

# Executive **summary**

## **EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AT UNIVERSITY.**

## **FOSTERING CRITICAL AND COMMITTED EDUCATION IN DEGREE STUDIES**

DIAGNOSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF  
IMPLANTATION, POSSIBILITIES AND STRATEGIES  
WITHIN THE FORMAL EDUCATION PROVIDED BY  
THE CATALAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES



**Fundació  
Autònoma Solidària**

**UAB CAMPUS**

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# Research Context

This diagnosis has been prepared within the framework of the project titled “Fostering Education for Development at University”, an initiative of the *Fundació Autònoma Solidària* (FAS) aimed at the specific and cross-cutting promotion of Education for Development (EFD) perspectives within a formal university ambit, with the object of fostering the role of the university in generating critical understanding and in preparing citizens who are both active and committed to transforming inequalities at the local-global scale.

Ongoing since the 2013-2014 academic year, this project has helped support the creation of a series of participative processes directed towards the

design and implementation of ways to introduce EFD into university syllabuses, whilst at the same time also supporting those existing spaces within non-formal education as a means of accompanying and strengthening the principal line of concern.

The project is carried out at the UAB campus (Bellaterra) and in Barcelona through a multi-participant networking strategy that includes the offices of several vice-rectors, centres and faculties, lecturing staff, students, university cooperation offices and organisation with expertise in EFD, among others, with the support of the Barcelona City Council and the Catalan Agency for Cooperation and Development.

# Structure of the Report

This diagnosis aims to ascertain the current presence of EFD in the Catalan public universities, as well as to identify ways of incorporating and broadening critical and committed education within the Catalan university system. Therefore, a range of information collection and analysis has been used, and stringent attempts have been made to incorporate the opinions of a broad spectrum of relevant agents. Following this idea, this document combines the results of empirical research in a specific way to produce this current diagnosis, with conclusions from other related activities that also contribute relevant information.

Following a brief introduction to define the working perspective on the concept of EFD and its formal situation within the university structure, the diagnosis presents a global vision of EFD in the 8 universities grouped within the Catalan Association of Public Universities (*Associació Catalana d'Universitats Públiques*: ACUP). We then present

the principal results obtained from assessing subjects in a number of degrees currently on offer within the Catalan public universities.

Whereas the first part of this research focusses on obtaining a general vision of the ACUP universities, the specific empirical data is derived exclusively from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. This has been obtained by combining quantitative and qualitative measures, with the objective of including the perspectives of those who have a direct contact with the structure and content of university degrees. To ascertain students' opinion on the role of universities with respect to critical education, and what value this might bring them as citizens and professionals, a questionnaire was produced, answered by 892 students from the first and fourth year of degrees within a range of distinct disciplines. In parallel to this, the opinions were obtained of people responsible for the organisation of degrees through interviews with five degree coordinators (from a range of distinct degrees);

these interviews throw light of the participants' views regarding the organisational dynamics and teaching objectives at university level from the perspective of those who design and teach the degrees.

This diagnosis also incorporates the results of the work seminar titled "Education for Development in Degree Studies", held on 15 January 2015 in Barcelo-

na. This brought together over 40 professionals from a number of universities and organisations involved in incorporating critical in Higher Education. Finally, the document includes a list of good practices currently being applied by the Catalan public universities.

The complete report can be consulted online on the FAS website [www.uab.cat/fas](http://www.uab.cat/fas) (Catalan only).

## What is Education for Development?

Education for Development (EFD) is an active learning process that seeks to visualise the priorities of sustainable human development, to understand the cause and effects of structural problems at a global scale, to encourage the full participation of the entire citizenry in eradicating poverty and in the fight against exclusion and inequality, as well as in the construction of a social and environmental context that does not lead us to the extinction of the planet's resources. Its objective is to attempt to influence new economic, social and environmental policies that are more just, sustainable and—consequently—consistent with the respect for and fulfilment of human rights. Issues included within EFD are broad and varied and have not been defined in any way that is either specific or consensual. As a result, there are several categorisations that may not fully coincide in content or perspective; at all

events, they are similar enough for them all to allow recognition of the diverse economic, social, political and environmental dimension that necessarily intervene in the welfare of both people and peoples. In this project, we have made use of a categorisation of areas divided into five strategic points:

