

## Higher education

# Training of excellence and seizing talent for internationalisation

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University and post-graduate education in Catalonia has become one of the sectors most involved in internationalisation, understood not only as cooperation with other universities and top-notch centres from the rest of the world but also including exchange of teachers, researchers and students. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the so-called Bologna Plan, has triggered change that had been in the pipe for years. Catalan schools enjoy worldwide recognition as taking leading positions and are award-winning all over the world. Nevertheless, their challenges require being able to transfer their research mission and excellence students to the rest of the society and thus to the Catalan business fabric with a mind set to the global world and internationalisation.



**Case studies:** UOC, UPC, UAB, Barcelona Graduate School of Economics, California-Catalonia Program for Engineering, ESADE, IESE

Catalonia takes a leading position regarding quality and excellence of its university and post-university education offer. Both universities and business schools have made an effort to internationalise their offer and, what is more important, to attract and retain international talent. Now, within the **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**, the so-called **Bologna Plan**, Catalonia's higher education system is in a vantage position to compete with the best European schools.

### The Bologna Plan provides more flexible degrees and will contribute decisively to internationalisation of higher education.



Josep Lladós, vice-rector of the **Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC)**, points out in this respect that «the Catalan university system is powerful, diverse and wide». To Joaquim Olivé, director of the **Fundació Politècnica de Catalunya (FPC)**, «globalisation is one of the drivers for change universities are experiencing as well as a must to go on offering opportunities for professional development of talent operating in a technological setting».

The FPC was created in 1994 by the **Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC)** to foster permanent education programmes. It has signed several agreements with universities from all over the world, like the **Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas**, the **Universidad del Pacífico** and the **Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú**. In Mexico there are education programmes in collaboration with the **Universidad Iberoamericana**, the **Centro Metropolitano de Desarrollo Sostenible** and the **Instituto Mexicano de Normalización y Certificación**. In Europe, the FPC has signed agreements with the **Swiss Federal Institute of Technology** in Zurich and the **Technological Education Institute of West Macedonia** in Greece.

In the 2008-2009 year, the UPC started integration into the EHEA and within its framework,

the foundation led by Joaquim Olivé created the **School of Professional & Executive Development**, a place to exchange knowledge among technology and innovation professionals «going for developing talent and innovation capacity of professionals to tackle the business challenges of the future», Mr Olivé points out.

The UPC has in its turn 78 official bachelor degrees, 58 master degrees, 43 PhD programmes and 347 permanent education programmes. It hosts nearly 2500 students from all over the world each year to complete their education, either in a degree, a master or a PhD programme, and 4550 students register in permanent education courses. The UPC has signed 96 international double-degree programmes and offers 14 master degrees in English and 7 **Erasmus Mundus** master degrees.

Referring to the Bologna Plan, the vice-rector of the **Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC)**, Josep Lladós, considers that «we're in a vantage position for adaptation. It's a system based on flexibility, meaning efficiency and placing the student at the centre, which is typical of the UOC learning methodology from its beginning». To Josep Lladós, Bologna shall be a «trigger for strategic change».

### To the UOC, the key is having been able to cater for a social need that had been hidden: the need of learning with a flexible methodology.

Talking of quality in the future of the Catalan university system involves including new variables from now, like efficiency in conveying knowledge and adaptability to the society, but as Mr Lladós reminds, «quality is not only making good teaching programmes but also having the best teachers and researchers».

The UOC was created in 1994 at the initiative of the Government of Catalonia to develop university distance education in Catalan, an

non-existing offer to that point as there had been only the **Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)**. The big reference to the UOC was Open Educate from the UK, although the methodology was totally different from that university. The founding rector of the UOC, Gabriel Ferraté, proposed to develop the whole curriculum through the internet only. In 1994, the penetration of this medium was still minor. Today, the UOC offers its contents for mobile phones and e-books, which increases flexibility and accessibility of its more than 50,000 students, including own degrees and post-graduate courses.

Featuring a unique model in Spain, this university has a strong international footprint by means of partnerships with universities and research institutions on four continents. The UOC promotes an integrated research, education and documentation system related with the use of information and communication technologies through the **UNESCO e-learning chair**. Its vice-rector points out international recognition of the university, having obtained the Center of Excellence Award given by the **New Media Consortium**, the Gold Award of the **IMS Global Learning Consortium**, the IGC award for digital innovation and recognition in 2003 as a centre of excellence within the SUN Global Education and Research Program.

### **Barcelona has many ingredients to become a post-graduate knowledge and education pole by attracting and retaining talent.**

Besides, the UOC is within several European virtual learning networks. «Many institutions approach us for joint projects or to explore partnerships or cooperation in some field. Within e-learning the UOC is always talked of.» Its vice-rector points out that «we can't think of the Catalan university system without our university today. You only have to look at the call of the International Excellence Campus: a very important part of these acknowledgements



▲ The UOC, a unique model in Spain, has a strong international footprint.

went to Catalan universities. Our university system is more powerful than it seems.»

