

**The access and admission system for university degrees:
current situation and perspective in Spain**

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Abstract

The system for access and admission to university degrees in Spain is undergoing important changes. For some time, the autonomy of each University and centralization, which is an aim of the European Higher Education Area, has coexisted. So far, the procedures prescribed overlap the functions, though they were created to reach a homogenized system. Thus, the European Acts prescribe a single university entrance system. However, this regulation implemented by the stakeholders in the Central Education Administration comes along with the different evaluation procedures determined by each region. What is ensured in this process is equity, transparency and a wide range of opportunities for the student. Undoubtedly, this situation has generated dysfunction and a host of contradictions about the uniqueness of each University and the standard procedures that still prevail. Therefore, in this article we provide a critical analysis of the access system. Our consolidated experience in the establishment and development of university entrance exams even allows us to draw conclusions regarding the European scenario. Indeed, this experience even supports an international perspective. The data analysed demonstrate that the more protective the system is, the more it can harm the student and assist the whole system.

Keywords

University Entrance System, Uniqueness, European Regulations, Evaluation Procedures, International Prospective.

The current scenario: between Spanish dispersion and European centralization

The current situation in the Spanish University is defined at present by a double centrifugal force: on the one hand, the autonomy and separation of each University in relation to the whole of Spain, on the other hand, dependency and centralization with regards to the European Higher Education Area. All this is taking place within the context of strong budgetary restrictions on the public funding of universities. And it is happening under the change experienced and forced by policy worldviews, in which the classical University myth which sees the institutions as fountains of knowledge is transformed and Universities become mere agencies of vocational training, under the omnipotent model of quality management. The contradictions, paradoxes and dysfunction generated between a discourse of the uniqueness of each University and the standardisation practice of the procedures are evident; but, still more evident is the widespread commercialization of the whole range of University degrees. The evolution, current situation and future perspective in the access systems to the level of Higher Education and admission to the university degrees that are offered are a clear sign.

In the political sphere, with the formal arrival of democracy in 1978, autonomy rules, among other issues. Thus, the Spanish territory is divided into 17 regions or "Autonomous Communities" each with its own Parliament and a high decision-making power which generates a federal sense in any competence field and, obviously, competencies in education¹ are included in an outstanding way. Competencies are transferred from the central Government to regional Governments; and among

¹ The evaluation of the educative consequences, going beyond university level, was analysed in previous research (Sabirón and Arraiz, 2012).

educational competencies, what stands out -in our case- is that of the organization, management, planning and financing of university education.

In turn, each University is autonomous in teaching and administrative management, though it has no resources of its own other than the tuition fees that the regional government sets itself. These regional peculiarities in autonomy have considerable repercussions in the official university degrees, as well as in the unofficial, giving rise to a dismantling of the status quo (Arraiz and Sabirón 1999: 276-298). In fact, the obsession with the association between democracy and autonomy led, at University level, to a diaspora of existing university campuses, and of the quality of the degrees taught (Álvarez and Lázaro 2002).

Currently, each region has more than one public and private University: for a population of around 47 million people, Spain has 76 universities (59 Public and 17 private universities), although only one -the National University of Distance Education- is of the Public level. This fragmentation, in which each region aspires to the political-educative control of its own universities, renders impossible the development and specialization of each university campus. The provision of degrees is repeated, despite some upcoming issue in what the Public universities offer. These duplications, which make the specificity of each Spanish university campus difficult, can be considered one of the reasons for its low international competitiveness. On the international scene, the Spanish universities are ranked below the top one hundred ones².

On the other hand, the recognition of the grades in the field of the European Union, and as a whole the development of the European Higher Education Area, calls for

² The first Spanish universities appear ranked in the 200-300 range score of the Academic Ranking of World Universities (<http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2013.html>).

standardisation in the accreditation procedures. National agencies for assessment and control appear. In Spain, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation was created along with its corresponding bodies in each "Autonomous Community" which, in turn, has a regional body³, in accordance with the decisions assumed by the stakeholders and derived from European policies. In fact, the procedures established overlap and duplicate the function of providing an answer to a European regulation which tends towards homogenization.

In this context, the different university entrance systems have two main characteristics which one should be aware of: on the one hand, in accordance with European prescriptions, the different university entrance systems follow a single procedure in the whole of Spain; on the other hand, each region establishes, in the development of the different methods and testing procedures, different content for the exams. Equity is ensured in the procedure, even though discriminations depending on the region where the student is assessed for the different university entrance system may appear. It is up to the stakeholders (Gubba and Lincon 1989) to decide on the most significant criteria to be included in the university entrance system, in a consensual way and represented through the organizing commission of the access exam. This commission is formed by the regional academic authorities, the academics responsible for the University, representatives of the High School teaching staff, representatives from the Inspection area and representatives of the University teaching staff. Those stakeholders are in charge of defining the new needs, mostly dictated by European policies, and hence introduce the necessary changes, under the supervision of the Rectorate of the

³ For the National Agency, see <http://www.aneca.es/>; in the case of Aragón and the region the University of Zaragoza belongs to, see the Agency for Quality and University Development of Aragón (<http://acpua.aragon.es>).

