

WORKBOOK 1

Leading change in diversity and cross-cutting challenges

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newlead

INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE
MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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1 INTRODUCTION

One of the objectives of the NEWLEAD project is to create a set of workbooks focused on different topics related to **innovative leadership** and **change management** in the environment of higher education. The aim is to use these workbooks to collect examples of good practices that can serve as a guide for European HEIs. The issues addressed have been chosen within the topics prioritized by the members of the consortium, the results of the surveys that were published during the first part of the project and the main interests of the participants in the two Focus Groups¹ (FG) on leadership development and institutional transformation organised 30/03-01/04 in Barcelona and 02/06 and 03/06 in Reykjavik.

The workbooks would mainly incorporate new knowledge about national issues and key challenges for university leaders and ways to address them at different institutional levels. These reports would also present case studies and best practices to address cross-cutting challenges and institutional transformation priorities and institutional leadership development.

Workbook 1 addresses the United Nations 2030 Agenda and describe the way in which the Spanish university system has incorporated it as part of its strategy. Including the SDGs in the institutional strategy has not only consequences on the Institution's mission and activities, it has also an impact on the HEI leaders' profiles. HEI executive teams should enhance their capacities and soft skills to better address institutional transformation in a fast-changing and disrupted context. This is in fact, one of the main challenges to which NEWLEAD aims to respond.

¹ <https://unileaders.eu/en/2021/12/16/call-for-participation-newlead-focus-groups-for-university-leaders-2/>

This specific Workbook takes the case of two best practices based on collaborative and networking strategic work, one at the national level and the other at the regional one.

On the other hand, and as part of the 2030 Agenda, the workbook addresses the way in which Spanish universities have worked at a national level in ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education in HEIs. We explore the role of the Spanish Rectors' Conference Crue through two specific projects for which it has collaborated with different stakeholders, as an example of collective leadership that has helped to inspire, implement, coordinate and push challenging and transformative agendas in Spain and to successfully transform both the system and institutions.

The two cases described in this workbook show that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in universities present different challenges that are relevant to the overall mission of the institutions. The workbook describes in more detail some of the challenges that higher education leaders face in this context, such as governance and coordination, institutional culture, awareness and visibility, training and development, and data collection and analysis.

Overcoming these challenges and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, such as Equity, Diversity and Inclusion goals, transforming universities themselves into sustainable institutions, and building alliances with other actors to achieve greater societal impact represent major institutional transformation processes. University leaders and their teams play an essential role in their successful implementation. They need to drive the design of new strategies and priorities, convince the university and academic community of their importance, and act as agents of change. This requires structural leadership change in different dimensions such as developing new leadership styles and skills.

The two examples also show the important role of shared leadership in interacting with different partners to advance the development of the whole sector and to support individual institutions in their own development.

2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE 2030 AGENDA IN SPANISH UNIVERSITIES

In 2015, world leaders in the United Nations framework agreed to a structured action plan on 17 key objectives aimed at achieving a fairer, more sustainable, and more egalitarian society. This action plan has been one of the most ambitious agreements to which the main world powers have committed to and serves as a framework to define policies in different fields. This world agreement

named the 2030 Agenda, came into force in January 2016 which is included in the document “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for a Sustainable Development”.

The 2030 Agenda serves as a road map for all countries to address the most urgent issues and challenges. In order to work on the 169 milestones within the 17 objectives, known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the collaboration of governments is necessary, but also the main social agencies. The SDGs emphasize the need to connect the social, economic, and environmental dimensions, as well as address the interrelated objectives. Implementing and addressing the SDGs is everyone's responsibility, and therefore, directly questions the education sector and especially universities.

On this matter there are various networks and associations worldwide that have developed specific roadmaps for *Higher Education Institutions* in order to facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in their action plans. Some of these organizations are the Sustainable Development Solutions Networks (SDSN), Future Earth, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and other associations such as Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS), Environmental Association for University and Colleges (EUAC) or the Association of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

2.1 Universities as key players in the SDG development

In the seven years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is beyond dispute that universities all over the world have stepped up to help tackle the major global challenges it raises. However, it is also clear that progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has so far been extremely slow; and in some respects, as important as social inequality, or the climate emergency, we are suffering setbacks rather than seeing progress².

Universities have a key role to play in the construction of the 2030 Agenda for several reasons. Firstly, because academic knowledge is fundamental to addressing the SDGs: sharing the knowledge generated or expanded in universities with other stakeholders is essential to arriving at solutions to the challenges stated by the 2030 Agenda. Secondly, because a global political agenda of this scope is, for the first time, championing the need for equal access to higher

² [Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development \(UN 2019\)](#)

education for all. This demonstrates a worldwide acknowledgement that the passage through university helps to craft global citizens.

Universities occupy a privileged place in society, and have long been powerful drivers of global, national and local innovation, economic development, and social welfare. Because of their work in generating and disseminating knowledge and their pre-eminent position in society, they have a key role to play in achieving the SDGs. For it is likely that none of the SDGs could be achieved without the involvement of this sector.

At this point universities have a fundamental role in achieving the milestones indicated in the 2030 Agenda. The global network of universities can be an active "solutions network" to help governments, businesses and civil society chart out the pathways to successful sustainable development. Universities around the world should be at the forefront in helping society find the technical solutions to achieve these goals (Sachs, 2015³) and thus establish a Win-Win relationship between the university and the 2030 Agenda. It is also important to highlight that the HEI will benefit in turn by committing to this roadmap. The University and the 2030 Agenda relationship is therefore a double benefit binomial, a Win-Win relationship.

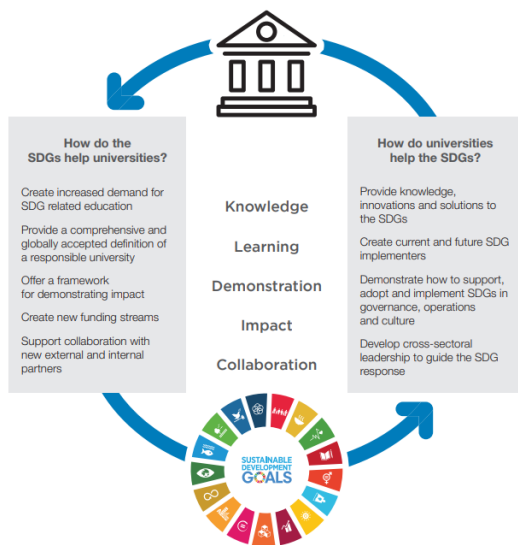


Figure 1: The win-win relationship between Universities and SDGs (SDSN Australia/Pacific (2017): Getting started with the SDGs in universities. Guide for universities, higher education institutions, and the academic sector)

³ "Achieving the sustainable development goals", Sachs JD 2015, Journal of International Business Ethics, vol.8,no.2, pp 53-62 (p.61)

How does the 2030 Agenda Strategy benefit universities?

Below, and based on the SDG implementation guide in the universities prepared by the SDSN⁴ in collaboration with the ACTS⁵ and REDS⁶ the **main benefits** that the HEI can incorporate the SDGs as main axes in their strategic plans are highlighted.