A proof of this is the case of the **Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)**. Just turned forty, it is among the best Spanish universities «thanks to its teaching quality, the excellence of its research and the outcomes of technology and knowledge transfer» rector Ana Ripoll explains. «The UAB wishes to be an internationally recognised centre in seizing talent, excellent in teaching and acknowledged for its social commitment.» The university offers 84 bachelor degrees, 119 master programmes, 73 PhD programmes and 481 continuing learning programmes. Precisely for this reason, the UAB has strongly gone for mobility at all levels in both its academic offer through international quality master degrees taught in English and research. An emerging area in the world, Asia, is now focused by this university. The UAB opened offices in Shanghai and Seoul to «facilitate exchange of students and researchers as well as relations with universities and research



centres in these countries», Ms Ripoll says. The UAB also has cooperation agreements with the food industry from the Chinese province of Shandong and thirteen South Korean universities with which it cooperates in neurological, biological and regenerative research. The Institute of Pharmacy has been created together with the **Hankuk University of Foreign Studies**. «The UAB wishes to deepen its international focus taking advantage of its teaching, research and transfer quality as well as its talent attraction and management model and the push for the use of English.»

### Language is the big barrier to global knowledge. This is why higher education pushes for courses taught in English.

Within this transfer, the UAB hosts many **Eras-mus** exchange students based on agreements with 500 European universities, mainly from Germany, France and Italy. As to the university's own programme, there are agreements with 89 universities from the five continents, mainly Mexico and the United States, «which shows our consolidated synergy with American universities», the rector points out. Regarding master courses, eleven are taught in English.

«I think that all universities are becoming increasingly open. We've been working on our own for a long time, disconnected from the society. Apart from this link to research, which has been very important, what we have done now is not only to create knowledge and thus enlarge research but also transfer this research to the society», the UAB rector states.

### Attracting and retaining talent

Seizing talent outside Catalonia and Spain, both in teachers and students, is the big goal of universities and business schools with an

international mindset belonging to the Catalan higher education system. A good example is the **Barcelona Graduate School of Economics** (Barcelona GSE), an institution created as a result of cooperation between the **Department of Economy and Enterprise of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra**, the **Unit of Economic Fundamentals and Analysis of the UAB**, the **Institute of Economic Analysis of CSIC** and the **International Economy Research Centre**.

These centres had created a reference network in analytic economics already in 2003 with the support of the then Department of Universities, Research and Information Society. After reaching success, the now Barcelona GSE was created in 2006.

### If the best students come to Barcelona and study at the best schools, they can help Catalan companies internationalise their business.

As its director general Eduard Vallory states, the aim is «to create added value. Our drive for an international offer of excellence in master programmes is aimed at attracting talent and have Barcelona become a European landmark in graduate studies.» Currently, an 88% of participants in Barcelona GSE programmes are foreigners. Its director general points out that «the aim is that this high rate of foreign students finds it attractive to stay in Catalonia as well as being able to detect them here instead of having Catalan companies going abroad to find skilled professionals in any corner of the world.» So it is about creating a critical mass of students and researchers in Barcelona that place the city as one of the world reference centres.

Barcelona GSE offers six master and two PhD programmes, one in Economy, Finance and Management by the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and the International Doctorate in Economic Analysis (IDEA) by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

## The Catalonia-California connection

The Government of Catalonia has been maintaining a tight relationship with the **University of California** since 1986, a brand encompassing ten university campuses with a strong internationally renowned drive for research. Cooperation with Catalonia has allowed both areas to enjoy a high degree of knowledge transfer during these 23 years.

### Foreign students doing their studies here are the best prescribers of Catalan business schools and universities abroad.

Cooperation has been developing in different areas, from agrofood – between the **Institut de Recerca i Tecnologia Agroalimentàries (IRTA)** and UC Davis – to engineering with programmes created together with the UC Irvine campus, among others. «Irvine is a good example of internationalisation that allowed young Catalan students to go there and learn, come back and enter later the labour or academic market», Àngela Bàguena, the head of the Research and Innovation Planning and Management Service at the **Department of Innovation, Universities and Enterprise** of the Government of Catalonia points out.

The origins of cooperation in engineering date back to 1995, when Pere Balsells, a Catalan entrepreneur emigrated to the United States in 1947, took the initiative of creating a programme cofunded by himself, the University of California, Irvine and the Government of Catalonia so Catalan students could deepen their engineering studies in the US. There is currently also a call for innovation projects connected with this programme, the so-called **California-Catalonia Program for Engineering Innovation**, in which Catalan universities as well as companies from California and Catalonia can take part. Within

### The Bologna Plan, time for internationalisation

The Bologna process was initiated with the aim of creating a European higher education area based on international cooperation and academic exchange. Bologna will facilitate mobility of students, teachers and researchers. The European Higher Education Area involves adopting harmonisation and a common architecture of university degrees.

In the Anglo-Saxon model, master degrees are part of higher education. In mainland Europe, there were so far five-year degrees prior to the PhD. Master degrees were dealt with as specialisation and were not always recognised by other countries. In fact, in Spain they were given the official status of university degrees only in 2007. What Bologna does is keeping the old degrees, now called bachelor, which will be of three or four years duration only. After that comes a specialisation master and later the PhD degree. Bachelor degrees are aimed at preparing students for the labour market. Master degrees are more advanced and specialised and prepare for an academic, professional and research career. Doctorates are based on a programme made of a training and a research period (PhD thesis).

