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# «Countries will only be as successful as their universities will be»

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**Inaugural lecture  
2022/2023**

**The UOC's 27th  
academic year**

«Universities Without Walls - Adapting to Change in Europe», lecture by Professor **Michael Murphy**, president of the European University Association (EUA).

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**Monday 17 October 2022,  
7 p.m. CEST**

The inaugural lecture was recorded on 4 October 2022

[w.uoc.edu/en/inaugural22](http://w.uoc.edu/en/inaugural22)  
#InauguralUOC



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# Inauguration of UOC's 2022/2023 academic year

U1

- Welcome given by the UOC President, Josep A. Planell.
- Speech by the President of the UOC Board of Trustees, Pere Vallès.
-  [Video report on the past academic year, 2021/2022](#)
- Lecture by Professor Michael Murphy «Universities Without Walls - Adapting to Change in Europe».
- Questions from the UOC community.
- Closing words from the then Minister for Research and Universities of the Government of Catalonia, Gemma Geis.

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# Introduction by the UOC President, Josep A. Planell



*Welcome to the inaugural lecture: the academic and institutional event that marks the official start of the new academic year 2022/2023.*

*Most of the restrictions introduced in the wake of the pandemic are now behind us. But the pandemic, one way or another, has changed us all, both personally and collectively. The UOC has not interrupted its activities during these two years, not even for a day. And I would like to thank the more than 87,000 students in 141 countries for the trust they have placed in us year after year – now for over 25 years! In these last two years the UOC has faced increasing demand from governments and organizations around the world, having become well-known as a source of expert advice.*

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*We are what we do. And today, we can say that we have done a lot.*

*Living in ‘interesting times’ means you cannot let your guard down, because the changes and the challenges are constant. For instance, there are the convulsions caused by COVID, such as economic recession or political turmoil; but in addition, there are the effects of human stupidity and avarice, as seen in the climate emergency and new wars, among them one on Europe’s doorstep that is bringing back the fear of a nuclear nightmare.*

*All told, we as citizens and as a university are being called upon because, as our guest today, Professor Michael Murphy, likes to remind us: the usefulness of post-pandemic universities depends on their ability to connect to the reality that surrounds them. This is why it is so important to know where we are, to focus on the essential while taking into account the urgent.*

*In terms of the UOC’s immediate future, it serves as an example of the need to persevere with the process to complete internal digitalization and evolve our educational model. And we are looking further ahead, with key projects such as the Poblenou Campus, our three buildings in the centre of Barcelona’s tech district, which will let us concentrate our activities. The Campus will play home to our new Interdisciplinary R&I Hub, which will be inaugurated and presented to the public on 28 October.*

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## Introduction by the UOC President, Josep A. Planell



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*There are two key aspects to walking forward: daring to take the step, and ensuring we have the proper support. Move on and consolidate, consolidate and move on.*

*Likewise, every so often, we need to stop and reset. In short: to ensure accountability.*

*That is why, as is now tradition, we will use the opportunity presented by the inaugural lecture to take stock of the past year with a video report and then some words from Mr Pere Vallès, president of the Foundation for the UOC's Board of Trustees.*

*Universities are institutions with a long history which, in recent times, has seen two main models exist side by side: the German research-based model inspired by von Humboldt, and the French Napoleonic model focusing on professionalization. Each has its pros and cons, and, unable to choose one over the other, our university system has ended up trying to achieve a difficult synthesis of the two, and not always with the best results.*

*Indeed, regardless of the model or the synthesis, all higher education institutions have found themselves having to adapt to the so-called "iron triangle" made up of three essential components: access to university for the new generations, the quality of the teaching provided, and the cost. Any change made to one of these components directly affects the other two. In other words: it is impossible, for example, to maximize access and quality while minimizing cost.*

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*Some have said that online education could provide a way out of this dead end, since technology can lead to a significant reduction in costs. However, these savings lead to a divergent scenario. On the one hand, we have new university models in search of business which, instead of using these savings to bolster the other two components, siphon them off as profits, and simply create a new triangle – not an iron triangle, but a Bermuda triangle, where quality and research are forced out to maximize economic gain.*

*On the other, there are institutions which, respecting their public mission, see the possible savings technology can bring as a means of reinvesting in building a university that can accommodate everyone, and where quality acts as the guiding star for the teaching and research.*

*These are not merely words.*

*In terms of the first component, access, the UOC has shown how it is possible to become an inclusive university: a university for those who are in work and a university for those who are spread throughout the land.*

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## Introduction by the UOC President, Josep A. Planell



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*As for the second component, quality, I am sure that Professor Murphy will cover this topic in his lecture today. As president of the European University Association, and throughout his career as a university president and academic, he has always stressed that the strength of the European project is intrinsically linked to the strength of its university system. Because it represents a bastion of social inclusion, of regional development, and of social and technological innovation, and because it promotes values of openness, tolerance and international collaboration.*

