



1. Policy/practice

* Title	Good practices in Modular Training in Spain_FGUVA experience	
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* Keywords (These should also refer to themes relevant to other objectives groups where appropriate)	Key (professional) competencies, modular education, modularity approach, e-learning, Capability Advisor.	
* Duration of policy/initiative	Date of beginning:	Date of end:
* Outline, Summary (max. 500 characters)		
<p>One of the most important tasks in the contemporary professional training system is the coordination of education and development policies according to mobility and hiring needs. Emphasis in goals and changes should be laid not only in university degrees but also in training for employment. The Spanish Ministries of Education and Labour have both underscored the importance of bringing professional training closer to the country's economy and, therefore, to its labour market. This is bound to have an impact on the Spanish education system or, more specifically, on the goals, contents, methods, and organisation of the Spanish academic system.</p> <p>The orientation of education to professional skill development is fundamental to the adjustment of training to the real labour market needs. In this sense, modularity is crucial to the design of adequate training programmes.</p>		

2. Conceptual framework

<p>* Modular training / Professional competencies and University Studies</p> <p>- Modular Training</p> <p>Modular Training can be defined as “a system in which curriculum contents are divided into individual units or learning modules.”² According to this definition, modules –or modular units– can be combined in the design of training programmes meeting specific trade, work or task needs. Given modules’ flexibility and transferability, modular training allows for ongoing curriculum adaptation, rendering curricula fit to serve the needs and follow the evolution of companies.</p> <p>- Professional Competencies and University Studies</p> <p>Traditionally, in the Spanish labour market, holding a university degree was the only requirement to start out on a professional career. The better graduates’ academic records were, the more chances they had of finding a good job where they could advance their career. Later on, this concept that only basic training was necessary to enter the labour market became obsolete, and the idea emerged that degree-supplementary training –university expert or specialisation courses– made the difference.</p> <p>Nowadays, focusing on academic training only is out of the question. Therefore, some issues that used to be considered important have somehow lost their significance, whereas others which had been overlooked before are now highly valued as more accurate predictors of professional success, or at least they are being paid attention to, especially when companies’ opinions on requirements to be fulfilled by university graduates are heard. To these apparently minor aspects</p>
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¹ Please note that it is important to provide the details of an individual who may be contacted by the consultants should they require further information.

² This definition is Joaquim Wagner’s. Wagner is an expert in the application of the modular approach to professional skill development, a field in which he conducted research for the International Labour Organisation. His conclusions can be read in *Módulo para la Calificación del Empleo como herramienta para la Formación Modular basada en la Competencia Laboral* [Module for Employment Qualification as a Tool for Professional Skill-Based Modular Training].



we are referring to when we speak of *professional skills and competencies*, which can be defined as “*the skills required in the labour market that tend not to be systematically included in university curricula.*”³

Within this general framework, it is useful to emphasise the so-called *key competencies*, i.e. those that are “*(...) essential to effective participation in the labour market and work organisation, focusing on the ability to apply integrated knowledge and skills. Key competencies are **general** rather than pertaining to specific jobs or trade. This means that they are not only crucial to effective insertion in the labour market but also fundamental to participation in adult life.*”⁴

Applying the modularity approach to the development of this kind of skills is the greatest challenge that formal and non-formal education systems have had to face over the past few years.

Advantages of Modularity in Education

1. Efficiency
2. Flexibility
3. Accuracy
4. Adequacy to be applied to ongoing education and training
5. Conveniences for heterogeneous groups
6. Transferability

³ Carlos J. van-der Hofstadt Román and José María Gómez Gras (2006), *Competencias y habilidades profesionales para universitarios* [Professional Skills and Competencies for University Students], Ed. Díaz de Santos (ISBN 84-7978-796-1).

⁴ Joaquim Wagner in his research for the ILO.



3. Applying the Modularity Approach to Key Competency Training: The case of the Valladolid University General Foundation

* Key Competencies

The Valladolid University General Foundation's experience in professional skill development began in 2003. In the context of a project financed by the Leonardo da Vinci European Programme⁵, the Foundation participated in a survey reaching over 500 companies in several European countries (107 were based in Spain), aimed at gaining knowledge on what the most sought-after general professional competencies⁶ were when hiring university graduates.

