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Contextualising change through a common strategy: Lecturers' perceptions and key role in supporting academic reform

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Abstract European universities are currently going through a process of change in order to meet the common goals set for higher education by the European Commission. They are revising their educational models to adjust them to the guidelines of the “Bologna Process” and are devising an institutional strategy for its implementation. In practical terms, this means aligning former national degrees and diplomas to standard European Bachelor and Masters degrees and PhD doctorates, by creating acknowledged professional qualification benchmarks that also include adjusted course lengths and contents. This process, in the end, mostly affects academic staff members who have a fundamental role to play in carrying out the pedagogical reforms on the teaching front. Besides presenting a commentary on the institutional approach of one particular technical university in Spain, the purpose of this paper is to propose, from the authors' point of view as lecturers, a strategy which has the potential to create a favourable atmosphere for carrying out such a reform. The article's main objective is to highlight a series of action points which may serve to reinforce and advance the main institutional strategy by relying on the powerful influence of its academic staff members.

Keywords Bologna Process · University reform · Educational challenges · Strategy · Lecturers · Change · Spain

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Résumé Contextualiser le changement à travers une stratégie commune : perceptions et rôle central des enseignants dans la réforme universitaire – Les universités européennes connaissent actuellement une mutation visant à atteindre les buts communs fixés par la Commission européenne pour l’enseignement supérieur. Elles remanient donc leurs modèles pédagogiques pour les aligner sur les directives du « processus de Bologne » et élaborent leur stratégie institutionnelle pour la transposition. Concrètement, ce processus implique d’adapter les anciens diplômes et titres universitaires nationaux aux diplômes européens standardisés Bachelor, Master et Doctorat en fixant des exigences reconnues pour les qualifications professionnelles, dont la durée et le contenu des cours. Finalement, cette démarche concerne en premier lieu les personnels universitaires qui ont un rôle fondamental à jouer dans l’application des réformes pédagogiques à la pratique de l’enseignement. Outre un commentaire sur l’approche institutionnelle adoptée par une université technique en Espagne, cet article a pour but de proposer, dans la perspective des auteures en tant qu’enseignantes, une stratégie renfermant le potentiel de créer une atmosphère favorable à la réalisation de cette réforme. Leur principal objectif consiste à présenter une série de lignes d’action pouvant servir à renforcer et à faire progresser la stratégie institutionnelle centrale, en s’appuyant sur la forte influence des personnels universitaires.

Resumen Contextualizar el cambio mediante una estrategia común: Percepciones del profesorado y su papel decisivo de respaldo a la reforma académica—Actualmente, las universidades europeas están atravesando un proceso de cambio para alcanzar los objetivos comunes establecidos por la Comisión Europea en el ámbito de la educación superior. Están revisando sus modelos educativos para ajustarlos a las directrices del ‘Proceso de Bolonia’ y asimismo elaborando una estrategia institucional para su implantación. En la práctica, esto significa adaptar los antiguos títulos y diplomas de Educación Superior a las actuales titulaciones académicas europeas de grado, máster y doctorado, creando parámetros de cualificación profesional que incluyen adaptar la duración de los cursos y su contenido. Este proceso de cambio a quien más afecta finalmente es al profesorado, que tiene que desempeñar un papel fundamental para llevar a cabo las reformas pedagógicas en el sector educativo. Además de presentar un análisis sobre el enfoque institucional de una universidad técnica española, el presente estudio tiene por objeto proponer, desde el punto de vista de las autoras en calidad de docentes, una estrategia que tenga el potencial de generar un clima favorable para acometer dicha reforma. El principal objetivo del artículo es destacar una serie de acciones que puedan servir para reforzar y hacer progresar la estrategia institucional, basándose en la poderosa influencia de su profesorado.

Since the 1990s, economic changes and new technologies have impacted both on individuals and society. The development of the World Wide Web and of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has contributed to a vertiginous spread, sharing and dissemination of information and knowledge worldwide which has resulted in the acceleration of economic globalisation.

Knowledge is becoming a driving force for the economy and education is adapting to these changes. In this context, universities play a fundamental role in the production and transmission of knowledge and its practical application to innovation (EC 2005, pp. 5, 12, 13). However, various reports issued by the European Commission between 2003 and 2008 showed that European universities were not prepared to face the new challenges of globalisation; hence they have been, and still are, undertaking structural reforms of their systems to meet the needs of the knowledge society and become more competitive in a global economy (EC 2008).

