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## **HSBC Malta Foundation supports young minds in STEM debate on Artificial Intelligence**

HSBC Malta Foundation has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting education and innovation by sponsoring the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the Thematic Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Debate for Primary Schools, organised by the Primary Science Team within the Directorate for STEM & VET Programmes (DSVP). The event focused on the theme of Artificial Intelligence - 'Is Artificial Intelligence a source of opportunity or a cause for concern?'. This event saw the participation of 40 Year 6 students from primary schools across Malta and Gozo.

This edition of Thematic STEM Debate is part of the STE(A)M Learning Ecologies (SLEs) project, an EU-funded Horizon Europe initiative, in collaboration with the Department of Artificial Intelligence within the Faculty of Information & Communication Technology at the University of Malta. Designed to promote critical thinking, debate skills, and scientific literacy, the event provided students with an engaging platform to examine AI's impact on society through a round table debate.

This year's competition was structured into two initial debate rounds held on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February at the STEM & VET Curriculum Hub in Pembroke, where students debated in groups of 20. The top eight debaters progressed to the final round which was held on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February at Maria Regina College, Qawra Primary. The debates were adjudicated by professionals, including representatives from HSBC Malta Foundation.

To ensure that the student debaters were well-prepared for the event, a Public Speaking Workshop, co-ordinated by Esplora, was held on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> January at ESPLORA Interactive Science Centre. Students and their mentors participated in a hands-on workshop on public speaking strategies, argumentation, rebuttal techniques, and presentation skills.

### **Empowering Future Innovators**

As part of its dedication to fostering STEM education, HSBC Malta Foundation contributed to the event by providing Mio the Robot kits as prizes for the Top Debater Award winners. Additionally, all finalists received a book on Artificial Intelligence, courtesy of the European Commission Representation in Malta. Certificates of participation were presented to all students who took part in the initial debate event.

Speaking about the initiative, Glenn Bugeja, Corporate Sustainability Manager at HSBC Malta, said, "Artificial Intelligence is shaping the future of industries worldwide. At HSBC Malta Foundation, we believe that empowering young minds to critically engage with technology is essential for preparing the next generation for the challenges and opportunities ahead. This debate serves as an excellent platform for students to develop communication, reasoning, and problem-solving skills that will serve them well in any career path."

Isabel Zerafa, Education Officer for Primary Science added that "such a debate event is crucial for stimulating problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Furthermore, early engagement with the ethics and societal impacts of AI, can cultivate more responsible creators, developers, and informed citizens. These events build essential skills for a tech-driven future, promoting early awareness of AI's limitations and empowering students with digital and AI literacy."

The Thematic STEM Debate has become a flagship event in Malta's primary, middle and secondary education sector, nurturing curiosity, intellectual confidence, and a deeper understanding of STEM-related issues. By supporting initiatives like these, HSBC Malta Foundation continues to play an active role in enhancing educational opportunities and fostering innovation in the country.



***Photocaption - Empowering future innovators! 40 primary school students engaged in a dynamic debate on Artificial Intelligence as part of the Thematic STEM Debate initiative.***

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