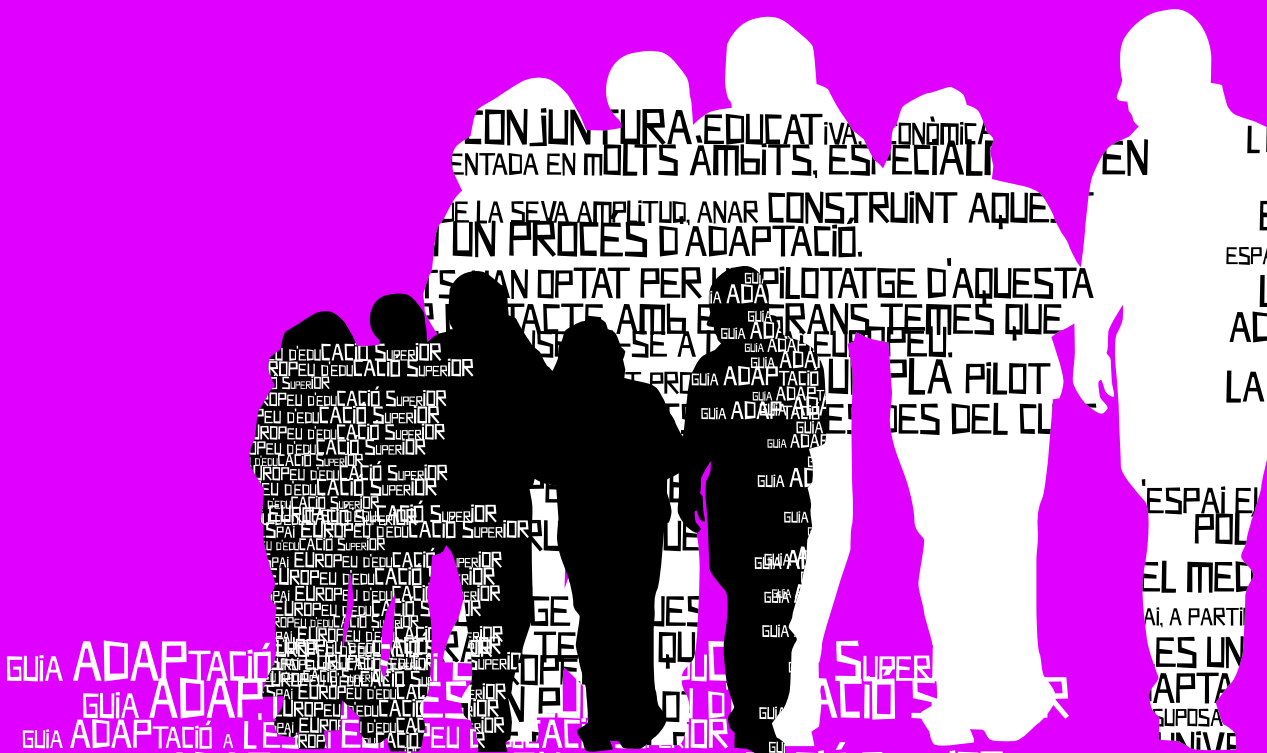# GUiDE TO ADAPTATiON TO THE EUROPEAN HiGHER EDUCATiON AREA

5. Evaluation of the learning process

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GUIDE TO ADAPTATION TO THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a continuation of the guide to adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Here we approach a subject of considerable importance: the evaluation of the learning process. This is an essential matter for everyone involved - both students and teachers. It has often been said that evaluation has been dealt with in less depth than other areas of teaching, perhaps because it has traditionally taken place at the end of the teaching-learning process. We shall try to improve this tendency.

Thus we begin the fifth booklet of our guide, starting from what we have learned from the four previous issues and having seen the response they have generated in the university community. We now know to what extent the guide succeeds in initiating and steering the debate as to how we want the EHEA to be applied in our university.

