



### Laudatio by Francisco Rubio, Vice-Rector for International Relations at the UOC

"The eLearning initiative of the European Commission seeks to mobilise the educational and cultural communities, as well as the economic and social players in Europe, in order to speed up changes in the education and training systems for Europe's move to a knowledge-based society."

(Declaration that stands in the eLearning initiative's web page of the European Commission.)

"Globalisation, new technologies and demographic developments constitute an enormous challenge; one of the answers to this problem is access to lifelong learning."

(Quotation from Ján Figel, Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism)

Rector, Dr Tony Bates, distinguished authorities, members of the university community, ladies and gentlemen,

Like any other organisation, even if still very young, the UOC is developing in stages. It is a university that has emerged from the knowledge society (I would go so far as to say the advanced knowledge society), in which internal changes are at all times faster than external changes. It is a university for a constantly-changing world and for an Internet world, which it manages with calm, courage and intelligence.

In its almost eleven years of existence, the UOC has become a reality that is continuously adapting to society's needs, and especially to those of its country. It is a University where the students are the centre of the learning process, which continues throughout their life, when they need it and are able to do it; a University that has undoubtedly made a firm commitment to research and innovation in methodology as its reason for being; and which has also addressed its internationalisation. A commitment which assumes and preserves its identity and the reason that determined its creation.

Right from the very start, Rector Ferraté, an academic with experience, vision and wisdom, opted for a university model with three basic axes: different levels of learning; research and innovation in methodology; and the social dissemination of the knowledge generated at the university itself. In light of the nature of this ceremony, we will be looking at the research axis. Rector Ferraté saw (at the opportune, possible moment) the need to promote research institutionally, which is the feature that characterises an excellent university above other institutions of higher education.

To achieve this goal, in 2003 the Governing Council created the IN3 (Internet Interdisciplinary Institute), and also fostered research and innovation by professors and managers, in both institutional strategic lines and personal initiative lines by teaching staff. Professor Manuel Castells was very quickly taken on to lead the research into the Internet Society. The most well-known and relevant project in this field to date is the Project Internet Catalonia (PIC). Professor M. Castells is also Chairman of the IN3 Scientific Commission; this Commission includes figures who are recognised worldwide in the strategic fields of interest to the UOC. Professor T. Bates has been part of this Commission from the start and until very recently. The task of the Scientific Commission is to focus the university's research lines from an external, world perspective.

This apart, as a consequence of this strategy, the UOC has started offering a PhD course that draws together all the University's research learning strands. The aim of this course is to teach students how to develop in-depth and systematic research regarding the use of ICTs in the different social environments, as well as studying global changes in an Internet society. An international, interdisciplinary PhD course that transversally integrates different theoretical perspectives and methodological tools for students in over 45 countries.

Today, we are celebrating the second Doctor Honoris Causa investiture of the UOC, which is awarded to an academic, researcher and innovator in the field of education (in other words, of teaching and learning processes, as well as those of their organisation), with the intensive use of ICTs. Professor Anthony (Tony) Bates has carried out his creative, innovative and analytical work in a field which coincides fully with the academic focus of the UOC. In this sense, the Governing Council took on board the proposal by Psychology Studies and Education Sciences made by its Director, Dr Toni Badia, for "his leadership in the systematic application of ICTs in higher education on a world level, changing students' learning model, as well as the organisational model of the institutions which, in different varieties, apply them". Dr Bates has created his own perspective and vision in this field, which is recognised all over the world. I am honoured to have been given the task of presenting the doctorate, on behalf of my University, and of introducing him as an honoured member of the UOC's research family, which welcomes him today.

For me, it also gives me great personal satisfaction to have been asked to do this. Between Tony Bates and myself there is a personal and affective relationship. He received me, in a scientific and human way, as Visiting Scholar to the Department of Distance Education and Technology of the Continuing Studies Division at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada), where he was the Director. It was in the autumn of 1998 (when I left my post as Rector of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) and it was "my professional reinvention, my cultural evolution and my commitment to a university at the service of a changing society, an Internet society, in a globalised world in which local identity played an increasingly important role".