- 1 Economic and social sustainability
- 2 Governance, human rights and global citizenship
- 3 A culture of peace and restorative justice
- 4 Interculturality
- 5 Gender

## Results

### The Presence of EFD in Formal University Structures

1. All universities make reference to EFD in the initial articles of their statutes, even if these are, in effect, mere declarations of general intention, of an unproblematic character, which can be interpreted and accepted from a wide range of positions. These declarations refer to the fostering of critical thought, respect for human rights and, in several universities, respect for the environment and sustainable development.
2. All universities carry out social policies that confirm their commitment to the local and global society. These include areas that pertain to EFD such as equality, sustainability, inclusiveness and

- cooperation. These areas are worked on from specialised centres and institutes, which take responsibility for each one of these in a fragmentary manner and without any overall coordination. Specific work is undertaken through campus policies and programmes, which are outside the formal academic ambit. With the exception of work on inclusiveness and the evaluation of competence in Sustainability and Social Commitment at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC), there are no direct links between these policies and the degree-syllabus contents.
3. Degree syllabuses have a not inconsiderable number of subjects that could incorporate EDF perspectives without any requirement for syllabus change. The thematic areas of these subjects, however, are highly fragmented depending on the specific degree of which they form a part, in such a way that certain areas of knowledge give a very broad coverage of EDF issues and concerns, but in others such questions are entirely absent.
  4. Economic, Social and Environmental Sustainability are present above all in engineering degrees, but also have a space for themselves in the sciences, in economics and, to a lesser extent, in the syllabuses of law studies, social sciences and the humanities.
  5. Governance, Human Rights and Global Citizenship, on the other hand, have a broad-ranging presence in the social sciences and humanities, and occupy certain spaces in law studies, economics and education. Nevertheless, their total absence is worth drawing attention to in scientific-technical degrees.
  6. The thematic ambits of Interculturality, Gender and a Culture of Peace and Restorative Justice have a more fragmented presence, limited to specific degrees or very particular subjects. Subjects referring to Interculturality can be found in the social sciences and humanities and, above all, in education and teacher-training. Those that particularly study restorative justice are limited to law studies and education. In contrast, Gender is a thematic area found in a substantial range of degree studies with specific subjects that aim to introduce perspectives of gender into the main ambits of the degree in question. Nevertheless, its total absence is worth drawing attention to in scientific-technical degrees.
  7. Most subjects that are able to incorporate the principles of EDF within their range of contents are optional. This means that there are only a few cases in which all students will take such subjects in an obligatory manner. At the same time, however, these are subjects taken in the final years of the degree, which means that they should facilitate a deeper reflection on and analysis of the elements being taught.

## The views of UAB students

8. The greater part of UAB students believe that politics and economics should be directed towards a model that takes into account the principles of sustainable development and global citizenship. Yet the percentage of students committing themselves to specific policies that might have an influence on a change of paradigm is, in fact, very small, and they still show an important degree of agreement with policies that actually create inequality.
9. Students call for a university that prepares them for their incorporation into employment, with a high number of technical and practical aspects to their learning processes. However, they also want the university to provide them with tools for reflecting on global dynamics and that help them to critically analyse complex realities.
10. Expectations with regard to university learning (knowledge that students wish to obtain) differ significantly with other expectations (knowledge that students think they will obtain or have actually already obtained), especially among final-year students, when their evaluation is

- about past experience. These differences are especially evident in knowledge related to the ability to analyse critically and to manage complex global realities. Consequently, students think that university does not provide the necessary tools to understand and critically administer reality in a way that would be desirable from their own point of view.
11. Students believe that the best learning methodologies at university are professional placements and activities that represent an alternative to formal study, even if they also express the opinion that, in practice, knowledge is principally transmitted in traditional lectures. This data points to a demand for the use of diverse methodologies, at the same time as revealing a lack of recognition for the traditional processes of knowledge transmission at university in favour of others that directly opt for practical and participative learning.
  12. Learning related to sustainable development and global citizenship should principally be incorporated through the use of new teaching methodologies that promote interdisciplinarity amongst areas of knowledge, and introduce this within specific content within existing subjects or in specific optional subjects.
  13. Students perceive that learning which incorporates EFD perspectives will be particularly useful to them in their future as citizens, but at the same time a majority also voice the opinion that it can help them increase their competence within the labour market.
  14. There are differences between degrees regarding the priorities of current economic models. Over 80% of those studying primary teaching, veterinary medicine, journalism and sociology defend the need for a change in patterns of consumption, and opt for social responsibility in this ambit. The percentage falls to 50% for economics students. In parallel, over 50% students in economics, primary teaching, computer engineering and chemistry defend the need for a liberalising of markets so as to self-regulate, whilst only 25% of sociology students hold this view.
  15. Most students want to obtain adequate preparation for employment; yet less than half of those enrolled in law, economics, journalism, sociology, primary teaching, history and psychology believe that they can actually achieve this in their studies.
  16. Differences between the hope for and expectation of an education in critical thinking are especially evident in the degrees of veterinary medicine, chemistry and psychology. In contrast, there is little difference in sociology, which therefore shows a higher level of satisfaction as regards this aspect of the degree.
  17. The suitability of the lecture format as a priority methodology for learning at university varies from 70% of acceptance by history students to 20% for those studying primary teaching.
  18. The perception of the usefulness of an EFD perspective to strengthen the role of students as active and committed citizens is far lower in science degrees.

