Reflective Conservatoire Conference; chaired the Innovative Conservatoire (ICON) partnership, bringing conservatoire artist-teachers from across Europe and further afield together to share and develop their practice; and set up the Guildhall Creative Entrepreneurs scheme, incubating over 40 new businesses in the performing arts.



PANELLISTS



Christoph Lang, Rector, F+F School of Art and Design, Zurich

Christoph Lang is Rector of the F+F Schule für Kunst und Design in Zürich, Switzerland's sole independent art school, founded in 1971 by students and educators. He leads the institution as head of its non-profit foundation, overseeing strategic and academic development across state-accredited programs at all levels, including foundation studies, vocational training, and higher education diplomas. His leadership is grounded in interdisciplinary pedagogy, institutional autonomy, and the advancement of contemporary artistic discourse. Lang collaborates with board members, course directors, and academic partners to ensure the school's responsiveness to cultural and societal change while preserving its founding ethos of openness and experimentation. He has held teaching and research appointments at various Swiss universities and previously served on the board of directors of the Swiss Design Schools. His work contributes to the academic discourse on independent art education, positioning F+F as a site of critical engagement and pedagogical innovation within the European cultural and educational landscape.

Kaarlo Hildén, Rector, University of the Arts, Helsinki

Kaarlo Hildén has served as Rector of the University of the Arts Helsinki since December 1, 2020, and has been appointed for a second five-year term (2025–2029). Prior to his current role, he held leadership positions such as Dean of the Sibelius Academy, Faculty Dean of Classical Music, Programme Director at Hanasaari Swedish-Finnish Cultural Centre, and Head of a degree programme at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. He is currently Chair of the Finnish Association for Basic Education in the Arts, and serves on the boards of Finnish Education Employers and the Uniarts Helsinki Foundation. Renowned for his extensive national and international networks, Hildén is a recognized voice in shaping educational and societal discourse at the intersection of the arts, research, and creative entrepreneurship.



Prof Karolina Šantl Zupan, Dean, Academy of Music, University of Ljubljana

Prof. dr. Karolina Šantl Zupan has had a professional artistic career in the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra and worked as a solo flutist in the Opera and Ballet Ljubljana Orchestra. She has worked at the Academy of Music of the University of Ljubljana since 1992. From 2009 to 2021, she was head of the Department of Winds, Brass, and Percussion. From 2022, she has been the vice dean for Science and Arts Affairs. Her academic achievements are reflected in the many international and national awards her students receive. She leads international seminars, participates in national expert committees and expert juries in national and international competitions, and is a Yamaha Flute Artist group member. Her research focuses on the interaction between artistic and pedagogical teaching and the formation of artistic musical interpretation during higher education.

Dr Lisa Peck, Associate Professor in Theatre Practice, University of Sussex

Dr Lisa Peck is Associate Professor in Theatre Practice at the University of Sussex and Senior Fellow for Advance Higher Education in the UK. She has taught theatre, drama and performer training for over thirty years across all stages of education including teacher education. She is co-founder of the Performance Pedagogy Network, sits on the Higher Education panel of Digital Theatre Plus and is an Associate Editor for the journal Theatre Dance and Performance Training. She researches pedagogies of performer training, particularly feminist practices and women's contributions. She has contributed to numerous journals and books and is author of two monographs, including *Act as a Feminist: Towards a Critical Acting Pedagogy* (Routledge 2021) and is co-editor of the collected edition *Critical Acting Pedagogy: Intersectional Approaches* (Routledge 2023). She is currently working on a monograph *Passion and Pedagogy: Women, Emotion and Performer Training* (Routledge, pending 2028).



