

## **UNIVERSITY-COMPANY RELATIONSHIPS: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CEPESA CHAIR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HUELVA**

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### **Abstract**

Institutions of higher education and company organisations need to make clearer and more explicit the mechanisms for implementing efficient University-company relationships; the general objectives of such relationships are, on the one hand, to facilitate the transfer to the productive part of the economy of the knowledge generated in the universities, and, on the other, to facilitate feed-back to the universities of companies' needs for research and for well-educated and trained personnel, so that the universities can adapt to these needs.

This paper describes the experience of the Cepsa Chair/Professorship of the University of Huelva, which, in the opinion of both parties, has given good results; it focuses on the achievements and projects undertaken in its principal lines of action: the development of professional competences, with pioneering initiatives that are opening novel approaches in the regional and national context.

**KEY WORDS:** University-company relationships, external chairs, development of professional competences

### **INTRODUCTION**

The interrelations between universities and companies certainly take many forms, with the general aim being to make the connections between these two "worlds" ever more fluid and fruitful for both. Progressively many universities are incorporating a new facet to their mission: that of contributing to economic development, whether local, national or global, by the generation and transfer of knowledge to various productive parts of the economy. For this particular mission, efficacious mechanisms are needed, so as to serve as a bridge between the capacities and interests of the two parties. Only by working together, in a concerted, coordinated way, will it be possible to generate the intended synergies.

In the case of Andalusia (the Southern region of Spain), there is awareness of this need for a concerted approach, which is extremely important for advancing the development of the region; this awareness has resulted in the creation of instruments intended to give a powerful impetus to such relationships, including the "Plan de Innovación y Modernización de Andalucía" (Plan for Innovation and Modernisation in Andalusia), the "Corporación Tecnológica de Andalucía" (Technological Corporation of Andalusia), and the new model for the financing of the universities of the region (2007-2011).

In this context, we shall focus on the arrangements known as "external chairs or professorships"; these inter-organisational links have long been customary in other university cultures but have been set up only relatively recently in the universities of Spain and Andalusia, at least in significant numbers. In particular, we shall examine the experience of the Chair in the University of Huelva (UHU) sponsored by the Compañía Española de Petróleos, S.A. (CEPSA, Spanish Oil Company). It is an example considered to be successful by both parties, and has even merited recognition by the "Consejo Social" (Social Affairs

Board) of the University of Huelva which, in the light of its accomplishments over the years, has been proposed as an exponent of "best practice" in respect of collaboration between a company (as a representative of society in general) and the University.

### **THE CEPESA CHAIR**

The CEPESA Chair was set up in October 2004, in an agreement between the University of Huelva and CEPESA, which had previously, since 1997, collaborated through annually negotiated agreements. Since that time the Chair has been held by the author of this paper.

One of the first actions was to formulate the statement of a corporate identity for the Chair, specifying its mission, vision and values.

#### **OUR MISSION: WHAT WE ARE**

The purpose of the CEPESA Chair is to serve as an efficacious instrument for giving practical expression to the collaboration between CEPESA and the University of Huelva.

In this framework, the mission of the CEPESA Professor is to form a bridge between the two institutions, and establish links between them through the various activities that may from time to time be agreed.

The CEPESA Chair is not configured as an administrative organ of the University of Huelva, but acts rather like a motor, an instrument to impart a dynamic to the relationships between the parties, or a channel that interconnects the capacities of the company with the aspirations of the members of the university community in Huelva, putting them at the disposal of the company out of a sense of social responsibility. In short, it is a vehicle intended to stimulate University-Company relationships, at the service of society. It is significant that this is the first Chair in the University of Huelva that is linked to a particular company.

#### **OUR VISION: WHAT WE WANT TO BE**

The CEPESA Chair aspires to be recognized as a reference for successful, mutually-productive University-Company relationships in the province of Huelva.

Through its patronage, it will participate actively in the life of the University, and will sponsor activities with a significant impact not only on the University but also on the society of the city and province. Through its open and pro-active initiatives, the CEPESA Chair wishes to become an effective instrument in support of the purposes of the University of Huelva in terms of quality and progress.

#### **VALUES: OUR CODE OF CONDUCT**

- To be sensitive and adaptable rapidly to the needs of the parties involved.
- To be transparent and mutually collaborative in all activities undertaken.
- To observe a code of behaviour based on help, trust and recognition.
- To achieve continuous improvement through participation and teamwork.
- To seek innovation, as the principle underlying our activities.

