

# Present and future of the university

By **Jaume Pagès**

**Dialogue between Jordi Planella**, director of the Psychology and Educational Sciences Department **and Jaume Pagès**, CEO of Universia

**INAUGURAL LECTURE OF THE 2013/2014 ACADEMIC YEAR**

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## Presentation



Dear all,

I am pleased to be able to open this academic year 2013/2014, my first as president of the UOC. And I am pleased to be able to do so by introducing an inaugural lecture that, in line with the values we hold here at this University, is both online and networked, that explores new formats, that is broadcast via multiple channels and that invites the participation of others.

Jaume Pagès, CEO of Universia, has been charged with giving or, more to the point, sharing this lecture where, in conversation with Professor Jordi Planella, Director of the UOC's Psychology and Education Sciences Department, he analyses the challenges and opportunities for universities in an ever-changing and globalized context.

They are challenges and opportunities that, as you will have heard on more than one occasion, require lifelong learning and personalization of learning. Our e-learning model, which was rolled out in 1995 and which, since when, we have constantly evolved, makes this possible and helps our students (and graduates, who now number more than 45,000!) prepare for the needs and challenges of 21st-century society.

These and other questions – university governance, student mobility, the size and diversity of the system – are all analysed in depth by our speaker Jaume Pagès in the videos that make up the lecture in a dialogue which, far from providing definitive responses, opens new dimensions for reflection and enrichment.

I invite you to listen to, read, analyse and share this lecture, and, above all, make your voice heard in all those forums and via all those channels available on the web and social networks.

I wish you all the best for the upcoming academic year!

Josep A. Planell

President of the UOC

## The present and future of the university

*Every year, the inaugural lecture of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya invites us to reflect on one of the lines of knowledge or action of the UOC and is given by an internationally acclaimed expert. For the 2013-2014 academic year, we have spoken about the present and future of the university with Jaume Pagès i Fita, CEO of Universia.*

*With the aim of distilling Doctor Pagès' thoughts, we've asked Doctor Jordi Planella, director of the UOC Psychology and Educational Sciences Department, to hold an open and guided dialogue with him to consider the present and future of the university. This dialogue is what you will find transcribed and also on video in the first part of this document.*

*Following this, and to enrich the debate of this inaugural lecture, we've asked Tíscar Lara, director of communication of the School of Industrial Organization (EOI) and Ramón Compañó, programme director of the Joint Research Centre - Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (JRC-IPTS) of the European Commission, to open up new questions. You'll find the videos and the transcription of the most relevant ideas of both these experts.*

### In 2 minutes



"Should university select the best and help them develop, or educate as wide a population as possible?"

"Young people will build the world and they'll do it their way with the tools that we've given them."

"Initial education doesn't allow us to focus the rest of our professional life."

"How many universities in the world have the accumulated knowledge that the UOC has? Few."

[ ▶ ] **Video** [in Catalan, YouTube]: [http://youtu.be/WNu\\_O\\_oBTg](http://youtu.be/WNu_O_oBTg)

## The dialogue



**Jordi Planella** ■ The PISA reports seem to show the rhythms in education trends and policies. They don't show either Catalonia or Spain in a very good light. When you compare the information with other countries, do you feel that the results are of significant importance or simply information we need to bear in mind?

**Jaume Pagès** ■ From my point of view, we should always be aware of one thing that's fundamental: the education system is complex, extraordinarily complex, and, as I said, it has to be improved – it can always be improved – but it can only be improved with the collaboration of the actors in the system. I mean, with the collaboration and involvement of lecturers, teachers, schools, etc. It's a serious mistake – and I sometimes get the impression that it's



committed in our country – that we seek to change the system and improve it without counting on the involvement of the actors in the system; without counting on the involvement of the teams of lecturers. And it's not just that we sometimes don't count in this involvement but it causes these actors to turn their back on the reforms that are sought to be fostered. Consequently, it's bound to fail: it's a system that if they don't modify what the fundamental actors are, they're hardly going to be able to modify it by changing laws, by giving instructions, from offices or people who do so with good intentions and with a desire to improve it but don't manage to get the actors on board, from my point of view that's fundamental.

**J. Planella** ■ What permeability do you believe exists between the pre-university system and the university? Do you believe they communicate with each other, that they collaborate? Could some form of mechanisms be put in place that would foster this transfer?

**J. Pagès** ■ The university and pre-university systems communicate with each other, evidently; they collaborate less but more than they collaborated in the past where the distance was infinitely greater than it is today. And therefore, I believe that it's a trend that's already marked out and that the most in-depth knowledge has to be followed and fostered both by universities of what is being done in the pre-university system and by secondary school teachers and the pre-university system of what is expected of students once they get to university.

I think all us actors in the education system have to work with the goodwill that we are the actors in a system as a whole and each one of us in our level has to do so according to the real state in which students come here; in the state in which they get to university from the pre-university system and with the aim of handing over these students to whoever has to replace them – which always exists: in the pre-university system it's the universities; for the universities it's the production system or the ongoing learning system that has to replace their activity – and in these the students or graduates have to be handed over having achieved the maximum objectives that were proposed or that have been set out for them as the objectives of the education that has been given to them.