- The SDGs let you visualize and show the **impact that universities have on social progress**. More and more, the HEIs are called to act in what is known as their fourth mission (the other three are teaching, research and knowledge transfer). The fourth mission, increasingly present in the sector, includes all those actions led by the University that aim to impact their environment in general.
- Adapt the **educational offer to the new needs** and professional profiles that will be necessary in the near future. Universities, like any other social agent must be permeable to new social challenges and demands and adapt to them. In this sense, as institutions responsible for educating future citizens, universities must offer educational programs that prepare their students to face future social challenges, sensitive to the global problems we must face and capable of implementing the 2030 Agenda.
- The 2030 Agenda, given its global and interdisciplinary orientation requires the **collaboration and involvement of all social agents**. The SDGs generate a common framework where governments, organizations, institutions, and associations, both public and private must collaborate. Networking is, in this case, more necessary than ever. Universities must constitute strategic alliances to strengthen their action plans around the agenda.
- Given the importance that the SDGs have acquired, governments have specific competitive **financing funds** for projects framed in the 2030 Agenda. Universities thus have new financing opportunities.
- The SDGs define the necessary conceptual framework to facilitate the **organizational change** that HEI must promote to adapt to new social challenges and new needs. In this respect, the strategy outlined by the 2030 Agenda is a great opportunity to update the higher education sector.

⁴ Sustainable Development Solutions Network

⁵ Australian Campuses Towards Sustainability

⁶ The Spanish Network for Sustainable Development (REDS)

What do universities contribute to the SDGs?



Figure 2: An overview of university contributions to the SDGs (SDSN Australia/Pacific (2017): Getting started with the SDGs in universities. Guide for universities, higher education institutions, and the academic sector)

Based on the SDSN guide, below we summarize the key contributions from universities to the SDGs differentiating their four main areas of action.

- Education

While education is the centre of one of the objectives - SDGs 4 - is closely related and aligned to all other SDGs and has an important role to play in the implementation of all of them. This implementation will require that the entire university community (students, PDI and PAS) and specially the executive and leadership teams become effective executors of the SDGs and tackle a wide range of very diverse social and environmental challenges which are interconnected.

Therefore, universities are agents of change that hold great responsibility in sustainable development and for this they seek to be more receptive and sensitive to social needs. Quality education leads to better results when addressing the challenges related to the SDGs, and that is why it is essential to supply and equip students with transversal skills and key competencies such as systemic thinking, critical thinking, self-awareness, comprehensive resolution of problems, the capacity to anticipate and collaboration, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and social responsibility, among others.

- Research

New approaches to addressing SDG research are crucial to deal with the complexity of the current context which we are in, and more particularly within the classical university structures.

While it is true that changes in the external environment of research, government involvement and financing for national implementation by all sectors, and the availability of specific national research funds would also be necessary, it is also true that universities through their broad competences and interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research activities, an essential element, since they encourage and promote knowledge creation, provide the empirical basis, the necessary solutions and innovations at all levels.

In general terms, universities must understand research as the basis for understanding relevant challenges, promoting innovation to find sustainable development solutions, identifying difficulties and obstacles, evaluating the most efficient pathways, as well as systematically addressing and directing interconnections between different goals, for the successful implementation of all the SDGs.

- Operations and governance

Every university institution, acting responsibly, can contribute significantly to the achievement of the SDGs. They are often large entities that can exercise a substantial impact on social, cultural and environmental well-being aspects, both in the university campuses and in their immediate communities, in addition to the local, national and international sphere.

The role of universities in this area is to align their governance structures and operational policies with the SDGs, and this can be achieved through internal actions. These actions have a clear starting point: analyse how the strategies, policy, plans and information indicators are aligned with the SDGs, address any key gaps in the university response through the SDGs, in addition to incorporating the SDGs into the Reports of the institutional structures of those universities.

- External Leadership

Universities have a unique position within society, and this makes them especially suitable for leading and supporting the implementation of the SDGs. These institutions have the responsibility of outlining the way to sustainable development and on the way involving multiple interested parties.

With regards to this area of action, the role of universities must revolve around the following points: strengthen the commitment and their public participation in the field of the SDGs, initiate and facilitate dialogue and promote sustainable development policies.

- SDGs as university structural transformation activators

As seen in the previous sections, implementing the 2030 Agenda in the HEI is a challenge that entails structural, organizational and governance changes.

On the one hand, incorporating the 2030 Agenda focus on the strategies of the universities means expanding their spectrum of action mainly developing new initiatives and projects within the fourth mission of the University. The SDGs are an internal challenge that universities must take the opportunity to update and adapt their governance and efficiency models. The SDGs also allow to strengthen the impact that the university has on their environment, as a key agent for the development of society. The 2030 Agenda is a great opportunity to visualize the task of higher education in the creation of the knowledge society, a fairer, more sustainable and more egalitarian society.

Likewise, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda makes it necessary to have citizens trained and prepared to address the most urgent challenges that include the eradication of poverty and hunger, the protection of the planet, climate change and encourage peaceful societies. The university must respond to this need proactively.

2.2 Impact of implementing SDG's oriented strategy in HEI

Without the commitment and involvement of this strategic sector, none of the SDGs may be achieved. Universities, as natural networking environments, can become true social laboratories of avant-garde innovations and practices. Their responsibility is to fully support the different dimensions of sustainability (environment, employees, diversity policy, governance, economic sustainability, etc.) and they must lead by example and integrate proposals for responses to global challenges into the university's missions, and especially through teaching. Universities are responsible for training the future professionals, who are and will be the protagonists of the transition towards more sustainable and resilient paths⁷.

⁷ Dlouhá, J., Heras, R., Mulá, I., Perez Salgado, F., & Henderson, L.; *Competences to Address SDGs in Higher Education: A Reflection on the Equilibrium between Systemic and Personal Approaches to Achieve Transformative Action*; 2019

2.2.1 Main challenges of HEI in implementing an SDG oriented strategy

The Agenda 2030 work plan poses important challenges for the management teams of the universities, which must redirect the purpose of their institutions assigning a preponderant role to the issue of sustainability. Among these challenges we specifically highlight two:

1. HEI have to transform themselves into 100% sustainable organizations with regards to internal operations and processes.

There should be no discrepancy between what universities communicate in sustainability and what they really do. To be reliable, universities must support all aspects of sustainability: gender salary gap, policy of basic acquisitions, operations and services, employee mobility, energy efficiency, transparency policies, etc. In this sense, it is worth exploring certification mechanisms such as ASHE or others.

2. Building alliances with other social agents based on sustainability and positive social change

The success of universities in the approach to sustainability will also be evaluated in terms of their social impact. Therefore, it is recommended that they use links with local and international organizations to promote multisectoral dialogue, knowledge exchange and joint exploration of different paths to more sustainable societies.

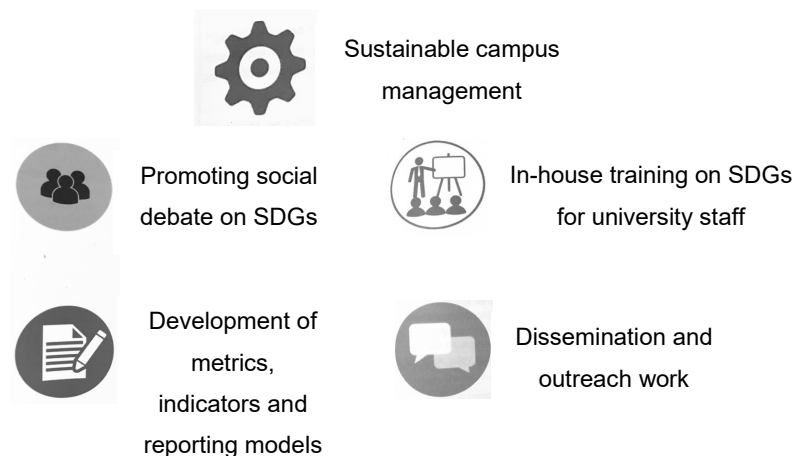


Figure 3 : Key points to be integrated into the overall strategy of the universities' pedagogical model

2.2.2 Training future leaders

Some authors call to the attention of the "great disconnection" between the commitments that we formally assume collectively and as individuals / organizations in relation to the sustainability and progress that we effectively manage to generate when the global indicators of sustainability are considered as those exposed by the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) or other organisms. For this reason, the truth is that global progress in sustainability remains insufficient⁸.