Currently, the development of professional competences is its principal axis of activity, which is increasingly tending to define the character of the Chair; for this reason, we intend to continue with this line of work below in this paper. However, without prejudice to the above, the relationship between industry and the natural environment also forms one of our principal interests. More information can be obtained at: [http://www.uhu.es/catedra\\_cepsa/](http://www.uhu.es/catedra_cepsa/)

#### **INITIAL VENTURES: THE "10C STUDENT" PROJECT (AWARD AND CLASSROOM).**

The process of adaptation to the European Higher Education Space in which the Universities are engaged creates a great opportunity for young and dynamic institutions like the University of Huelva, which do not have so much inertia and bad habits inherited from the past, and this is recognised in its

Strategic Plan for 2008. In this process of change, the concept of competence is at the core of the entire educational structure, and in the last few years the University of Huelva, in many of its Centres and degree courses (with pilot experiments, training initiatives for the teaching staff, etc.), has been working intensively to respond to this new framework of learning, so that its full participation in the Europe of Knowledge may be achieved.

Furthermore, the efforts made by the institutions of higher education in opening up to society and committing themselves to meeting the needs and expectations of it are undeniable (and equally undeniable is the meagre support that the universities are receiving from society, which is also fair to recognise). As already stated, the universities are beginning to take on a new role as part of their mission: that of agents of local/regional development; this underlines the importance of that connection with society, and in particular with the world of business and commerce, in order to transfer to it the knowledge generated in these institutions.

One of the main ways that such knowledge can be transferred is by the graduates that the universities place on the job market; these young people need a profile that matches as closely as possible the requirements of employers, private and public.

In this direction, the University of Huelva has committed itself to strengthening the employability of those who leave it with their respective qualifications; it tries to ensure that they develop not only the specific competences corresponding to their professional context, but also a series of transversal or generic competences that the job market demands: leadership, team work, management of change, business culture, identification of problems, creativity, project management, communication, etc. Currently the area of professional competences is applied widely in personnel management; it is a key concept in the occupational field, and is one of the units of measurement used in human resources processes.

For these reasons, in 2004, the CEPESA Chair was instrumental in initiating the "10C Student" project, and now supports and sponsors the management of the project by the Services of the UHU. The prefix "10C" is intended to encapsulate an underlying message aimed at the entire university community, but in particular to its students. The message is that the students will be more employable if, in addition to a good academic mark, they are able to acquire those transversal competences mentioned above, over the course of their academic studies. In other words, what the project seeks is an integral training (indicated by the "10") the object of which is for them to develop this series of significant competences (hence the "C").

This project highlights and exploits the broad range of services offered by the UHU, as the facilitator of such integral training and as the provider, in a complementary way, of training in particular competences that are valued by employers. The goal is to educate students who are technically well-trained in their chosen professional context, but who can also function in one or more foreign languages, who are fully computer-literate, who have gained experience in university centres of other countries (and are thus aware of the implications of job-mobility), who have practical experience of work in relevant companies, who are committed to their organisation and to society, with well-developed social and interpersonal skills, and a creative, entrepreneurial outlook.

In April 2006 this initiative was presented in the capital of Spain at a forum for senior managers of universities, after having been proposed as an example of good practice in university management. That same year the project expanded with the incorporation of the "10C Student Classroom", to complement the training in this field. This more pro-active dimension was thus added to that of the recognition of the students with this 10C profile.

This training, which takes the form of a triennial program for the development of transversal competences, is undertaken with the collaboration of "Dopp Consultores", one of the most reputed human resources consulting companies in the country, to whom the author is grateful for their contributions to the preparation of this paper. In this three year program, one general and one specific module are offered each year; the specific module is divided in three groups of competences: competences for personal effectiveness (PE), for the first year; competences for effectiveness in team work (TE), for the second year; and competences for organizational effectiveness (OE), for the third year. The following table gives the set of 12 specific competences covered in the program.

