

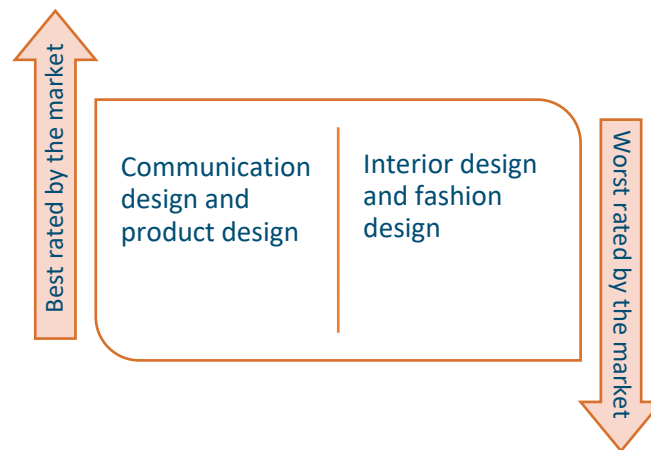
Conclusions and proposals for improvement from the seminar “Challenges in higher education in the field of Design”

The seminar “Challenges in higher education in the field of Design” was held on 19 February 2020 at Elisava. It constituted a forum for dialogue and reflection in which representatives from the business world and the higher education community strengthened synergies in order to achieve improvements in educational programmes.

Diagnosis and challenges in education

Dr Luisa Collina, dean of the School of Design at the Politecnico di Milano and President of Cumulus International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media, conducted a diagnosis of the situation in terms of higher education in Design.

There are four highly distinct specialist areas in education in Design, although the situation in relation to them on the labour market varies:



In addition, she identified the following **challenges in higher education**:

Sustainability	Globalisation	Technology	Social trends
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The goals are global and interdisciplinary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HEIs compete to draw in the best students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuous technological changes are taking place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust in higher education is in decline



Students need solid foundations that enable them to address known and unknown future challenges

How should these developments be addressed?

- New pedagogy: students have changed and teaching and learning methods similarly need to change. These methods must be based on **active, student-centred learning**, learning that encourages their curiosity, creativity and critical thought. Flipped classrooms and learning that also unfolds outside the classrooms should be especially promoted.

In order to address the pedagogical change, resources must be allocated in order to **train teaching staff** in active learning (for instance, using MOOCs), establish **new experimental learning settings** (such as the Educafé forum at the Politecnico di Milano, making it possible to try methods based on the “active classroom”, etc.) and instruct teaching staff about the use of the same. The education offered shall be complemented with open teaching that has no impact on assessment but does appear in the diploma supplement.

- New content: the volatile nature of technologies means that both Bachelor’s degrees and Master’s degrees cannot afford to specialise beyond a certain limit. **Solid foundations** are necessary which are then complemented by shorter, more intense and more applied programmes of lifelong learning which meet the needs of the labour market. Programming capacity should also be incorporated into the above. Lastly, global differentiation involves providing content about the **local identity** of design, which has enabled us to stand out historically.

Furthermore, the **AQU Catalunya employers’ study identifies the following main conclusions:**

- There is a broad range of places available on study programmes in Design: university Bachelor’s degrees and arts higher education degrees form part of them. Almost all of this education is available under private rates. In recent years, the range of Bachelor’s degrees in Design focussing on animation and digital design has doubled, although no students have reached graduation.
- The usefulness of external training placements needs to be improved.
- Design stands out due to having a substantial number of self-employed individuals on lower incomes.
- Skills that need to be improved in study programmes in Design are as follows:
 - Problem solving and decision-making;

- Practical training (application of knowledge in the professional setting); and
 - Leadership and project management.
- Despite these areas for improvement, employers are satisfied with the skills of the recently graduated individuals they have recruited (at 7.4 out of 10).
 - There are excellent prospects for growth in the sector. Skills relating to technology, digital design and project management will become most important in future.

The primary conclusions drawn from the round table were as follows:

- Salaries are low because companies do not feel that the individuals who have graduated in Design generate business value. Creativity needs to be perceived as a transformative strength, rather than an ornamental one.
- The humanistic theoretical base of the discipline must coexist with the business mentality. Design should be focussed as a discipline aimed at lending value to business.
- Aside from technical training, education should also enable graduates to engage in strategic and critical thought: in order to prove oneself effective it is necessary to be able to question the reality; to show an ability to generate opportunities rather than simply looking for the solution to problems.
- Difficulties are encountered when it comes to joining a company due to lack of permeability, especially within SMEs. The designer is not viewed as a strategic figure.
- The profession needs to be stratified in line with the qualifications framework and the skills level needs to be defined according to education cycles (arts higher education degrees or Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees and PhDs).
- Bachelor's degrees that specialise in specific technologies should be avoided.
- Most individuals are self-employed and "are defenceless", inasmuch as they are unfamiliar with management.
- It is necessary to work together in order to establish Design as a discipline that has the scope to be transformative.

Proposals for improvement

Taking into consideration the need for methodological change in teaching, the results of the employers' survey and the proposals stemming from the round table organised during the seminar, the following **proposals for improvement** are defined, intended to strengthen quality employability for future graduates in Design:

1. To opt for a change to the student-centred **active methodology**. To do so, institutional support for teaching innovation is vital.
2. To contribute to the **improvement of the skills of teaching staff** to enable them to lead the change to the active methodology. Training needs to be provided to teaching staff on flipped classrooms, active learning and use of new learning environments.
3. To ensure that the **education profiles in Design** are heavily focussed on lending value to business and society through creative solutions.
4. To have an impact on improving students' ability for **problem solving and decision-making** as a primary skills challenge.
5. To integrate **leadership** and **project management** into education in Design.



6. To improve **practical training** in study programmes by enhancing the application of knowledge in the professional setting.
7. **To deliver education** in administrative and economic **management** (payment methods, taxes, organisation, etc.) in view of the substantial proportion of freelancers among graduates of Design.
8. To boost **the permeability of individuals who graduate** in Design with respect to SMEs, endeavouring to reach out to companies from beyond the sector and fostering training placements in a more diverse range of companies.
9. To set up a **hub of educational entities in Design** in order to establish the discipline within society as a source of education centred on generating value.