To reduce this gap between action and results, more and more authors are bringing up the need to drastically change the business action approach so that economic activity is more intricate in the socio-ecological systems in which it operates⁹.

HEI, in their commitment integrating SDGs into **the global vision and strategy of the pedagogical model, are leading changes in** teaching curricula and organizational programs.

To respond to this challenge, executive training programs aimed at offering training on corporate sustainability have recently proliferated (it is the case of the programs taught by ESADE from the Ramon Llull University [The Strategic Integration of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs](#) and [Sustainable Management and the 2030 Agenda](#)¹⁰). These programs comply, with at least **three** objectives:

⁸ Dyllick & Hockerts; *Beyond the Business Case for Corporate Sustainability*; 2002

⁹ Raworth; *Economía Rosquilla: 7 maneras de pensar la economía del siglo XXI*; 2018

¹⁰ See video presenting the experience of these programs

- 1) Sensitize and raise awareness of the business community on the need (and responsibility) of acting differently, within the framework of a new paradigm.
- 2) Explain the theoretical foundations that allow us to interpret change, also, as an opportunity
- 3) Provide strategic tools and success cases to apply sustainability to the practice of the organization. In addition, the programs allow participants to alienate a nomenclature and shared intervention axes aligned with the sustainable development objectives

For these objectives to be met, not only companies but all social agents, from their field of influence, must take on the responsibility of acting to accelerate the transition towards the most demanding version of sustainability.

The positioning of universities at the intersection between theoretical knowledge, the generation of consciousness (individual and collective) and the preparation for working practice, places them in a privileged position to contribute to reducing or eliminating the gap between action and results. This reconnection between what we do, what we communicate and the achievements we reach for the world is essential when designing a new credible socio-economic model. Universities train the people who are going to be leaders and/or the employees of the organizations of tomorrow, and that gives them an opportunity- and a responsibility- to do so incorporating the principles of sustainability. The citizens and workers of the future must become aware of their ability to positively influence society and the environment, not only as members of a political community, but also as members of an organization, public or private. Therefore, universities must contribute to training people with critical thinking and the capacity of identifying opportunities to intervene in the sustainability that exist in each area of knowledge thus generating positive impacts.

2.3 Case study: common strategy of the Catalan university system facing the Agenda for 2030

2.3.1 The Catalan university system

The Catalan university system is made up of 12 universities - seven public, one virtual and four private non-for-profit - which offer a wide range of qualifications of recognised excellence in fields such as architecture, design, biomedicine, physics, chemistry, mathematics and economics,

among others¹¹. In addition to their dedication to education and teaching, the universities of Catalonia are internationally recognised for their research activity and play an outstanding role in innovation and knowledge transfer.

The Catalan university system has the quality to compete and cooperate internationally in a clear strategy to become the pre-eminent nucleus of higher education in southern Europe, and thus contribute to making Catalonia a pole of knowledge of the first magnitude (with 0.1% of the world's population, Catalonia already produces 1% of the world's scientific publications)¹².

According to Article 172 of Organic Law 6/2006¹³, of 19 July, on the reform of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, in matters of university education, the competences concerning programming and coordination of the Catalan university system, regulation and creation of correspond to the Catalan government:

As said previously, to date there are no doubts that for the first time in an international political agenda, higher education is considered important to achieve sustainable development on a planetary scale. In addition, and included in the different goals, the 2030 Agenda highlights the importance of research and transfer, as well as the missions of the university system and the research system.

The Government of Catalonia is committed to the SDGs through the development of the National Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Catalonia and the promotion of the Catalonia 2030 Alliance, in which the 2030 Agenda working group of the Catalan university system's

2.3.2 Interuniversity Council of Catalonia commission on Agenda 2030

The twelve universities that make up the Catalan university system together with the Catalan government and other institutions of the knowledge ecosystem, set up a working group in 2019 to develop an action plan to speed up implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The establishment of this group has ensured a continued collaboration that led to the implementation of common strategic actions aimed at meeting SDG.

This system-wide step is significant and one of only a few examples of coordinated action to implement the 2030 Agenda by a regional university system. But it did not arise out of nowhere. In

¹¹ <https://universitats.gencat.cat/en/estudis-universitaris/universitats-catalanes/>

¹² https://serrahunter.gencat.cat/ca/el_serra_hunter_programme_shp_pla_serra_hunter/sistema_universitari_catala/

¹³ <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2006/05/03/2>

2017, the eight universities of the Catalan Public University Association (ACUP) had already published their position in relation to the 2030 Agenda in a document entitled "The commitment of Catalan universities to the Sustainable Development Goals: towards a transformative education for a new world".¹⁴ A year later, the universities forming part of the Spanish rector's conference also made public their commitment to the 2030 Agenda,¹⁵ which included seven specific lines of action through which the agenda would be put into practice.

However, Catalan universities have done more during this period than just sign up to commitments. They have also been implementing these commitments through specific actions. Three important examples of how collaborative work enables significant structural change are described below.

- 1) Worthy of particular note is the collaboration between the Catalan universities and the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya), which led to the adoption in 2018 of the general framework for incorporating a gender perspective into higher education.¹⁶ This collaborative project carried out over a number of years has finally crystallized into a **guide that targets fulfilment of SDG 5 on gender equality**¹⁷ and has been rolled out from the 2020/2021 academic year.
- 2) Also, in 2018, Catalan universities, research centres and science parks, through the University Services Consortium of Catalonia (CSUC), pledged to **jointly purchase totally renewable energy for their campuses and installations**. This action contributes to the fulfilment of SDG 7 on accessible, non-pollutant energy for all, while enabling the Catalan university system to move towards closing the gap between commitment and action.
- 3) Finally, in 2019, a working group led by the Government of Catalonia's Department of Universities and Research was set up to develop a **Catalan open science strategy**, a consensus that is included in the National Pact for the Knowledge Society¹⁸ recently adopted by the Government.