#### [ ▶ ] Video

<http://youtu.be/ODT0U38XyhM>

[in Catalan, YouTube]

#### [ www ] Key ideas

<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/preuniversitat/index.html>

**J. Planella ■** From the privileged vantage point that is your day-to-day work at Universia, what do you believe to be the true mission of the university (referring to the book published by Ortega y Gasset in 1930 and which I feel is surprisingly relevant today)? Do you believe that the idea of a university that educates cultivated and critical citizens makes sense, or do you believe it's better that it continues to educate or educates high-level professionals in general?

**J. Pagès ■** I think that the challenge facing us is in fact between the elitist university, the university whose aim is to educate the elite in society, and the university of the masses, the university whose aim to educate the population as a whole. I think that this is the challenge facing us and that the universities are facing.

The traditional university and the most prestigious universities in the world have always been elitist universities because they came from a society that was essentially led by elites; and educating these elites was the aim that had been proposed by highly prestigious universities in any sphere – we can posit the American, English-speaking sphere, which is better known and that Ivy League universities such as Harvard and Yale are centres that seek to educate the elite in their country in the conviction that this helps; and evidently that's how it's been: a help to the country advancing.

Alongside this is a whole education system that educates citizens and doesn't necessarily educate elites but normal people and citizens. From my point of view, this second role will

grow in importance; and the democratization and generalization of education, and higher education in particular, should allow the education system to provide an answer to the global needs of the population and therefore to masses of people, of citizens, who have to be educated and who want to go into the university education system and who demand an answer. This poses very significant funding challenges: how can we fund a higher university education system that covers such a high percentage of the population? This is a challenge that we are experiencing in our countries and that has no immediate and easy answer: does it have to be funded exclusively by the public's taxes? Should the students, who will be in some way the beneficiaries of this education, participate in this funding?

We're reaching levels of participation in the university system that exceed 50% or that come near. Some countries have already passed this. It's not the same thing to maintain an education system that educates this percentage of the population as it is to maintain an education system that educates only 5% of the population; it's very different from all points of view: from funding, but the focus of the system is also important. What should the system propose? Educate elites and this way select the best to get there – these best ones measured in some way that cannot sometimes be explained how it's been calculated that they are the best and how they're selected – but well: selecting them in some way and helping them progress? Or educating the wider the population the better?

I believe that the challenge of the immediate future of the education system is precisely to solve this problem; and from my point of view I have no doubt that the option of achieving an education system that educates the population as a whole in the best way possible, and in particular in the line that educates them as citizens, in values and attitudes that makes them responsible citizens aware of the importance it has for the common good is, for me, important and the future of the education system lies here or they'll probably have to change it to get it to lie here.

**[ ▶ ] Video**

<http://youtu.be/bhjpQVsrlxA>

[in Catalan, YouTube]

**[ www ] Key ideas**

<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/millors/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ Spain's entry into the EHEA has created expectations, loves and hates towards the University, to such an extent that some people are comparing it with the crisis and criticism generated by the application of reformed compulsory secondary education in secondary education. These opinions have been included in books such as *Adéu a la Universitat*, by Professor Jordi Llovet, and *La universidad cercada. Testimonios de un naufragio*, written by eighteen acclaimed university professors, most of whom have taken early retirement. What are your thoughts on this process? Do you feel it's a failed attempt to really transform the university?

**J. Pagès** ■ Universities have greatly improved. I perfectly recall the university I experienced and I've had three graduate children and I've followed their evolution at university and they finished their courses in the nineties with the new system. And I have to say that my impression is that the university education system that they experienced was infinitely better than the one I did: there's no comparison. So when we hear talk that we have a system that doesn't provide an answer – I don't mean it's not true and that it can't be improved: it can be improved and it can be improved a lot. But it has improved so much that we sometimes forget it.

And sometimes also – and this is to do with something I said earlier – the comparisons are made between systems that cannot be compared if we want to do it properly. For example, when someone says: “In my day, university students didn't make spelling mistakes and now they do.” Okay, but they're forgetting something: in their day the students when this guy says this he's speaking of a time when university students didn't get to 10% of the population and these students that probably didn't get to 10% of the population already didn't make spelling mistakes by the time they got to university – which would be desirable for everyone going to university, there's no doubt of that – but that it's different when around 40 or 45% of the population goes to university.

And when it's said: “no, we were better educated...” listen: go and compare the 5% of that population with the 5% that are the best of today's – because those are the best, one supposes – then take 5% of the ones that go now, the same percentage, and compare them and you'll see that the ones today are infinitely better educated than the ones from before.

Luckily, that has changed from the point of view, for example, of their ability to form relationships and getting to know the world: today's students – to a greater or lesser extent – have the option of going abroad, of getting to know other countries, which is extraordinarily positive, and universities help where they can and that seems to me to be a very good thing.