<b>I.</b>	<b>Leadership (TE)</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Team work (TE)</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Management of change (TE)</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Ethics</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Basic business culture (OE)</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Identification of problems (PE)</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Creativity (PE)</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>Project management (TE)</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>Purchasing and selling processes (OE)</b>
<b>X.</b>	<b>Learning and personal development (PE)</b>
<b>XI.</b>	<b>Quality (OE)</b>
<b>XII.</b>	<b>Communication (TE)</b>

For a medium-sized institution like the University of Huelva, finding its place in the regional and national context is critical for its development. Configuring its own well-defined identity, which is internally and externally recognized, is a process that requires time and correct strategic decisions in the areas of university governance, accompanied by conviction and perseverance. All these factors are beginning to open niches in which the University of Huelva can position itself with some strength, in addition to those where it may already have a foothold: the field of the development of professional competences is perhaps one of them. The interested reader can find more details at: <http://www.uhu.es/alumno10C/>

Each year, more than 200 students are now attending the Project's "Classroom", and, in the four annual student intakes of the 10C Student Project over the period 2005-2008, 55 students have been awarded prizes. This prize consists, essentially, in an individual diagnosis of their profile of competences and in an *ad-hoc out-door* or experiential training course aimed at reinforcing their transversal competences; the success of this has planted the seed of another project, already almost reality, which is described further below.

### **A NEW IMPULSE: THE CENTRE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCES**

What has been described so far relates, first, to the prize awarded to the students who best fit the profile sought of an integrally-trained graduate, apart from but not forgetting their academic achievements; and second, to the training in a series of competences (for personal, teamwork and organisational effectiveness) which, for their general desirability, are considered essential for any university graduate today, whatever the disciplines of their formal studies. These are the two procedural aspects of the "10C Student" project.

We should recall that competences are not just the observable behaviours of those persons who reach a high level of performance in their job: they are the patterns of behaviour that are most likely to make us successful, or at least will help us in the execution of our professional responsibilities, because this is what is expected of us. Therefore, what we are stating, through this project, is our firm commitment to the employability of those whom we send out into the world of industry, commerce and the professions, in tune with the requirements of the European Higher Education Space. The University of Huelva has for some time now been moving from theory to practice, from words to actions, and this institutional policy is enabling us to move forward in this respect. The University thus considers it is now in a good position to become a standard of reference (for Andalusia and for Spain) in the training in professional competences, provided it is capable of making a quantitative leap in two aspects: getting a consistent message across to all members of the university community, in the sense of recognising the importance of competences, as a concept that transcends the acquisition of valuable but inevitably limited knowledge in a particular subject or field of learning, and extending even further (towards the utopian goal of universality) the

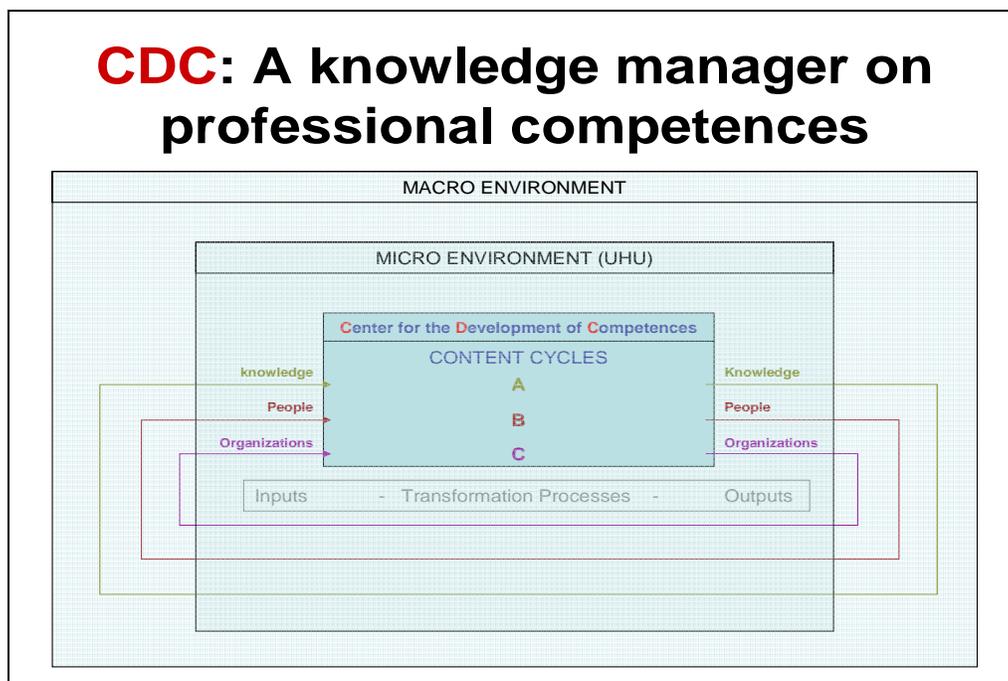
training and development of these competences among all those comprising the university community, but especially the students and teachers. The challenge has been laid down, and it is not insignificant.