*Nonetheless, this resilience needs ambitious policies and investments, and it needs the system itself to believe in the importance of the role it plays. This is why it so important to have independent evaluations, to commit firmly to knowledge and research, and to take part in and influence how the Europe of tomorrow is shaped, to prepare and work with the citizens of the future.*

*In short, it is not about reinventing the wheel, it is about being aware of the close links between access, cost and quality in higher education and the need for universities, administrations and citizens to act accordingly, to guarantee essential elements, such as equity, sustainability and employability. Making the iron triangle more flexible is not about personal interest, it is about benefitting everyone.*



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## Introduction by the UOC President, Josep A. Planell



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*At the UOC, we have been working on this for over 25 years, alongside the more than 850 institutions in 49 countries that make up the European University Association. And today we have the honour and the privilege of being able to welcome its president. I am sure that his vision and his words will help us clear the way for the challenges we currently face as academics and citizens in Europe.*

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**Josep A. Planell**  
President of UOC

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# Speech by the President of the FUOC Board of Trustees, Pere Vallès

U3



*Being accountable, when done correctly, is not easy. It's no coincidence that the title of one of the best known articles on accountability and higher education is inspired by the famous Simon and Garfunkel song Bridge Over Troubled Water.*

*Nonetheless, accountability is one of the aspects that defines the UOC. And I don't want to hide behind false modesty because I'm convinced that it is one of the best things the university has done in terms of governance and responsibility towards the society it forms part of.*

*Knowing who does what and having to be accountable ensure an adult, responsible and objective operation.*

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*Internally, the level of professionalism of each and every member of the UOC community has been made evident over these last two turbulent years. This professionalism has been seen in a clear commitment and an exemplary feeling of belonging, both individually and collectively.*

*But, as well as internally, this special way of working, the UOC way, has also seen the university gain external recognition. It was mentioned in the video report, but I'd like to stress the importance of our becoming the first Catalan university and the first online university in Spain to have its full range of official programmes accredited, to have had our digital assessment system validated so that we can move the whole process online, or to have rolled out new teaching roles, such as the first-year tutors or the professional careers advisors. These precedents highlight the value of accountability and, likewise, mean the rest of us need to take a look in the mirror and try to emulate them. And that, obviously, includes the UOC's Board of Trustees, too.*

*Among other things, the board is responsible for the process to recruit the next president of the university. We're working on this process with three principles in mind: transparency, traceability and rigour.*

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## Speech by the President of the FUOC Board of Trustees, Pere Vallès



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*Because, when the time comes, we also want to be able to be accountable. Above all, we want to guarantee, when we come to mark the university's 30th anniversary and regardless of how turbulent the times have been by then, that the UOC has been able to find leaders who are able to meet the standards of those that went before them.*

*Thank you very much.*

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**Pere Vallès**

President of the FUOC Board of Trustees

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# Summary: «Countries will only be as successful as their universities will be»

U4



Michael Murphy, a qualified doctor and president of the European University Association (EUA) since 2019, opened the academic year 2022/2023 at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) with the inaugural lecture Universities Without Walls – Adapting to Change in Europe. The lecture was streamed live.

The inaugural lecture was recorded on 4 October, and the participants included Josep A. Planell, the UOC President, Pere Vallès, President of the UOC Board of Trustees, and Gemma Geis, then Minister for Research and Universities of the Government of Catalonia. On 10 October Geis left that role; she was replaced as Minister for Research and Universities by Joaquim Nadal i Farreras on 11 October.

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## Summary: «Countries will only be as successful as their universities will be»

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Murphy's speech focused on the future, and he presented the key findings of the Universities without walls – A vision for 2030 report, which is designed to support European universities over the coming decade as they deal with the multiple challenges they face, including climate change, digitalization, demographic changes, social polarization and geopolitical realignments.

When drafting the document, the EUA consulted its 850 members, more than 100 experts in higher education in Europe and around the world, the European Commission, governments, businesses and the civic sector. As well as the challenges, it also found a broad consensus on the ways in which universities must evolve to support society. Murphy said that three key messages emerged as a result. “The first is that our clear and overarching goal must be to support society in attaining the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals; the second is that diversity is a strength of European higher education, and the third is that Europe’s diverse universities must be deeply networked – within countries and beyond in the wider world.”

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## Summary: «Countries will only be as successful as their universities will be»

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### What is the future for open universities?

At a time when European university partnerships are considering collaboration models that are applicable to all higher education institutions, the document also addresses some specific characteristics of universities' missions. Murphy explained that every new educational model must treat students in a different way, "as partners in the cocreation of understanding, with peer-supported, problem- and task-based learning. Because how to interpret and how to apply new knowledge, not the acquisition of facts, will be the focus of higher education in the coming years." Likewise, "blended campuses will deliver traditional learning on campuses but coupled with online learning, because that is the only way that universities can deliver lifelong learning effectively and efficiently."