This criticism is often born of nostalgia and it can be understood perfectly: everyone has what they've experienced as their point of reference; but when they speak of it and put this argument on the table, I sometimes use a quote by someone who criticised young people and that you can read and anyone who does would find it perfectly up-to-date and would say: "yes, yes: he's right". It's a quote from hundreds of years before Christ because it's a quote by Plato. Plato criticised young people, he said they weren't well-educated, that they were getting worse, etc. If that were true, today we'd be back in the Stone Age or before, wouldn't we? So it's not true and I think we need to view the generations that come after us as a whole: immersed in the world of the future: not in the world that we've inhabited, but in the one they have to. And on the other hand in the world that they will build, because finally it will be like that: the world is built by people and will be built by young people and they'll do it their way with the tools we've given them.

#### [ ▶ ] Video

<http://youtu.be/rVUNqsjS5S4>

[in Catalan, YouTube]:

#### [ www ] Key ideas

<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/estudiants/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ The last twenty years in Spain have seen quite a number of new universities established, but since 2008, when the recession began and governments also implemented a series of significant cuts to financial contributions to universities, there have been moves towards redesigning the domestic university system model as a whole. Do you believe it's possible that in the short and medium term the current diversity of universities will disappear? (we have twelve universities in Catalonia). What do you feel the Catalan university system will look like in ten years time, say?

**J. Pagès** ■ I don't see the Spanish and Catalan university system as extraordinarily heterogeneous. Quite the opposite, I see it as highly homogeneous still. Perhaps it's because I'm so used to seeing the university systems of others that are much, much more heterogeneous than ours. That's why, for me diversity and heterogeneity don't frighten me, quite the opposite: it's an incentive and I believe it's good that it's like this.

As for the criticism that we have over-stretched ourselves in creating new universities, the most serious analysis I've found is that of Francesc Xavier Grau, President of Rovira i Virgili University, who has made a detailed study of this which concludes that Catalonia in particular is just a bit below average in the countries we compared if we analyse parameters like the

number of universities per million inhabitants; and it's further below if we analyse other parameters, such as universities with links to funding. This leads me to think that we need to be prudent.

However, we do have a diverse system. They weren't just created for the sake of it, but to meet the real needs of the region. That's why I believe they continue to provide a good service. Another thing is that political power sometimes puts the pressure on to ensure that universities are established in a certain town and this pressure has to be analysed and checked against objective information to see how relevant the specific request is. But the university system is on its own. By this I mean that ultimately its capacity is very limited and in our law it's not the responsibility of universities, but of those who coordinate them, it's the government's.

#### [ ▶ ] Video

<http://youtu.be/AQxTXR1iRcg>

[in Catalan, YouTube]:

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<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/sistema/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ The country has undergone numerous legal changes, too often at the mercy of dominant political trends; the most recent law approved by Wert has led to more upheaval, which is still going on in the Balearics. All in all, it makes you feel there's some sort of disaster in the general education sector. What positives can we draw from this? How does it affect the prestige of the Catalan and Spanish higher education system?

**J. Pagès** ■ In the Shanghai ranking, I know it has been said that there isn't one Catalan university among I don't know how many top ones. I truly believe that whoever says that if there was one in the top 200 would say that there wasn't one in the top 100. If there was one, they would now say that there wasn't one in the top 50: it's just a desire to seek out negative news. However, there is one piece of good news that is not mentioned which I will tell you: the Shanghai ranking also publishes a ranking by specialists and topic areas. Quite a few: about 20. And of this, it only publishes about 200. Like the general ranking, it publishes 500 universities and publishes 200 specialities. 200 by 20, would be 4,000 universities, but it's not true because a lot are repeated, which gives around 500 and few different universities. So, of these 500, twenty-two are Spanish. If we look by country, Spain is the sixth country in the world with more recognised universities on this Shanghai speciality ranking. I also believe that the speciality ranking is much more reliable than the general ranking as I see it better able to

discuss and assess the ability of a university to offer medicine, philosophy or mathematics courses rather than the overall ability of a university.

The system of higher education is well regarded by society: there isn't any family who wouldn't want their children to go: none. I haven't met any. Consequently, it is, fortunately, widely recognised and it would be good if the actors in this system felt recognized by society and Catalan and Spanish families. The world's going through a crisis: many of the systems in our society are in crisis. I don't wish to point the finger, but it'd be easy to say that 'there's corruption in System Y, we all know who they are and there are processes, etc.' and within the education system, I don't know anything that's been subjected to that; if you want it to be a defensive mechanism... Okay, it's a defensive or offensive mechanism, and because sometimes the lessons they want to teach us come straight from these sectors I don't know how they have the nerve!

**[ ▶ ] Video**

<http://youtu.be/CAUocxfIhrM>

[in Catalan, YouTube]:

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<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/rankings/index.html>

**J. Planella ■** What are the consequences of moving towards the privatization of teaching? Is this model being used to foster a university-business that has no commitment to the present-future of society?

**J. Pagès ■** What is clear is that the level and quality of teaching staff is important in any education system. I think that right now, the state education system gives guarantees of selection to its teachers, for whom the private sector cannot. It's simply an element of recognition – not criticism – of reality. Having said that, it's clear that there are sectors where private initiatives have been successful that enjoy extraordinary and well-deserved recognition. And the opposite is true, it's the public sectors that need to use it as a mirror and learn.

