GUIDE TO ADAPTATION TO THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

1. Competences

UdG
Universitat
de Girona

L'ESPAI EUROPEU D'EDUCACIÓ SUPERIOR (EEES) NE
POLÍTICA PRODUÏDA A ESCALA MUNDIAL, AM
EL MEDI DOCENT UNIVERSITARI ES FA NECESSAR

GUIDE TO ADAPTATION TO THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

1. Competences

UdG
Universitat de Girona

1. Competences

This document is the first part of the Guidelines for Adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (the EHEA). *It is based on the discussions of the University of Girona's Committee for the Development of the Pilot Scheme for Adaptation to the EHEA and the working party which was created in winter 2005-2006 for the express purpose of dealing with the subject of competences. This group was made up of Alicia Baltasar, Jordi Colomer, Carmen Echazarreta, Rosa Ros and Ferran Viñas, coordinators of the various courses taking part in the Pilot Scheme, and Josep Juandó, Teaching Support delegate.*

Issued by: University of Girona, Vice-Rectorate of Teaching and Academic Policy (vr.dpa@udg.edu - www.udg.es/vrdpa), April 2006.

Legal deposit: Gi-1503-2006

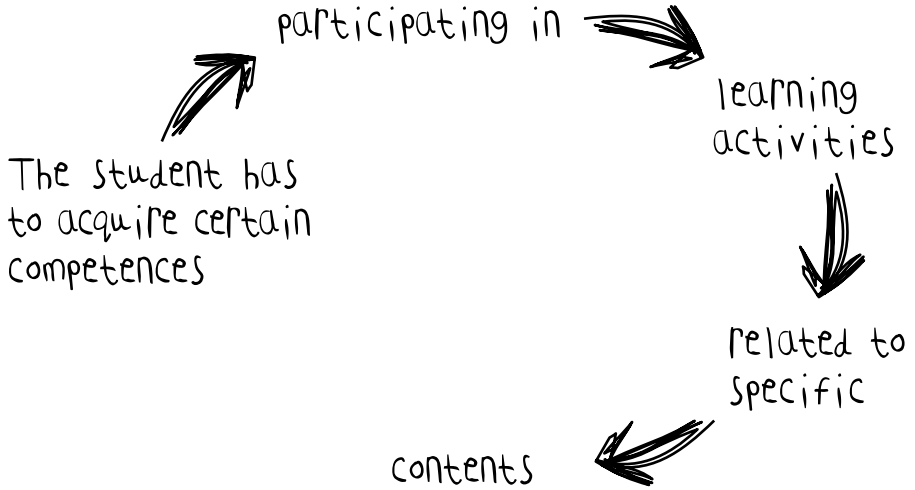
INTRODUCTION

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has arisen from a set of worldwide educational, economic and political circumstances that have been widely commented on in many fields, especially in that of university education. In view of its far-reaching scope, we need to start a building process, from each particular and specific reality, in order to adapt to it.

Catalan universities, like those in many other places, have opted to pilot this adaptation process in order to find out what this adaptation involves in broad terms and what the most appropriate steps are to become part of the EHEA.

The University of Girona has been fully involved in this process with a Pilot Scheme for Adaptation to the EHEA. All faculties and schools have taken part in it since the academic year 2004-2005. This Pilot Scheme is being followed up and analysed in order to determine how the process can be efficiently and reasonably adapted, so as to formulate the guidelines that will enable us to adapt all courses at the University of Girona to the EHEA in the very near future.

These pages should therefore be read bearing in mind that they represent the experience of ten groups of teaching staff at our university in adapting to the European Area, and that its only aim is to serve as a guide to the people who have to adapt their teaching to the criteria set out in the Bologna Declaration. We hope that they are useful to the university teaching community when the time comes for it to put into practice a reform which is both structural and methodological and which involves a change in the concept of teaching and learning.



1. EXPLANATION OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

From the point of view of the curriculum, the EHEA emphasises the fact that the student is at the centre of the teaching-learning process and, consequently, it invites us to plan teaching by focussing explicitly on learning.

At the same time, it challenges us to connect the academic world with the world of work through the competences that students need to acquire at university so as to apply them later in professional life.

We are therefore faced with a situation in which we have to plan our teaching by formulating the competences that each degree course at the UdG will need to offer students.

In this new academic context, we understand that at university, students have to develop certain *competences* through certain *learning activities*. These, in turn, will have to be achieved by working on *specific contents*.

2. FORMULATING COMPETENCES

The starting point for designing the curriculum, within the framework of the EHEA, is to formulate what competences the student has to acquire during the learning process.

Recommendations for formulating competences:

To give the maximum possible clarity and to guide both lecturers and students, it is advisable to formulate the list of competences so that they are easily identifiable as such. With this aim in mind, one satisfactory option is to systematically use *action verbs in the infinitive* to state the competences, thereby unequivocally indicating what the student has to be capable of doing.