Tony Bates is very well-known and recognised throughout the world, by those who are dedicated to non-face-to-face education with the intensive use of technologies. Tony Bates has had a long, varied and productive career in the different phases and eras through which Distance Learning has progressed, from the more conventional to the more recent uses of ICTs, in different types of universities and for different segments of students. He is open to change, innovative, creative, a critical thinker with a great deal of common sense and a sense of humour.

Tony Bates has developed a great deal in his perception and vision, from his initial time as Professor of Educational Media Research, a post he held for 20 years, at the British Open University, of which he was one of the academic founders. As of 1990, he was already in Canada and was working as Executive Director of Research, Strategic Planning and Information Technology at the Open Learning Agency of British Columbia, where he remained for 5 years. He was Director of Distance Education and Technology in the Continuing Studies Division at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada) from 1995 to 2003, and Research Team Leader of MAPLE, the Centre for Research into Managing and Planning Learning Environments in Education at the University of British Columbia.

Tony is the author of eight books, including: "Managing Technological Change: Strategies for College and University Leaders", and (with Gary Poole) "Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education". The research groups that he has led, both at the United Kingdom Open University and at the Open Learning Agency and the University of British Columbia, have published over 350 articles in the field of non-face-to-face education and the use of technology in the teaching and learning processes. He is a member of six editorial committees for magazines with a worldwide readership, specialising in distance education and educational technology.

He has also worked as a consultant in over thirty countries on different continents (and I would like to recall his highly enriching experience, albeit in another era, in Afghanistan). The institutions that he has advised include the World Bank, the OECD, the UNESCO, education ministries in a number of countries, and several higher education commissions in a number of states in North America. He also has broad experience in the world of corporate training and is currently a member of the Academic Advisory Board of the Volkswagen Auto Uni (the Volkswagen University), which has its headquarters in Wolfsburg, in Germany.

As I was saying, from his initial time at the British Open University, he has had a long career over the different phases, models and eras through which non-face-to-face education has passed. He is someone who has grown, who has lived and who has fostered change; and who has found in the UOC his natural space and environment.

To complete this academic perspective of Professor Bates, I would like to recall a recent interview (December 2004) in [elearningeuropa.info](http://elearningeuropa.info) (an initiative of the European Commission), in which he responded to one of the questions that causes most anguish among academics at conventional universities:

What should be the role of ICT in the "traditional" universities?

T. Bates: Let me say what I would like to see happen. I would like to see e-learning focused on the areas where it brings the most benefit. It should be used strategically and not just as a tool that everybody uses. We should realize that e-learning is expensive and time consuming for the professor, particularly at the beginning. This means a lot of change if we are going to do it well.

Bates has a humanity as great, at least, as his qualifications and academic recognition. Esther and me had the opportunity of enjoying it, both in Vancouver and then in Barcelona and the Canary Islands. He is someone with a huge capacity for work, who does so conscientiously and with great responsibility and efficiency. With his intercultural vision and action, the product of his character and his experience of receiving researchers from all over the world at his department, whom he treats in an individual and personalised way. He is someone with *seny* (good sense and reason).

As his personal traits, I would highlight his British sense of humour, difficult to understand at first for we Latin people, both because of its linguistic expression and its cultural content. He loves golf, skiing (even though it seems that he will not be invited to be an athlete on the Canadian Winter Olympic team in Whistler-Vancouver 2010) and flying small aircraft (he flies himself to some academic conventions close to Vancouver, as David Stewart recently explained). These are just some of the traits that go to make up his personality. And let's not forget his passion for football (soccer), about which he has been and is a theoretical expert, with his beloved team: London's Tottenham Hotspur (founded in 1882), although I get the feeling that before long he will change to Barça, which has captured his heart as he has now seen them play at the Nou Camp. His passion for white water rafting is also well-known, both when he shares it with non-experts as was the case with us in the area around Vancouver, and when he goes rafting with Pat, at senior level, descending a stretch of the Colorado River on one of their summer holidays.