In the United States and Latin America, the distinction between public and private is, fortunately, a little hazier, because when we're talking about it, we don't really distinguish between Berkeley or Stanford and, at this level, there is a difference. But by contrast, they all have a mission to serve the public, which is probably what differentiates them and gives them their stamp of recognition and not of objective linked to private or individual interests.

**[ ▶ ] Video**

<http://youtu.be/6K6ajKvzMtg>

[in Catalan, YouTube]:

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<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/publica/index.html>

**J. Planella ■** In today's society, it could be said that the paradigm that in some way viewed education as an activity associated solely with the education of children and young people has been torn apart; we're talking more and more of lifelong learning, of second opportunities and, in fact, I believe that the UOC has a very definite role to play here offering second opportunities. Could you describe some of the elements that link this change with the education needs of today's society?

**J. Pagès ■** I believe that lifelong learning is a reality, one that we can touch and experience. I myself have lived in an education system since my childhood until I was twenty-something when I graduated; but afterwards I've had to continue and I've made many changes in my life and in these I've always been linked to some additional learning or education system to the initial one. And I see in my children and in the generations that followed us that this is normal and becoming standard: people are aware that with the initial education – even though they've turned twenty-something and sometimes even thirty – it is not an education that allows them to focus the rest of their life; on the contrary, changes happen in their environment and the internal changes that occur in people mean that they have the will – sometimes the imperative – to train or simply change line of action within the same year or even change profession completely.

This is becoming more general and it's clear that to face these challenges as an individual and as a group, distance learning systems have spearheaded the way and have advanced in comparison with traditional education systems which have also played an important role, but it's clear that the distance learning system, and in particular universities like the UOC, have played a fundamental role in developing and providing this service each time society and the people in it voice their needs and requirements more vociferously.

And I believe this will continue and even in some cases, we'll even see how distance learning systems have a positive influence on traditional education systems and, in particular, on-site teaching. We're seeing now that there are students who can choose between traditional, on-site learning or distance learning who opt for distance learning because they see an advantage in it and it's a fact that the systems need to create relationships with each other and

that one helping the other and vice versa is positive. I simply believe that the education system is so important that the diversity and heterogeneity of the system need not frighten us, quite the opposite: it's good that it's there because it's an element for progress that helps with finding solutions and if it doesn't find them or the other does, these solutions become generalised and develop the system as a whole. That's how I see it: extraordinarily positive.

**[ ▶ ] Video**

<http://youtu.be/vYQmmCtu5VY>

[in Catalan, YouTube]:

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<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/lifelonglearning/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ In recent years, we've seen small changes to questions linked to university governance and, in fact, I believe that the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya's very own selection process does in some way respond to this small change that is linked to university governance. Do you feel that, in terms of the future, we've still got a lot more changes to this to come?

**J. Pagès** ■ I've held responsibility at the university, I've been a university president, that's how I know the subject of governance and in some way I've experienced it very closely. I think it's a very important issue for universities and that it has to be tackled and we have to find an answer; but – as with other things – an answer in line with the people who live in it, I mean, with the actors of the system. I think the best way is to look at the models that work that there are around the world: the universities we consider to be good universities; we have to see how they work and try to copy them. In this we wouldn't to, let's say, innovate. But copy other systems that work.

But I would call for a great deal of prudence in introducing systems that work in organizations that have nothing to do with universities. I've often compared – talking to colleagues in my profession, engineers who have held high positions of responsibility in companies, for example – the university system with a company. A company, to give a similarity, has an objective, a clear objective which is ultimately to provide a service and through this service which is recognized on the basis of remuneration and profits.

A company does not have the objective – or it should not have the objective – of making a profit. Its objective is to provide a service and the profit is the measure of whether it's providing

the service or not. A more or less perfect measure, but a measure. Having said that, the company has an objective.

However, the University doesn't have one single objective, it has a whole range. I compare it due to my scientific and academic training with first calculus and second calculus – I've been a teacher of both. The first calculus is the calculus of a variable and it has a level of difficulty that can be very high, but it's the calculus of a variable. And the second calculus is the calculus of various variables and the level of difficulty is not proportional but exponential. In other words, the calculus of two variables is not twice as difficult as the calculus with one or the one of three is triple. It's something else, another world.

And that's it: companies or institutions that have one objective are the first calculus; universities, which have many objectives, have the level of complexity that corresponds to the calculus of various variables of the second-year calculus; another different world and that's why the solutions in one case are not transferable to the other. And that for me is relevant: sometimes it's thought of giving a system of governance the way companies are governed, I think that would be a mistake.

