

Inauguration ceremony

Auditorium, UOC Campus, Can Jaumandreu, Barcelona

Minister, chair and members of the Board of Trustees, president, presidents, vice-presidents, members of the Catalan parliament, deputy mayor, dean and members of the board of the Catalan Association of Economists, president of the Catalan Association of Accounting and Management, colleagues, administrative staff, family and friends, *miembros de la comunidad UOC del conjunto de España y Latinoamérica*,

Much of my career has developed alongside the growth and consolidation of the UOC. Firstly, from 2002, as a course instructor and then, from 2010, as dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business, and later as Vice President for Competitiveness and Employability.

This experience of over two decades has let me see and understand at first-hand what it means to belong to the UOC. It has shown me how to take on responsibility, but, most of all, it has shown me, over and over again, that the opportunity cost is 'not doing something' now – at the UOC, when you decide to do something, people's ideas always align. This is a virtue, but also a great responsibility. Above all, my belonging to the UOC has led to my forging links with a project, a model and a team that I strongly identify with.

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So, let me start by thanking the UOC's Board of Trustees and the University Council for allowing me to take part in this process, and for the trust they have placed in me. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the Executive Board and, in particular, the person who has led it over recent years: my predecessor, teacher and friend, President Planell.

Over this last decade, I've had the luck (first) and the honour (later) to work with and learn from his leadership, his strategic thinking... and his metaphors.

Throughout his term in office, President Planell has compared the UOC to, among other things, the complex process of shooting a film, where each scene is vital for the final production. But he has also compared us to the specialists in a Formula 1 pitlane, where each individual mechanic works to guarantee the excellence of the whole... And, he's even gone as far as to use somewhat more mundane metaphors, such as referring to the UOC as a brand of soup I won't mention now...

I'd like to bring these and other analogies together today in a new metaphor which, affectionately, I'm sure he'll like: the UOC as an opera. Opera understood as a work of complete art, where all skills come together, all abilities and all know-how, but which needs someone to come up with it and to make it possible... This has, without doubt, been his role.

Far from trying to equalize everyone's virtues, President Planell has been able to unite the potential of the different parts around a common goal. With the empathy, rigour and sensitivity of a good conductor, and knowing how to listen to diagnose, knowing how to listen to integrate and to provide each individual, each musician, with the confidence they need and with a sense of pride, to join in the harmony and synchrony of the shared project. Thank you, President.

I also wish to outline, even if only briefly, the main features for the future project that has spurred me to get here now. This project is a summary of the latent tension between a given setting and an imagined horizon. This latent tension can be threatening and debilitating, but it can also be creative and transformative.

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Our setting involves institutional governance, funding, technological challenges, crises affecting the model, productive transformations, the great need for knowledge, social demands, new dynamics and unexpected opportunities. Whereas, the imagined horizon is the vision or the project that I want to outline: an imagined horizon that can be summed up in three main principles.

Firstly, **evolution of the things we do well and revolution of the things we can do better**. Open, continuous and shared pathways; personal, pedagogical and professional support; meaningful learning experiences; open transdisciplinary and translational research; innovation as a driver of change, and knowledge transfer as a duty. Secondly: the UOC, just like people, is stronger in alliances. **Working alongside others is working better**. And thirdly, **societal impact is a must**.

Three principles that are intertwined and reinforcing. Three principles that will set the course for my time in office. As anyone who knows the UOC knows... – Minister, members of the Board of Trustees – the UOC has become a valuable asset, an asset that has been and wants to remain proactive, unique and integral, to make the Catalan university system outstanding, competitive and inclusive.

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Our unique digital nature and our – improved, re-evolutionary – educational model let us respond better than anyone to the changing demands of industry and society; and to do so overcoming the barriers of distance, time or skills gaps. This ability to anticipate and to adapt is particularly evident when we talk about lifelong learning, which is something we talk about a lot nowadays. That which 27 years ago **made us unique** but which was deemed to be merely a 'second chance for those who couldn't study or who couldn't complete their studies when they were younger', **now makes us vital, relevant, systemic.**

Vital in terms of being ready to respond to the many needs coming from the demands of a society that no longer accepts limiting our education to just one stage of our lives.

Relevant in terms of being experts in understanding how technology engages with human activity, and in being able to provide the right responses from the university system.

And systemic in terms of being inclusive. The fact that the UOC model is scalable and ubiquitous, that it has great scope and accredited quality means we are capable enough and, above all, diverse enough to cover the needs of all generations, to leave no corner unattended, to leave no one behind, to push the boundaries of knowledge, to take higher education wherever it needs to go. In short, to understand that we're more than the sum of our parts; to understand that it's more than just a formative experience, it's transformative.

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To make this possible, **to provide the conditions needed and ensure the UOC's future – a useful future – I can count on a powerful triad: the project, the team and the leadership.** This triad defines my – our – proposal.

Firstly, **the project is engaging and well-timed: to realign our role, to be socially useful.** It involves something so simple, and yet so difficult, as going back to our roots as we adapt to the new reality, to new demands. Something so simple, yet so difficult, as renewing that which has defined us since the beginning: **make technology a virtue; from research gain evidence; and from alliances create a system.**

Secondly, **the team is excited and committed. It wants – we want – to be renowned for doing things well.** I said at the start that much of my career has developed alongside the growth and consolidation of the UOC. I have seen first-hand the commitment of those – those of us – who know what it means to **form part of such an important project, a project that changes lives. And by changing lives, we change the world.**

Our commitment is to knowledge. Knowledge understood in the widest terms, able to take on the four missions identified by the European University Association as key as we look to 2030: **teaching, research, innovation and culture.** These aspects have always been at the forefront during the 27 years of our history: whether explicitly, in the case of the first three, or more implicitly in the case of the fourth – culture, which during my term in office will be incorporated into the university's mission.

And, thirdly, **leadership that is forward-looking and capable.** I want to construct and configure this leadership with the courage to take on change, and to overcome inertia and uncertainty; with the courage to accept criticism, and with the right to make mistakes, to delegate efficiently, and, above all, with the confidence to prioritize the institution, society and the future.

I want to strengthen this leadership with the stubborn kindness of someone who sees education in terms of welcoming and learning how to support; of someone who knows that social harmony, public spirit and togetherness require equity, justice and empathy. A leadership that I want to strengthen and reinforce with work that is demanding, but because we demand it of ourselves; a leadership that is capable of sustained effort, and that is respectful and conscious that only through individual commitment can we build collective governance.

This is how the final combination is interlaced: **courage, kindness and work.** It's nothing new, I know, but it is sincere.

I am convinced that based on this, we can keep building the UOC of tomorrow. Because these are the things I have learned and had passed down to me throughout my life. And, here, I'd like to dedicate a few words to my friends and family: to my father, who instilled in me this triad; to my brothers and sisters (both family and friends) with whom I've cared for and nurtured it, and to my children, who will inherit these same principles.

In short: Nothing fills me with more awe than taking over leadership of this university that has been my home. Nothing inspires me more than leading the UOC over the coming years – and leading it together. And nothing makes me happier than starting today, because I do so surrounded by all of you.

Thank you very much.

Àngels Fitó.