¹⁴ <http://www.acup.cat/ca/publicacio/declaracio-el-compromis-de-les-universitats-catalanes-amb-els-objectius-de>
¹⁵

<http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/SalaDePrensa/Multimedia/Publicaciones/Documents/CRUE%20Universidades%20Espa%c3%b1olas.%20Posicionamiento%20Agenda%202030.pdf>

¹⁶ http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_21331700_1.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.aqu.cat/en/Universities/Methodology/General-framework-for-incorporating-the-gender-perspective-in-higher-education-teaching>

¹⁸ <http://empresa.gencat.cat/web/.content/actualitat/pacte-nacional-societat-coneixement/documents/arxius/Pacte-Nacional-per-a-la-Societat-del-Coneixement.pdf>

As previously stated, the goal of this working group is to produce an action plan to speed up the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Catalan university system. With the aim to complete the mission by the end of 2030, the first stage was to assess the current basis of the system. The results of the *2nd Global Survey Report on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development*,¹⁹ produced by the International Association of Universities (IAU) in 2019, were the key input in this assessment. The data collected allowed for a very interesting preliminary diagnosis of the evolution of the university sector from the point of view of sustainable development. The main findings are highlighted below:

- The situation in Catalan universities is very similar to other European universities
- There is extensive knowledge of the 2030 Agenda on the part of university administrators
- Most Catalan universities have or are engaged in producing a specific strategy with respect to the 2030 Agenda
- There is an extensive coverage of all SDGs in the four areas addressed by the survey:
 - Education and teaching
Of the 12 Catalan universities, 11 have integrated sustainable development into their academic offer.
 - Research and teaching
All Catalan universities do research on sustainable development, which has an impact on almost all of the SDGs.
 - Community engagement
100% of Catalan universities maintain relations with schools, associations, government and NGOs, as they are deeply rooted in the territory, and have strong links with third sector organisations.
 - Campus initiatives
The SDGs that are worked on most are 3 (Health and well-being), 5 (Gender equality) and 13 (Climate action)²⁰.

However, the results of the surveys have also shown that there are mainly three obstacles to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Catalan institutions: (1) **lack of staff** focusing on sustainable development, (2) **lack of funding** to implement actions, and (3) **lack of specific training** for academic and administrative staff.

[Action plan of the Catalan Universities for the Agenda 2030](#)

¹⁹ https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_hesd_survey_report_final_jan2020.pdf

²⁰ Action plan of the Catalan Universities for the Agenda 2030

Following this assessment, it was possible to draw up the university system's action plan for achieving the 2030 Agenda. It was decided to organize it into five dimensions:

- | | |
|------|-------------------------|
| I. | Strategy and governance |
| II. | Education and teaching |
| III. | Research and transfer |
| IV. | Engagement with society |
| V. | Campus initiatives |

As can be seen, these areas correspond to the four proposed by the International Association of Universities (IAU) in the global survey on higher education and research for sustainable development, and a fifth area corresponding to strategy and governance has been added, in accordance with the context of the Catalan university system. With the aim of accelerating the incorporation of the 2030 Agenda in Catalan universities, as well as trying to strengthen the role of the Catalan university system in the different actions that address the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each of the areas of the action plan has been articulated in lines of action that are subsequently specified in a series of general actions formulated as a university system, thus leaving full freedom for universities to develop more specific initiatives²¹.

3 EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE SPANISH UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

The 2030 Agenda includes the Sustainable Development Goal 4, that aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. In 2020, The Covid-19 outbreak caused a global education crisis during which most higher education systems were affected by numerous disruptions and faced unprecedented challenges, including those related to institutional leadership. During these times, leading in equity, diversity and inclusion within the Spanish university system became increasingly timely, and the work carried out by Spanish universities for the last decade, coordinated by the Spanish Rectors' Conference and in collaboration with various institutions, allowed universities to protect this social dimension and overcome the different challenges they faced.

As well as within the framework provided by the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted on the 13 December 2006, provides the context and the impulse to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote

²¹https://recercauniversitats.gencat.cat/en/01_departament_recerca_i_universitats/recerca_i_universitats_de_cat_alunya/politiques_i_principals_actuacions/agenda-2030/pla-daccio-de-les-universitats-catalanes/

respect for their inherent dignity²². More specifically, with Article 24 on Education, ratifying States recognise ‘the right of persons with disabilities to education’ and commit to ensuring ‘an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning’ through facilitating ‘their full equal participation in education as members of the community’. This includes initiating ‘appropriate measures to employ teachers, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education’ (Art. 24.4) and ensuring that ‘persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others’ (Art. 24.5).

At a European level, further political commitments have been made to strengthen equity, diversity, and inclusiveness in higher education. Since the Paris Declaration of European Union member states of March 2015²³, and in the three most recent Bologna Communiqués (2015 Yerevan Communiqué²⁴, the 2018 Paris Communiqué²⁵, the 2020 Rome Communiqué²⁶), the ministers responsible for higher education committed themselves to strengthen the social dimension of European higher education, prioritising the need to create an inclusive and equitable system.

Initially defined in the 2007 London Communiqué²⁷, the social dimension refers to ‘the extent to which the student body is entering, participating in, and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of the population’ (p. 5). The latest 2020 Rome Communiqué goes beyond this definition to include ‘creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity and is responsive to the needs of local communities’ (p. 3).

This Communiqué calls public authorities and higher education institutions to integrate the ‘Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA’²⁸ at the core of higher education core missions. The Communiqué recommends incorporating these Principles and Guidelines in the ‘institutional governance and management’ (p. 3), which is considered ‘a crucial step forward in the Rome Communiqué when looking to strengthen inclusion, equity, and diversity in higher education’ (EUROSTUDENT VII p. 11). Overall, the 2020 Rome

²² Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-Persons-with-disabilities.html>

²³ Paris Declaration of EU member states in March 2015, available at: <https://bit.ly/3ZYUYWr>

²⁴ 2015 Yerevan Communiqué, available at:

²⁵ 2018 Paris Communiqué, available at: <http://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-conference-paris-2018>

²⁶ 2020 Rome Communiqué of the Bologna Process, available at: http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf

²⁷ 2007 London Communiqué, available at: <http://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-conference-london-2007>

²⁸ 2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué Annex II. Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA. Available at: http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf

Communiqué sets out that achieving a 'socially inclusive higher education will remain at the core of the EHEA and provide opportunities and support for equitable inclusion of individuals from all parts of society' (p. 5).

Equity, diversity, and inclusion have become central in EU policies, both in overarching frameworks and specific policies for higher education. For example, in 2017, the Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education set out by the European Commission defined 'building inclusive and connected higher education systems' as a priority for action (European Commission, 2017, p. 6)²⁹. Furthermore, in 2019, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan³⁰ which sets out, in the first principle, that 'everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning' (p. 44). More recently, the European Commission's communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025³¹ identifies and highlights this priority and makes inclusion one of the six dimensions to develop the EEA (p. 12).

The recently published European Strategy for Universities³² prioritises the need to foster diversity, inclusiveness and gender equality as 'disadvantaged or discriminated groups (ethnic minorities, people with migration background, or with disability, people from poor families, children of low qualified parents) are still underrepresented among students, academic staff and researchers' (p. 9). In order to address this priority, the Commission, in close cooperation with the stakeholders and the Member States, will 'develop a European framework for diversity and inclusion, including on gender gaps, identifying challenges and solutions for universities, and the needed support of public authorities' (p. 10). Furthermore, the Commission calls on the Member States '**to encourage universities to implement institutional change** through concrete measures for diversity and

²⁹ European Commission COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on a renewed EU agenda for higher education, May 30, 2017. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0247&from=DA>

³⁰ European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en

³¹ European Commission: COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on achieving the European Education Area by 2025. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0625>

³² European Commission: COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on a European strategy for universities. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ebf108dd-791c-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1>

inclusion, including voluntary, quantified targets for inclusion and inclusive gender equality plans, building on the Rome Communiqué' (p. 10).

Moreover, the European Union Council, in its Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)³³, published in January 2021, identified 'improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training' (p.4) as the first priority within the five identified in this strategic framework. Actions proposed within this strategic priority include 'supporting access to inclusive quality education for persons with disabilities, persons with specific learning needs, learners with migrant background and other vulnerable groups', as well as 'supporting the re-entering in education in a lifelong learning perspective and providing opportunities to enter the labour market through different education and training pathways' (p.5). Furthermore, at an institutional level, the document proposes 'developing gender sensitivity in the learning processes and in education and training institutions', which would, too, require transformative leadership for its implementation and at different levels of the institution.

