

# Starting them young

New businesses are vital for the economy as they provide a turnover of new ideas, Junior Achievement Young Enterprise manager LORNA FARRUGIA tells **Sandy Calleja Portelli.**

**R**ichard Branson once said that entrepreneurship isn't just a label: it's a lifestyle. To access this lifestyle, tomorrow's entrepreneurs would do well to learn more about Junior Achievement (Young Enterprise).

Over the last 25 years, JAYE, with the support of HSBC Malta plc and professional services firm Deloitte as main sponsors, has helped more than 6,000 young students get their first taste of entrepreneurship. Although not all of them have gone on to open their own businesses, all have benefitted from the experience. I meet up with the organisation's manager Lorna Farrugia to find out more about the Young Enterprise experience.

"The organisation is based on three pillars: entrepreneurship education, financial literacy and employability skills. We look at entrepreneurship in a wider aspect and while our main aim is to encourage young people to start up their own business, we realise that out of 30, one might succeed to do that. However, this is not a numbers game - rather, our main aim is to foster an entrepreneurial spirit which these youngsters did not think they had."

Farrugia believes that the general percep-

tion of a businessperson traditionally bears a certain tinge of being different, perhaps driven by capitalist greed.

This might discourage some people from even considering the possibility of being an entrepreneur.

"The message we try to deliver is that even those who prefer not to start businesses of their own want a successful career for themselves.

"As a prospective employee, the best way to achieve this is to understand what their employer is striving for: their values, ambitions and why certain decisions need to be made. We are lucky to have professional companies like HSBC Malta and Deloitte who lend their expertise and support to deliver these messages to our students."

The organisation is best known for its flagship programme, the Company Programme, which targets Sixth Form students and gives them a platform from where they can start their own company.

"Participants get an insight into real life as they source their capital, develop a concept from idea to final product, and proceed to sell it on the open market. In the process they learn many different skills including human resources issues, marketing and customer care, and organising and attending meetings to name but a few."

JAYE has expanded beyond this and now reaches students from as young as seven years old, gradually teaching them about the circulation of money and the importance of taxes within the local community in primary schools. These programmes help foster the perception that business is important for the community. Secondary school students are introduced to the principles of free enterprise and the role of businesses within



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the economy through the mini-company programme. During this programme, students are given materials to use to craft a product, develop a business and finally deliver a presentation on their company.

"This October, we are introducing the Start-Up programme at the University of Malta in collaboration with the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accounts. This is intended to be a launching pad

for young entrepreneurs to start their own business. It's not going to be an easy task as the majority of students are working and studying, so their free time is very limited. However, we hope to reach those students with an idea that can be developed into a business venture."

The list of alumni of the Company Programme includes renowned names such as designer Carlo Schembri, film director Rebecca Cremona, co-founders and directors of Think Design Limited Chris Cutugno and Bjorn Azzopardi, along with accountants, lawyers and others who occupy top management positions.

There is more than a hint of pride in Farrugia's voice as she says, "I would say that out of the more than 6,000 students who have gone through the programme, a good 20 per cent now have successful careers whether as entrepreneurs or professionals."

"Entrepreneurship has to be seen from two aspects: those who start their own business and other entrepreneurs who will go out of their way to make the company they work for a success.

"New businesses are vital for the economy as they provide a turnover of new ideas and an opportunity for innovative companies to flourish. We give our students a sheltered environment where they can experiment and fail if they must. We have had teams who started out with one idea, saw that it was going to fail and they had to change direction.

"Another team, which actually went on to win that year, was very heavily dependent on one Japanese company for their raw material, when everything came to a sudden halt due to the earthquake that hit the country. These are lessons that our students learn through hands-on experience: none of them will ever depend on one supplier."

Lara Gail Dougall participated in the Company Programme when she was at sixth form and today she is the programme coordinator for the Company Programme and Start-Up. She tells me that parents should encourage their children to participate in such programmes.



Lorna Farrugia, Junior Achievement Young Enterprise manager  
Photo: Matthew Mirabelli