University. Moreover, with the new Act, the stakeholders are responsible for deciding what is going to be assessed. However, once again, the loop of the Spanish Education Administration occurs: each University commission is autonomous; yet they are grouped together in the overall organization of Spain (CRUE, Confederation of Rectors of the Spanish University)⁴.

The mark obtained by a student is valid for entry to all of the Spanish universities. This situation has been reached with a regulation that, a priori, guarantees equal opportunities for the student, regardless of his origins and the region where he attended Secondary and Upper Intermediate School. We will return to this issue in the final discussion.

The second context characteristic to retain is of historic origin: in Spain, the centuries-old universities coexist alongside the newly-created ones, but otherwise, they can be publicly or privately owned. Public universities constitute the majority. However, unlike the situation in other European countries, universities recognized by the national or regional Government prevail, and few are the degrees offered by universities that we could classify within the scope of non-official Higher Education (Arraiz and Sabirón 1999: 299-311). The university entrance system to University degrees is the same for all, regardless of ownership.

⁴ In this sense, the University of Zaragoza is a pioneer in the alternative proposals in this new legal framework. We consider two main criteria: it is a university that represents the Spanish University and it is innovative and pioneering in the selection and admission of students.

The current entrance system to university education: methods and regulations

In Spanish universities, the first distinction to be retained is that established between: i) university entrance system, and ii) admission⁵ system.

As established in the current regulations and Acts, i) "The university entrance system embodies the right a person has to apply for admission to a University to follow specific Degree courses. This right can only be exercised by those who meet the entry requirements for the University prescribed by the current legislation". In contrast, ii) "Admission means the effective acceptance of a student on a specific degree course and at a specific University". They are two linked processes but with different backgrounds and results: first, i) access to university studies through different university entrance systems is established and will be explained in detail below; and, once the students gain access to it, ii) each University, depending on the vacancies on each degree course, selects students to be admitted according to the grades obtained in the corresponding university entrance exams. In an initial evaluation a gap appears: although the success rate of the whole university entrance system is high (the success rate reaches 90%), admission to certain degrees (Medicine, for example) is highly selective. This dysfunction between i) university entrance system and ii) admission system, would justify the reform which, currently, is being developed.

The current university entrance system, which will be maintained in the next academic years, offers students the following possibilities: a) university entrance exams; b) university entrance exam for candidates over 25 years old; c) university entrance exams

⁵ The most efficient way to visualize the University entrance exam and admission is to follow a specific example. We suggest the model of the University of Zaragoza, and we will refer to it in the specifications for the university entrance system. See the procedure, access and admission on the institution's website (<http://www.unizar.es>).

for candidates over 45 years old; d) university entrance for candidates over 40 years old with professional experience; e) university entrance system for graduates; f) university entrance system for vocational training students; g) university entrance system for students with foreign studies.

Success in the university entrance system guarantees the right to pursue undergraduate studies but it does not guarantee admission to the degree demanded by the student (Escudero 1996). Once the student has passed through the access and entrance system, his permanence requires conditions more rigorous than the access conditions. Permanence is generating more of a debate at the heart of the University educational community than the entrance exams. In any case, as stated above, we will describe the main entrance system possibilities.

University entrance exam (PAU)

The call for University entrance exams (PAU), also called "selectivity" in slang, is governed by detailed regulations (which are listed in the references). The university entrance exam (PAU) is divided into two phases, a general phase and a specific phase (Figure 1):

PAU	
General Phase (compulsory for all Upper Intermediate Secondary Education students)	Specific phase (non-compulsory to get higher grades)
	A maximum of 4 subjects for Upper Intermediate Secondary Education

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Spanish language and Literature – Foreign language (to be chosen from among English, French, German, Italian or Portuguese) – Spanish History or Philosophical History (to choose one option) – A subject of specialization to be chosen 	<p>(different to those chosen for the general phase, whenever the student applies for the general phase and the specific one in the same call for examinations)</p>
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I. General phase. It is compulsory for Upper Intermediate Secondary Education students and has validity. It consists of 4 exercises, of which one deals with a specialization freely chosen by the student. The weighted average which is 60% of the grade obtained in the Upper Intermediate Secondary Education Certificate and 40% of the grades obtained in the general phase of the university entrance exam, provides the grade required for entry (up to 10 points).

II. Specific phase. It is non-compulsory and is carried out to improve the grade required for entry, up to a maximum of 14 points. The marks obtained in the subjects that belong to the specific phase are valid for the University entrance system during the two academic years once the student has gained them. In this phase, the student can be assessed on up to a maximum of four subjects of the Upper Intermediate Secondary Education stage.