As well as the policy responses and political framework, data drawn from the INVITED project coordinated by the European University Association and from EUROSTUDENT VII provide further context to the situation of diversity, equity and inclusion in the EHEA / EU through concrete action at the system level to foster equity, diversity and inclusion in higher education.

According to the results of the INVITED project³⁴, across Europe, **strategic approaches** to foster equity, diversity and inclusion **have become widespread at an institutional level**, where they 'are part of the main strategy of the institution in three out of four cases, but there are also specific, institution-wide strategies for the topic in more than half of the responding institutions' (p. 15). Overall, this study shows that higher education institutions' perceive inclusiveness and embracing diversity as an explicit value for their institution and a part of their social responsibility' (p. 15). Albeit the diversity of initiatives, the INVITED project data identifies that 'the challenge for taking a qualitative step forward on the topic of equity, diversity and inclusion is to connect all the dots, creating linkages within an institution and between institutions systems' (p. 44).

³³ Council of the European Union. Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), February 26 2021. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2021.066.01.0001.01.ENG

³⁴ Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in European Higher Education Institutions: Results from the INVITED project. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3ZY3rcz>

Furthermore, the most recent EUROSTUDENT VII report³⁵, for the period 2018-2021, draws the attention to the 'negative impact' that the Covid-19 pandemic will have 'on equity and social inclusion in pretertiary education, creating a knock-on effect of reducing equitable access to higher education and lowering the level of participation of at-risk students in higher education in the coming years' (p. 11). The European Commission's view to achieving the EEA by 2025 highlights that, although the HE sector has demonstrated its resilience throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, 'the crisis also sharpened the challenges' (p. 10), including challenges regarding inclusion.

3.1 Scenario setting: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Spanish University System

There has been a positive change towards equity, diversity, and inclusion in the Spanish University System, both at a normative or legislative level and raising awareness on the need to provide appropriate support to advance towards more inclusive higher education. In Spain, up until the approval of the *Ley Orgánica del Sistema Universitario* on the 9th March 2023³⁶, Higher Education was regulated by the *Ley Orgánica de modificación de la LOU* (LOMLOU), of 2007³⁷, which modified the *Ley Orgánica de Universidades* (LOU), of 2001³⁸, establishes that students with special or particular needs will be subject to measures that allow their inclusion in universities.

Despite the latest legislative reform of 2007, which was considered a significant step forward in this regard³⁹, there is still a lot to do to improve the participation of the people with disabilities in the university education system. The challenges in this regard are concerned with access, retention and completion of university studies. In this sense, it is not sufficient to meet the legal requirements and it is fundamental to take a step further and develop, within universities, an inclusive environment, as transformative leadership is fundamental to change the culture of the institution.

³⁵ Hauschildt, Gwosć, Schirmer, & Wartenbergh-Cras (2021). Social and economic conditions of student life in Europe: Synopsis of Indicators. EUROSTUDENT VII 2018-2021

https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_VII_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf

³⁶ Ley Orgánica del Sistema Universitario LOSU, available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2023/03/22/2/con>

³⁷ Ley Orgánica 4/2007, de 12 de abril, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 6/2001, de 21 de diciembre, de Universidades. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2007-7786>

³⁸ Ley Orgánica 6/2001, de 21 de diciembre, de Universidades. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2001/BOE-A-2001-24515-consolidado.pdf>

³⁹ Informe Cermei. Universidad y discapacidad La inclusión de las personas con discapacidad en la Universidad española. Informe del CERMI Estatal de reforma normativa en materia de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad en el sistema universitario español, 2020. p. 11. Available at: https://www.cermei.es/sites/default/files/docs/colecciones/Cermei.es%20n.%C2%BA%2081%20Accesible_0.pdf

As shown in the data included in the *Universidad y Discapacidad* study⁴⁰, published in 2021, the total number of students with disabilities in Spanish universities in 2019-2020 was 19,919, which is 1.5% of the total university student body⁴¹. Universities have enrolled 12,024 students with disabilities with an on-campus offer (1% of the total student body) and 7,886 (5.6%) in online universities. In 2019-2020, most university students with disabilities, 19,405 students, enrolled in public universities, representing 1.6% of the total, compared to 0.4% in private universities (505 students).

Data shows that the proportion of students with disabilities present at the university is lower as the educational level advances. Thus, out of the 19,910 total number of students with disabilities enrolled in the 2019-2020 academic year, the majority (16,959 students) are studying undergraduate degrees (first and second cycle), representing 1.5% of the total number of students in this group. Furthermore, 1,766 of this total are enrolled in postgraduate/master's degrees, that is, 1% of the total number of students in that level of studies. Finally, 631 students with disabilities are enrolled in doctoral programs, representing 0.8% of the total doctoral students enrolled in Spanish universities.

In this context, specific support measures for students of diverse backgrounds and needs aimed at improving the above data include financial aid, organisational alternatives and distance learning or methodological adaptations.

First, in terms of financial aid for students, in order to ensure that no one is excluded from studying at the university for socioeconomic reasons, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP), the regional government and the universities themselves organise a policy of scholarships and grants for students.

Within its sphere of competence, the MEFP regulates the granting of scholarships and general aid. In these scholarships, the MEFP invests financial resources, which helps students with special educational needs and compensates universities for public prices for the academic services corresponding to students and students of the National University of Distance education affected by disability.

⁴⁰ Universidad y Discapacidad. V Estudio sobre el grado de inclusión del sistema universitario español respecto de la realidad de las personas con discapacidad. 2021. Available at: [https://www.fundacionuniversia.net/content/dam/fundacionuniversia/pdf/estudios/V%20Estudio%20Universidad%20y%20Discapacidad%202019-2020%20%20\(Accesible\).pdf](https://www.fundacionuniversia.net/content/dam/fundacionuniversia/pdf/estudios/V%20Estudio%20Universidad%20y%20Discapacidad%202019-2020%20%20(Accesible).pdf)

⁴¹ 61 Spanish universities participated in providing data for this study.

Special scholarships for university students with disabilities include:

- the possibility of reducing the teaching/learning load to enrol for university students affected by a legally qualified disability of a degree equal to or greater than 65%
- If the student enrolls in all credits instead of reduced enrolment, the fixed amounts of the related scholarships increase by 50%.

Second, higher education distance learning is offered by the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), a national public university, to facilitate access and continuity of their studies to all people who cannot attend the university regularly due to work, economic, residence or any other circumstance.

The *Ley Orgánica de modificación de la LOU* (LOMLOU) of 2007 incorporates further measures to include people with disabilities and ensure their access, entry, retention, and completion of degrees. Such measures include:

- guarantee equal opportunities for students and other members of the university community with disabilities, eliminating any form of discrimination and establishing positive action measures aimed at ensuring their full and effective participation in the university environment
- disposition of the means, support and resources that ensure absolute and effective equality of opportunities about the other components of the university community
- University environments must be accessible following the conditions of equal opportunities, non-discrimination and universal accessibility for people with disabilities and in their development provisions. The buildings, facilities and dependencies of the universities, including virtual spaces, as well as services, procedures and the supply of information, must be accessible to all people in such a way that a reason of disability prevents none of the university community from the exercise of their right to enter, move, stay, communicate, obtain information, or others, in natural and practical conditions of equality
- all curricula proposed by universities must take into account that to carry out training in any professional activity must respect for and promotion of human rights and the principles of universal accessibility and design for all.
- total exemption from fees and public prices in studies leading to obtaining a university degree for students with disabilities.

