

# Inauguration of the Interdisciplinary R&I Hub

## UOC Poble Nou campus

President, Minister, faculty, administrative staff,

Frenchman Jean Monnet said: "Nothing is possible without men, but nothing is lasting without institutions." Although Monnet had in mind European institutions, I think what he says is true of the UOC, too. That's why I want to start by paying tribute to our community (of students, and of teaching, research and administrative staff). Because it's hard to imagine having to celebrate our first 25 years in such exceptional circumstances, in circumstances where we had to focus on the urgent without losing sight of the essential.

During the pandemic, the UOC has been able to go on providing its services to our 90,000 students in 141 countries, rolling out extraordinary measures to ensure our teams remained healthy and able to perform at their best. And now we're rolling out a number of consultancy programmes with governments and organizations around the world, thus strengthening our leadership in the field of online education, research and administration.

*"The pandemic has seen us lead the way internationally in driving the digital transformation of higher education."*

However, we mustn't waste time feeling self-satisfied. Today marks the end of our anniversary celebrations, and now it is time to look ahead to new challenges. This marks the end of one stage and the start of another. And there's no better example than the setting we find ourselves in now.

We're unveiling a new campus here in Poble Nou which will house all of the UOC's academic activities and much of our administration, too. This strengthens our roots here in the city of Barcelona, and our commitment to forming part of Catalan culture and industry, our commitment to acting as an active hub for knowledge. Likewise, today, we're inaugurating the new Interdisciplinary R&I Hub. Thanks to the vital collaboration from the Government of Catalonia, this new facility will play home to some one hundred projects and over five hundred people. It will house an ecosystem of eight (and soon nine) experimental labs and specialized equipment.

*"With this in mind and based on our commitment to frontier research at the intersection of technology with the human and social sciences, we have identified three main fields of work for this new hub: e-learning, e-health, and the network society."*

Because, as UOC professor Marina Garcés says in her latest book, only by activating our thinking – all our thinking and all our talent – can we "get history going again and transform society"<sup>1</sup>. Obviously, all this requires the creation of the right conditions and for universities to take on their responsibilities. And we can't hide away from that.

As you yourself said, President, at the recent inauguration of the academic year a few days ago in Lleida: "universities have given more to society than they have received. The time has come for universities to receive the best possible treatment, because we know they will give back so much more to society, and the country needs that."

Today marks the end of the anniversary celebrations and the start for this new campus and this new research hub, so let me give some details on the role the UOC has played in giving back to society to cover the country's needs. 86% of our students are admitted to the university without taking the entrance exams. **They are people who are in work and who are learning throughout their lives.** Our classrooms play home to over 5,000 people born in other countries who now live in Catalonia. **We are the university that welcomes diversity.** For example, nearly 2,000 people with registered a disability of over 33% are studying on programmes at our university. We have more than 7,300 people living in towns with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, and 65% of them are women. **We are the university that's linked to the territory.**

*"Accessibility, diversity, inclusiveness, territorial equity, and equality – that's how knowledge reaches the far corners of our country in the 21st century."*

There may be those who ask: "If the UOC didn't exist, how would Catalonia have been able to handle these needs now?" We would rather frame the question another way: "What else can we do to be useful to the Catalonia of the future?" But we need support from society and from the institutions. Please don't misinterpret me – and please don't misinterpret me, President and Minister, in particular –, I'm not asking for more funding (well, that too) or a stable institutional and legal framework (though, that as well), instead and above all, I'm asking to be allowed to take part in building this shared future. In short: **we want to be taken into account.**

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<sup>1</sup> Marina Garcés, *Males companyies*, Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2022, p. 63.

A neoliberal model and globalization, and the people espousing them, have led to increased social inequalities, populism and authoritarian systems, and undermined public debate with anti-scientific discourses based on fake news... but I don't want to spread pessimism, quite the contrary.

**To be able to understand and take on the perils we face, we need to be able to make the most of our strengths.** And we have strengths. Especially in Europe. And universities have to take advantage of these strengths. Because, as stressed by the economist Mariana Mazzucato, who we recently awarded an honorary doctorate, **public institutions play a vital role as agents guiding, driving, encouraging and guaranteeing the common good.** And that's where we find ourselves as universities, and that's why we need to ensure universities can act as forums, as places that welcome critical thinking and diversity. Universities need to generate rationality – in other words, thoughtful, humanistic, scientific and social debate.

*"Only when talent takes the lead can we hope for a world order built on democratic, scientific and humanistic principles... That's what tomorrow's universities can provide. And, let's be honest, tomorrow is already here."*

Here at the UOC, we want to be part of that tomorrow – and we want to be part of it here at the Poblenou campus, at this research hub, each and every one of us who make, have made and will make the UOC what it is.

Thank you very much!