## The views of UAB degree coordinators

19. UAB degree coordinators state that there are no institutional strategies to introduce EFD into syllabuses. They identify different subjects in distinct areas of knowledge that have introduced certain thematic areas of EFD, but such initiatives always depend on the disposition and perspective contributed by the lecturers from their individual point of view.
20. Whilst it is true that degrees and thematic content in the humanities and social sciences allow us to identify EFD perspectives to a greater or lesser extent in a range of subjects and in a cross-disciplinary manner, coordinators of scientific-technical areas detect significant difficulties in introducing elements of critical and committed education that have no direct

- and immediate connection with the studies of a more technical and specific nature offered by their degrees.
21. Determining the relevance of students' critical and committed education is felt unanimously by all coordinators.
  22. However, they also indicate the difficulty of drawing up syllabuses that incorporate the critical perspectives of global analysis with specific knowledge that is more directly professionalising and that the coordinators also see as indispensable. This difficulty is most particularly noteworthy in scientific and technical studies, where there are a high number of very applied subjects.
  23. The recent implantation of new syllabuses adapted to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) represents an opportunity for the incorporation of content relating to sustainable development and global citizenship, in the sense that it is an opportunity to reformulate syllabuses and also to give a response to the evaluative structure based on competences that students are required to attain.
  24. Vantages offered by the new organisation of academic credits is the extension in time that certain subjects have attained, whether through more teaching hours or through re-structuring via tutorials and work spaces in reduced groups. This facilitates far greater attention to students' needs and also increases opportunities for reflection on the subjects themselves.
  25. The now-obligatory character of degree-final projects is considered to be one of the advantages that would facilitate the introduction of EFD concerns into degree study. Most degrees provide a closed list of projects subjects, so that the challenge in this ambit is now to provide incentives to lecturers so that they can both propose and supervise topics of relevant interest.
  26. With respect to disadvantages, the high level of specificity required by subjects makes it difficult to introduce new points and critical perspectives deriving from lecturers' individual initiatives if such issues have not been previously contemplated.
  27. The application of the EHEA has not brought about a reduction of ratios, nor a clear methodological change in the teaching carried out by most lecturers. Consequently, most university classes still follow the traditional lecture format.
  28. But whilst the adaptation of syllabuses to the EHEA may not have initially implied substantial modifications in content or methodology, the process itself has most certainly involved a change in the dynamics of coordination among lecturers, bringing indications of new working strategies directed towards guaranteeing collaboration in deciding on the skills required to be attained, and on the analysis of such skills, in designing the syllabuses and deciding on subject content.
  29. Degree coordinators observe that the introduction of EFD into syllabuses does not mean creating new subjects; rather, it involves the incorporation of EFD perspectives and ideas into existing subjects in a cross-disciplinary manner. This opinion is motivated by academic and cognitive interest with respect to students, and also by the difficulties that a change in agreed syllabuses would involve.
  30. There is also a general opinion that implementing EFD contents in an efficient and general manner would require the involvement of all necessary parties within the university, most particularly that of the governing team and authorities within the university structure. In this respect, the coordinators remark that no generalisation of EFD would be possible if this was not guided by institutional direction.
  31. In relation to specific measures that might be adopted, coordinators draw particular attention to the creation of practical resources that would provide them with tools to introduce such topics into the various subjects; the incorporation of professional specialists on the degree-final project examining committees; or establishing specific training for lecturers. With respect to this last question, however, they also draw attention to the difficulties of attendance that such initiatives often involve, rather than those pertaining to lecturers who already have the necessary sensibility and previous knowledge.