Today, the new University Law LOSU, approved on the 9th March 2023, incorporates several normative amendments that will mean a step further in the direction of building a more inclusive Spanish University System. The LOSU incorporates the idea that inclusion is a key responsibility

of universities, and it will be fundamental to ensure access to higher education to groups that have been traditionally excluded. Furthermore, the current LOSU extends the 5 percent reserve in favour of people with disabilities to Doctoral studies, so that universities will reserve at least 5 percent of the places offered in the official university Undergraduate degrees, Master's degrees and Doctorates, thus favouring the academic university progression of people with disabilities.

As well as the aforementioned Organic Laws, the *Estatuto del Estudiante Universitario*⁴² establishes a set of rights to avoid discrimination within higher education. This Statute underlines that universities must provide the necessary resources and adaptations so that students with disabilities can exercise their rights under similar conditions, without this implying a lower required academic level.

These specific needs must be considered to guarantee equal opportunities and full integration into the university concerning the access and admission processes. Universities must make their spaces and buildings accessible, including virtual spaces, and provide the material, human and technical means to students with disabilities to ensure full integration. As well as the provision of resources, with regards to assessment, universities must make the necessary methodological adaptations, including promoting participation in national and international mobility programs for all, adapting tutoring activities to take into account diverse needs, promoting internships with companies and institutions that are accessible for students with diverse needs, among other. Given the institutional transformation of putting forward these changes, as we will see through the specific examples, the role of leadership will be fundamental for the implementation of this transformation.

As well as the aforementioned legislative framework, institutional collaboration and coordination have been vital to advance in the inclusion of an increasingly diverse university community. In this regard, the commitment of the National Rectors' Conference Crue Spanish Universities with inclusion and support for diversity and disability is firm. Crue works for an increasingly inclusive university, an increasingly accessible and socially responsible university. Crue Spanish Universities committed to the 2030 Agenda of Nations Nations, within which Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims at guaranteeing an inclusive, equitable, quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, as well as to provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and practical education for everyone.

⁴² Real Decreto 1791/2010, de 30 de diciembre, por el que se aprueba el Estatuto del Estudiante Universitario. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2010/BOE-A-2010-20147-consolidado.pdf>

The strategic collaboration between Crue and Fundación ONCE has been fundamental to promote inclusiveness in universities. It is very important that leaders understand well what inclusion is about, and this requires the joint development of pedagogy. Crue and Fundación ONCE have worked hand in hand to explain how exclusion works and what mechanisms exist to promote inclusion.

Interview with Isabel Martínez Lozano, Director of Programs with Universities and Promotion of Young Talent ONCE Foundation

For the last decade and with this aim in mind, Crue Spanish Universities has worked in close collaboration with Fundación ONCE⁴³, Foundation for Cooperation and Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities. Through this collaboration, experts have contributed to analysing the specific needs within universities and how to manage them appropriately. The aim is to achieve an inclusive education at the system-level so that people with disabilities can access university and achieve the highest levels of knowledge. This collaborative work allows both institutions to take firm steps

and advance in improving the access and progress of the students with disability in higher education. Through a well-defined strategy and through specific strategic programmes, which range from programmes to promote international mobility, work-experience or the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in universities, this cooperation has been the framework in which Spanish universities have aligned their strategies and moved together towards a more inclusive higher education system.

The successful institutional collaboration is also a result of the commitment and the work carried out by Red SAPDU, the *Red de Servicios de Apoyo a Personas con Discapacidad en la Universidad*, Network of Support Services for People with Disabilities at the universities, and by the *Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con Discapacidad* CERMI⁴⁴. Together, Crue Spanish Universities, Fundación ONCE, CERMI and Red SAPDU have carried out studies, organised meetings, drafted methodological guidelines, recommendations to teachers, protocols, and curricular adaptations guides. All these programmes have changed the involvement of universities with inclusion and in the development of more inclusive institutional strategies. They have also promoted leaders which, based on their experience, have been able to move other institutions to follow and share best practice in benefit of the entire system. The Spanish University System is an example of how, through a cohesive and converging process, all organisations involved have developed a shared political approach among universities that now move together and at a similar pace.

⁴³ Fundación ONCE: <http://www.fundaciononce.es/en>

⁴⁴ CERMI Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con Discapacidad: <https://cermi.es/>



Figure 4: Spanish institutions that have collaborated together to develop more inclusive institutional strategies. These institutions are: Network of Support Services for People with Disabilities at University (Red SAPDU), the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities (CERMI), the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities and the ONCE Foundation.

The role of Crue in promoting equity, diversity and inclusion **across de Spanish University System** has been fundamental also during the Covid-19 pandemic⁴⁵. This context requires a specific reflection as it posed major challenges for higher education that needed of an intensification of the work to protect inclusion in the Spanish university system by all stakeholders. Within the acts of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities of 2020, under the slogan ‘A Day for all’, Crue intensified its work so that no person with diversity is left behind. In this sense, since the beginning of this unexpected situation, Crue’s Sectorial Commission for Learning and Teaching issued a series of recommendations to ensure that the rapid transition to remote teaching did not exclude students with disabilities or special educational needs. Through this network of 76 universities, HEIs collaboratively established measures to adapt both the teaching guides and the assessment systems to online formats that guaranteed equal opportunities for all students.

Crue Spanish Universities also played a key leading role in protecting all those candidates who took the university entrance exams at the end of 2020 (EvAU). Through the work of Crue’s Sectorial Commission for Student Affairs, and more specifically through the working group on Diversity and Disability and in coordination with Red SAPDU, Spanish universities maintained their commitment to universal accessibility, non-discrimination, and equality in the adaptation of these tests to the guidelines issued by the Spanish ministries of Health and Education. In this context, it is also worth highlighting the importance of Crue’s collaboration with Fundación ONCE who, for the fifth year, issued the scholarship program for paid external internships for university students with disabilities, which is co-funded by the European Social Fund.

⁴⁵ Aula Magna. La CRUE se compromete a que ningún estudiante con diversidad quede fuera del sistema por la pandemia. Available at: <https://www.aulamagna.com.es/la-crue-se-compromete-a-que-ningun-estudiante-con-diversidad-queda-fuera-del-sistema-por-la-pandemia/>

3.2 Implementing strategies for greater Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Spanish University System

The experience of Spanish Universities demonstrates that inclusion and developing an inclusive higher education environment must be institutional values that require inclusive leadership at all levels as they affect all aspects of the institution. Taking a thorough evaluation of the existing challenges for inclusion as a starting point, the strategic approach was then to develop specific programmes and initiatives that would support and help universities to overcome them. The next sections describe two programmes which are considered of particular relevance in this regard.

3.2.1 Improving student services for students with specific support needs

The *Guía de buenas prácticas para la transición, el acceso y la acogida del alumnado con necesidad específica de apoyo*⁴⁶ is one of the results of the institutional collaboration between Crue Spanish Universities and Fundación ONCE, in close collaboration with Red-SAPDU. The aim of this Guide is to develop actions and improve learning and teaching, as well as student orientation, to reach a majority of young people with disabilities to pursue and complete their university studies. Within this work, Crue Spanish Universities, Fundación ONCE and Red SAPDU propose actions to improve the transition of students with disabilities towards University, and to improve retention throughout their studies.