In Spain, the university system is going through a process of change as a result of the common European goals set for higher education. These goals aim at making every country converge towards a common teaching structure, launched by the so-called “Bologna Process”, with the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) throughout the continent.¹ In practical terms, this means aligning the former system of 3-year *Diplomatura* (diplomas) or *Ingeniería Técnica* (technical engineering) degrees and 4-, 5- or 6-year *Licenciatura* (licence) or *Ingeniería* (engineering) degrees to standard European Bachelor (termed *Grado* in Spanish) and Masters degrees, followed by a standard European PhD doctorate. Within this European standardisation process, opportunities (and new responsibilities) are opening up for individual universities to create their own degree programmes, which were hitherto determined centrally for all Spanish universities.

Hence Spanish universities are making significant changes in their academic and organisational structure to adapt to the new European scheme by introducing the new teaching–learning methodologies in their education system. This process of adaptation to EHEA and modernisation is evident from the latest report issued in February 2013 by an Expert Committee appointed by the government for the reform of the Spanish university system, the *Proposal for the reform and improvement of the efficiency and quality of the Spanish University system* (MoE 2013). The report is intended for examination and debate by the academic community since it diagnoses the current university situation and proposes a series of measures to improve quality and efficiency.

Taking a closer look at academia, the Spanish Council of University Rectors (Spanish acronym: CRUE) has stated that while the Bologna Process is being progressively implemented in a reasonable manner, albeit requiring a significant effort on the part of academic staff members, it is an apparent lack of resources which stands out in a distinctively negative way as one of the main barriers in the implementation of the process. At a rectors’ conference held in Murcia (Spain) in May 2012, Prof. Adelaida de la Calle, chairwoman of CRUE, said that Spain has a good university system “and that the dedication of the teaching staff to implement the Higher Education Area at no cost must be acknowledged” (Carreres 2012).²

¹ The “Bologna Process” was launched in 1999 by the Ministers of Education and university leaders of 29 countries in order to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 and it has further developed into a major educational reform encompassing 46 countries. Three main objectives have been pursued from the start: introduction of the three-cycle system (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate), quality assurance and recognition of qualifications and periods of study. The EHEA was meant to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe.

² Translations from Spanish sources such as this one were done by the authors of this paper.

There is also the opinion that university directors have a limited view of their role in the adaptation to EHEA; they confine it to bureaucratic, administrative and management issues rather than taking on the role as pedagogical leaders capable of devising and promoting an informed strategic plan. Thus objectives, procedures and results of this process in terms of available human, material and functional resources can be contextualised to their own universities (Gonzalez and Raposo 2009, p. 380).

This is reflected in an analysis of the Bologna Process in Spain by Carmen Fenoll et al. (2010), who focus on specific structural, administrative and organisational aspects of the university reform that have a clear effect on the performance of the various actors involved. Fenoll et al. give an overview picture of the positions held by university leaders, teaching staff and students towards the implementation of the Bologna Process in Spain, bringing to light certain limitations in the current university system which have slowed down the implementation of the new standards. For example, they cite the lack of leadership shown by the authorities responsible for university reform (*ibid.*, p. 8), the lack of coordination between the government and universities (*ibid.*, p. 6), and the sceptical attitude of a good part of the teaching staff (*ibid.*, pp. 7, 8).

However, Fenoll et al. do not propose a strategy to accomplish university reform in the light of these negative factors; neither do they attempt to provide suggestions or a recommendation of how to find a way to coordinate efforts and lead reform successfully. The aim of this paper is to offer a commentary on how the process of adaptation to EHEA is being implemented at the Technical University of Madrid (*Universidad Politécnica de Madrid*; UPM) and at the same time to raise awareness about the importance for universities to adopt a common strategy between the institution and its academic staff members to support their university's educational reform.

The UPM strategy for adaptation to EHEA

The Spanish higher education policy has been addressing the comprehensive modernisation of the system towards the new framework of European convergence since 2001.

In order to integrate themselves into this framework, Spanish universities are adopting the following strategic objectives: (1) the need to ascertain the quality of teaching and governance of universities; (2) the need to renovate methodologies and to improve the teaching skills of lecturers; and (3) the importance of positioning their own university within the community of universities (Mira et al. 2012).