Murphy pointed out that digitalization will obviously be "the key enabler of blended and lifelong learning". In addition, "universities will remain critical to innovation", and there will be a "a much bigger emphasis on a healthier, sustainable research culture, and on stronger ethical frameworks". And in line with what the UOC's proposes, he added that "the most dramatic change in research will be the adoption of open science and open access."

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## Summary: «Countries will only be as successful as their universities will be»

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Finally, he pointed out that “the cultural role” is extremely important. “In most countries, universities are repositories of the cultural assets of our societies, and celebrate the unique historical artefacts of our cultures. Our academic staff interpret those artefacts, their symbolism and what they represent. Culture preservation will remain an invaluable role of universities in the future.”

### **The success of European countries is closely linked to that of their universities**

According to Murphy, the major question in terms of the challenges they face is whether the institutions will be able to adapt to all these changes in the right way. “The ingredients for success lie in the hands primarily of two actors: universities and governments.” The former must focus on two key factors for success: “strong and professionalized leadership” and “research assessment reform”.

Meanwhile, governments are crucial because they control two critical factors which enable universities to be successful. The first factor is the regulatory environment: “national systems that maximize the autonomy (with accountability) of universities enjoy the strongest performing systems,” he stressed. He also criticized Spain’s restrictive regulatory system, which makes it less competitive than its European peers. The second factor is how governments distribute and control resources, without which “ambitions and strategies are merely hallucinations”.



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## Summary: «Countries will only be as successful as their universities will be»

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Murphy concluded that “in general, those countries that invest in higher education and research are ‘the strongest innovators’ and ‘enjoy the most successful economies’ because they know that in this century, in the knowledge age, countries will only be as successful as their universities will be.”

Finally, he urged the UOC, an open university that has been without walls since it was established, to be generous when collaborating with traditional institutions that are beginning to make efforts to adapt to the change. “I know that UOC will be an exemplar in sharing,” he said.

### **The UOC – successful in the iron triangle**

President Josep A. Planell moderated the last inaugural lecture of his term of office, which concludes in April 2023, and reviewed the successes and challenges for the UOC model. He also recalled that, regardless of the model they select, every higher education institution is subject to the iron triangle of access to university for the new generations, the quality of the teaching provided and cost. Any change made to any one of these three has a direct impact on the other two. He described how the UOC is among the “institutions which, respecting the public mission they’ve been assigned, see the possible savings technology can bring as a means of reinvesting in building a university that can accommodate everyone, and where quality acts as the guiding star for the teaching and research”.

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## Summary: «Countries will only be as successful as their universities will be»

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In turn, Pere Vallès, president of the Board of Trustees of the FUOC, congratulated the UOC and its model for the awards they had received that certify their excellence. He stressed “the importance of becoming the first Catalan university and the first online university in Spain to have its full range of official programmes accredited, to have had the digital assessment system validated so that we can move the whole process online, or to have rolled out new teaching roles, such as the first-year tutors or the professional careers advisors. These precedents highlight the value of accountability and, likewise, mean the rest of us need to take a look in the mirror and try to emulate them.”

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# «Universities Without Walls - Adapting to Change in Europe»

05



*It's a big honour for me to be invited to share a celebration at the commencement of a new academic year at the Open University of Catalonia.*

*Now of course, as an open university you are at the forefront of innovation in service to the 21st-century society. And this is a society that, on the one hand, offers opportunities to citizens that were unimagined when I was a child but, on the other hand, it is a society that is facing challenges that are also unprecedented in scale, in pace and in consequence.*

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*So, to prepare Europe's universities for the next stage of evolution, EUA consulted some 850 members, as the rector has mentioned, and also over 100 experts in high education in Europe, across the world, European commission, governments, business and the civic sector, to ascertain the common views on our challenges and on how universities need to respond. We found remarkable consensus on the challenges.*

*Number one, environmental sustainability: we must combat climate change while we sustain economic wellbeing at the same time.*

*The opportunities and challenges of digitalization and artificial intelligence: we must ensure that citizens can both use and compete with artificial intelligence, particularly in the workplace.*

*There are concerns about demographic shifts – ageing populations in most countries in Europe, growing populations in a few, migration in most – with the challenge of embracing diversity.*

*There are wide concerns about societal polarization, inequality, misinformation.*

*There are concerns about geopolitical realignment, which is interrupting cooperation and collaboration at a time when the world needs it most.*

*The pandemic featured, because that was the timing of our consultation, and I'm sure if we did the consultation today we would encounter war, food and energy shortages, and inflation – showing how the world changes dramatically and rapidly.*

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*But we also found a broad consensus on how universities must change, how we must evolve to support society. And we also heard that evolution must happen at a pace that matches or exceeds the speed of secular change.*