It is traditional, in the best of cases, that the persons nominated as Doctor Honoris Causa by a university have, apart from their own merits, some kind of relationship or commitment, be it real or potential, with the institution that is awarding them the degree. This is the case of Tony Bates in relation to the UOC. He is someone, as we have already seen, who is truly committed to the UOC and to the country, who has identified with our character and is assimilating it, starting with the challenge of learning the Catalan language and culture, in which he is making notable effort and progress.

Tony Bates' relationship with the UOC coincided with my joining in the 2001-2002 academic year. I had only been at the UOC for a few months when I received an e-mail from him telling me that he was on a sabbatical year and wanted to explore the possibility of spending a month at the UOC, and he asked me if I could give him the name of a contact. He also contacted Professor Albert Sangrà, whom he had met at a congress held in the United States. The UOC was delighted to receive this illustrious Visiting Scholar.

I would like to transcribe his proposal for his visit, just as he explained it to us:

"My reasons for coming to the UOC are entirely selfish. I wanted to learn from a very innovative institution. In particular, I was interested in the organizational structure of an institution designed from scratch as a virtual university, in its funding and business model, as well as in its pedagogy. If possible I wanted to identify and take back to the UBC best practice in the design, delivery, and management of online learning. From this perspective, my visit has been a great success."

During his time here, the UOC asked him to write a report on certain areas of the University's activity, such as: its teaching model, its technology model, its organisational model and its business model. We also asked him to give us his view of the state of research in e-learning at the UOC from an international perspective. He highlighted a lot of points and drew our attention to others, which could be done differently. All this was extremely useful to us and many of these points have now been contextualised in our model, and others are in the process of being so. I would like to highlight a paragraph from his report, which I consider relevant to this act:

"I believe that UOC's location and context, as a regional, Catalan university serving Catalan students in the Catalan language, is very important. It is a serious and genuine attempt to respect and maintain cultural identity within an increasingly globalised world. For this reason alone, it deserves success and support. At the same time as serving regional needs, it is also exploiting the potential of the Internet for global reach and influence."

Subsequently, in this initial contact, an ever more intense, focalised academic relationship was born between Tony Bates and the UOC. His part-time association with the University has been centred on the planning, management and development of an e-learning research programme, with three main areas, based on the initiatives of the UOC's own professors from the different Studies at the University. Our aim, and his, is for the UOC to become a European Centre of Excellence for research in e-learning within two years.

However, the commitment is not just academic, but also personal. Pat and Tony have learnt how to know and love our country, to enjoy its towns, cities and streets, its people, our customs and traditions; and they have made an effort to integrate into our culture and language, as I said before. Also, our country offers them the opportunity to enjoy their hobbies and to have a high standard of living. They already know the benefits of this country in terms of golf courses, ski resorts and slopes, rivers for white water rafting, havens of traditional and imaginative cuisine, etc. They already know that they will feel just like in Vancouver, and that's why they have chosen our country as their regular home, not so cold

and, above all, not so much rain as in the beautiful city in the British Columbia.

For all of this, the UOC is honoured to receive Professor Tony Bates as an honourable member of its research and innovation environment. This nomination and its formal reception links him and binds him permanently to our University. In a moment of renewed and exciting drive by the UOC, it is appropriate and necessary. The UOC is recognised throughout the world for its excellent learning and the innovation that it offers through its teaching model (CV, materials, services and support to students, etc.), and also for research in e-learning. With his inclusion into this research environment, our capacity, efforts and quality will be boosted and developed; bringing individual interests into line with institutional ones, and projecting them on to the international scientific community. The UOC's national and international positioning will be strengthened and enhanced, as a relevant and benchmark core in the morphology of the e-learning network to which we are committed.

Because of all this, I would like to thank Tony Bates, on behalf of the UOC and myself, for having accepted this nomination. I would also like to thank all of you, as your presence has given prominence to this solemn academic ceremony.

Thank you very much.

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