To confront it, and under the premise of growing to continue being in the vanguard, the creation of a Centre for the Development of Competences (CDC) has been proposed as the next step to consolidate and strengthen its embryo, the “10C Student” project.

## CONTENTS

To give an idea of the intended scope of this Centre, we will adopt the systems approach, in accordance with which the CDC is conceived of as an open and cybernetic system that interacts with and obtains feedback from its environment, on the micro scale of the University of Huelva itself, of which it forms part, and on the macro scale of society in general. Thus, we will describe its *inputs*, its *outputs* and the *processes* that would take place in the CDC.

In terms of content, a Centre of this nature could cover *three phases or cycles*, which we have designated *A, B and C*, as can be appreciated in the following figure:



Cycle A is the phase that will be carried out with explicit *knowledge* as the “raw material”, through two main processes: one of accumulation, for the creation of a stock of knowledge in the CDC, and the other of creation, for the generation of new knowledge on the topic of professional competences through research. The following table summarises the elements:

Inputs	Transformation (processes)	Outputs
- Internal knowledge (from the UHU).  - External knowledge (from other universities, etc.).	A1. Accumulation, compilation, classification, combination, ...	Library (books, journals, other documents). Documents translated from other languages. Inventories of competences. Own scientific journal. Circulated bulletins, newsletters, etc.
	A2. Generation of knowledge (by research).	Methodologies (of development, of assessment). Applications for the self-assessment of competences. Didactic material for training courses, in various formats (digital, video, etc.). Inventories of competences for particular professional areas and jobs. Scientific publications.

Cycle B is the phase that takes place with those *persons* who attend the CDC to acquire particular competences, the trainees. The process of transformation thus consists of the development in these individuals (both internal and, eventually, external to the UHU) of the professional competences sought and valued by them, whether related to cognitive aspects, to training in skills or to the development of particular attitudes.

Inputs	Transformation (processes)	Outputs
Persons (from within the UHU) who need and want to develop certain competences.	B1. Education/training activities aimed at the wider university community: -Students (B11). -Teaching staff (B12). -Administrative staff (B13).	Persons (from within the UHU) with new professional competences.
Persons (from outside the UHU) who need and want to develop certain competences.	B2. Education/training activities open to sectors of society in general.	Persons (from outside the UHU) with new professional competences.

In respect of Cycle C, it is intended that this will be undertaken with *organisations* rather than with individuals; it will include the University of Huelva itself, and will comprise specific studies and consultancy assignments, as summarised the chart that follows:

Inputs	Transformation (processes)	Outputs
UHU.	C1. Studies.	Analysis of processes and organisational structures. Design of systems for the management of persons based on competences.
Other organisations.	C2. Consultancy work. *Other Universities (C21). *Other types of organisation (C22).	

One final aspect to be stressed is the importance of cycle A activities as support for the other two (B and C), which will apply the knowledge accumulated, externally and internally, as a productive resource.

## MISSION: ITS REASON FOR EXISTING

The principal mission of the CDC would be to complement the actions undertaken in the Faculties and Schools of the UHU to orientate their degree and diploma courses towards the development of professional competences with the object, within the framework of the European Higher Education Space, to improve the prospects of their graduates for insertion in the labour market. This complementarity would be derived, particularly, from the support given by the CDC to the development of transversal (common or generic) competences, to supplement the specific competences needed in each professional environment or subject area.

This mission will be implemented through an annual program of activities to meet the training and research needs that are currently identified in this field of professional competences. At the same time, it is important to underline that this initiative will serve to bring together the dispersed efforts (in respect of study, research and training) that are being made throughout the organisation, and will encompass them in a global project, thus generating synergies from a more collective and interdisciplinary approach.

In general terms, the CDC could be defined as a *centre for actively managing knowledge on the subject of professional competences*, in particular those of transversal character.