Regarding objectives (1) and (2), the Spanish Quality Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (ANECA) was set up in 2002 to evaluate the quality of university teaching through specific programmes such as DOCENTIA (Teaching Performance Assessment Programme) and ACADEMIA (Teaching Staff Evaluation). The former aims at establishing that not only the academic staff are qualified and competent to execute their teaching activity, but also promotes their development and recognition. The latter evaluates the merits and competencies of future lecturers and

guarantees the observation of quality standards in the selection of lecturers within international evaluation and research benchmarks.³

But within the context of university teaching, the emphasis is on designing new curricula to make degrees compatible with the European policy framework and to introduce the necessary adjustments to apply the “European Credit Transfer System” (ECTS).⁴ Every university has designed new Bachelor and Masters degree courses. These have been approved by ANECA, which evaluates the proposed study programmes and confirms that they conform with EHEA norms. This change in curricular design represents a “conscious effort” on the part of universities to transform their structures and teaching methods.

For example, UPM is specifically committed to reforming the structure and organisation of its degree programme to meet the social and labour market demands, the requirement of internationalising its study plans as well as effecting a change of the training paradigm to a student-centred approach. This implies a renovation of teaching methods. For this purpose, UPM has implemented three methodology improvement measures under the heading “Incentives for educational innovation” (Educational efficiency plan: Renovation of methodologies programme; UPM 2010a), namely (1) Designing its own accreditation system for the pedagogical training received at UPM or abroad; (2) Analysing and improving the current incentives and their attractiveness for academic staff mobility to travel professionally or to receive foreign lecturers (see also Internationalisation plan; UPM 2010a); and (3) Increasing resources to enhance participation in innovative teaching practices.

These three measures focus on the importance of the involvement of academic staff members, of updating and improving their skills to implement these reforms successfully. Defining the innovation of its educational methodologies, UPM’s educational efficiency plan clearly states: “The success of this present reform ... will depend on the degree of commitment and capacity that UPM will have in order to incentivise the participation of all concerned in this changing process, and especially that of lecturers” (Educational efficiency plan: Incentives for educational innovation; UPM 2010a, p. 34). At the very least, this document acknowledges that lecturers are “key players” in this transformation towards institutional and international success.

Regarding the third strategic objective, national and international positioning of each university depends on the strategic policies adopted by individual universities in order to create opportunities to meet these objectives.

UPM has been implementing its new, future-oriented “educational model” since 2010, and the key word here is “change”. UPM’s strategy consists of a series of stages, plans, programmes and measures which are supposed to bring about these changes through specific actions which are clearly defined in UPM’s restructuring policies (Executive summary: Documentation; UPM 2010a). With this model, UPM

³ For more information on DOCENTIA and ACADEMIA, see <http://www.aneca.es/eng>, [accessed 3 January 2014].

⁴ The “European Credit Transfer System” (ECTS) is a student-centred system based on the student workload that is needed to meet objectives of a programme through learning outcomes and competencies that must be acquired by the student for their studies.

establishes its strategic objectives, from the original presentation proposal: (1) To show UPM's institutional commitment to the new educational challenges faced by the knowledge society within the context of EHEA; (2) To take on an integrated educational position composed of intellectual, methodological and ethical aspects in a balanced manner; and (3) To strengthen UPM's institutional identity and reinforce its stamp of excellence through 50 key measures which are intended to effect a significant advance in the new educational strategic plan, either by impact, by innovation or by relevance in comparison with other universities of international standing (Presentation; UPM 2010a).

UPM has a clear institutional strategy which foresees a general move into a new scenario for the renovation of methodologies, for innovative education and for universities' appropriate planning, all based on a new concept of teaching and learning. However, this redefinition of educational models involves not only a change from traditional values to the new values of worldwide education but also the full engagement of those directly responsible for introducing these new values in the context of innovation. It is precisely these active agents of the changing process that we focus on below, particularly understanding the role of lecturers as one of the main mechanisms to trigger the smooth implementation of this educational change which is designed to lead to enhanced academic quality and success.

The scope of lecturers' involvement in the educational reform

Without doubt institutional support is an essential starting point for reshaping a university's organisational and educational model. UPM has indeed initiated a reform of its pedagogical system with a strategic plan of support and rewards to its academic staff members which aims at enhancing the quality of education (UPM's "Teaching incentives programme" is discussed later in this article).

However, the implementation of this reform also needs the commitment of individuals to accept its rationale and implications and thus make the proper adjustments to accommodate their skills to the new framework (Bucher 2010, pp. 2, 9). Being participants in the changes at UPM, both of us are very much aware that political forces, social pressures and technological advances are putting universities under considerable pressure, without the ability to react, so that the task of effecting change falls on those who have the direct capacity to carry out the new ideas and ways of working in their immediate field of activity, not least their direct contact with colleagues and students. Hence the level of lecturers' engagement in pedagogical reform is even more crucial for a successful outcome.