*We captured our findings in a document that we called “Universities Without Walls – a Vision for 2030” – and in that we are setting out guidelines for the evolution of Europe’s universities in the next 10 to 15 years. So, what is the vision at this point?*

*The first message is that our clear and overarching goal must be to support society in attaining the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable development must be the primary objective across all university missions – whether it’s education, research, innovation or culture; universities must be exemplars, they must be role models for the rest of society in embracing sustainable practices. That was the first message.*

*The second point of consensus is that diversity is a strength of European higher education; wherever your institutions sits on the spectrum of university missions, all must be valued equally. Because we know that strong regional universities, which prioritize service to local communities, collectively are as important to society as the prominent globally famous, research-intensive universities. There are important roles for all.*

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*Open universities, such as yours, provide learning opportunities for large segments of society who would otherwise be shut out of education. And you are critical to ensuring that all can thrive in this new “knowledge society”. Yours is a particular mission to maximize access to learning.*

*The third key message is that Europe’s diverse universities must be deeply networked – within countries, across borders in Europe and beyond in the wider world, and that means our students, our staff and our researchers moving freely (in person and virtually) for joint degrees, research and intercultural learning.*

*All universities must embrace international alliance participation because that will drive transnational solidarity so that all parts of Europe and, in the end, the world will succeed. At the moment, the European University alliances are piloting partnership models that should be applicable ultimately by all higher education institutions across Europe.*

*This European model of deeply networked, diverse institutions will also underpin our particular philosophy of “distributed excellence”, because it should deliver the scale of excellence that is needed to compete successfully with other countries who espouse a concentrated elite university model. We have concerns that that model exacerbates societal and regional inequalities. So, this is a unique European, higher education and research model that we are implementing. The vision also went on to address some specific elements of university missions and, firstly, that of Learning and Teaching.*

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*'Universities without walls' means no more ivory towers; it means that we will espouse blended campuses which will deliver traditional learning on campuses but coupled with online learning, because that is the only way that universities can deliver lifelong learning effectively and efficiently, as you know.*

*We see, more often than in the past, students learning outside campuses, in the workplace, more experiential learning, not just in business but in civic, in social and in cultural spaces. This will sharpen students' "real-world" problem-solving skills. It should foster more creative thinking, it should imbue them with better, work-ready, interpersonal skills.*

*Without walls also means more staff mobility between the campus and the workplace. And that's how we will ensure that course content is up-to-date and we will ensure that staff's own skills are continuously updated.*

*We are strongly recommending that curriculum design should involve societal stakeholders, again to ensure fitness for purpose. External expertise, inputs from practitioners in various sectors will improve the quality of our offerings and it will also widen the sense of ownership of universities in society at large, which ultimately may lead to support or more investment.*

*Learning will no longer be the preserve of 18 to 23-year-old undergraduates; it will take place over a lifetime. Yes, it will occur predominantly in the younger years for most in the coming decade, but not all. And high-performing universities will be those that exhibit the necessary*

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*flexibility in programmes, delivery and assessment. So, we've got to get used to students, young and old – especially outside the regulated professions – co-designing their own learning portfolios and many moving between institutions accumulating accredited microcredentials.*

*And this will require considerable reform of academic governance. The new model of education will be treating learners differently – not as sponges of established facts, but as partners in the co-creation of understanding: peer-supported, problem- or task-based learning. Because how to interpret and how to apply new knowledge, not the acquisition of facts, will be the focus of higher education in the coming years.*

*Digitalization will of course be the key enabler of blended and lifelong learning and it will also create more opportunities for international and inter-cultural learning. What is called Collaborative Online International Learning, or COIL, will never fully replace in-person mobility but it will complement that mobility and it will grow opportunities for new international experiences for millions of students currently locked out of international experience because of cost.*

*Lastly, under this heading, we see that careful adoption of learning analytics based on big data and artificial intelligence frameworks should enable more bespoke, individualized student support.*

*Under the Research and Innovation heading: we see this remaining, of course, a key mission of all universities – all universities – (dominant for some) and this too is*



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*going to evolve dramatically in the coming decade. Universities will remain critical to innovation to combat the global challenges I mentioned earlier, and in supporting regional economies and societies.*

*We can certainly anticipate a much bigger emphasis on a healthier, sustainable research culture, on stronger ethical frameworks and on integrity in research, because we've got to regrow and sustain societal trust in science and in expertise. And furthermore, "interdisciplinarity" must move from being rhetoric to a measurable reality.*

*The most dramatic change in research will be the adoption of Open Science and Open Access. Publishing our research openly, storing our original research data in openly accessible repositories, such as the European Open Science Cloud, that too will help restore trust in evidence and in expertise.*

*We at EUA of course call for a just scholarly publishing ecosystem: one that is transparent, one that is diverse, that is economically affordable and sustainable, technically interoperable, and steered by the research community. That's a large agenda in one paragraph.*