Dr Sharon Watson, CEO and Principal, Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Leeds

In May 2020, Sharon was appointed CEO and Principal of the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, following her role as the 7th Artistic Director of Phoenix Dance Theatre. Throughout her career, she has been widely recognised for her leadership and contribution to the arts. Named one of the Cultural Leadership Programme's Women to Watch in 2010, she went on to receive the Sue Ryder Yorkshire Woman of Achievement in Business Award and was named Yorkshire Woman of the Year in 2016. She featured on the inaugural Northern Power Women Top 50 Power List in 2017, won the First English Woman's Award for Arts and Culture in 2018, and was awarded Honorary Fellowships from NSCD and Leeds Beckett University. In 2020, she was appointed Deputy Lieutenant of West Yorkshire, and in 2021 received an MBE. Sharon also serves as a trustee for Manchester International Festival and Leeds 2023,

Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation

The Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation, through its Visual and Performing Arts Department (V&P Arts), is committed to nurturing the role of the Arts (Art, Dance, Drama, Music,) within the national curriculum as a vital component of holistic learning. V&P Arts education cultivates essential skills for today's world, including personal and social development, creative and critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and innovation. These empower students to better understand themselves and engage meaningfully across the curriculum and in life. We recognise the arts as a universal language and advocate for artistic literacy as a core area of learning. By cultivating artistic inclinations from early childhood through primary, secondary and post-secondary education, we aim to unlock each learner's creative potential and support the development of artistic skills and life competences. V&P Arts education provides authentic opportunities for learners to explore notions of identity, express inner thoughts and emotions, and connect with their communities. This places artistic skills on equal footing with other foundational skills in the educational journey. Our vision is to instil a lifelong love for the arts in every learner, shaping a future society that values creativity, embraces diversity, and finds a sense of belonging through the transformative potential of artistic engagement.

Culture Directorate

The Culture Directorate was established to ensure that the governance role of the Ministry responsible for culture is carried out as efficiently and effectively as possible, while also ensuring that key issues affecting the sector are brought to the attention of the appropriate political and administrative authorities. Its core responsibilities include providing policy direction and advice in the fields of arts, heritage, and the audiovisual sector; managing cultural programmes such as the Culture Pass; preparing contributions for public debate and discussion; and coordinating with relevant entities and stakeholders on all matters relating to Malta's cultural and creative sectors.

Arts Council Malta

Arts Council Malta (ACM) is the national agency for development and investment in the cultural and creative sectors. Its principal task is to fund, support and promote Malta's Cultural and Creative sectors. Arts Council Malta's Strategy is a forward-looking framework that places cultural rights at its core. Rooted in Malta's National Cultural Policy 2021 and aligned with international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and UNESCO's recommendations on the Status of the Artist, the strategy envisions a future where the arts are central to Malta's development. The vision is for "the arts to be at the heart of Malta's future," while the mission is to invest in artistic and cultural expression, support the sector's sustainability, and ensure that everyone has the right to participate in cultural life. Key instruments to achieve the aims of strategy consisted of the Charter for the Status of the Artist and the Rights to Culture campaign. The ACM strategy is built around six strategic areas: (1) Public Investment, (2) Diversity and Communities, (3) Education and Development, (4) Internationalisation, (5) Creative Entrepreneurship, and (6) Research and Evaluation. Each area is supported by specific objectives and a set of actions designed to foster a thriving cultural ecosystem. These areas reflect a holistic approach to cultural policy, addressing both the needs of artists and the wider community. The Council is currently developing its next five-year strategy, Strategy2030.

The Malta Visual and Performing Arts School

The Malta Visual and Performing Arts School provides an alternative educational pathway for young secondary school students up to MQF level 3. It operates as a national institution akin to the National Sports School and is administered by St. Thomas More College. The school specializes in five principal art forms: visual arts, dance, drama, media, and music. It admits 48 students annually from across Malta, selected through a competitive process that includes referrals, auditions and academic achievements. The school offers aspiring young artists a unique opportunity to develop their artistic abilities while maintaining a strong academic foundation. The school's dual-focus curriculum ensures that students can progress in core subjects as well as their chosen artistic disciplines, thereby acquiring proficiency in their respective art forms while continuing to engage with essential core academic content. During Years 7 and 8 students select a primary art form on which to concentrate, while concurrently receiving instruction in the other four disciplines through a rotational system spread across the academic year. The standard curriculum for traditional subjects remains intact, thereby ensuring a balanced educational experience. From Year 9 to Year 11 students concentrate exclusively on their selected art form, facilitating deeper specialization as they advance in their studies.