Looking at these arguments in context, it is instructive to consider a general survey which was conducted by UPM in 2008/09 to assess academic staff members' satisfaction with the adaptation to EHEA. It revealed a dissatisfaction rate of around 60 per cent (UPM 2009, p. 54). A similar survey carried out in 2010/11 (UPM 2011)⁵ showed that just over 50 per cent (51.9%) did not agree with the adaptation

⁵ This is an internal report only available to UPM's academic community in *Politécnica virtual*. The authors are grateful for being given permission by the university to use this information.

to EHEA (p. 11). The conclusions of the 2009 survey showed that lecturers sought transparency and participation of the academic community in the university reform process towards European convergence (UPM 2009, pp. 54, 84). These results prepared the ground for a greater involvement of academic staff members, and of the academic community, in the ongoing changes of the educational model launched by UPM.

The issue of organisational change is covered in a good number of studies, focusing on how to create a receptive context, looking at institutional culture and fostering readiness in members of the organisation (e.g. Chaffee and Jacobson 1997; Tabatoni et al. 2002; Weiner 2009). It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into a detailed study on how organisational change is deployed, but we agree with scholars (e.g. Smith 1998; Ramaley 2002) who argue that a strategy to manage institutional response is necessary to undertake transformative change. In fact, we believe in a *focused commitment* of the institution and its direct actors, i.e. academic staff members, to successfully induce change, regardless of other measures taken by the institution in its educational approach. This commitment represents a *strategic approach* to be adopted by stakeholders (the academic community and the governing bodies) in order to create favourable conditions to implement the pedagogical reform required in the university. Since this is an issue which concerns almost every university in the current scenario, we propose a possible strategy based on our experience as lecturers and we look at some aspects of UPM, where we teach, as a background context for our perspective.

This strategic approach can be broken down into several actions with measurable results, which may be introduced immediately at individual and institutional levels, and can be outlined as follows:

University mission and involvement of the academic community

Establishing a clear pathway towards the institutional mission of the university which all parties know about and subscribe to

This is the “mission statement” endorsed by the university itself, which reflects its core purpose, identity and values. UPM does not have a clear mission statement but it does have a set of goals which are outlined in the University Statutes (UPM 2010b), which define the main direction towards the creation, development, transmission and critique of science, technology and culture. Furthermore, UPM also seeks to provide stimulus and professional support to public and private companies in the process of their technological updating and innovation (ibid., Article 2, p. 3).

Miguel Zabalza points out that “not all universities make their mission statement clear because it is likely to demand the effort of defining the content and purpose of its formative mission” (Zabalza 2009, p. 91). We would argue that having a clear mission statement does establish in a single document, without any doubt, what the university stands for. This formalised mission statement would make it explicit for people to find out about it and for the university to introduce it to the academic community, thus – by implication – meeting the new European standards. Despite

the absence of a formal mission statement, UPM's educational model does certainly: (a) define the university's main educational project pillars in accordance with the European convergence process, (b) bring an injection of dynamism into the new curriculum design, and (c) encourage the reworking of methodologies at our university, as initiatives and experiences developed by so-called "Educational Innovative Groups" (EIGs)⁶ have shown since 2005.⁷ There have in fact been successful attempts since 2008 to carry out various "strategic actions" conducive to this project in every respect, showing a gradual change of mentality and ways of working towards a "more collaborative teaching organisational model" (Plan to stimulate active education: Teaching team programme; UPM 2010a). For example, the EIGs established at UPM do indeed address the three main goals of the integrated formative projects, namely: (a) the integration of planning and learning within each subject of the formative programme of each degree; (b) the enhancement of interdisciplinary relations among subjects towards attaining a more "transversal education"; and (c) a more coherent definition of the profile of degrees in tune with the demands and expectations of the socio-economic environment as well as with the guidelines set by international organisations (such as the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [CEDEFOP] and the International Labour Organization [ILO]). Good practices and experiences carried out throughout the formative projects will surely be continuously diffused to become a frame of reference for curriculum development and implementation.