We must state once more that we understand the creation of the EHEA as an opportunity to reflect on our teaching methods, so as to improve them according to our own criteria, always approaching them from our own practices which we consider a good starting point for the future of the University of Girona. It would be a great mistake to ignore our own history as teachers.

7. CONSIDERING EVALUATION

Evaluation of the learning process is a matter of the highest importance, especially for the student, but also for the teacher. The results of evaluation, which in the academic world lead to a grade, can certainly guide us as teachers in our teaching practice.

If evaluation is so important, then it is right to consider it in depth from the very beginning: from the moment when we design the teaching programme.

Right from the start we must think about a possible evaluation for both the students and the teaching staff: for the students so that they can approach it with the ability to succeed and as one more element of learning; for the teachers, so that we can feel the

satisfaction of a job conscientiously done, without an excessive workload. Evaluation must be sustainable.

We must also think about an evaluation which provides reliable information about the learning achieved. We must take care over the connection between what we teach the students and the way in which we teach them, and between what we ask them to demonstrate and the way in which we ask them to do so.

If we add to these two conditions - sustainability and efficiency - those proposed by the Bologna process, it will probably be useful for us to consider the following matters:
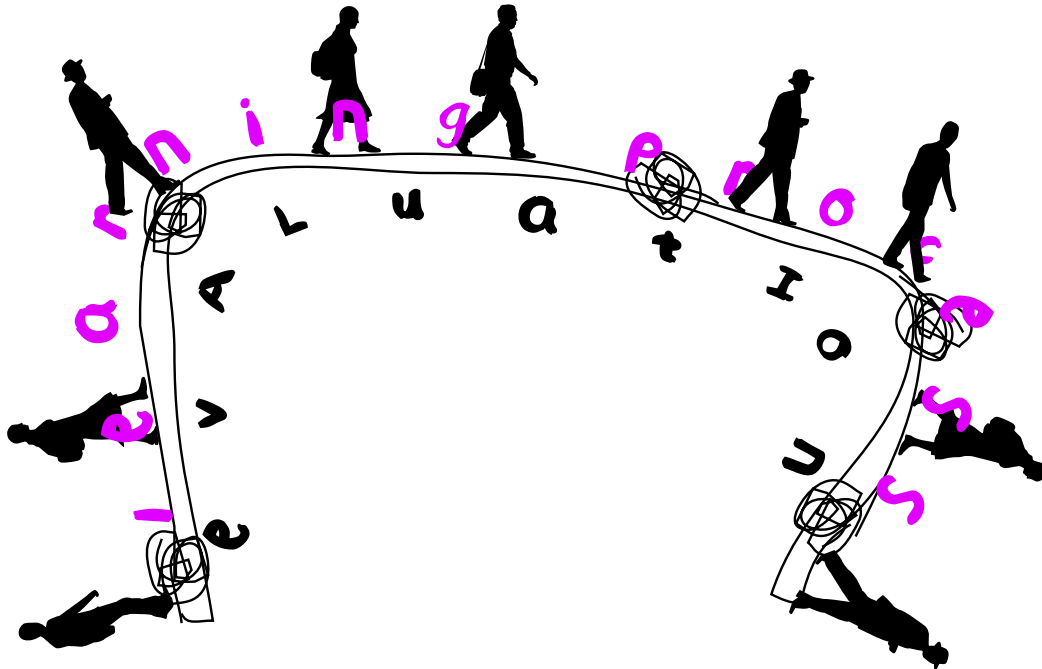
— First of all, we must begin from the premise that we do not necessarily have to change our model of evaluation. However, we must consider whether we can improve it.

— It is a good idea to bear in mind that there are many evaluation instruments of which we may use only a few. We can consider whether it would perhaps be timely to add others. It is satisfying to achieve coherence between the object of evaluation and the instrument we use. Diversity of evaluation instruments can enrich the experience of both students and teachers.