MCAST Institute of Creative Arts

MCAST's mission is to provide universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with an international dimension, responsive to the needs of the individual and the economy. The Institute for the Creative Arts at MCAST offers a growing portfolio of courses, ranging from art and design to graphic design, animation and game art, creative media production, photography and journalism, fashion and performing arts, and cultural heritage skills and conservation. The Institute works closely with the industry to provide students with realistic assignment briefs and experiences.



Mikiel Anton Vassalli College

Established in November 2018, MAVC's mission is to enhance and coordinate visual and performing arts education in Malta and Gozo. The College provides vocational education by the four schools within its remit including the Gozo Visual and Performing Arts School, the Malta School of Music, the Malta School of Art, and the School of Drama and Dance. MAVC's vision is to elevate these specialized schools to the status of an academic cluster, emphasizing the quality of teaching and learning in the performing and visual arts. Furthermore, the College seeks to foster synergy among the four specialized institutions and to promote collaboration and excellence in arts education in Malta.

MATSEC

The MATSEC Examinations Board is Malta's national educational assessment body, providing qualifications at Secondary Education Certificate (SEC), Intermediate and Advanced levels, ranging from Level 1 to Level 4. It has an important role in general arts education by offering qualifications in Art, Theatre and Music across all levels, and it has also recently introduced Dance at SEC level. MATSEC oversees the full cycle of assessment, from syllabus development to the work of examination panels, and ensures the manageability of all assessment components such as coursework/school-based assessments, and written, oral and practical examinations. The Board seeks to uphold international standards of quality assurance by ensuring that all syllabi and assessments are valid, reliable and aligned with best practices in the field of assessment. Through its work, MATSEC strengthens and sustains the role of the arts as an essential component of Maltese education.

UoM Department of Art and Art History

The Department of Art and Art History provides undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in Fine Arts and Art History. Since the setting up of an Art Unit in 1987, it has been responsible for the academic formation of art historians, artists, curators and other cultural operators in Malta's cultural, heritage and educational management institutions. The Department has promoted and produced extensive research in the rewriting of the art, architectural and design history of Malta in its Western European and central Mediterranean dimensions. With the establishment of the Fine Arts programme in 2018, the Department has expanded its role into practice-based research, cultivating a critical approach to creative practice. The department's graduates have proceeded to research and work with major international institutions. They have also published extensively across many disciplines, coordinated conservation and restoration interventions, collaborated and participated in important national, international exhibitions and contemporary art shows, and organized numerous conferences and seminars.

UoM Department of Arts, Open Communities & Adult Education

The Department of Arts, Open Communities, and Adult Education seeks to engage different sectors of society by addressing cultural, political, artistic and twenty-first-century open educational practices by promoting local and international research within the broad spectrum of lifelong education. It aims at developing strong educational links between visual, theatrical, and musical practices, as well as wider contexts that impact on various audiences, like the digital domain, media, museums and cultural or community-based groups. Through collaborative modes of production, mediation and critical pedagogies that engage young and adult learners, the department seeks to help to redefine the role of arts and culture in society through the lens of education.

UoM Digital Arts

The Department of Digital Arts bridges contemporary artistic practice and digital technology. Its students are led to develop a refined, critical and unique voice through developing a practice founded on historical and theoretical grounding, contemporary conceptualization and aesthetics, and technical accomplishment in order to help them launch their careers in the Digital Arts.

UOM School of Performing Arts

The School of Performing Arts at the University of Malta was established in July 2012 to bring together the departments of Dance, Music, and Theatre Studies. Its mission is to develop skilled and versatile artists for the twenty-first century by integrating the technical, artistic, and critical aspects of performance. The School offers a range of study programmes at Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral levels. In all these programmes, students can focus on a discipline of their choice or combine studies from all three areas. Its teaching emphasizes the interplay of theoretical and practical approaches, fostering interdisciplinary processes through various frameworks. As a key player in local arts education, the School prepares its graduates for a variety of career paths in performance, teaching, research, community-based projects and cultural management. Alumni of the school hold important positions in the cultural and creative sectors both in Malta and internationally.