*And bringing science close to citizens, including through "citizen science" will also be a key new feature, and encouraging society to own the research agenda and to invest in it.*

*Under the third major heading of university missions, our institutions must be deeply embedded in our regions, collaborating not only with business and with industry,*

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*but also with broad civic society.*

*We place a very strong emphasis on universities as the key leaders of regional innovation: in economic, business and public policy matters.*

*Staff in the universities must engage more in public discourse: providing the data, providing the evidence to inform public policy, and connect more effectively with our graduates, our alumni, because they are now an ever-growing cohort of potential champions for universities within our societies.*

*There is the cultural role. In most countries, universities are repositories of the cultural assets of our societies. Whether it's museums or art galleries or libraries, drama theatres, performance spaces... universities celebrate unique historic artefacts of our cultures. Our academic staff interpret those artefacts, their symbolism, what they represent. And from our consultations, culture preservation will remain an invaluable role of universities into the future.*

*In the round, that's a vision. And the key question: Can we adapt successfully? Can we implement the vision? We formed the view that the ingredients for success lie in the hands primarily of two actors: universities ourselves and governments.*

*Firstly, universities must focus on two key success factors: the first is strong, professionalized leadership – it is crucial – and formal leadership training and development must be embraced career-long at all levels*

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*within our universities.*

*Secondly, universities must reform academic career assessment, so that incentives for academics are aligned with the plans and goals of our institutions and the needs of society. I'm pleased to see that, in July, the European Commission, EUA and Science Europe (who represent research funders) agreed principles for the first step, which is research assessment reform across Europe. And I recommend that Spanish universities join the "coalition of the willing" embracing reform, in the coming months.*

*Beyond universities, governments are the second key actors, because they control two critical enablers of university success: the first, regulatory environment, and secondly resources.*

*EUA monitors autonomy and regulatory frameworks across Europe every 5 or 6 years. And in general, we see that national systems that maximize the autonomy (with accountability) of universities enjoy the strongest performing systems.*

*And as I'm speaking in Spain, I have to say that in comparison with other countries in Europe, you do exhibit a very restrictive regulatory system for public universities that will make competitiveness difficult for Spain.*

*The second key enabler in the power of governments is public funding. I put it simply: vision, ambitions and strategies without sufficient resources are merely*

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*hallucinations.*

*We also monitor public funding across Europe, the resourcing of universities. And, again, over the past two decades we have seen very diverse national funding pictures – some investing, some countries stagnating, and some countries even divesting from universities. In general, those countries that invest in higher education and research are the strongest innovators and they enjoy the most successful economies, because they know that in this century, the knowledge age, countries will only be as successful as their universities will be.*

*So, Minister, Rector and President, distinguished colleagues, I've set out, in summary, a vision for Europe's universities over the next decade or more. Universities Without Walls is a roadmap. And in an open university, such as UOC, you may well say: "all the rest are joining us? We never had walls!"*

*And you are right, traditional universities are now embracing blended learning and blended campuses and, to do so, have much to learn from you – and I hope that you will be generous in sharing your experience. Europe's universities will succeed only through partnerships and through generous knowledge sharing. I know that UOC will be an exemplar in sharing, so*

*Happy new academic year to all at the Open University of Catalonia!*

*Thank you very much.*

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**Michael Murphy**  
President of the European  
University Association (EUA).



*“The first is that our clear and overarching goal must be to support society in attaining the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals; the second is that diversity is a strength of European higher education, and the third is that Europe’s diverse universities must be deeply networked – within countries and beyond in the wider world.”*

*“Every new educational model must treat students as partners in the cocreation of understanding, with peer-supported, problem- and task-based learning. Because how to interpret and how to apply new knowledge, not the acquisition of facts, will be the focus of higher education in the coming years.”*

*“Digitalization will obviously be the key enabler of blended and lifelong learning.”*

*“Universities will remain critical to innovation, and there will be a much bigger emphasis on a healthier, sustainable research culture, and on stronger ethical frameworks. The most dramatic change in research will be the adoption of open science and open access.”*

*“In most countries, universities are repositories of the cultural assets of our societies, and celebrate the unique historical artefacts of our cultures. Our academic staff interpret those artefacts, their symbolism and what they represent. Culture preservation will remain an invaluable role of universities in the future.”*



*“The ingredients for success lie in the hands primarily of two actors: universities and governments. The former must focus on two key factors for success: strong and professionalized leadership and research assessment reform.”*

*“National systems that maximize the autonomy (with accountability) of universities enjoy the strongest performing systems.”*

*“Those countries that invest in higher education and research are ‘the strongest innovators’ and ‘enjoy the most successful economies’ because they know that in this century, in the knowledge age, countries will only be as successful as their universities will be.”*

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# Questions from the UOC community

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## 1. Universities' global strategic vision

**Teresa Guasch Pascual**  
Dean of the Faculty of Psychology and  
Education Sciences

On past occasions you have said that Europe will only be as successful as its universities will be. This means we have a great deal of socio-economic responsibility; it means universities must drive research and innovation to respond to the challenges our society and economy are facing.