The two main aims of universities, namely fostering and disseminating knowledge, if you put them under the microscope, you'll see are rather contradictory: because the dissemination of knowledge is essentially a conservative attitude, it involves preserving what already exists and disseminating it to new generations and therefore is associated with an attitude that says “what is good is what we know and that's what we have to be able to get the new generations to learn and know”. Very well, it's an attitude linked to the teaching and education of the new generations. But, running parallel to this, another role of universities is research, which aims to move away from all this: innovate, generate new knowledge that breaks away from and criticizes and questions everything we know and generates new knowledge spaces and opens new frontiers. And curiously, the two functions that may seem – and to some extent have some level of contradiction – are entrusted to the same institution. And this seems all right to me because it's very difficult to convey to new generations knowledge that might be really useful and relevant to them if you don't have any experience in generating it and here is the importance – from my point of view – in the higher education institutions also conducting research. Because without this it's very difficult to choose and decide from everything someone has received what can be discarded and what doesn't need disseminating and, on the other hand, what's important and what does need passing on to future generations. This is why I would call for prudence when fostering or importing models from other areas.

## [ ▶ ] Video

<http://youtu.be/--SNazKBxf0>

[in Catalan, YouTube]:

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<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/govern/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ The Catalan university map comprises eleven on-site universities. Was their creation necessary? Are they currently feasible or do we need to restructure the Catalan university system?

**J. Pagès** ■ I don't believe that on-site universities will disappear in Catalonia, I believe they have a clear role to play and I don't believe that we have over-stretched ourselves in creating new universities. I often use Girona as an example, it's somewhere I know and love – when I studied in Girona, you could only study teacher training, that's why I'm a teacher and because I like it, because my parents were teachers before me, but also because in Girona you could only do teacher training. Now, fortunately, you can study more things in Girona and it's true that Girona society now is more able to send its children, if it wants, anywhere – Barcelona or wherever – than it was when I was young. And Barcelona is much nearer to Girona than it used to be. I used to take a whole day to get to Barcelona and now you're there in a couple of hours. And most families have the resources to do it. But despite everything, I've seen how over the last 20 years, the business structure of Girona has been swamped with graduates essentially from Girona University, and since this business structure has achieved milestones that it would never have set itself had it not been for the influence and participation in its structure of this human capital from academia, which has allowed it to trade abroad, export, etc. And now deal with the crisis more successfully than it would have done, for sure, if it hadn't adopted this dynamic that it did adopt, thanks precisely to the human capital educated at the university. This is why I'm absolutely convinced that the contribution that the new universities that were set up in Catalonia made – for Girona you could read anywhere else – in their day have been extraordinarily positive; and I don't see any element to think that this has to change or that it should get to the level of having to close down any university.

## [ ▶ ] Video

<http://youtu.be/3iyg4Uyr8KE>

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**J. Planella** ■ It could be said quite categorically that open knowledge has torn down the (metaphoric) walls of the university. Is this changing real education-learning models or are universities continuing to teach as before? Could MOOCs bring more radical changes to the education process?

**J. Pagès** ■ I believe that not only does distance learning play a key role in lifelong learning, but also in initial education and that the UOC is a successful experiment that acquires knowledge gained over many years that is essentially its capital. And of which there are not that many similar capitals, in other words: how many institutions in the world have the accumulated knowledge that the UOC does? Very few. And, that's why it could become a key actor if this were to be proposed. I sincerely believe that it could and that there are now tools for conducting distance learning experiments aimed at very broad sectors of the population: for example, the experience of the massive open online courses. The team I run at Universia has made a platform available to partner universities – first Spanish and now also Latin American – for them to experiment with, as we're convinced that this is something that's here to stay in the education system and that it's worth it. You can't hide your head in the sand and turn your back on it. The only way, moreover, of accessing it is to try it, to do it: you learn by doing and without doing, you don't learn. It's not something you can do by analysing it and studying it: you have to do it! And the actors who want to be involved have to do it.

That's something that has some future at the UOC. I suppose there must also be detractors – those who feel that massive education has no future – I don't know, but at the moment there are several million people all over the world who have signed up and it seems to be getting bigger. And it's bound to change hugely: stop being free, or not... How far can we go? I don't know, but it can't be something ephemeral when Google has also joined in.

[ ▶ ] Video

<http://youtu.be/YTojnuAbL3M>

[in Catalan, Youtube]

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<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/lifelonglearning/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ Your work at Universia is to ensure that the university anticipates the needs of the society of the future, fosters research and knowledge while meeting the needs of the current employment market. How do you connect the whole of the university community in the project?

**J. Pagès** ■ We at Universia have a privileged relationship with university managers and presidents. We're an associated enterprise, so our boards of directors are made up of a



number of university presidents from the country where we are and so the relationship with the presidents is fluid and we can do what they tell us – sometimes, not always, but we try to do so as far as we can.

That's why we have a natural relationship with the management sector of the university structures: it's a bit complicated for us and we've tried to see how we could contact and link the teaching staff or the sectors of the teaching staff and we've tried several tools: offering academic journals, offering resources such as the Innoversia portal, which seeks to bring together the world of research needs of companies with the abilities of university research teams, etc. And when we thought how we could link students as a university organization, we made several attempts: the most successful at that time is having launched 5 years ago in the field of helping students find work:

We created portals that set out to help the students find work and that's worked pretty well.

It's growing enormously. We don't only intermediate with university students, I can give you an idea: I expect to end this year, 2013, having intermediated with over a million job posts, and of these, about half will be university students who will have found their first job through us.