One of this survey's results was a ranking of the ten general or horizontal skills preferred by companies. This is the list:

- **Self-development:** Ability to analyse one's own strong points in the other competencies and detect areas for improvement; to draw up a set of long-term work and personal aims, and to plan a series of concrete measures for attaining them.
- **Verbal and written communication:** Ability to transmit messages clearly and transparently to others, and to listen non-judgementally to what others have to say.
- **Client awareness and knowledge of their needs:** An attitude that is constantly focused on client satisfaction.
- **Ability to negotiate and to influence people:** Ability to use negotiation as a potent tool for preventing and solving conflicts, and to do so with sound knowledge of negotiating techniques.
- **Leadership:** Pinpointing patterns and attitudes of leadership, and training oneself to apply them consciously.
- **Adaptability to change:** Ability to foresee, analyse and adapt to changes and to plan their implementation.
- **Skill at making contacts and establishing relationships:** Ability to forge social relationships in all spheres of an enterprise, the medium-term or long-term aim being to network.
- **Creative thinking and problem solving:** Skill at analysing problem situations, finding innovative solutions and assessing the possible consequences of proposals.
- **Teamwork:** Being able to contribute to attaining team objectives and benchmarks without losing one's own innovative edge; determining what added value each member of the team can bring because of his or her strong points; and performing in synergy.
- **Time management:** Ability to find the weaknesses in one's own use of time and to organize one's work efficiently, with priorities correctly matched to the importance of each matter.

Based on these ten skills, identified as key competencies for university graduates' effective professional development, another Da Vinci-financed European project was carried out.⁷ This project set itself the goal of designing the necessary training materials for the development of those professional skills that employers considered to be key competencies through a modularity-based training programme.

* Modular curriculum contents

The modular curriculum for key skill development designed by the Valladolid University General Foundation in the framework of FORTIUS project was based on the definition of individual, fully *interchangeable* units, allowing students to plan their own training depending on their specific needs and/ or weaknesses.

The modules' self-sufficient contents result in personally designed skill development plans in which there is a one-to-one correspondence between the modules and the competencies identified as *key* in the previous study.

Training module contents:

1. Verbal and written communication:

Competency in written and verbal communication skills means you are able to:

- Select **appropriate** and **effective methods** of communication.
- Ascertain **appropriate tone** and **level of language** in specific situations.
- Present information through verbal or written means, so that the **others can understand**.

⁵ European Framework for Work Experience (EFWE). www.efwe.org.

⁶ *General or horizontal competencies* are those personal skills required for an adequate performance in the work environment, without their being related to any specific training areas or business sectors. Their general or transversal nature gives rise to their association with the concept of *key competencies* defined above. Thus, *key competencies* and *horizontal skills* can be said to be synonymous here.

⁷ Fortius project. www.leonardofortius.eu



	<p>-Actively listen and pay attention to people who communicate information, asking pertinent questions for clarification.</p>
2. Customer awareness:	<p>Being 'customer aware' means you are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Build effective relationships with customers. -Offer reliable and high standard services to customers. -Assist customers in finding the appropriate way for satisfying their needs. -Search for feedback from customers in order to improve the quality of your own services.
3. Influencing and negotiating:	<p>Success in influencing and negotiating means you are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recognise how to reach a win/win outcome. -Facilitate the discussion and use the differences of opinion for finding the most convenient solution. -Respect diversity of people and differences of opinion. -Focus on expected outcomes allowing the other party to maintain dignity. -Control the conflict during the discussions.
4. Leadership:	<p>HAVING LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL MEANS YOU ARE ABLE TO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recognise the difference between leadership and management. -Know when and how to apply a particular leadership style -Recognise your own preferred leadership style. -Set high standards for oneself and exhibit a positive outlook and progressive attitude i.e. lead by example. -Have personal integrity, be open, honest and trustworthy.
5. Managing changing:	<p>Managing change means you are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Be open and respond constructively to change. -Support and accept new plans and processes. -Accept change and seek opportunity for personal and career development. -Find or develop new solutions to improve on current strategies. -Cope with uncertainty whilst preserving the confidence and enthusiasm for achieving goals.
6. Networking:	<p>Effective 'networking' means you are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Proactively seek and identify opportunities to make reciprocal links with others. -Recognise how you can develop relationships with others through conversation, by adding value through the interesting and relevant knowledge you impart. -Actively engage in conversation with an awareness of the connections you can make. -Draw on a list of contacts outside your immediate group for help and information.
7. Problem Solving:	<p>To demonstrate your ability to solve problems and think creatively you should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Analyse a situation and assess its complexity. -Determine the causes and search for solutions. -Identify and assess the consequences of each solution. -Apply effective solutions with specific goals in mind.
8. Self-Development:	<p>Managing your self-development means you are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Assess your own performance against the requirements of your current/future job through continuously seeking feedback from colleagues and/or customers. -Identify a personal learning style to direct the development of your skills. -Develop a self-development plan and apply it. -Use various methods to investigate your interests in order to develop or improve your knowledge and skills. -Identify and take opportunities for self development.
9. Team working:	<p>Being an effective team worker means you are able to ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Work and contribute to achieve a set of team aims and objectives. -Recognise how the skills and strengths of others contribute towards an effective team.