The Bologna Plan also creates an open degree model. Universities had to abide by previously established curricula and programmes so far. Now they can provide an academic offer that becomes part of the open degree catalogue upon approval. Likewise, degrees can disappear if they do not comply with minimum quality standards.

this Balsells-Government of Catalonia programme, six post-graduate and two post-doc grants are given in engineering and another post-doc grant in experimental sciences (physics, chemistry, mathematics and Earth sciences). Around eighty students have benefited from this programme, Ms Bàguena says.

To her, «the main difference between the United States and Europe lies in research and knowledge transfer to the private industry». **The 2000 Lisbon Declaration** set that 3% of GDP (gross domestic product) had to be devoted to research, of which two thirds would come from the private and the rest from the public sector. According to the latest official data, research expenditure in the European



Union was 1.85% in 2007. In Catalonia, R&D investment in 2008 was 1.61% of GDP, keeping the proportion set by the EU between public and private funding. «In the United States, apart from having very high research expenditure, 80% comes from the private industry and 20% from public funds, which means that all this knowledge creates wealth», Àngela Bàguena adds. This is why «having engineering students staying in touch with this new culture is an outright benefit. It's a cultural change and another, more entrepreneurial way of doing things. Such knowledge stays then. Internationalisation is beneficial even if you move to Perpignan. It's always a new way of doing things. If you move to the United States, the more.»

### ESADE and IESE, two pioneering models



**ESADE** (Escola Superior d'Administració d'Empreses) and **IESE** (Institut d'Estudis Superiors de l'Empresa) business schools from Barcelona have placed the city as an international landmark knowledge cluster. Pioneers in offering master degrees, both institutions enjoy a great international reputation thanks to their educational quality and excellence in teaching programmes adapted to business reality.

ESADE was created in 1957 out of an entrepreneurial initiative given the need for specific business administration studies. These entrepreneurs got in contact with the Jesuits, who were already running other universities in Spain, the United States and Europe, to take over academic management. The first academic class in the business science degree started in 1959. «These origins are still kept today», Xavier Mendoza, deputy director general of ESADE and professor at the Department of Business Policy points out. Over the years, ESADE deployed post-graduate and continuing learning courses for managers. Internationalisation occurred practically from the beginning and was already included in the first curriculum, by which «having good command of English was mandatory», Mr Mendoza remembers.

Yet internationalisation is a matter affecting everybody, according to the deputy director general of ESADE: «We can apply it to the whole of the university system. Internationalisation of this system has two potentials as far as contributing to the country's competitiveness is concerned: one is human capital, talent. If we're able to attract talent and train it, a part of it may stay here and help Catalan companies adopt an international mindset. The second is that if we become international because we're strong in research, it means that our researchers are in touch with knowledge clusters and thus able to act as a link, as a bridge between the most advanced areas and the industrial fabric of the country.» Mr Mendoza defends mobility of both knowledge and people: «We can't expect to have knowledge, technology and trade flows become global without understanding that if everything becomes global and mobile, professional opportunities won't stay only in our own environment.»

### ESADE and IESE were created in the late 1950s, when the economy started moving and entrepreneurs needed quality education.

The other great business school in Barcelona, IESE, started in 1958 as a business administration post-graduate school of the University of Navarre. In the beginning, IESE offered training programmes for managers at a time in which business schools were not very known outside the United States. These programmes were initially aimed at experienced managers. Since then, more than 32,000 people have taken part in IESE programmes.

In 1993, as a reaction to globalisation, IESE started forging partnerships with American business schools like **Harvard Business School**, **Stanford**, the **MIT Sloan School of Management** and the **University of Michigan Business School**, offering open tailor-made programmes. IESE also initiated the **Global Executive MBA** programme

with modules on three continents for executives from all over the world. Lluís Renart, associate professor in Commercial Management at IESE, specialising in export and multinational marketing and export consortia, remarks that at a given point, IESE «didn't only look towards potential Spanish participants but also wished to attract and serve foreign ones». IESE currently has business schools in most of South America, Africa and Asia. «The aim is that they become independent. We not only preach internationalisation but also practise it. It hasn't always been easy. In the 1980s we went out of Spain to the whole world convincing European and American students to come to Barcelona and do a master in English. In the beginning it wasn't always obvious, but I think that to a certain extent, we've been an example. Of course, in all programmes

we tell the need that companies go abroad and this is a process that has been done very well.»

Today, in the IESE full-time master programmes done in English, nearly 80% of students are foreigners. Like ESADE, this business school also fosters exchange of teachers and professors. In fact, nearly 70% of teachers are foreigners. «We're moving in an international setting as participants, contents, programmes and also teachers move in this new scenario», Lluís Renart concludes.

**Both schools based their model in American and British master courses, the only references for post-graduate schools in those times.**



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