

Conclusions and proposals for improvement from the seminar

“Challenges in university education in the field of Economics and Business”

The seminar “Challenges in university education in the field of Economics and Business”, which took place on 17 May 2019 at the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Barcelona (UB), was a space of dialogue and reflection in which representatives of the business and university worlds strengthened synergies with the aim of improving study programmes.

The challenge and the proposal of the CORE project

Wendy Carlin, from the University College of London, introduced a major challenge: the problems facing our society and our companies have changed and it is consequently necessary to change education in the field of Economics and Business. The pressures for change come from:

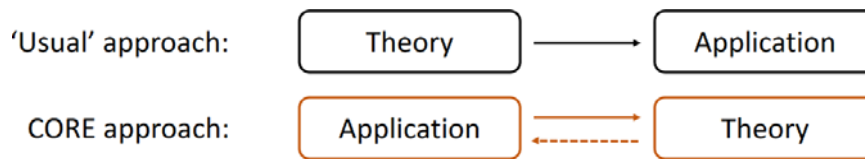
- **Public opinion**, which is highly critical of education for not having foreseen the economic crisis of the financial bubble.
- **Employers**, who are very critical of the education’s effectiveness in providing the capacity to apply the knowledge acquired to the real world, and in fostering creativity and critical self-knowledge.
- **Students**, who according to a survey of over 4,000 individuals from 12 countries, consider aspects which do not currently form part of the main core of the curriculum (social inequalities, unemployment, poverty, growth, sustainability, etc.) to be fundamental problems.

Meeting these challenges specifically requires:

- New skills: data management, programming, visualisation, interpretation, communication.
- New contents in response to new challenges.
- New teaching methods: proceeding from problems to modelling (understanding the benefits of abstraction on the basis of real data).

The proposal of CORE, an open-access international project aimed at improving study programmes in the field of Economics and Business, entails an education focused on current challenges: the innovation economy, social inequality, environmental sustainability, etc. This proposal is based on the following teaching principles:

1. Evidence-based teaching: proceeding from questions to data or evidence, and from data to models (abstraction).



2. Interactive learning: students handle data, generate visualisations, learn to use tools that are applicable to different real-world issues, self-assess themselves, etc.

The employers study conducted by AQU Catalunya reaches the following main conclusions:

- Whereas these graduates show a higher access to the labour market than the rest of the graduates of the Catalan university system as a whole, their satisfaction with their education is lower.
- Training placements in companies are given a bare “satisfactory” grade by graduates.
- The cross-disciplinary skills to be improved in these study programmes are practical training, problem-solving and decision-making.
- The specific skills to be improved are the ability to determine the needs and wishes of costumers (customer focus), the ability to manage complexity and uncertainty, and commercial skills.
- Despite the need for changes, employers are satisfied with the skills of the recent graduates whom they have hired (7.1 on a scale of 10).

In order to meet this challenge and to improve the employability of graduates, the following proposals for improvement are made:

- **Promotion of pedagogical renewal:** case studies or work by challenges should continue to be promoted as training methods, increasing in this way the focus on solving practical and working-world problems.
- **Improvement of skills training** and especially of skills which are considered most necessary from the employers’ standpoint: practical training, problem-solving and decision-making, customer focus, management of complexity and uncertainty, and commercial skills.
- **Continued work on both hard skills and soft skills**, especially with respect to professional ethics, communication skills, critical capacity and big-picture thinking.
- **Promotion of ICTs in the classroom**, in a twofold sense: on the one hand, students should acquire a better knowledge of the ICTs used in business (for example, some accounting programme) and on the other, the ICTs as a teaching strategy. For example, ICT support is required for large groups to allow students’ opinions to be gathered immediately.



- **Greater company involvement in training**, with a commitment, for example (and as long as it is possible), to dual training, ensuring that the same knowledge is learnt regardless of which company provides the training.
- **Incentivising training in companies** so that there will be a win-win situation in which companies will benefit from considering placements to be training situations in which it is in their own interest to participate (tax benefits).
- **Ensuring the quality of training placements** since they have, precisely, a training facet. Consideration should be given to the possible development of a training placement quality index that would allow an improved fit between students and companies.
- **Strengthening of Bachelor's degree final-year projects** as the culmination of graduate professional skills; this would be evidenced by a better assessment of these projects by students.