- Demonstrate **initiative and contribute** to achieve **results**.
- Show readiness to **help the other members** of the team in **finding solutions and achieving outcomes**.
- Accept and give **feedback** in a constructive and sensitive way.
- Understand the **role of mistakes and conflict** in promoting team development.

10. Time management:

Managing your time effectively means you are able to:

- Estimate realistically the necessary **time for completing tasks** in relation to their complexity.
- Prioritise your tasks** dependent on their importance, urgency and/or expected outcomes.
- Organise your own work to **meet deadlines**.
- Delegate responsibilities** to appropriate people to help you achieve simultaneous deadlines.

*** One Step Ahead: Applying the New Technologies to Modular Training for Skill Development**

Modularity-based professional skill development would lead to the design of customised training depending on students' needs through the use of new technologies.

The following step in the Valladolid University General Foundation's application of the modular approach to professional skill training programmes was a new European project, financed by the eLearning initiative of the European Commission.⁸

In the context of the PLATO project, a complete online training and accreditation system was developed for competencies and skills acquired by students doing business internships in companies abroad. To this end, an open-source Learning Management System is included which, based on students' self-assessment of their skills, allows them to manage their own learning by defining their own learning paths. The self-assessment test that makes the starting point of the training design is done using *Capability Advisor*,⁹ developed by ISCN¹⁰-Austria for previous European projects.

The use of *Capability Advisor* has many advantages for students, as it goes beyond a conventional distance learning platform in that it gives them the possibility of managing their own learning paths based on their initial assessment of skills or knowledge.

Applying the modular approach to learning contents development is the key to this type of experiences in a time when for young people academic training and subject related expertise on its own is not enough, if they are to compete against others on a competitive labour market. Further key competencies or work-related skills like team working, problem solving, customer awareness, communication skills, and others are increasingly required too; and today it is more important than ever to be able to use these key competencies to support an individual's specialised knowledge.

*** Conclusion: Good Practices in Modular Training in Spain**

⁸ PLATO project (<http://deis.cit.ie/plato/>).

⁹ The *Capability Advisor* is an integrated system based on modularity for the development of training contents and using a distance learning platform in which students choose their own learning paths after their initial self-assessment of their skill levels.

¹⁰ www.iscn.com



The growing pace of economic and technological changes over the past decade has had a direct impact on Spain's economy, resulting in a gap between the professional degrees granted in the Spanish Professional Training System and the labour market's needs. The transformation in work contents and in required skills is conditioned by a trend among companies and organisations to enhance market competitiveness. Companies are now focusing on the incorporation of new technologies and products, the development of new ways of work organisation and corporate management, and the desire to change workers' ideas and ambitions. Nowadays, all employees should be flexible, creative, highly motivated to achieve organisational goals, willing to take in innovation, full of energy, capable of working in teams, and so on, so that their traits contribute to the company's productivity and result in competitive advantages for it. This involves a basic change in attitude with regard to employment policy and human resource management, and the professional skills acquired in formal education and in everyday life are a key factor in this process.

One of the most important tasks in the contemporary professional training system is the coordination of education and development policies according to mobility and hiring needs. Emphasis in goals and changes should be laid not only in university degrees but also in training for employment. The Spanish Ministries of Education and Labour have both underscored the importance of bringing professional training closer to the country's economy and, therefore, to its labour market. This is bound to have an impact on the Spanish education system or, more specifically, on the goals, contents, methods, and organisation of the Spanish academic system.

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*** Scope or level: national, regional, local**

Transnational :

EFWE: Germany, Spain, Finland, Romania, Belgium, United Kingdom

FORTIUS: Spain, Hungary, Italy, Romania

PLATO: Ireland, Spain, Austria, Hungary