Based on your global vantage point of different universities and individual interests, how can we achieve the right balance, and, above all, what strategy would best enable each university to excel in its speciality – the aspect that sets it apart from competitors in the global context – while also contributing to the construction of this shared European framework?

**Michael Murphy:** *Wow, I think there are nine questions in that question.*

*Fundamentally, you were asking what is a wise strategy for a university to excel, to balance its missions, to be unique in some way and be global and European at the same time.*

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*It's a question that keeps Rector Planell awake at night, I think.*

*The spectrum of university missions is extremely broad, as I mentioned earlier, from globally orientated, rich, old research-intensive universities on the one hand, and on the other, the smaller regional universities focused on the local economy and skills needs. And then again open universities sit in a particular part of that spectrum.*

*But, firstly, it is extremely important, in trying to address your question, that a university sits confidently in its chosen place on the spectrum. All cannot be Harvard, far too many universities' strategic plans aspire to be Harvard. Not feasible in the absence of history, wealth, strong geopolitical positioning, scale, political clout and so on. And as I said earlier, the strong regional universities are the backbone of our system.*

*But once you have identified your space on the spectrum, your next job is to identify your peers, nationally and internationally, benchmark against them. U-Multirank, I recommend as a good source of holistic information about university missions. Identify those that are similar to you in profile and form alliances with them. Research collaboration, student mobility, staff mobility, that's how you will contribute to a stronger Europe.*



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*Every university should be in an alliance. The biggest mistake is trying to be great at too many things simultaneously, so you have to prioritize, politically difficult within the university, especially politically difficult if the university elects its leaders. You must prioritize to identify the one or two areas where it is likely you will have a chance of being globally unique, and you make those choices based on track record, excellent faculty, good infrastructure, confidence that resources will be available, investment in this specific area that you are choosing.*

*So, there are many steps answering the nine questions in the one question. But I think the most significant line would be: in this era, excellence is a team sport, look around, find your champions, find strong Messis, Lionel Messi for your team, and last point, never disappoint the rest of your faculty, you will have prioritized some disciplines over others but all must be encouraged to develop so that they will be prioritized in the next strategic plan and you can grow your portfolio of world-competitive specificities, specialisms.*

*I hope that helps answer two of the nine questions.*

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**Video**



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**Key ideas**

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*“Every university should be in an alliance. The biggest mistake is trying to be great at too many things simultaneously, so you have to prioritize.”*

*“In this era, excellence is a team sport. Look around, find your champions. And, last point, never disappoint the rest of your faculty.”*

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## 2. Diversity: the key to minimizing the risks of artificial intelligence

**Joan Casas-Roma**  
Coordinating professor, Faculty of Computer Science,  
Multimedia and Telecommunications

The potential benefits that artificial intelligence technologies can have in many sectors is beyond any doubt. But it is also known that these technologies sometimes carry a risk with them, such as the risk of replicating certain biases and patterns that we may not want to see repeated again. Now, when thinking how these technologies can be applied to higher education institutions like universities, do you think this could help prevent the appearance of these biases and make education more fair and accessible for everyone? And if so, how?

**Michael Murphy:** *(You have first-class honours for questions.) It's ironic you're asking me about the risks of artificial intelligence, because I explained to the rector earlier that I was born in a medieval agrarian economy, in a farm in the west of Ireland. Long before the digital age, so, I can't claim expertise, but I will say the following, there is a great risk of bias entering the algorithms because of the nature of the people who write algorithms. They tend to be white, Caucasian, middle class, and so on and so forth.*

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*So, it is hugely important that the programmers, the authors, are diverse, in their nature. We've got to work very hard on that. There has to be a clear governance process, a very powerful governance process to ensure this diversity.*

*Secondly, the members must be sensitized to these biases, before they get to work.*

*And thirdly, there must be extensive piloting and comparisons between the outcomes of the proposed algorithm and the judgements made on the same cohorts of the students by human, experienced adjudicators.*

*As a physician, I'm a great believer in randomized control trials and I think these algorithms should be subjected to randomized controlled trials in large populations. So, this is going to be expensive and it's going to take time but it must be done well to avoid disaster.*

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**Video**



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**Key ideas**

*“There is a great risk of bias entering the algorithms because of the nature of the people who write algorithms. So, it is hugely important that the programmers, the authors, are diverse, in their nature.”*

*“There has to be a clear and powerful governance process to ensure this diversity. The members must be sensitized to these biases before they get to work. And there must be extensive piloting and comparisons between the outcomes of the proposed algorithm and the judgements made on the same cohorts of students by human, experienced adjudicators.”*

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### 3. Fighting against technological inequalities

Luisa Achaerandio Alarcón  
Representative of the Student Council

Lifelong learning can be a difficult challenge to meet. In his regard, a university without walls is less constricted by the barriers of space and time, with greater reach into students' study places, but not everyone has the same resources or opportunities and, in addition, it limits the social aspects of learning. How could a university without walls tackle inequalities and encourage more experience-based learning?