One of the identified challenges for inclusion in higher education was access, and more precisely the transition between pre-university education and higher education. This Guide contains a proposal to facilitate the change of cycle education of students with disabilities and/or in Special (education) needs (*Necesidades Específicas de Apoyo Educativo*, from NEAE) come from post-compulsory secondary education and access studies college students.

⁴⁶ Red SAPDU (2020) *Guía de buenas prácticas para la transición, el acceso y la acogida del alumnado con necesidad específica de apoyo*. Available at: https://www.crue.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/GUI%CC%81A-SAPDU_DIGITAL.pdf

The Guide has a practical nature and aims to serve as a tool to guide departments, support teams specific services, information services and university orientation services (from now on SIOU), access and admission services, commissions organisers of university entrance exams, associations and entities, families, students, technical staff of support services and even teachers at universities. The Guide is conceived as a live document that must be updated periodically through a continuous work process from the SAPDU Network in order to analyse the specific problems, needs, practices and experiences of Spanish universities.

‘Education is the most powerful weapon of social transformation, it minimises inequalities and contributes to personal and social development. One of the important challenges that people with disabilities have had has been the difficulty in accessing and continuing within the higher educational system, which has increased the negative effects of disability.

This Guide developed by Crue, Fundación ONCE and Red SAPDU proposes actions that begin in the last years of Secondary Education, so it necessarily requires collaboration between different administrations and, within them, different units. Specifically, at our University, the Access Service and the Functional Diversity Attention Unit, which both belong to the Vice Rectorate for Students, Equality and Inclusion, participate actively.’

Interview with María Isabel Ramírez Álvarez, Vice Rector for Student Affairs and Rector’s Delegate for Gender Equality at the Universidad de Almería. Coordinator of RedSAPDU

This Guide proposes the ‘*Modelo de Transición, Acceso y Acogida*’ (TAA) (i.e. transition, access and reception model) for the improvement of the inclusion of NEAE students at universities intending to facilitate adequate incorporation into higher education is a reference document that is followed by all universities. The model described therein identifies three key stages that are fundamental for an adequate process: Transition to university; Access, and Reception protocol. Each university support service should define specific actions and develop its protocol based on this model. Universities develop programs to accompany students from the entrance exams, during and after their completion, to ensure the effectiveness of the entire process.

3.2.2 Advancing institutional strategies in training curricula of university studies: Curricular Training in Design for All

Within the institutional collaboration established between Crue Spanish Universities and Fundación ONCE, another successful initiative has been the project *Formación Curricular en*

*Diseño para Todas las Personas*⁴⁷ (Curricular Training in Design for All). In the context of building an inclusive environment, this initiative that arose from the presentation of the *Libro Blanco del Diseño para todos en la Universidad* (White Book of Design for All at University)⁴⁸ prepared by the coordinator of the initiative, with the collaboration of the Fundación ONCE and the *Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales* (Institute for Seniors and Social Services) (Spanish acronym IMSERSO). This White Book was the starting point for the inclusion of the basic concepts of *Design for All* (D4ALL) and *Universal Accessibility* in the training curricula of university studies and considered the incorporation of Design for All in university curricula. The project started with studies related to Information and Communications Technologies, Architecture, Design or Telecommunications, Business Administration and Management, Law, Medicine, Education, Psychology and Social Work. The project establishes its central goal by introducing the basic

'Spanish universities have implemented many adaptations for the inclusion and orientation of the student body since 2016 that have allowed the universities to begin to receive students with diverse educational needs. This is also thanks to the development of educational policies in the stages prior to university education.

The Red SAPDU and the coordination work of Crue have been essential to start a process of sharing good practices and experiences, as well as working as a network, so that the needs of the student body are better identified together. With the support of the guides developed by Red SAPDU and Crue, at the universities' governing bodies, we can make decisions that must be taken to improve inclusion.

Interview with Ángela Alcalá Arellano, Vice Rector for Student Affairs at the Universidad de Zaragoza and Executive Secretary of Crue's Sectorial Commission for Student Affairs.

concepts of Design for All and Universal Accessibility into the curricula.

In the development of this project, working groups made up of teachers from different Spanish universities envisioned ways to adapt these curricula, following criteria that took into account both the learning and the skills that the students would need to acquire in order to exercise each specific profession about persons with disabilities, their rights, their needs, how to resolve them, how to research this subject, etc.

The goal is to train professionals who consider the impact of disability on society, respect the

⁴⁷ *Fundación Curricular en Diseño para Todas las Personas* (Curricular Training in Design for All) (*Diseño para Todas las Personas en la Universidad* (D4ALL) Project). Available at: <https://www.crue.org/publicacion/formacion-curricular-en-diseno-para-todas-las-personas/>

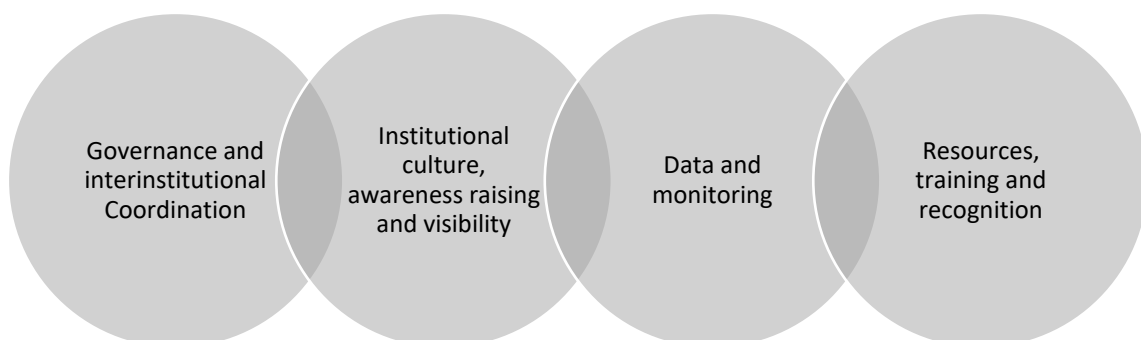
⁴⁸ Libro blanco del diseño para todos en la universidad. Available at: <https://biblioteca.fundaciononce.es/publicaciones/colecciones-propias/coleccion-accesibilidad/libro-blanco-del-diseno-para-todos-en-la>

rights of the people who make up this social group and apply their knowledge to design and offer services that include them. In this way, we can ‘ensure that these concepts will form part of all projects about human activity in the future, thus complying with the Resolution of the Council of Europe in this matter.’⁴⁹.

The general idea is that all degree courses that have anything to do with human beings, the environment and the design of the physical and virtual environment should include, to a greater or lesser degree, knowledge on Design for All and Universal Accessibility in their study programmes. The method should bring visibility to concepts that are currently diluted, in addition to boosting research and the training of specialists who will guarantee equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

3.2.3 Main challenges for the implementation of institutional strategies

The experience of university leaders in the implementation of these institutional strategies for furthering equity, diversity and inclusion in Spanish universities points to important challenges that should be considered for the strategy to be effective:



1. **Governance and interinstitutional coordination.** The experience of Spanish universities shows that establishing interinstitutional coordination and collaboration at a national level has been key for advancing in the development of an overall more inclusive HE system. In turn, this interinstitutional coordination and collaboration between universities at a national level has supported the introduction of specific measures at the level of individual institutions.
2. **Data and monitoring.** It is fundamental to collect data that will enable a comprehensive analysis of the situation, of the situation of different offices and units that are dedicated to

⁴⁹ Idem.

inclusion, equity, and diversity within institutions. This analysis is key to advance and strengthen the implementation of strategies at an institutional level.