— If we plan to incorporate new evaluation methods or instruments into our practice, we should consider the first principle stated above: sustainability. We cannot give ourselves additional work and commitments. In any event, we must replace an evaluation practice which we think could be improved with one which we consider better.

— We have two main ways of collecting information for evaluation:

· Preparing evaluation tests: activities with the specific aim of leading to evaluation.
· Stating that some learning activities are also evaluation activities. For example, an exercise or reading given to our students within the framework of the course so as to provide them with some knowledge could also be considered as evaluation activities and thus given weighting in the qualification.

— We need to ensure that the evaluation is part of the students' learning process, that it is constructive. In any event, the fact that the students have to use their knowledge during evaluation activities can certainly help them to familiarise themselves still further with this knowledge.

— Evaluating students' progress during the learning process, rather than waiting until the end of the teaching process to make the evaluation, offers us the opportunity to improve the learning process. If necessary we can incorporate new elements of teaching, or perhaps modify certain practices. This is the concept and the aim of continuous assessment.

The value we draw from the application of continuous assessment is precisely this: following the learning process, understanding it as a basis for improving

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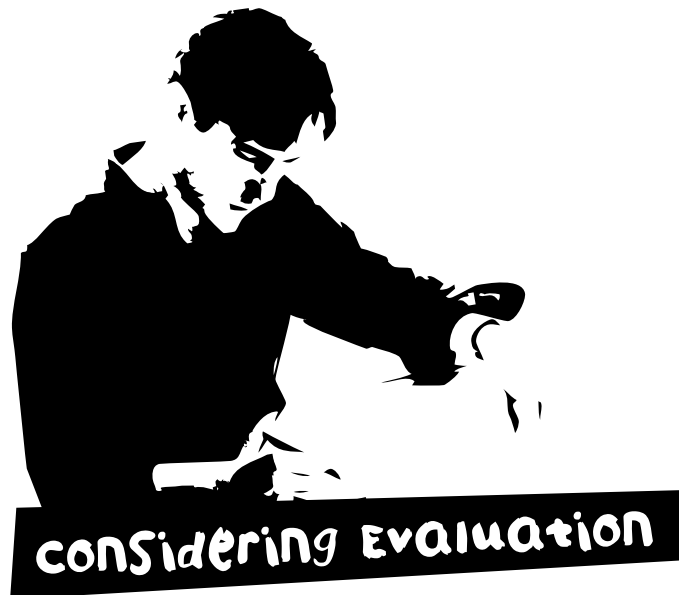
learning itself. If we want to apply a model of continuous assessment, or a combination of this and final evaluation, we must consider which instruments could be of use to us. We will discuss these instruments in the next section.

— Evaluation does not end when the students have finished their examinations or tests, or handed in their work, or even when the teacher has published the marks. Evaluation provides a much better return when there is feedback: when students are asked to reflect on their results and consider how, if necessary, they can improve them. We may find that there are a variety of ways of encouraging this reflection, according to the options offered by the material, the course, the number of students, etc. Contact and exchange of ideas between teachers is probably one way of finding valid alternatives.

2. INSTRUMENTS, METHODS, AGENTS

It is not difficult to make an initial list of possible evaluation instruments, since a good number of the teaching staff already know most of them. Just to recap, we can mention a few suggestions:
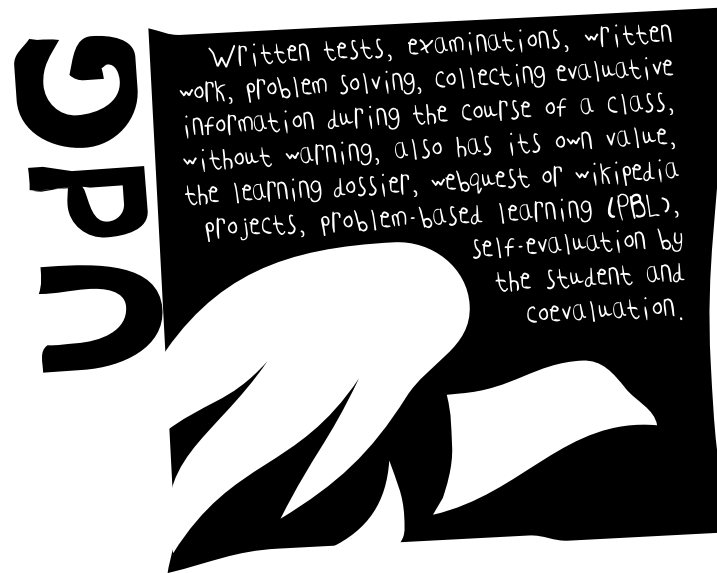
— Written tests, examinations. These are the classical evaluation instrument in the teaching world.