So, I think that this is a way to impact – not to tie but to establish a bond because I get the impression that someone who finds their first job through X, whoever that is, this X leaves a mark on them and they recognize it all their lives. Therefore, I think that sometimes we universities have concerned ourselves more with the ones coming in – if more are coming in, if fewer are coming in – and we've been less concerned with the ones going out. And I think we need to concern ourselves with the ones going out too, it's very, very important. And it's through them that we should be trying to achieve this, if not loyalty, at least maintaining the relationship. They shouldn't get the impression that the institution considers it over once it's given you your degree, and that they have nothing to offer, but the opposite, they can continue to be an element of reference and of permanent relationship, setting up the ad hoc structures that are necessary – that's a bit more complicated and we're probably not able to get into it now.

**[ ▶ ] Video**

<http://youtu.be/6z1Yu51i9Ww>

[in Catalan, YouTube]

**[ www ] Key ideas**

<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/universia/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ The UOC has turned 18. How do you see the future of this 100% digital university in the national and international university scenario?

**J. Pagès** ■ The UOC has strengths and it also has weaknesses, there's no doubt. But one of the strengths it has is the experience gained over the years it's been operating to date. And the other strength it has is the ties it's created and that it keeps up – and without which it wouldn't survive, I think – with the other Catalan universities. We have to be aware of this, sometimes the UOC isn't a university of the Catalan universities: it's in the system, but it's a university that, without the other Catalan universities, would have a less open future than the one it has with the cooperation and collaboration of the others. And that's a value! An extraordinarily positive value, that can be developed and from which we can surely get even more of a yield than we get – I don't know, because I don't know with the sufficient closeness.

Then there's another element that I think is relevant and it's the evolution that in the not too distant future all the matter of automatic translations will have and how we'll overcome language barriers in not too long a time thanks to technology. Advances are significant here and university systems have often established levels of influence according to the natural language barriers that give them a survival space in which they can develop and grow.

But the day these barriers come down, then competition will be more universal. For a university like the UOC, linked to a very much minority language – globally speaking, like Catalan – breaking down these barriers could be a danger for everyone or it could be an opportunity, because it could open up frontiers for it that we now see as closed. I think it's worth thinking with a global mentality and see it as a world university and how we'd do it: in a world where I think there are huge opportunities. It's tough to carve out a space in North America, or England, or France, or Germany: but surely it's not so hard to carve out a space – not Latin America any more, which is also tough – in emerging countries in Africa, I imagine there are lots and lots of possibilities for a university that has built up something that any other would want to have and to spend at least the time it's spent and that's no trivial matter: it's quite a few now and that's why it's an added value.

I think it's very good to think globally and not restrict yourself to a cultural space that's your own but that should not necessarily straitjacket us and we have to be able to see that that will transcend.

I think that the day the language barriers come down, and I wager it'll be within ten years, then who'll stop if it's not a very prestigious university, it'll be another that will have set out to do it well and do it massively, then it comes here and offers its services? If someone wants to stop it, I'd say “Hey, no: let my grandchildren choose; don't impose on them”. And if we're like that

and we accept that freedom is an asset that we have to protect, then it's worth us all pulling our finger out because competition is inevitable. It's like the old joke about two explorers in the jungle and they suddenly hear a lion roar, and one of them stops and changes his shoes for a pair of running shoes and the other one says "huh,... I don't know why you're putting those on, the lion'll run faster than you." "I don't care about running faster than the lion; it's you I've got to beat!"

Therefore, I think that right now universities are like these explorers, I don't know if we can hear the lion's roar or not, but there are those who are putting on their trainers and running. And maybe they're doing it to leave us behind.

#### [ ▶ ] Video

<http://youtu.be/RJABQLZmhTY>

[in Catalan, YouTube]

#### [ www ] Key ideas

<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/uocglobal/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ The university year has started and students aged between 17 and 18, when they've finished the second year of the baccalaureate, they've passed the university entrance exam, have to take a decision that will possibly and radically map out their future lives, their professional life at least. They'll be searching different information spaces, most certainly the portal you run, the project has quite a significant role to play in this process, but a few days ago there was criticism from the CEO saying that initially there were too many degrees on offer in Catalonia. They were talking of 450 degrees from which students could choose: just too many possible courses to study. What do you feel about this? Do you feel that we might be creating – as someone called it – a kind of university bubble offering degrees? And what might happen in the future?

**J. Pagès** ■ In a film made some years ago about Mozart, the person who was his kind of rival at times, criticised him about one of his works and told him that they felt it had too many notes; and the other one said to him: "which ones?" putting him in a tight spot. So when they say "there are too many degrees...": Which ones? Above all if an administrative authority says it, then it's their responsibility, right? Let's see: What do they mean there are too many degrees? I think what there's too much of is university legislation, and what's lacking is teaching independence to be able to decide. It's true, the degrees we currently have might seem confusing to students as there are a lot and we've gone from a system where university degrees had a name and there was a pre-set list of qualifications to which universities had to

adapt to a system with a little more freedom where universities could even set the name of the qualification. To me, that seems hugely positive. That's what happens: why should there have been a qualifications register and a state that ensured a degree was called X, Y or Z? I don't understand why it can't be the universities that name these degrees. That's what happens in most countries: I don't know if there is a qualifications register in France. Universities decide the names of the degrees they award. And as for the United States, let's not even go there... So I'd like to know and make a specific comparison of the number of degrees with different names awarded by our universities and compare them with similar systems.