As an example, we can think of verbs such as:

administer, analyse, apply, assess, be able to, catalogue, communicate, create, design, develop, devise, diagnose, differentiate, direct, do, formulate, identify, integrate, interpret, investigate, plan, reason, respect, sample, show, solve, train, use, write, etc.

We have expressly excluded verbs like *know*, *understand*, etc., from this list of examples, as we are aware that they may make us define what may be, strictly speaking, contents rather than competences. Moreover, it is considered that to carry out any of the acts the proposed verbs refer to, knowledge and understanding are implicitly required.

1. Competences

In contrast to this competences-related criterion, the contents can be stated using nouns (for example, knowledge, diagnosis, analysis, research, interpretations, differences, etc.).

To give a clear vision of the course design, it is important to make every effort to achieve this differentiation.

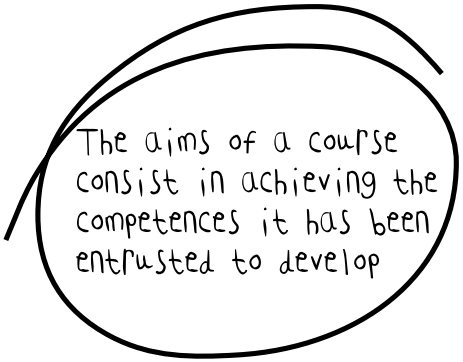
Some examples of statements of competences might be:

Examples of specific competences:

— Be able to carry out a design analysis of a specific CPU according to the basic architectural models of Von Neumann and Harvard.
— Apply techniques to collect information on how individuals, groups or organisations function.
— Use theoretical knowledge to interpret the real world.
— Use computer programs to create mathematical models applied to population studies.

Examples of transversal or generic competences:

— Present the results of work, both orally and in writing, and lead a discussion on the subject,
— Analyse complex situations and design strategies to resolve them, both individually and in a group.
— Use the English language.
— Evaluate one's own activities and learning process and come up with strategies to improve them.

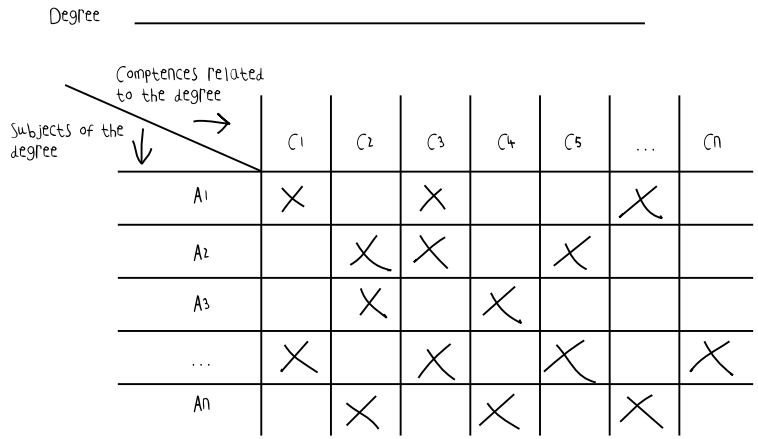


3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AIMS, COMPETENCES, COURSE CONTENT AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

A wide range of terminology has appeared throughout the adaptation process to the European Higher Education Area and at times this can lead to some confusion. Probably one of the factors that has had most influence in this respect is the difficulty encountered when comparing terminology between university systems in different countries.
In this context we recommend the use of some specific terms be appropriated, even though this involves the risks entailed in making a choice. At the University of Girona we have chosen to consider that a subject aims to provide the competences it has been entrusted to develop. In the curriculum design process, this allows us to talk directly of competences, taking this as a concept which includes that of the aim. *

Once the competences have been determined, it is time to define what learning activities, linked to the specific contents of the subject, will be proposed to the students so that they develop each of the competences we have specified.

It is inherent in this process that each competence will be worked on through various learning activities and different contents. As a consequence, there must be a lower number of competences assigned to a subject than contents and learning activities.



4. PLANNING COMPETENCES AT TWO LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY

These competences need to be developed throughout the degree course. We therefore have to check for coherence when dealing with competences.

The student's study plan to attain the competences must be considered at two different levels:

4.1. The first level corresponds to the body in charge of the degree. This organisation has to produce a plan of action that makes sure the competences (both specific and generic or transversal) that it has deemed necessary in the degree are fully and coherently covered.

Each subject must be entrusted to develop these competences, so that the whole degree guarantees a compensated and sufficient processing of the different competences.

A tool that fulfils this function, set out in the table, may be useful for this aim.

Two basic ways have been identified within the framework of the Pilot Scheme to attain this final result, and each has its advantages:

A. The first way could be called "top-down", where the Academic Council determines the competences to be developed during the degree courses in accordance with the end-of-degree profile of the studies, the existing documentation and the characteristics that we want to give to the future

graduate, and distributes these over several subjects so that the overall result is satisfactory.