— Problem solving, or perhaps some other type of exercise within the framework of the class, working individually or as a group, publicly, is another practice which has long been known. Its value in evaluation is also without question. We may use it to evaluate different aspects: knowledge, the ability to use it, public attitude, etc.

— Written work, its oral presentation, with a broad range of evaluative possibilities: content, expression, form etc.

— Provided that the students are told that this may happen, collecting evaluative information during the course of a class, without warning, also has its own value: that of evaluation which is not specifically prepared. This allows us to evaluate what is being done at a particular moment. This forms part of encouraging the culture of constant quality.

Among the less traditional evaluation methods also in use at our university we can find, for example:

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Written tests, examinations, written work, problem solving, collecting evaluative information during the course of a class, without warning, also has its own value, the learning dossier, webquest or wikipedia projects, problem-based learning (PBL), self-evaluation by the student and coevaluation.

— The learning dossier, the systematic collection of evidence of learning.

— Webquest or Wikipedia projects, activities of a collaborative nature.

— Problem-based learning (PBL), a teaching method which integrates evaluation opportunities.

— ACME, the tool for continuous assessment and the improvement of

teaching developed by a group of teachers at the University of Girona, has great evaluative worth from a specific perspective. You can see this at www.acme.udg.es.
You can obtain information about the use of these instruments at the University of Girona by writing to.

We do not only find variation in the instruments used. The question of the agents (who has to perform the
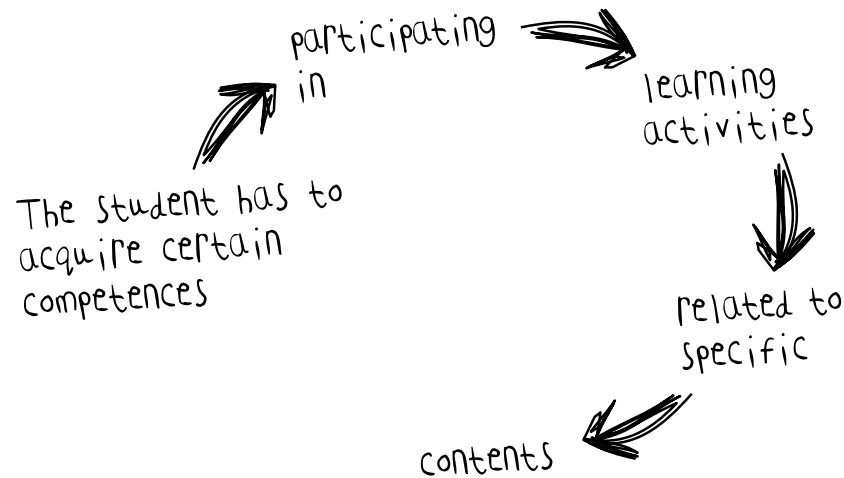
evaluation) gives rise to two ideas which already have a certain tradition in our university and which we must certainly take into account:

— <mark>Self-evaluation by the student is a little-used practice. It requires training, guidance, tutoring.</mark> Treated with care it can become a valuable instrument and highly educational in the area of reflection about one's own activities.