Another thing, this helps guide, confuse or make it difficult for students finishing secondary school and entering the university system to choose. But this system is a complicated all over the world: in the United States, for example, which we sometimes take as the model for a higher education system – and in fact we need to consider why there are some very good universities, although as well as these, there are others that leave a lot to be desired – but the system used to guide students in their choice starts a year and a half before they finish secondary school and have to join the university system in September, in the January before they decide; and anyone who hasn't done it has missed the boat. That's why decisions take longer to make and secondary education systems endeavour to supply their students with the relevant information to enable them to make their choice.

**[ ▶ ] Video**

<http://youtu.be/7oNI-yfmCV8>

[in Catalan, YouTube]

**[ www ] Key ideas**

<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/titulacions/index.html>

**J. Planella** ■ As part of your education career Jaume, you obtained a DEA (Advanced Studies Diploma) in IT in the early 1960s in Toulouse, at a time when few students went abroad to study. At this time, I'd say things have changed from a dual perspective: there are lots of students who have completed their degree or are studying for a Master's or PhD in a type of academic exile and there are others who have gained their degree here but have exiled themselves professionally. What kind of future do you see in this need to leave, at least in the second part (to work)?

**J. Pagès** ■ In fact, I was studying for a DEA (Advanced Studies Diploma) in IT in Toulouse and it was there I began working and researching what would become my doctoral thesis. Those of us who left – primarily if we had aspirations or drive, let's say, of studying for a

university degree – we left because the system had nothing to offer us. What I mean is that in the 1970s – which is when I left – studying for a doctorate in Spain was almost impossible: the system could cope with such a small number of doctorates that it was difficult to find anyone to guide your thesis, to help you study for a doctorate... which at the time was relatively easy in France; there were established research centres; established research activity; you could join a team, development was much easier. So much so, that some of us who left at that time, people who went on to study at university or not, did it for that reason: to continue with our academic development which in our country was not possible or much more complex.

Luckily, that's changed, and today many people, if they want, can continue studying in Spain because there are acknowledged research centres and teams that can take them on. Despite their being able to do it here, some do leave, and I think that's good, mobility is extraordinarily positive. What we want is for students from here to go and study abroad and also foreign students come and study at our research centres and that's what's happening. Fortunately, we have sufficiently recognised research centres with people from abroad queuing up to come and study here.

However, it's quite another thing that people are leaving because there are no professional opportunities in the country. That's a separate issue. And that's linked to the economic and financial recession we're in. And that's not good: the fact people *have* to leave. That they leave – that they can leave – yes, that's good. But that they *have* to leave because they can't develop here, where they can generate the added value that they can generate through their work they can do abroad... that's a bit sad. But it's not the fault of the education system!

**[ ▶ ] Video**

<http://youtu.be/veqKHK5C6Yw>

[in Catalan, YouTube]

**[ www ] Key ideas**

<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/estranger/index.html>

**J. Planella ■** What future do you feel awaits universities? Might it no longer be an institution where students go to obtain a specific degree and become an institution that accompanies them throughout their lifelong learning processes?

**J. Pagès ■** The future of universities is difficult and dangerous to predict. But I would say one thing: I believe that with the emergence of communications, the demographic wave we're talking about, the fact that the population is asking for or demanding ever higher levels of

education, puts a stress – as it has never been stressed before, from my point of view – on education systems as a whole. And specifically higher education.

In other words, In the knowledge and information society, knowledge and information become very important. Very. Everyone's convinced of it. And what's also clear, the system that is designed to generate and convey this knowledge lives with more pressure. And what might happen? There are only two outcomes: it's capable of providing a response or it's not. If it's capable of providing a response: it has a future I would say that is extraordinary because it's always had it, but more so now because the matter itself – the hard core of academia – becomes the first level of importance for the future of our society and everyone recognizes it. Therefore, that it's capable of doing so, and of doing it well, it has a very clear and extraordinary future. But if it's not capable of doing it well, it also runs the risk that, as it's important – if it didn't do it there wouldn't be a problem, but seeing as it's important – it can't be accepted that it doesn't do it well and that it doesn't provide a response, and therefore what might happen? Simply, it'll be replaced.

I think that the education system, especially higher education, is currently undergoing an enormous stress that will not decrease in the immediate future, but will increase; which forces it to adapt and change, to mark out, a little, the future of a society that it is very different from what it was, not a hundred years ago, but twenty years ago.

This challenge is an extraordinary challenge for higher education institutions which also have a very great inertia and where changing them is costly as it takes years and even though they're changing, they're doing so pretty slowly. I don't know if the pace at which they are used to changing is enough for the future demands of our society. And we run the risk of a certain replacement and, in fact, there are elements that highlight this risk. In other words, we now have institutions with enough financial clout not to think twice about it, and who are setting up their own education centres, and that is still replacing one model with another: a fact that we call Corporate Universities. That they exist and that they are experimenting alongside the traditional systems, with the desire to occupy a space and that, if they do, it's because they think the other one is not up to it or isn't providing a response to the needs that that have to be met.