3. **Resources, training, and recognition.** In the implementation of transformative strategies at an institutional level, it is fundamental to dedicate sufficient resources to advance the different changes and sustain them in time. These resources would also allow for implementing measures to train university staff, including academic staff, and could imply an institutional recognition of their activities.

2. **Institutional culture, awareness raising and visibility.** Awareness-raising initiatives, that include information sessions and diverse actions of visibility, are fundamental for the overall transformation of the institutional culture, at all levels, that takes time to come about and has proven key to support the implementation of the strategic transformation.

More specifically, in terms of leadership skills, the Spanish experience demonstrates that the following are fundamental leadership qualities for advancing institution-wide transformative strategies for equity and inclusion:

- **Personal experience of leaders with disabilities.** This personal experience has proved to be an important aspect to consider, be it because leaders have a disability themselves, or because they have personal experience with family or friends with disabilities. This affects the awareness of leaders of the need of addressing challenges of inclusion and the way in which these initiatives and practices are prioritized within the institutional strategy and transformation.
- **Empathy.** This aspect of a leader is also critical to understanding leadership in institutional transformation towards more inclusive and equitable higher education. Empathic leaders have the capacity of putting themselves in the place of others and facilitates the development of an ideological conviction and motivation. Empathic leadership teams have built a strategic conviction that has made the strategic implementation possible.
- **Collaboration and openness.** The Spanish case is an example of joint and collaborative work, where institutions have taken the lead in implementing transformational strategies for more equitable and inclusive activities. These individual institutions have been able to move other institutions, leading them to adapting their strategies too.

The above actions have made it possible to advance towards a more inclusive higher education system in Spain. However, until now, these institutional transformations have been highly dependent on the personal leaders' experience or with their empathy. Institutional transformation in equity and diversity is not a linear process. Some institutions make important changes during

some periods of time but might stagnate or involute. Furthermore, there are multiple challenges and changing conditions that keep defining new needs in the social environment that must be addressed. A recent example of this is the increasing need to address mental health at universities. Diversity is ever-changing and each society and each moment in time has its own social challenges. Changes frequently come faster than what leaders and leadership teams need to adapt to them.

All institutional transformations highly depend on the individual leaders and the relation they have had with disability. I would like to highlight the example of Manuel López, President of Crue (2013-2015) and Rector of the University of Zaragoza (2008-2016). He used to explain first-hand how he had always been aware that, because of his disability, he had to develop his intellectual career.

Interview with Isabel Martínez Lozano, Director of Programs with Universities and Promotion of Young Talent ONCE Foundation

Although the work done during the last ten years has moved Spanish universities in the same direction, changes in leadership teams have determined the pace at which change occurred. This is why developing leadership skills and the need for leadership training is considered fundamental for advancing further in their implementation. It would be very important for institutions and institutional leaders to develop their leadership skills and to develop the necessary tools to strengthen them to allow universities to be able to address new challenges, which

are increasingly global and with a higher social impact.

In the Spanish context, some challenges still endure and are being addressed, to date, by all collaborating institutions. On one hand, inclusion of Academic Staff with disabilities is a dimension in which universities are working on, with the support of Crue and of Fundación ONCE. This process has been a long one and, currently, collaborative initiatives look into the best possible formulae in order to meet the legal requirements and improving the staffing processes of Academic Staff with disabilities in universities.

In order to further advance in the overall improvement of inclusive and equitable practices within the Spanish university system and, possibly, beyond, Fundación ONCE is currently collaborating with the Spanish National Accreditation Agency ANECA on a *Sello de Calidad de Inclusión* (quality inclusion seal) that, through a variety of indicators, will enter its pilot phase this year with three Spanish universities. As of 2024, this Inclusion Quality Seal by ANECA will be offered to any university that wishes to stand out and be recognized internationally.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

One lesson learned from the cases presented in this Workbook is that to address the institutional transformative processes presented, as well as with the multiple challenges that they pose, it is not only important to redirect and readjust the purpose of higher education institutions, but also the role played by the leadership teams. Plans, actions and strategies are **implemented by leaders and teams**, thus, new challenges or priorities for institutions, requires **transforming** the mental models of leadership, teachers and administration and service personnel. Providing professionals with the necessary skills is required to ensure that they can develop an integrated strategy, make informed decisions, and carry out responsible actions, to become agents of change in their schools, communities and societies. To carry out this agenda for change and transformation, university management teams need both **new capacities** and knowledge as well as **new leadership**. They also must know what the main challenges are for our society and what answers are being given both in the same sector and in other sectors.

Leadership capacities

- ✓ **PROMOTE** the change agenda, prioritizing sustainability and long-term results both in strategy and day-to-day.
- ✓ **SENSITIZE** the community about environmental and social challenges.
- ✓ **DEVELOP** new capacities to face the necessary transformation.
- ✓ **FACILITATE** highly participatory processes in the design of the new university. The change that our educational communities must assume is only possible with their involvement.
- ✓ **PROVIDE** the necessary resources for the execution and monitoring of the transformation plans.
- ✓ **ACT** with coherence. Be specimens carrying out responsible actions.
- ✓ **SHARE** the progress in the transformation process with the different interested groups, celebrating the successes and sharing the challenges.

New Leadership style

- ✓ **SENSITIVE**, because it accompanies the educational community in the transformation process;
- ✓ **COLLABORATIVE**, because it establishes alliances with other agents to be able to carry out systemic changes;
- ✓ **HEROIC**, because it has the courage to question the status quo;
- ✓ with **OUTLOOK**, because its perspective considers the impact of its decisions on future generations.

Another lesson learned from the cases exposed in this Workbook is that **collaborative** work and **networking** are key strategies to achieve institutions and organisations progress and evolution. When affording **disruptive** and **systemic transformations** adding the efforts, diversity and special features from all social agents is the only way to ensure success. Universities, NGOs and governmental institutions have to agree a common objective and work together to reach it. This collaborative strategy has to **respect the singularity** of each institution and has to complement its own strategy. Working for obtaining a **better society lead by the most prepared professionals and also best citizens** is the common objective, but each society agents has to find its own motivation driver.

Finally, the driving force that universities can use in the acceleration of achievements related to **Sustainable Development Objectives** and their **Social Responsibility** is inseparably attached to the constant dissemination of leaders with systemic thinking and regenerative purpose. It is the responsibility of governing bodies to contribute to boost the efficient use of resources ensuring economic growth without leaving no person behind and protecting the biodiverse and clean planet. It is not enough either to promote measures to mitigate or reduce environmental damage. The transforming purpose of universities for the coming decades will be associated with supporting, restoring and sustaining life, giving back to the environment more than what has been extracted from it, contributing with a positive net **impact** in all professional and research activities that we promote and provide in an integrated way of a measurable economic, social and ecological value.

ANNEX

WORKBOOK 1:

Leading change in diversity and cross-cutting challenges

The following QR links to an interview in video format where Professor Oscar Mateos from Ramon Llull University shares with us the main challenges and achievements that Catalan universities have faced in leading their common Action Plan for the 2030 Agenda.

This workbook addresses the 2030 Agenda and the way in which the Spanish university system has incorporated it as part of its strategy. And more specifically, in this video you can discover more about the case of the Catalan universities as an example of how universities have worked in a network to create an action strategy around the SDGs to meet the milestones set out in the 2030 Agenda.