Notwithstanding this advance at UPM level, European convergence and the force of its principles have not yet found their way into becoming an integral part of the activity and practices of all individuals, some of whom still prevail with traditional teaching habits as reported by the "Commission for the renovation of educational methodologies at the university" (MoES 2006, pp. 45–46). Consequently, sections of some Spanish universities, including UPM, we must add, have not responded as quickly as anticipated to the new pedagogical trends and practices required by the Bologna reform. For example, after an investigation carried out at Spain's largest university, the Complutense University of Madrid (*Universidad Complutense de Madrid*; UCM; approx. 90,000 students), both Ferran Ferrer i Julià (2004) and María José Fernández Díaz et al. (2010) state that there is a degree of ignorance among academic staff members regarding the changes required by the introduction of the EHEA and a feeling of resistance caused by a lack of knowledge about the reason for change. Despite the proposal of a new educational model for university reform, uncertainty and doubts persist among lecturers about the improvements this reform will bring. Such a frame of mind does not promote a clear willingness on the part of academic staff members to adapt to the challenges posed by the EHEA

⁶ "Educational innovative groups" are formed by UPM lecturers who are willing to work on a project in an area related to teaching perceived as open for improvement. Besides providing more quality and projection to the teaching activity in the context of UPM, they also aim to promote teaching innovation initiatives in national and international fora.

⁷ Project reports outlining the high impact of these initiatives on the new teaching standards imposed by the Bologna Process are available (in Spanish) at <http://innovacioneducativa.upm.es/proyectosIE> [accessed 12 December 2012].

(Fernández Díaz et al. 2010, p. 115), which is indirectly supported by UPM's 2011 survey (UPM 2011, p. 11).

To compound the issue, Manuel Arenilla Sáez et al. argue that the process of university reform in Spain within the EHEA framework has followed a “corporate-institutional” model, where State and regional administrations have a powerful position in the regulation of universities with little input from the university itself (Arenilla Sáez et al. 2012, pp. 111, 112). This is precisely the case with the so-called “University Strategy 2015”,⁸ designed to undertake the process of modernisation of Spanish universities, which “has been debated, negotiated and approved only at the government level but not in parliament, and neither has it generated a broad social and professional debate nor has it incorporated a financial commitment and a budgetary reserve while in force” (ibid., p. 100).

In the case of UPM, there has been an active participation from academics as well as social and production agents (e.g. professional associations and industrial institutions partnered with UPM) in the definition of the educational model in its early stages. Nevertheless, there is still the important task of informing and convincing the university community as well as social and economic agents of the values of this new model (Criteria for the definition of UPM's educational model 2010: Methodology; UPM 2010a). There is also an urgent need to create a “bond” between the academic community and the proposed educational project by raising lecturers' awareness of its significance, informing them about its progress, and finally by convincing the whole community of its benefits. This process requires an exercise of leadership which ought to start with a mission statement.

Leadership and performance strategy

Creating a sense of leadership to involve actors in the changing progress

In the case of Spain, there are two issues: (1) the Spanish Government has shown a lack of leadership in the university reform process, for instance the excessive emphasis placed on short-term reforms rather than planning generic and specific strategies in the medium and long term which entail an integral projection of the main objectives of the university reform (Valcárcel 2007, pp. 21, 33, 36); and (2) the current collegial university governance system implies that decision-making and management execution have to go through one or various collegial organs with some representation of students and administrative staff (Fenoll et al. 2010, pp. 5, 8). This makes functional changes within universities difficult to accomplish, since consensus has to be reached beforehand and responsibility is attenuated. Everyone assumes that things “must” be done, but no one takes the lead to accomplish change and those who do are often regarded with suspicion (ibid., p. 8).

The introduction of the reform has been carried out following common guidelines, without the existence of a clear performance strategy and a strong

⁸ The so-called “University Strategy 2015” is a governmental strategy aiming to effect medium- and long-term changes in Spanish universities for the “2013–2015 timeframe”. For further information see <http://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/eu2015/2010-eu2015-ingles.pdf?documentId=0901e72b804260c4> [accessed 6 January 2013].

commitment of all members of the academic community (and social agents) in the process of convergence (Valcárcel 2007, p. 74). This has produced some confusion in those actors (especially academic staff members) more directly affected by the changes brought by the launch of EHEA. Some minor effects of these kind of discrepancies can be seen, for example, in the applied linguistics department.