## VISION: SCOPE OF THE CDC

The establishment of the Centre has to be approached as a development path in which more and more processes of transformation, as described above, will be progressively incorporated. In that sequence of stages, the consolidation of the precedents and the response to the needs of the micro and macro environment will be adapted in a process of evolution that, logically, must be constructed on the basis of human and material resources that should enable growth to occur in a sustainable way.

Specifically, the sequence foreseen will be as follows:

### Start up phase

In this initial stage, the scope of the CDC will be limited to cycle A (processes A1 and A2), together with the maintenance and, if possible, the in-depth consolidation of the "10C Student Classroom", which corresponds to process B11 in the above table. Therefore, its activities will consist essentially of three lines of work: study, research and training:

- Study, corresponding to process A1, is work with the object of equipping the UHU with a comprehensive stock of knowledge on the subject of competences, organised and accessible to the community.

- Research (process A2) will be undertaken by a specially-created interdisciplinary group of researchers in the UHU. Later this work should be expanded to make space for researchers in other institutions, in Spain and in other countries, to participate. This would be an ideal platform for tackling projects of excellence, with more possibilities of success in calls for competitive bids for research funding at the regional, national and European levels.

This research should be orientated to studying the changing requirements of today's dynamic job markets. The Centre would thus act in the form of an Observatory of Professional Competences, which would contribute to the syllabus of the various degree courses offered by the UHU. As such, it could play a role as a forum for debate on this subject, on the strength of its significance for potential insertion in the job market, and as a meeting point or linking device among the organic units of the University associated with this area, such as the Directorate of Orientation (to the student), the Employment Service, the Directorate of Innovation in Teaching, and the Unit for Quality. It might even make use of services like the Theatre Classroom, given that "*drama*" and "*story telling*" are being found very effective as techniques for developing changes in attitudes and certain competences. The Modern Languages Service would also be a valuable resource for strengthening linguistic competences.

- Training for the development of transversal competences, with the goal of involving and helping the maximum possible number of students (process B11). The objective in the medium term is to make this training universal, so that all the graduates leaving the UHU should have had the opportunity of participating and gaining a recognised qualification. Thus, the University would help its students to obtain the CERTICAP-Universia accreditation (for foreign languages command, computer literacy and

interpersonal skills), which the UHU is approved to award (see: <http://www.uhu.es/certicap/>). This training could be extended to the teaching staff, obviously at the request of the various Faculties, Schools or Departments of the UHU.

We would therefore stress the synergies that the Centre can generate, not by replacing but by complementing the services that are already provided, and by bringing together under one roof diverse functions of the university organisation, to achieve better coordination in the interests of the students' complete education. Equally, the establishment of alliances with other universities (in Spain and abroad) that may be keen to work in this same line, with professional organisations, consultants and public administrative bodies, is an essential part of the proposal.

#### Consolidation phase.

Once the activities of the initial phase have been secured, the CDC should be able to commence the next phase of growth and definitive consolidation by fully incorporating the B cycle and starting the other two, B12 and B13. And thinking of the need for the Centre to become self-financing, the B2 process could be incorporated, as a means of generating income through the provision of services of this type to other clients outside the UHU.

#### Phase of definitive configuration.

Taking a long-term view, the Centre could later be in a position also to incorporate the C cycle: first the C1 process, for domestic consumption, and then C2, to support other Universities (C21). The C22 process would be more complex to implement: in the extreme case, it could be done with the direct involvement of professionals in consultancy.

The matrix that appears next illustrates what could be the vector of growth for the Centre in terms of basic product-market combinations.

CYCLES (services/products)	A		B			C			
	A1	A2	B1			B2	C1	C2	
			B11	B12	B13			C21	C22
Internal (UHU)	P1	P1	P1	P2	P2		P3		
External	P1	P1				P2		P3	In alliance

P1: Phase 1. P2: Phase 2. P3: Phase 3.