**Michael Murphy:** *Well, they ask this question on a campus where you have more experience of these matters than anybody else!*

*The pandemic was a great lesson. It made us humble; at least, it should make us humble, because it gave us a lot of evidence of the scale of inequality across countries and across Europe. Even in the richest countries, we saw that there's patchy access to broadband, students in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged, the technical infrastructure, well, a lot of students did not have the computers they needed.*

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*Technical infrastructure in our campuses, in our traditional campuses, was very sub-optimal. Interoperability of ed-tech platforms is a challenge, and now you are experts on this more than I am. The technical skills of faculty were very variable in many disciplines and in many institutions, in fact we saw the consequences of many European universities not engaging in wide development and training of their staff to teach, either in the traditional fashion or in the new fashion.*

*And that led to more inequalities. So, the technical skills of faculty require a lot of investment. What can we do as universities to address some of these factors driving inequality?*

*The first I think is that we have to advocate more effectively with our governments, and with our ministers, for the investment necessary to develop infrastructure, the investment necessary to upskill our staff. We need to do a lot of work on ed-tech and, if I might make an observation as somebody from a medieval agrarian background, we should think carefully about common publicly funded, open-source ed-tech across Europe.*

*I would not wish to see an EUA president sitting here in 20 years' time who has not learned from the disaster of the publishing industry of the past 50 years where we have been held hostage to profit-making publishing houses, who sell back to us for enormous sums of money the information that we give them for free. I would like to see a common European approach and EUA has recently set up a working group on the digitalization of our university system and that's a topic on their agenda. So, these are things we can do to address inequality.*

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*Isolation of students. I think the blended campus has a lot to offer because getting the mix right between the online experience and the value of socialization among peers, among student peers, is important. And you could even look, I'm sure, at ways of organizing your student groups in different locations in towns and cities across Spain or wherever so that they come together physically to complement and to discuss and peer learn, and to complement what you are providing on an online basis.*

*And lastly on socialization and equalization, the equality agenda, I think that we all need to work on the experiential opportunities for students and even open universities can work with employers in the sector and representative bodies to organize some experiential learning for those students not in work. I know that most of your students are actually working, in the case of UOC.*

*The question is are you extracting value from that experience that they are undergoing in parallel with education and are you linking the two experiences that they are having. I'm running out of thoughts I hope that one or two ideas may have some value.*



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**Video**



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**Key ideas**

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*“We have to advocate more effectively with our governments, and with our ministers, for the investment necessary to develop infrastructure, the investment necessary to upskill our staff.”*

*“We need to do a lot of work on edtech and we should think carefully about common publicly funded open-source edtech across Europe.”*

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# Closing speech by Gemma Geis, Government of Catalonia Minister for Research and Universities (26/05/2021 - 10/10/2022)

U8



*It's an honour for me to participate in this beginning of the academic year, with no face masks any longer, and so it's a pleasure to be here, in this inauguration of the academic year of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.*

*As I've already told him, I found the lecture given by Dr Michael Murphy, of the European University Association extremely interesting. Indeed, the report entitled "Universities without walls, a vision for 2030" has been quoted a great many times in the Parliament of Catalonia.*

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## Closing speech by Gemma Geis, Government of Catalonia Minister for Research and Universities (26/05/2021 - 10/10/2022)

U8

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*We have used it extensively, and so, thank you for your good work, because it's work that also inspires us and reaches the university system in Catalonia; thank you very much because it's a very good report. We've used it very many times and we have it under consideration, because I think it provides a very good explanation of our position and the civic challenges for the defence of rights and freedom at universities that we are facing, such as the defence of academic freedom and the defence of universities' autonomy.*

*I think the UOC is a very good example of the concept of a university without walls, because it's a university without frontiers, because we see it with its students, with the number of students who enrol; with its format, which is flexible, which adapts quickly; we also saw it with the pandemic.*

*And in that respect, I consider it to be an inspirational benchmark, above all, because of its focus on innovating and improving educational methods – indeed, Dr Michael Murphy also referred to this – the UOC's ability to share its learning system and therefore to inspire other universities as well.*

*I'd also like – I think there are a few months left until the president completes his term –, on behalf of the Government of Catalonia and on behalf of the team at the Catalan Ministry of Research and Universities, to thank him for his work, and to thank all his team.*

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## Closing speech by Gemma Geis, Government of Catalonia Minister for Research and Universities (26/05/2021 - 10/10/2022)