For the past five years, language lecturers at UPM (approximately 60 people, distributed across all UPM Schools/Faculty) have embarked on the new study plan from their own institutions, each relying on its situational needs.⁹ As a result, every departmental section within each School/Faculty had to prepare a syllabus guide to train students in the communication skills that were more or less agreed by all language lecturers on a general consensus within the linguistics department. Although the present language curriculum is the product of the department's intensive efforts of the department, at the time of writing there are still some basic issues:

*A) The dilution of the original initiative of providing students with a homogeneous communicative competence above the B2 European language level requirements.*¹⁰ This is a language policy initiative set up by UPM, under which there is a subject worth six credit points called “English for Professional and Academic Communication” which is mandatory for all degrees in the official curriculum. Some Schools have found that a large majority of students do not fulfil the prerequisites of the required entry level (B2) and have consequently been forced to provide students with additional tuition to achieve the required proficiency in English. Occasionally this has meant postponing this mandatory subject to subsequent years of the degree or admitting students with a lower language level (B1) to their Schools/Faculty on condition that they obtain a B2 when they finish the degree.

B) A loss of uniformity in the main contents of the language syllabus guide, despite there being a fundamental “communicative nucleus” intended for the whole curriculum of the university.

Along these lines, the 2008–09 general survey showed that departmental coordination was one of the least satisfactory aspects reported by academic staff members as far as teaching activity was concerned (UPM 2009, p. 40). We concur with the conclusions of this survey that the way forward is to reinforce both vertical and horizontal coordination within departments (ibid., p. 83). Indeed, we would argue that strengthening the leadership roles of the dean, the academic committee and respective heads of departments in Schools is likely to make transmission of

⁹ The Department of Linguistics Applied to Science and Technology is an inter-university department responsible for the teaching of modern languages in the 19 engineering schools and the Faculty of Architecture within the Technical University of Madrid (*Universidad Politécnica de Madrid*). The Department's main office is currently located at the School of Telecommunication Engineering from which all departmental activities of the different sections and teaching units in every School/Faculty of the university are coordinated.

¹⁰ The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) defines six language proficiency levels, starting with A1 and A2 for “basic users” and ending with C2 for very high proficiency. B1 and B2, in the middle range, apply to “independent users”.

directives more effective. As part of a performance strategy, this would imply a clear pathway for disseminating information, consulting academic staff members, incorporating experiences and ideas into a network of exchange of good practices, and finally coordinating a feedback strategy to evaluate outcomes, so that an integrated and cohesive teaching programme is designed and implemented by all.

Global coordination through collaboration

Integrating efforts within departments and with peers from other universities to achieve institutional goals

A notorious issue in academia is the tendency towards individualism, deeply rooted in the tradition of “academic freedom”, which is now clashing with the holistic strategies of the new paradigm forcing institutions and their actors to orchestrate an *overarching synergy* in the face of socio-economic needs and pressures of modern society. The new strategies point towards a culture of collaboration and teamwork. Collaboration, aiming to reach a common goal entailing strategic “alliances” with other agents (e.g. joint degrees, international projects like the “European Framework Programme”¹¹), goes far beyond any internal agreements in order to develop projects with an international dimension. Teamwork becomes operational by means of effective communication strategies and collaborative decision-making that serve to join people from various organisations (government bodies, research laboratories and universities) to work together in multidisciplinary teams to solve difficult and challenging problems (Gibbons et al. 1994, p. 49).

Thus, the individual power of lecturers becomes more attuned within the general framework of institutional policies in such a way that a “general perspective” is imposed over vested interests to achieve greater cohesion in the functioning of the university and its effectiveness in the knowledge society, usually defined as a “global network of knowledge and action” in European Commission documents: e.g. *Assessing Europe’s university-based research* (EC 2010).

At the lecture hall level and more specifically in the linguistics department, UPM language lecturers need to address the subject needs of the students. This has resulted to a certain degree in isolation and a lack of unity to incorporate skills and expertise of department members into a common framework. However, with the introduction of the new language policy in UPM’s curriculum, individualism is now giving way to openness and collaboration, replacing old habits and, most important of all, meeting the current demands of EHEA. For example, teacher collaboration is beginning to be used as a strategy to establish more frequent contact among lecturers from various Schools to elaborate the teaching plan for English as a mandatory subject. This means coordinating the content as well as allocating time for every teaching module of the syllabus, exchanging ideas and materials on new tools (ICTs, tutorial practices) which may be introduced in the teaching context, and finally designing a joint evaluation and follow-up assessment of the outcome along a

¹¹ The European Framework Programme has played a crucial role in funding multidisciplinary research and cooperative activities in Europe and beyond.

concrete timescale. Consequently, coherence in curriculum and instruction is promoted by integrating efforts to solve problems introduced by common subjects for all Schools.

