

SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE 2018-2019 ACADEMIC YEAR AT THE UPC

Vèrtex Building Auditorium, Campus Nord, 21 September 2018
Rector Francesc Torres

- **Àngels Chacón**, Catalan Minister of Business and Knowledge
- **Francesc Xavier Grau**, Catalan Secretary for Universities and Research
- **Ramón Carbonell**, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the UPC
- **Rectors and chairs of universities' boards of trustees**
- **Senior officers in the Catalan Secretariat for Universities and Research**
- **Academic and municipal authorities and institutional representatives**
- **Friends**

During the inaugural lecture, we were privileged to hear the thinking of the professor Marina Garcés. The presence of a philosopher in the auditorium of the Catalan university of engineering, science, technology, and architecture was no coincidence. We must be increasingly aware of the social impact of our task. A modern society that seeks to be sensitive to people's needs, that aims to be sustainable and to look after the environment, must combine intellectual and technical progress effectively. We can only advance if there is greater interconnection between technical and scientific education and humanistic education. By inviting Marina, we wanted to show that we are committed to introducing these humanistic concepts in our research and in the training of our graduates. It is vital that the university community, and particularly our students, are aware of the ethical implications that we must face with increasing frequency during our working lives, often in relation to the impact of technological advances on society. We must be fully aware of the social transformation brought about by adopting increasingly disruptive technologies. Thank you, Marina, for encouraging us to reflect on this topic.

We have just brought the 2017-2018 academic year to a close, and I would like to continue this event with thanks to those who made it possible. Last January, I gave my inaugural speech as rector of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya with all the enthusiasm of a team launching its project, but also with the

conviction that there was a complex, difficult task ahead. I am very happy to say that the university community's response has been way beyond our expectations: the collaboration, energy, and desire to advance that we have found in all corners of the UPC have been extraordinary, overcoming tough budget restrictions and complicated new regulations. Such a positive response has enabled us to complete quite successfully an academic year in which the university's management was transferred. I would like to express, on my behalf and that of the Executive Council, our sincere thanks to the entire UPC community. We have felt the strength that comes from support and from sharing this collective, exciting project that is the UPC, in which all of us play a role. We will do everything we can to continue to move forward and continue to share this project, and, most importantly, not to disappoint you.

Clearly, the economic and political context in the last academic year was complicated, which made it hard to undertake our academic work in the best possible way. Unfortunately, the years of crisis that we have experienced have normalised situations that should never even have been exceptional. Today, at the start of a new academic year, we call again on our rich, welcoming, plural society, political forces, and leaders to take the path of dialogue in the search for solutions that reflect the different sensitivities of the population. We reiterate our concern for the progress and upcoming resolution of various judicial processes that involve politicians being remanded in custody, which in no way help to restore the political path and consensus everyone wants. Our commitment to society has led and leads us to ensure that university community members' opinions are heard, if they are expressed peacefully and with respect to individual and collective rights and freedoms.

We are living in a time in which universities are at the centre of the political and public debate, due to some incidents that I believe are isolated and that are clearly localised. Universities, and public universities particularly, are one of the most highly respected institutions that gain the most public trust year after year. This is an asset that we must preserve so that society becomes increasingly aware and less tolerant of bad practices in government bodies. These incidents should encourage us to stay on a path we took some time ago: that of

transparency, efficiency, accountability, risk prevention, social commitment, commitment to sustainable development, inclusion, and cooperation. This is not a future goal: it already forms part of the UPC, which is a leader in many of these aspects.

I would like to continue with the pleasant tradition of again congratulating the prize winners who reached individual or group goals and received recognition from outside the University in the last academic year. They deserve our appreciation for contributing specially to increasing the prestige of our university.