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*The truth is that we've worked very well together: It's been a pleasure from day one and I've found a rapport, which is where the Catalan university system makes a difference. I've already referred to this difference which we have in Catalonia's university system. And I also believe that over the last year the president has been able to convey to us some of the needs that the UOC has had in terms of budget and recognition; I believe that with this budget increase of 14% we have satisfied some of the requirements that the UOC has had.*

*The fact is that the figures are..., you see them on the screens, but they are absolutely momentous. Overall enrolment in the UOC centres continues the upward trend of recent academic years. With more than 80,000 bachelor's and master's degree students, the UOC is the leading Catalan university in terms of student numbers. If we measure it in full-time students, it's the second-ranked university in Catalonia, behind the University of Barcelona. These students are located in more than 140 countries around the world; that's why it's a university without walls.*

*And as far as research is concerned, the UOC has more than 50 groups in its own research centres, as well as the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute, which specializes in the internet and the effects of technology on human activities, and the eHealth Center, focusing on research into digital health to transform the system in line with the paradigm shift in health. Both centres are closely related to this ability to transfer this knowledge from research to society in order to improve it; so I believe that these two research centres are a clear example of this.*

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## Closing speech by Gemma Geis, Government of Catalonia Minister for Research and Universities (26/05/2021 - 10/10/2022)

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*But today, in this inauguration of the academic year I would also like to acknowledge the UOC, because it's a university that's committed to our country, because this year the UOC – as we also announced and as we've discussed in the Parliament of Catalonia – has made the necessary and essential commitment to enable a national demand for an increase in places for teacher training in secondary education.*

*There was a lack of public sector positions in this country to do the master's degree in secondary education to be teachers in our schools. We needed to offer more places and all the UOC staff responded to increase the places that the country needed. So today I also want to publicly acknowledge this mission of public service, this mission for the country which the UOC has worked towards.*

*I think it's been a genuine example of this commitment and a turning point for the university research system; Dr Murphy also mentioned this earlier. What are the resources? In Catalonia we have the National Pact for Knowledge; it's an agreement that was approved by all the parliamentary groups, with a participatory process, an agreement that said very clearly that Catalonia needed to increase the funding for research at public universities in this country. Last year we increased the budget of the Ministry of Research and Universities by 14%, and I'm sure that next year it'll continue to grow. I'm certain that next year the budget for Research and Universities will be able to grow.*

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## Closing speech by Gemma Geis, Government of Catalonia Minister for Research and Universities (26/05/2021 - 10/10/2022)

U8

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*Now, in the next few days we are also about to pass Catalonia's first science law. It's already going through Parliament; our lawyer is preparing her opinion. So within two or three weeks a law for science in Catalonia should be passed for the first time, which we didn't have, which I think will recognize this entire system of knowledge, of university research centres in a law of our own. We're continuing to work towards a university infrastructure plan, for a strategy which I think fits in very well both with what the president was talking about and the universities report for 2030, and I think we must also implement policies to retain talent.*

*And finally, and I'll be brief, we have a major challenge as a country, which is the future text for the Organic Law for the University System, a Spanish law. And I think we need to defend the Catalan university system and its particular characteristics, and what we must demand and argue is for this Spanish law to be a flexible law, with open doors so that the unique nature of the Catalan system can be recognized and the strength of the Catalan university system, as seen in the international rankings, can be built upon.*

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## Closing speech by Gemma Geis, Government of Catalonia Minister for Research and Universities (26/05/2021 - 10/10/2022)



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*So I'm very grateful to be able to share this start of the academic year with you. I also wish you a very good academic year at the UOC, and you should know that you have the utmost support from the Ministry of Research and Universities to continue finding the mechanisms and the needs that you have, and I think that we have begun to satisfy some of them this year.*

*Thank you very much, and I hope you have a very good academic year.*

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**Gemma Geis**

Minister of Research and Universities of the Government of Catalonia (26/05/2021 - 10/10/2022)

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# Michael Murphy's biography



Michael Murphy is President of the European University Association. A past President of University College Cork, Ireland (2007-17), he has been active in many academic organisations in Europe and the United States and has served as Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Ireland, Chair of the Health Research Board of Ireland, Chair of the Irish Universities Association and Chair of the Permanent Working Group (PWG) of European Hospital Doctors. Currently, he chairs the Steering Committee of the European Learning and Teaching Forum and the Advisory Board of U-Multirank.



## Library guide



Prof. Murphy graduated in Medicine from University College Cork in 1976. Following postgraduate medical training in Dublin and in Clinical Pharmacology at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in London, he received his doctorate from the National University of Ireland in 1984. Dr. Murphy spent a decade on the Faculties of Pharmacology, Physiology and Medicine at The University of Chicago before returning to Cork as Professor of Clinical Pharmacology and later as Dean of Medicine. An expert on drug therapy for cardiovascular disease, he led several international clinical trials of interventions to reduce cardiovascular mortality.

Term of office: 2019-2023.

 Source: [Web EUA](#)

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