On the other hand, the possibility of employing lecturers from other countries substantially contributes to improving the quality of education. Although some employment contracts and collaborations already exist in various Schools, UPM regards this integrative aspect as an asset for the enhancement of its internationalisation as planned in its educational model (see the actions intended for overseas visiting professors to UPM through the international teaching mobility programme. Programme 31: Staff mobility, UPM 2010a). Actually, since the creation of the linguistics department in 1987, there have always been regular native-speaker lecturers, both tenured and temporary, teaching different languages (English, German, French ...). This track record of incorporating lecturers from other countries already puts the university in a better position of international dialogue and integration within EHEA.

Supportive environment

Being critical and alert to one's own preconceptions and misconceptions of the profession that continually challenge the capacity for change both from inside and outside the working environment

Over recent years, some anti-Bologna groups have been set up by lecturers to complain about the reform in higher education, claiming that the outcome of these reforms will devalue higher education (Fenoll et al. 2010, p. 8). Lack of information and training make people helpless and exposed to negative criticism and continuous attacks of the new systems and organisation of an institution. Misconceptions arise both inside and outside the academic context: the former, based on the usual petty bickering, circulates the idea that new pedagogical currents are devaluing the university's main purpose. The latter undermines the credibility of the reform, that is, despite the conviction that universities have a crucial role to play in the knowledge society, their role is questioned by society and public powers (Nadal 2011, p. 207).

It is now essential for academic staff members to re-examine their professional principles and to challenge their assumptions in order to accommodate the new standards. At the same time, they need to be on guard against passive attitudes and some peoples' efforts to maintain the status quo, thus preventing them from being open to improvements. The best way to overcome this situation is to seek support from those who believe in the reform and make alliances with peers who are ready to change their approach and practices. Actually, asking for active collaboration from those involved in initiatives under way (e.g. EIGs) "... makes the new direction more familiar, clarifies it by giving a concrete illustration, and creates instant allies for change" (Chaffee and Jacobson 1997, p. 242). For example, at UPM's School of Mining Engineering and also at the School of Architecture, the Committee of department heads, set up to discuss specific issues related to teaching, has increasingly relied on the linguistics department for planning the strategy to

incorporate English-language lecturing in Masters degrees in engineering, thus involving an academic staff member in an institutional issue which may facilitate the introduction of an international perspective in UPM's curricula. This is an opportunity to get more academic staff members to support a new direction in Masters degrees, which may be resisted by other academic staff members rather than being accepted as an asset for the School. In this manner, through supportive actions involving academic staff members and directors, a culture for improvement is gradually created from the reality of the Schools/Faculty and their particular needs.

The best approach is communication and exchange of ideas among lecturers in a department or School (through personal interaction, debate or networking), which reinforce identifying with the main educational guidelines of the curriculum. This new stance, however, does not come about in a straightforward manner. It is a process of adaptation often regarded as a "learning process" or "educating process" (Tabatoni et al. 2002, p. 5), which not only affects lecturers in a department, but presupposes the integration of the efforts of every section of the institution (Presidents, deans, academic staff members, students, administrative personnel) to generate a "shared identity" and devise "action plans". But as Judith A. Ramaley (2002) affirms, such a frame of mind cannot be generated unless collective behaviours are sustained whilst rewarding individual efforts.

Incentives and career advancement

Rewarding work done and building confidence both in academic staff members and in all other actors involved in the process of change

The first action point here relates to promotion and tenure policies and the acknowledgment of people's work. For instance, the recognition of the commitment to teaching in national evaluation schemes is one step forward in the current educational system; ANECA's DOCENTIA programme, mentioned earlier, monitors teaching quality and fosters the development and recognition of lecturers. A policy has also been devised by the Spanish government to recognise and reward excellence in teaching and research performance: The "University Strategy 2015" for the modernisation of Spanish Universities is now reformulating goals and time periods for its fulfilment under "Horizon 2020".¹²

As for the second action point, lecturers need to build their confidence through professional development programmes which provide them with sufficient time and training to adjust to the new schemes. Along these lines, UPM's educational model proposes a scheme called "Plan to stimulate active education", in which one of the strategic actions outlined is a "Teaching incentives programme" (see Academic degree training in the Educational model 2010: Measure n° 21; UPM 2010a) linked to an evaluation tool for lecturers to be applied only in the teaching domain and

¹² "Horizon 2020" is the current EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation launched in January 2014; it will run until December 2020. For more information see <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/what-horizon-2020> [accessed 2 January 2014].

carried out internally. This evaluation entails a package of incentives including the following: facilitating academic staff exchange, offering special training courses, supporting the publication of educational innovation initiatives, fostering greater collaboration of support staff in teaching activities, etc. All these incentives can be accredited in the UPM evaluation system, thereby rewarding lecturers' efforts to upskill themselves and documenting their dedication to innovative practices in teaching in their Schools/Faculty.