— Co-evaluation: some aspects of our courses could be evaluated from the point of view of the students themselves: evaluation among equals. In this case it is a good idea to ensure anonymity. But co-evaluation, if applied with rigour, can benefit the students' involvement in the learning process.

Another booklet in this series of guides will soon appear in which these and other possible evaluation instruments and methods will be discussed further.

participating in → learning activities

The student has to acquire certain competences

↓ related to specific

contents ↙

3. EVALUATION AND COMPETENCES

Until now we have been presenting some elements to improve evaluation from the point of view of reflection, always beginning with what takes place in the classroom, which must necessarily be the basis of our future teaching.

There remains one further issue for us to tackle. What is the aim of evaluation? What do we have to evaluate? What should our point of reference be, when we come to evaluate?

Let us look again at the graphic at the top of this page, which we have been using since the first booklet in this guide to describe teaching activity.

So, if we have planned our teaching on the basis of the formulation of the competences we want our students to acquire, it seems logical to evaluate the acquisition of these competences.

In accordance with what we said at the beginning of this booklet, through evaluation we must check whether or

not what we intended for the students has been achieved, whether the learning we sought has been done. And, given that what we intended was the acquisition of certain competences, it seems logical to check whether these competences have been acquired.

This statement immediately draws our attention: it suggests questions and requires an explanation. The following paragraphs aim to address this.

— If we apply the principle of sustainability which we argued for above, then we must evaluate the acquisition of these competences without this involving us in a great deal of extra work. Reflection on the instruments used for evaluation can probably help us here.

— Evaluating the acquisition of competences should also provide us with an evaluation of the acquisition of the course contents on which we have worked. We must devise evaluation activities which measure both competences and contents at the same time. The "Considering Evaluation" section of this booklet may provide some guidance.

— We must be very clear about what it is that we want to evaluate, the competences. In order to evaluate them, we need to have them very well defined. A clear formulation of their terms will help us here, and set of stages and levels for each competence will make the evaluation task easier.

— It would even be useful to establish as many levels for each competence as there are academic courses making up the degree course.

levels of competence

to highest
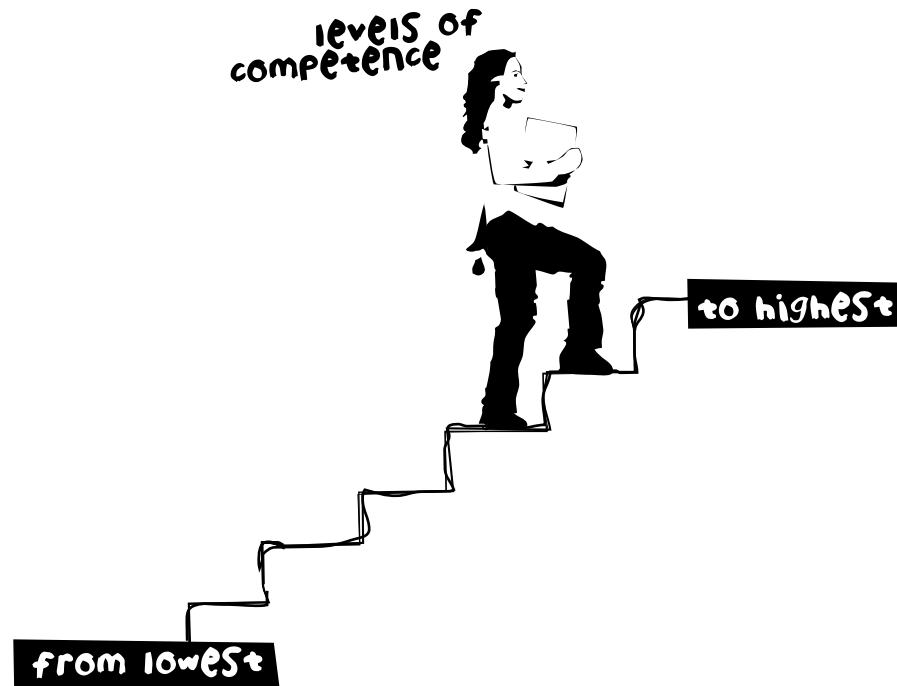
from lowest

— Criteria for establishing levels of competence:

