

### Chatting with scientists: The Teen Science Café

The Teen Science Café was held at St. Francis Secondary School Sliema on Thursday, 10th March. The Teen Science Café is a STEM popularisation initiative launched by the Science Centre Team, Malta (DQSE). The project is targeted for Form I and II students in secondary schools. The aim is to offer students opportunities to encounter a number of professionals/experts from different STEM related careers. The professionals/experts from different fields of science visit schools to share their career insights related to STEM. The focus is on interactive, informal exchange between students and professionals to engage young students in conversation about relevant STEM themes and career paths in an informal setting, thus impacting positively on students' study and career choices. The Teen Science Cafés primarily serve as an outreach exercise in terms of promoting careers in science and technology. This facilitates improved careers' guidance and interest in studying STEM subjects.

At our school, the Teen Science Café was organised in collaboration between a guidance teacher, an Integrated Science teacher and Form 2 PSCD teachers. The preparation itself took several weeks, and included liaising with the Science Centre Team, contacting the guests, carrying out the logistics and preparing the students for the event during the PSCD lessons. In particular, the students were given the profile of the guests beforehand and asked to prepare some questions they wished to ask the visitors on the day.

The visitors came from a range of fields and included:

Ms S. Debono – *Environmental Consultant*

Dr. E. Vento Zahra – *Dental Surgeon*

Ms. A. Bartolo – *Quality Engineer*

Dr. R. Vassallo Agius – *Aquaculture Consultant*

Prof. C. Scerri – *Genetics Researcher*

Mr. J.C. Ellul – *Forensic Expert*

Ms. C. Muscat – *Painting Restorer*



**An intense discussion with Mr. J.C. Ellul (Forensic expert)**

The students spent one and a half hour rotating in groups from one expert to another in succession.



**Getting to know Ms. S. Debono (Environmental Consultant)**

Apart from helping students become more aware of the non-traditional careers that science may lead them to, this activity also served another important purpose. At this age, students have quite an unrealistic image of scientists. Studies have shown that students usually perceive scientists as males, loners, who usually spend their time mixing chemicals in labs. This activity helped to address this inaccurate perception of scientists by helping students recognise the diversity of environments scientists can work in, that some of them never work in labs and that most of their work usually involves collaboration with other experts who may not even be scientists.

**Claudette Azzopardi**

**Marquita Abela**