## Results from the Working Seminar

32. Participants in the First Working Seminar “Education for Development in Degree Studies” detected elements of both a negative and positive character with respect to the development of critical and committed education in the formal university ambit taking the perspective of diverse axes and levels of activity: university–society relations; university policy; university structure; and the role of direct parties (lecturing staff and students).
33. With respect to university–society relations, emphasis was placed on the state of disconnection among lecturing staff, students and society, which creates a mutual lack of awareness regarding similar initiatives organised from a range of distinct ambits. It was also clear that there is an ideological hegemony of ideas opposed to those of EFD that threatens the development of such ideas within the university. In contrast, however, a growing interest was detected in precisely these ideas even in ambits traditionally distant from critical education, such as the world of corporate business, and the opportunities that this might imply in working towards its institutionalisation.
34. With respect to the dynamics of university policy, participants complained of the interference by private business in the university and the lack of public resources that make it difficult to incorporate critical knowledge into a dominating economic model. The non-recognition of work in introducing critical education into formal studies was emphasised, as was the lack of institutional interest for fostering this and providing it with the necessary relevance in a specific and formalised manner. From the perspective of strength and opportunities, however, attention was drawn to the growing interest of large-scale international organisations and corporations in sustainable development as a means of justifying the need to introduce such topics and concerns from a more professionalising perspective within the university.
35. With respect to university structure, the seminar delegates remarked on the rigidity of conditioning factors within regulated teaching and within academic organisation, and the difficulty to introduce organisational changes in the formal ambit. This rigidity is detrimental to changes in syllabuses and also to cross-disciplinarity, as it promotes work on the basis of a highly compartmentalised organisation. In contrast, the recent introduction of the EHEA was perceived as an opportunity, as it has gradually allowed for the introduction of new dynamics of collaboration and presents a field in which new studies, particularly at postgraduate level, are still being developed.
36. The implication of lecturers and students was also analysed from a diversity of perspectives. Whilst the existence of a committed teaching staff that works towards consolidating these changes through its daily work is positive, it is also evident that there is a certain resistance from other members of the same group who are not interested in introducing new perspectives into those subjects for which they are responsible. As for students, emphasis was made of the difficulties that can occur when they requested participation that goes beyond the lecture room or faculty, although it was also recognised that there are organised critical groups calling for their participation in the processes of formal change.
37. The seminar delegates emphasised the need to establish joint work between organisations and universities, in order to explore ways of collaboration and common topics within the ambits of teaching and research. They also emphasised the need to work towards overcoming the difficulties that have arisen as a consequence of significant existing organisational and structural differences between the university and social organisations.
38. Particular emphasis was placed on the sensitivity of university institutions to the external demands of society, and it was suggested that social organisations should promote pressure campaigns aimed at the incorporation of sustainable development and global citizenship



within formal studies in a clear and cross-disciplinary manner.

39. The vice-rectorial offices for teaching in universities have a central role to play in developing EFD in their syllabuses. The need was therefore voiced to create strategies that would help the chief members of such offices to be familiar with the principles and assumptions of critical education, and for their participation in its introduction and promotion at a formal level.
40. It is therefore necessary to institutionalise the recognition of universities' social transference

as an indispensable measure if EFD is to attain formal recognition, one that would guarantee its incorporation into syllabuses and that would recognise the work carried out by all professionals in its promotion.

41. It is also important to promote inter-university action and coordination among distinct institutions to help foster working dynamics that would facilitate the sharing of knowledge and that would be of mutual benefit. At the same time, these joint strategies must be used to provide greater strength to the call for the institutionalisation of EFD.