From lowest to highest complexity of content to be used
From lowest to highest skill required
From lowest to highest autonomy
From lowest to highest proactivity
From lowest to highest creativity
From lowest to highest critical sense
From lowest to highest argumentation

— Some examples of stages of competences:

Transversal Competence:

Taking responsibility for one's own training process

Stages

1.-Managing and developing the learning activities suggested by the teachers completely and correctly.
2.-Analysing the growth of one's own knowledge and its relationship to the learning activities carried out.

3.-Comparing self-evaluation with evaluation results, jointly with teachers or tutors, so as to create strategies for progress.

Transversal competence applied to the area of economics:

Effectively and efficiently collecting and selecting economic information from different sources and in different formats in function of specific objectives.

Stages

1.-Selecting information from given sources with generic aims (e.g. the latest inflation data from the National Statistics Institute).
2.-Choosing sources which enable one to obtain information with generic aims (e.g. inflation data).
3.-Choosing sources and relevant information with specific aims (e.g. the latest inflation data).

Specific competence for the degree in Organisational Communication

Designing and managing written communication strategies in the area of public relations.

Stages

1.-Applying communication strategies following the models worked on in class and in situations developed during the course.
2.-Designing communication strategies in new situations, being able to apply creativity and ingenuity with the aim and effect of persuading via the message.
3.-Creating communication strategies in complex situations and with limited resources, demonstrating the ability to make decisions to resolve adverse and/or crisis situations.

— If we define all the competences to be worked on in our courses at this

Course Competences	Levels of competence	Competences corresponding to a particular course or module	Grade for each competence worked on (according to the scale previously given, for example)*	Grade for the course (according to weighting already given to the competences worked on)
C1	C1.1			
	C1.2	C1.2	b	
	C1.3			
	C1.4			
C2	C2.1			
	C2.2			Good
	C2.3	C2.3	a	
	C2.4			
C3	C3.1	C3.1	c	
	C3.2			
	C3.3			
	C3.4			

In this column, just as an example, we have used the valuation scale given as an example in this section.

level, then it will be easier for us to evaluate their acquisition. And we can can assign a grade to each student for each competence. We can use whatever valuation scale we consider most appropriate, from the classic academic scale of 0 to 10 points to more qualitative scales, such as the type shown below:

a. Excellent result.
b. Resolves the activity correctly, without problems.
c. Carries out the activity quite well.
d. Carries out the activity with mistakes.

e. Does not carry out the proposed activity.

— From here it is not difficult for us to reach the grade, the mark, which we have to give to each student for each course. We will have collected at least as many grades per student as there are competences which we have worked on and evaluated. It only remains to establish a weighting for the various competences.

— The chart below illustrates the suggested process.

4. SOME OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

— Evaluation through competences, which should not involve more evaluative effort, must serve to improve the process. The change, insofar as it is carried out, must be positive. It is therefore a good idea for us to consider it in every context, beginning from the evaluation we carry out in our current situation. We cannot lose sight of the fact that the Bologna process should be seen as an opportunity for reflection and improvement, rather than a change for its own sake.

— As we evaluate the students' progress in acquiring the competences, we may discover that certain people show problems with specific competences. It would be a good thing to provide them with elements which enable them to improve, whether in the current form of optional activities or in some form enabled by future structures.

— The move from grading competences to grading the course provides us with an opportunity to think very logically and deliberately about the competences: perhaps it would be appropriate to state that the successful acquisition of certain competences is compulsory in order to pass our courses.

— The exchange of information, especially among teachers who are working with the same students on the same competences but on different courses, will be a very powerful tool to improve teaching.

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