As far as students are concerned, they also need to be reassured that the introduction of innovative pedagogies and assessment methods will not damage their way of studying and successful completion of their degree. Here communication between lecturers and students in a more open, flexible atmosphere both within and outside of the classroom is changing the concept of education towards a more "humanistic dimension" (UNESCO 2002), where teaching is focused not only on the academic side of the action, but also on the "human" aspect that contributes to learners' personal growth, asserting values and confidence-building. At the same time, new forms of evaluation are being designed to reward individual work and independent study in a particular field for which students receive academic credit.

Finally, administrative staff can be strengthened to support change by way of additional skills to enhance their performance training (e. g. updating their mastery of web programmes/software applications). Setting up reward systems for efficiency and productivity is also a way to encourage their adjustment to organisational goals.

Certainly, national-scale action plans, put forward by academics (e.g. Valcárcel 2007; Fenoll et al. 2010; Arenilla Sáez et al. 2012) to make Spain succeed in the European convergence are, in our view, valid especially regarding the leadership of those in authority and the need for information and involvement of the main agents in the reform process. However, we think that this "protocol of actions" which we propose here is able to *focus* on the institutional strategy towards a more *operational level*, highlighting some "specific actions" which may create a favourable atmosphere for a change of attitudes and values in the key actors of this reform. Hence, although educational policies and their implementation are the direct responsibility of the institution, it is individuals who have to share its distinct identity and accept its rationale and implications, by applying them as part of their behaviour and practices. Thus both forces – those in authority and individuals – interact with each other to create a *two-way communication strategy*:

Basically, strategic planning is necessary as well as staff development plans, but above all else actions are needed to create "synergies" between academic staff members and the university's management, that convince lecturers of the need for change, that promote conditions to make this change feasible, and that neither generate antibodies nor resistance (Martinez 2009, p. 106).

What is clear from our own experience is that a deep university transformation will only take place if there is a change in lecturers' academic and teaching culture, but *not* if this change is simply introduced by top management. In this respect, final recommendations given by Brenda Smith (1998, pp. 236–238) to bring about institutional change in the university, based on the success of a project called

“Sharing Excellence”,¹³ in our view seem very well suited to developing and supporting a strategic approach in our context.

Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper, supported by the various surveys mentioned, that there is a certain degree of openness and acceptance by lecturers at UPM to the introduction of EHEA requirements and, as a consequence, to their own professional activity. Above all, the crucial role of engaging academic staff members in the planned institutional strategy for change is a key issue for its success, and from our experience this coincides very well with the views of the academic community at UPM.

We have also argued and presented evidence that what is required at the university level is to establish conditions conducive to promoting the educational policy through a mission statement and a clear performance strategy. This approach would have to start with fostering personal reflection and critical awareness of the process involved. We have shown that this approach needs not only a clear direction from the government and university leaders to steer the reform, but also effective coordination strategies to integrate the efforts of every section of an institution.

Furthermore, we have presented arguments for integrative mechanisms which contribute to the implementation of a transformative change by establishing communication channels and exchange of ideas to induce collaboration. Such a course of action should rely on alliances and positive attitudes which support the conditions for change in concrete initiatives of motivated people, including the need to keep an open mind towards improvement and to be critical towards inner and outer forces which threaten the new values and practices. Progress in this direction will in time build confidence among the actors involved and contribute to a supportive environment. We have also established the need to communicate information throughout the change process which is essential for a strong commitment of the community. Finally, we concur with the evidence and authors cited that training and the effort to adapt to the new university context should be recognised and rewarded individually and collectively in order for this change to be taken seriously.

However, our position is that such transformation will not take place without restoring to lecturers – to a great extent – *their capacity of leadership and power* in attaining the reform. This is done by involving them further in the consultation process, information-sharing, and decision-making. But above all, it requires enhancing their *trust and share* in the university’s present challenges, cultivating their *desire and will* to adapt to current pedagogical changes, and incentivising their *response* to the new educational models. Because without their conviction, action,

¹³ “Sharing Excellence” is a major externally funded project on peer observation of teaching conducted at the University of Nottingham Trent (UK) that facilitated a major structural change to the organisation and also resulted in a change in the university culture.

influence and support in the organisation, *change is not possible*. And this, nowadays, is unthinkable!

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