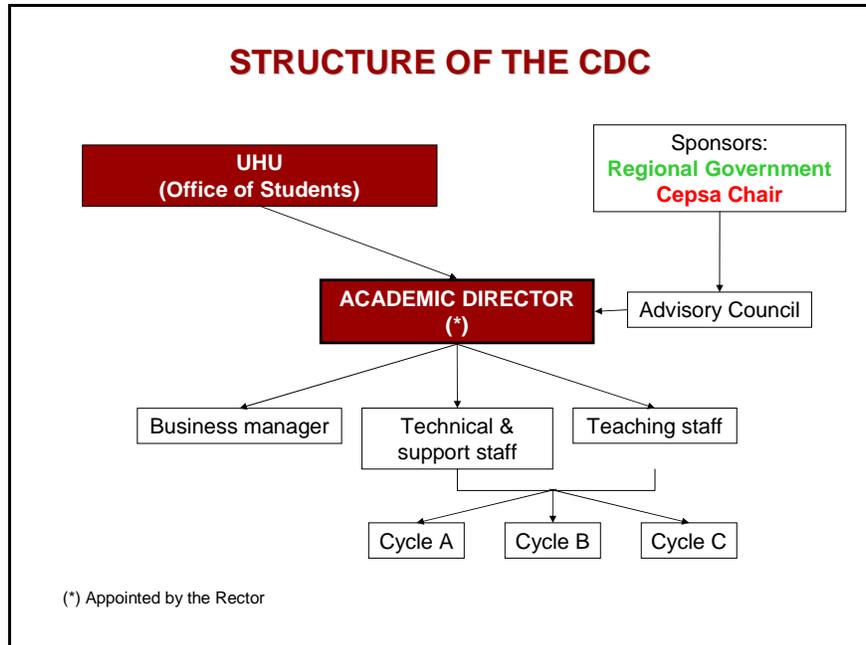
## STRUCTURE

The CDC will operate under the tutelage of the Office of Students of the UHU, with the support of the CEPESA Chair in its capacity as promoter and sponsor of the project, together with the higher education authorities of the regional government (Junta de Andalucía). If the growth of the Centre should give rise, in the future, to the involvement of additional sponsors, by agreement between the parties, a Board of Sponsors would be constituted, enabling all of them to be represented. The two sides would define the general lines on which the Centre would be directed and operated.

The CDC would be led by a director appointed by the Rector. The Management of the Centre should be able to rely for advice on a Council formed by equal numbers of experienced persons from the university and external agents directly associated with and supportive of the Centre's objectives; the total number of Board members should be limited in the interests of operational facility. In this way, the Advisory Council would serve as the connecting mechanism between the University (with its organic management units most directly linked with the mission of the Centre) and society (business organisations, trades unions and professional associations, government, consultants and others).

A Centre of this type by its nature needs a very flexible operational structure, adaptable to the variety of demands that may be made on it. For this reason it will have to make use of the skills of various collaborators (teachers and researchers) who will be required by the Director depending on its needs at various stages of development. Hence in the following diagram, intended to summarise this epigraph, there is reference to an *ad-hoc* staff contingent, mainly from the UHU but not discounting the possibility of including external teaching or research personnel if the circumstances so require. This approach of

working to clear and specific demands or by specific projects is considered the best way to respond to the proposed cycles of contents (A, B and C) already explained more fully, as the future unfolds with all its inevitable unpredictability.



### THE STAR PROJECT OF THE CEPASA CHAIR: ESTABLISHING A TRAINING AREA FOR THE PRACTICE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL COMPETENCES

As has been said, in the new scenarios emerging in university education, educators are attaching increasing importance to professional competences. In today's world, the universities cannot limit themselves to helping their students to acquire knowledge specific to their chosen fields of learning. To help students to survive and prosper in complex and dynamic occupational contexts, and to respond to the needs of society, they need the opportunity to develop and improve their personal capacities, abilities and attitudes, in parallel with the opportunity to acquire an advanced education in particular professional, scientific or cultural disciplines.

In this respect, the University of Huelva is considered one of the most advanced institutions of higher education at the regional and national level, for introducing the concept of professional competences in the field of the university education. Proof of this are the initiatives described above, especially the "10C Student" project and the setting-up of the Centre for the Development of Competences, as an instrument to complement, on a transversal basis, the activities undertaken in its Faculties and Schools.

In future years, this Centre for the Development of Competences will roll out a series of procedures and actions to give members of the UHU community the opportunity to improve in the acquisition of knowledge and the development of their professional competences, and to gain an appropriate recognised qualification for their corresponding achievements. All of these efforts are seeking to align its degree courses more closely with the changing requirements of the job market, and to result in greater success for its graduates in obtaining satisfying, well-remunerated jobs with good prospects for future professional and personal growth.