When each lecturer has to design their own subject, they are given pre-determined competences by the Academic Council. However, this does not mean that these cannot be complemented by others that are considered suitable, as long as they do not interfere with the coherence of the study plan. Thus the UdG's application for course design provides the lecturer with support.

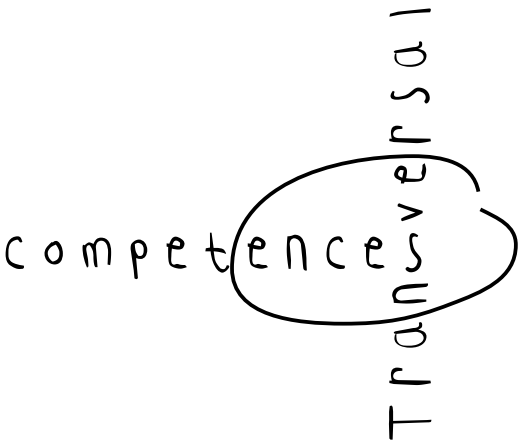
B. The second way could be considered "bottom-up". This one would involve three stages:

B.1. Collective definition of the competences that the degree must guarantee the graduate.
B.2. Self-assignment, on the part of the lecturer, of the pre-determined competences that they believe may be worked on in the subject to be taught.
B.3. Collective verification of the resulting level of coherence and correction, if necessary, of the assignment of certain competences.

4.2. The second level of educational planning relates to the lecturer, whose task is to devise the learning activities that set the student on the right road to acquiring the assigned competences by means of the work to be undertaken for each subject.

We understand that course design has to guide both lecturers and students, as much as this is possible. A good aid for this is to put forward a coherent proposal that is seen as reasonable and sustainable. For this reason, it is advisable to avoid long lists of competences, which could make it difficult to focus. The lecturer should not fall into the trap of making excessive simplifications, either, as this would not afford the minimum specification required to begin the learning process.

To define a reasonable range, let us say that each subject should work directly with 5 to 8 competences.



5. TRANSVERSAL OR GENERIC COMPETENCES

To seek the maximum returns from this category of competences, and at the same time to bring meaning to its definition and nature, means integrating them in the specific course content of each degree.

The organisation of subjects and other programme elements (such as seminars, courses, etc.) to specifically develop some transversal competence, must always be understood as an introduction to the competence in question.

Once introduced, it will need to be integrated instrumentally into the specific subjects relating to each degree's course contents.

To ensure coherence when integrating the transversal competences into the subject contents, the teaching staff involved must work together and this will lead to a gradual increase in collaborative work among lecturers when planning courses.

6. COMPTENCES ASSESSMENT

In so far as we wish to focus university teaching on the acquisition of competences, we need to devise ways of assessing work that respond to this concept.

Probably the best way of showing that a competence has been acquired is through practice. In this respect, learning activities are a good way of observing the acquisition of competences. (When we speak of learning activities in a future guide in this series, we will have to bear in mind the link between competences and activities and hence, the coherence and coordination needed for the set of learning activities.) Transversal competences are worth noting in this section. They should be assessed, and the result of their assessment process must have a significant effect on the mark the students obtain. This should be coherent with the importance that we wish to place on this kind of competence.

Some assessment activities conceived as transversal with respect to the study programme, the course and the module may constitute a good instrumental framework in which to assess generic competences. We will return to this issue in a later document on the subject of assessment.

** When making decisions on the preparation of this first issue of the Guide to Adaptation to the European Higher Education Area, we have taken into account the meanings of the term "competence". These come together in a complex concept, one which connects the different types of knowledge which a person acquires in different contexts and at different moments in his or her life with the situations or problems, of varying complexity, that this person may face and need to resolve.*

We have also taken into account the role we should allow these competences to play in the process of curriculum planning: from taking them as a broad point of reference when making decisions in the framework of curriculum development through to giving them a more direct role, placing them among the operative components of the planning process.

Furthermore, we also wanted to take into account that we need to think about a curricular planning process which addresses all of the university's teaching staff, with their great diversity of teaching methods and curriculum planning. We therefore wanted to go for simplicity: a simplicity which compromises neither the bases of the new models of teaching nor the essential concepts of the curriculum's components.

Treating competences in this way has resulted in formulations which vary according to the type of aims, the idea being to make the idea of a competence compatible with the purpose of acquiring it. Thus we formulate competences in terms of purposes, and make room for what we might call "competence aims"

EUROPEU D'EDUCACIÓ SUPERIOR [EEES] NEIX D'UNA
ÍTICA PRODUÏDA A ESCALA MUNDIAL, AMPLIAMENT
DI DOCENT UNIVERSITARI. ES FA NECESSARI, EN VISTA
R DE CADA REALITAT CONCRETA I ESPECÍFICA, EN

L'ESPA
PU
EL MEDI
ESPAI, A PARTIR DE
LES UNIV
ADAPTACI
SUPOSA L'A
LA UNIVER
D'AD

UdG
Universitat
de Girona

dssny:J+1