## Recommendations

First, **it is clear that there is an interest felt by a broad range of individuals and institutions for these issues and concerns to be incorporated in university teaching.** Whether from formal declarations of principles and objectives by institutions or by lecturers, students and social organisations, there is a generalised acceptance of the link between the university and society, and of the role that this needs to play in constructing a fairer world for everyone. Beyond the university ambit, and therefore outside the scope of this diagnosis, **this interest is also evident on the part of large-scale international organisations.** In this respect, the UN has committed itself to sustainable development on a global scale as a priority action to provide continuation to the Millennium Development Goals finalised this current year of 2015. Voices calling for the emphatic involvement of all relevant social actors are, therefore, diverse and global. In consequence, this should be a **sufficient and convincing argument with which to request that universities take out clear steps in this direction, and that they adopt explicit measures to allow them to move from declarations of intention to specific action.**

**In order for these dynamics to become practical realities, however, they need to be institutionalised.** That is, they need official recognition. Whilst EFD in formal studies depends only on the positive disposition of lecturers, we cannot hope for such

concerns to be given a generalised dimension within academic syllabuses. **The institutionalisation of EFD is the key to providing it with official recognition, to providing it with the necessary resources that would guarantee its application and structure its implementation through standardised instructions or initiatives This is the only way in which its cross-disciplinary inclusion within syllabuses can be ensured.** Furthermore, such institutionalisation has to facilitate **recognition of the tasks carried out by lecturers,** at an individual and—above all—professional level. Necessary recognition in a context such as the university ambit, in which professional careers are directly linked to obtaining merits for specific actions and tasks, and in which any of those that are not recognised—however vital for professional praxis—will remain outside the list of tasks deemed requisite by the institution. In that respect then, **universities need to be aware that their commitment to social responsibility must go further than social policies with repercussions on their own communities alone, and opt unambiguously for critical education** that will have a direct impact on the student body as a whole, and an indirect impact of a far broader character once those same students become members of the work force and bring to it their particular perspectives.

To guarantee the cross-disciplinarity and generalizability of EFD content and methodologies, **specific**

**training and strategies that facilitate this should be made available to any lecture who may require such help.** These strategies must be adapted to distinct ambits of knowledge and should cover both content and methodological procedure. This implies the creation of a variety of resources that could a suitable response to a range of needs, from specific strategies for specific subjects, to training directed towards a fuller understanding of working dynamics. **It is essential that such tools be created in collaboration with the lecturing staff, as specialists in subject content, and that specialists in EFD and in teaching methodology should also be involved** so as to ensure that content design includes a clearly recognisable critical perspective and a working methodology that promotes the participation and analysis of students themselves. Once again, it is essential that such tasks are officially recognised in order for them to be incorporated into the working dynamics of all participants, and to avoid exclusive dependency on the positive disposition, time and space, of such participants' personal interests.

**It is also essential to determine strategies that foster student participation in all these processes.** For whilst the data shows that students are interested in greater familiarity with the complex phenomena that determine the dynamics of the world today, and in obtaining elements that would allow them to carry out critical analyses of their reality, a certain resistance can nevertheless be detected in some student circles when active participation beyond class attendance is called for. That said, the predisposition of organised student groups on campus to methodologies distinct from traditional lecture formats, as determined by the questionnaire, indicates that **there is a critical mass prepared to defend a form of university teaching that is distinct from the current model.** What is required, consequently, is to have the necessary strategies by which to make students an ally to these changes,

adding them to the other voices calling for a university with a sold social commitment, one that not only works to further its links with its immediate surroundings but that is also sensitive to the dynamics that create inequality and to its own role in the change towards a fairer local and global society.

Finally, in order for these processes to be possible, it is important to highlight the relevance of networking, and to recognise that this is essential in all such undertakings. **Collaboration, cooperation and the recognition of the various actors actively involved in the promotion of EFD within the university is key, at a number of levels, to guarantee its success.** At the institutional ambit, networking is fundamental to supporting those voices calling for change. Acting jointly and in a coordinated manner, we can make a significant repercussion that would be impossible if we act independently, without the recognition of equals and without a shared strategy. Such a dynamic does not imply a failure to respect the distinct working rhythms and interests of each individual; on the contrary, it means giving relevance to all relevant processes on the basis of mutual knowledge and recognition, and from a common basis that allows us to share the principles with which, together, we can truly be of influence.

**This networking is also absolutely fundamental at the most basic level of participants' daily work.** And in such a case, knowledge and recognition of participants and initiatives is relevant in two ways. First, because **it provides such initiatives with a visibility** that they would otherwise not be granted, thereby increasing their chances of success and reinforcing those tasks that are often invisible in day-to-day work. And, second, because **it potentiates the exchange of knowledge and dynamics, facilitating joint work between diverse individuals and organisations in such a way that ensures the mutual enrichment of the outcomes obtained.**





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