It is also a tradition to take stock of the last academic year. In this case, I will refer to our first ten months as the team leading the UPC. The best we can say is that academic activity has developed normally, given the circumstances. We can highlight the rapid consolidation of the UPC Besòs project, and the positive reception of some recently implemented teaching initiatives, such as the bachelor's degrees in Industrial Technologies and Economic Analysis, Data Science and Engineering, and Electronic Engineering and Telecommunications. Demand for the rest of the academic offerings remained relatively stable, although there are a few clouds over some traditional qualifications that require attention. We should also mention that the optometrist Donald R. Korb was awarded an honorary doctorate. He highlighted the importance of being a good observer and maintaining intellectual curiosity for problem-solving, as well as the need for all of us to embrace collaboration.

After an electoral campaign that entailed a change in direction of the University, in the first months our academic policy focused on consolidating the interrelations between the university community, the campuses, and the areas of activity. Our aim was also to form ties and seek synergies with local and autonomous government bodies, and with the industrial and business sector. In a broader sense, the Executive Council's actions developed within the framework of three key ideas in our electoral programme:

- The centrality of students
- Decentralisation

- The promotion of research, innovation, and knowledge transfer

We have carried out this activity in parallel to the development of an action plan, based on our electoral programme, drawn up with active participation, and published recently. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in the community for their contributions. It is an ambitious plan. Its formation served, firstly, for us all to get to know our university better. It also helped us to organise various areas of activity in which we can advance the idea of the University as a body with distributed intelligence and responsibility, in which initiatives are created from the bottom up and in which each campus, school, and unit can develop its own project in the framework of the three general principles that I mentioned previously. The plan is ambitious because we did not want to leave anything out. However, we are aware that to progress effectively, and above all to achieve the boldest targets that we have proposed that are vital to the future of the UPC, additional resources are needed. I am not going to enumerate all our demands and grievances to the Minister or the Secretary for Universities, who are with us today, because I know that they are already aware of them. I would even go as far as to say that work is being undertaken in the right direction. Nevertheless, I must stress that the lack of investment in infrastructure and facilities and an appropriate recruitment policy to address staff renewal must be tackled urgently; otherwise they will lead to considerable deterioration in our work. The UPC, and the entire Catalan university system, has carried out a remarkable social, cultural, and economic function in the last thirty years. Although funding is much lower than it should be in developed countries, all external quality indicators (whether they are surveys or rankings) place the UPC in the first division of scientific and technological universities in the world. However, we should not be fooled by this illusion: the extraordinary effort made by the community in recent years to stay at this high level of excellence cannot be maintained indefinitely. If we do not act decisively, we will soon get to a point of no return that will take us straight back thirty years.

So, I ask you to remain positive and to work together to find imaginative solutions and create synergies with other social stakeholders. You have our

support and involvement. We do not need a big debate to conclude that better funding would be of great help to us.

After the congratulations and the just and necessary demands, whatever the context and the current challenges that we must face, when we start a new academic year we must look to the future. I believe that those of us who have responsibilities must be optimistic. We must know how to transmit enthusiasm to our students and that a better future is possible, that they are the ones who can and must make this possible, because it is their future. The video that we will show now is focused on this idea of transmitting to society and students that at the UPC we are all working eagerly and happily to create a better world. We wish to transmit the conviction that our academic activities in engineering, science, technology, and architecture are focused on making the world fairer, more sustainable, and friendlier to people and the environment, as befits a public university that is competent, committed, and supportive such as ours.

To conclude, I would like to announce that at the end of the year, we will launch a series of initiatives leading to the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the creation of the UPC in 2021, a celebration that in fiscal terms starts two years in advance. We must take advantage of this celebration to assert the role of the UPC in the social and economic development of Catalonia, and to reconsider the path that we wish to follow in coming decades (UPC 2030). I invite you all to participate in this initiative.

It is said that real happiness, true happiness, is a way of travelling, not a destination. We must know how to give meaning to every step we take and to enjoy and share the journey. Today we start the journey of a new academic year and I wish you all, particularly the students, a lot of this kind of happiness, the real kind.

I declare the 2018-2019 academic year officially opened.

Thank you.