As a key part of these procedures and actions, and having a high priority, is the creation of the Training Area for the Practice and Development of Competences, in the installations that form part of this University in the Centre for International Studies and Ecological and Environmental Conventions (CIECEM), located in the "Parque Dunar" of Matalascañas, in the municipality of Almonte, set in the extraordinary natural environment of the National Park of Doñana.

It is worth recalling here that *competence* is understood in the wider sense as the combination of knowledge, abilities and attitudes that well-educated professionals need to have in order to optimise their capacity to assume all the responsibilities involved in their respective jobs. Hence the professional competences that trainees will be developing in this Training Area are those of horizontal character, that is, those that do not depend in themselves on the type of technical or specialist content associated with the job. Examples of these are team work, leadership, communication skills, negotiating skills, and motivation.

In order to attain optimum job performance, in accordance with the previous definition, the improvement of competences will require trainees to work simultaneously on three dimensions:

- 1 Knowledge: the professional must learn the particular techniques applicable to an area of work activity (i.e. must acquire the appropriate know-how).

- 2 Skills: The professional must develop effective ways of putting into practice what has been learned in the classroom, and must work to convert this know-how into routine working habits so as to optimise results over the longer term.

- 3 Attitudes: The professional must be able to control and modify the ways of reacting personally to situations, especially at the emotional level. This is more difficult than it sounds.

Each of the above dimensions requires the application of well-researched and proven *methodologies* that are appropriate for each type of specific content. There are two main approaches regarding the methodology to be applied:

- 1 In respect of the acquisition of knowledge, the traditional form of classroom-based learning is acknowledged to be best. In terms of method, the effective transfer of such knowledge must be accompanied by presentations, exposure to and discussion of practical cases, group debates, study of the solutions to problems applied in various real-world contexts, etc.

- 2 In the fields of abilities and attitudes, the most important methodology is that of learning through practical experience (experiential learning). When the trainee has actually experienced particular challenges, tasks or problems "live" and "in situ", this provides the invaluable opportunity to learn from a critical review of their own behaviour.

This behaviour, which is an authentic example of the trainee's attitude when faced with the situation devised, and then of the particular abilities or skills (or lack of!) that the trainee puts into practice to deal with that situation, can then be examined, under the guidance of the teacher and colleagues, and personally evaluated by the trainee to identify the improvements required; this is one of the most effective ways of conditioning future behaviour, decisions and action. Repetition with various different situations will thus enable the trainee progressively to improve the relevant competences with the aim of achieving the desired results. Such procedures constitute authentic training for optimum professional performance in any occupation.

As tools for the development of this methodology, laboratory activities are utilised (by means of the controlled reproduction of situations similar to those that professionals will experience in fulfilling their job responsibilities), together with live activities, based on carrying out teamwork and leadership training exercises in the open air (out-door environments) or in covered spaces (in-door environments), in which the trainees can identify and learn from experiences parallel with those that they will face in real-life working environments.

In all the cases, this type of training requires, to a greater or less extent, the availability of specific installations that are specially designed for these purposes, so that the training activities appropriate for the objectives sought can be correctly and safely carried out. In fact, many of the desirable activities cannot and should not be undertaken without having such installations in which they need to take place; hence the UHU has included plans for these installations in its current investment projects.

Taking all the foregoing into account, the Training Area for the Practice and Development of Competences of the UHU is conceived as the space designed specifically for the integral development of professional competences; this will be implemented by means of the combination of activities of a training nature, both laboratory and "live", in and outside the classroom, with the object of enabling trainees to optimise their competences in assuming all the responsibilities associated with the jobs or professions they choose to enter on leaving university.

## FINAL COMMENTS

The innovatory character of this initiative needs to be strongly emphasised. There are very few references found, in Spain and in the world, to similar projects. In any case, those that do exist are not as comprehensive in content and scope as the CDC of the University of Huelva proposed in this paper.

Equally it is fair to emphasise that the CEPESA Chair, as an instrument for building relationships, has provided more than just growing financial support, important as this is. The experience gained in these years has demonstrated that the “added value” that is most highly valued in this relationship with a company of the magnitude and capacities of CEPESA is “fresh air”, novel ideas and involvement in the improvement of education and research in their aspects applied to practical real-world issues, which must always be a two-way exchange.

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