

Chapter 20

Location Guided System of Training Solutions and Learning Itineraries Based on Competences Adapted to Users' Needs: The UOC eLearning GPS

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ABSTRACT

Competency design stands out among the methodological and educational model changes introduced by the EHEA (European Higher Education Area). This concept is a key factor when developing programs based on academic and professional profiles that respond to social and labour market needs. The UOC eLearning GPS is based on competences and is meant to reduce the gap between formal training and the reality of the labour market and social needs that traditionally has characterized the university. These aspects are the basis of this application. Using a language of competences, the application helps the students identify their main skills and capacities, as well as areas of improvement. Following the model of competency design, this tool helps the user detect and reduce the gap between a starting position of competence and his or her learning and training expectations. UOC eLearning GPS application offers solutions and learning itineraries closer to the user's real learning needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the syllabuses for Spanish undergraduate degree, diploma and foundation degree programmes have been based on the transmission of a large volume of theory to students. The inclusion of educational proposals in these syllabuses to help students transfer this body of theoretical knowledge to practical situations that would bring their university training more closely into line with the practice of a profession was negligible until the 1970s. Since then, increasing emphasis has been placed on the professionalising aspect of university training, and degree programmes have been modified accordingly. This contrasts with the professional world, which increasingly demands that university institutions produce graduates who, in addition to possessing a solid grounding in theory, have suitable skills to pursue a career related to this knowledge without the need to engage in lengthy practical training upon entering the workforce. To meet this demand, universities have taken up the challenge of revising their syllabuses with a view to ensuring that their graduates, in addition to being people who 'know about', are also people who 'know how' (Zabala, 2007).

Although a large number of degree programmes had already incorporated this approach by the 1990s, it was the approval of the Bologna Declaration¹ in 1999, whereby 29 European countries undertook to initiate a process to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), that served as the true catalyst to ensure that all degree programmes would be redesigned in keeping with the new societal demand. Over the first decade of the 21st century, universities have made considerable efforts to adapt their educational offers to the guidelines laid down to meet EHEA requirements and have taken great pains to ensure that their entire organisational and academic structure can handle a change of this magnitude. Unfortunately, there have been few initiatives that enable students to make use of the new educational offer in a way

that is both comprehensible and allows them to obtain the maximum benefit, namely, a university education tailored to their immediate or future professional interests. The new syllabuses are more flexible, which allows students to set out different paths and, thus, define their own professional profile over the course of their university education. However, for students to be able suitably to personalise their educational paths, they must know how to match the skills they already have with their expectations for improving these skills or acquiring new ones and with the skills that can be acquired through a given programme or degree (Delgado, 2005). In order to help its students choose the courses or educational paths best suited to their interests, the UOC decided to promote, through the Office of the Vice President for Innovation, the development of a tool to meet this need.

1. LINE OF INNOVATION

The *e-learning GPS* project falls within the sphere of assessing the driving lines behind the first strategic plan published by the UOC's Vice President's Office, Innovation. Although it is included within this sphere, as will be seen, none of the core functions and services offered by the tool is directly related to the actual evaluation of formal teaching and learning contexts. Instead, its importance with regard to such evaluations lies in the characteristics of the system's main operating process. This process is an open, guided one in which students can determine, structure and optimise the organisation of their skill sets in order to meet their next learning goals.

2. BACKGROUND

Several circumstances gave rise to the proposed innovation driver known as the *e-learning GPS*. Most of them were the result of the technologi-

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