**[ ▶ ] Video**

<http://youtu.be/BVvytWI-9k4>

[in Catalan, YouTube]

**[ www ] Key ideas**

<http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/universitat/coneix/actes-institucionals/llicons-inaugurals/2013-2014/idees/futur/index.html>



## Jaume Pagès i Fita

CEO of Universia

A Bachelor of Education graduate from Girona, although it is in the field of industrial engineering where he developed his academic and professional career. An industrial engineer and professor of Systems Engineering and Automatics from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC), he held the post of vice president at this university for eight years and then President for a further eight years (1994-2002). From 2002 to 2004, he was a Universal Cultures Forum Association delegate, Barcelona 2004

Since 2005, he has held the post of CEO of the Universia university collaboration network, from where he has an overall view of the university structure and, specifically, of Spanish and Latin American universities.

[ [www](#) ] CV on ACUP (in Catalan): <http://www.acup.cat/content/jaume-pages>

[ [www](#) ] CV on Wikipedia (in Spanish):  
[http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaume\\_Pag%C3%A8s\\_i\\_Fita](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaume_Pag%C3%A8s_i_Fita)

[ [www](#) ] Dossier on Jaume Pagès [created by the Library]:  
<http://beta.biblioteca.uoc.edu/app/bibweb/?q=en/resources/dossiers/jaume-pag%C3%A8s-i-fita-inaugural-lecture-20132014>



## Jordi Planella Ribera

Director of the UOC Psychology and Educational Sciences Department

A graduate in Systematic Education and Doctor in Education from the University of Barcelona, he is professor of Social Education with the UOC

[ [www](#) ] CV on a Academia.edu: <http://uoc.academia.edu/JORDIPLANELLA>

## Counterpoint: an open dialogue

*To enrich the debate of this inaugural lecture, we've asked Tíscar Lara, director of communication of the School of Industrial Organization (EOI) and Ramón Compañó, programme director of the Joint Research Centre - Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (JRC-IPTS) of the European Commission, to open up new questions.*

### [ ? ] What are the strengths of the European university?

**Ramón Compañó** ■ “In the United States the idea of universities as the engine house of jobs, spin-offs, is highly institutionalized, which in other European countries isn't necessarily done like this.”

“Perhaps the problem isn't so much the universities but perhaps the problem or what we need right now is an industrial scene that is able to absorb all the knowledge of the universities that we have at present.”

[ ▶ ] **Video** [in Spanish, YouTube]: <http://youtu.be/hxbiGNNhed8>

### [ ? ] What value could being on-site offer an online university?

**Tíscar Lara** ■ “An online educational institution can (...) reinforce this work that it does creating, participating, proposing meeting activities. Although they're very short, it's shown that they make the relationship, the community that is constructed, much more cohesive and the learning experience much more satisfactory.”

[ ▶ ] **Video** [in Spanish, YouTube]: <http://youtu.be/skxqJJDcglc>

### [ ? ] Does the university as we know it today have meaning and a future?

**Ramón Compañó** ■ “There will always be large and small universities, ones that compete, that don't compete, that are complementary, because in the end what matters is not so much the size; it's whether they're able or not to prepare students for what they need after.”

[ ▶ ] **Video** [in Spanish, YouTube]: <http://youtu.be/1AWsdjrEnM>



### [ ? ] What are the differences in terms of technology transfer in Europe?

**Ramón Compañó** ■ “Every country has its scenario and its interrelation due to the past that it's had and it's a bit difficult to compare them because we can't take the parts and one country and compare it with another without knowing how we've reached the situation we have.”

“If the industrial fabric that we have has no capacity to absorb students, despite the fact we're generating a lot of teaching, many good students are going to find it difficult to adapt to the one we do have. It's a commitment that we all have to foster; universities and, obviously, society as well as industry.”

[ ▶ ] **Video** [in Spanish, YouTube]: <http://youtu.be/fTPRqWMWEe8>

### [ ? ] How can universities offer global and local solutions at the same time?

**Tíscar Lara** ■ “The key is being based on local needs, getting to know them and identifying them. And with participation and collaboration, through a constructive process. Not supply-based planning, but demand-based planning. And with demand-based planning, you have to know what these local communities need to enable them to think globally and act locally.”

[ ▶ ] **Video** [in Spanish, YouTube]: <http://youtu.be/3PcleP-CJ48>

### [ ? ] What is the role of universities such as the UOC in the future of the university system?

**Ramón Compañó** ■ “A society where we're at a stage of lifelong learning is definitely a more effective market for *distance universities* than on-site ones for obvious reasons.”

“I believe that healthy competition is good. It will make each of us reconsider naturally how we achieve a quality education model (...). And there won't necessarily be a just single model, but the models that may be developed will be very different.”

[ ▶ ] **Video** [in Spanish, YouTube]: <http://youtu.be/50heilqFO8s>

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