The specialized subjects the student can apply for in the specific phase, are related to the specialization he has studied in Upper Intermediate Secondary School or belong to

what are called common subjects (Figure 2, the specialized subjects are highlighted with an asterisk) (figure 2)

Musical Analysis II	Dramatic art	Biology
Earth and Environmental Sciences	Artistic drawing II	Technical drawing II
Design	Business Economics	Electrical Engineering
Physics	Geography	Greek II
Spanish History*	Philosophical history*	Musical and dance history
Art History	Latin II	Spanish Language and Literature II *
Foreign Language II – German*	Foreign Language II – French*	Foreign Language II - English*
Foreign Language II – Italian*	Foreign Language II - Portuguese*	World Literature
Mathematics applied to Social Sciences II	Mathematics II	Chemistry
Graphic-arts expression techniques	Industrial Technology II	

Those students who meet any of the following requirements can apply for these entrance exams: to have the Upper Intermediate Secondary Education Certificate; to have the Senior Vocational training Certificate in Arts and Design, or Senior technical sports certificate; those who come from different education systems of the European

Union or other States with which Spain has signed international agreements; students who have passed the university entrance exam and may apply again with the aim of improving their grades.

The university entrance exams for both phases will take place over three days, in morning and afternoon sessions, with a total length of 1 hour and 30 minutes for each exam. There is a first call for examinations in June and the second call takes place in September; however, those who participate in the second call can only apply for the free vacancies after the admission process for the students who passed the examinations in the first call has taken place. To participate in the examination process, students pay a fee of around 100 euro. Each University arranges the carrying out of the examination process through various magistrate courts. Each court, composed of a President, a Secretary and Chairs, is assigned a specific number of Secondary Education Schools, as well as a proportional number of reviewers. The magistrate courts are appointed by the President of the University. Students who have passed the Upper Intermediate Secondary school stage are assessed in the corresponding court.

The exams are proposed and elaborated by Secondary School teachers and University teachers, supervised by a specialist in the subject. The correction of the exercises and the corresponding marking is carried out by the different Chairs of each specialised subject, who are, in turn, chairs of the different magistrate courts. Anonymity in the correction process, as well as transparency and objectivity in the marking process is guaranteed. The criteria for assessing exercises are public and known by the students before carrying out the exams.

The final grade obtained by the student combines different parameters until reaching a maximum of 14 points:

I. The grade obtained in the general phase, compulsory for Upper Intermediate Secondary Education students (maximum of 10):

-Any exam is graded with a score from 0 to 10 points.

-The grade is obtained by the arithmetic average achieved across the 4 exams.

- A minimum grade of 4 points is required in this phase to assign the average calculated with the grades obtained for the Upper Intermediate Secondary Education Certificate.

-The grade necessary to enter the university requirements system is the weighted average of the 40% of the general phase and the 60% of the average grade obtained in the Upper Intermediate Secondary Education Certificate.

-With regards to the university entrance system (the specific grade required), students must have an entrance grade equal to or higher than 5 points, provided that a minimum of 4 points in the general phase of the University entrance system is obtained.

Success in the university entrance system allows the student to apply for any Spanish University and it also ensures direct access to all those undergraduate degrees in which the places on offer exceed the demand for the courses. However, to get a place on a competitive degree course, where demand for places exceeds the number of places on offer, the student can get a higher grade in the general phase if he completes the specific phase.

II. The grade in the specific phase (maximum 14):

-It is non-compulsory and its aim is to improve the access grade, it being possible to reach a maximum of up to 14 points.

-In this phase the student can be examined on a maximum of 4 specialized subjects; in particular, in cases where students apply in the general phase, these subjects must be different from the specialized subject chosen in the general phase.

-From the 4 subjects the student has been examined on, the two highest grades will be analysed, so that the final access grade is obtained using the following formula:

$$\text{Access grade} = \text{Access grade (general phase)} + a*m1 + b*m2$$

a, b = analysed variables that may vary between 0,1 and 0,2, depending on their specialization link with the degree to which the student asks to be admitted

m1, m2 = grades obtained in those two subjects of the specific phase that, multiplied by the analysed variables, provide a higher grade for admission to the degree course desired.

If the student does not agree with the mark awarded, he may request a second correction in the same call for the examination. The second correction process provides the same guarantees as the first. If a mismatch between the two marks exists, a third correction takes place and there will be no more chances to ask for correction. These entrance examinations condition the development of the second year of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education. During this year, students, guided by their respective teachers, tend to dedicate themselves, in fact, to doing the previous examination models of the calls for entrance exams. The current curricular aim of this second year Upper Intermediate Secondary education is the students' training to pass the entrance exam. Secondary education schools and Upper Intermediate Secondary education schools are, finally, those who decide if a student can or cannot apply for the University entrance system in view of the grades he has achieved: if he is not ready, if he fails any subject,

then he cannot take part in the examination process. This is the university entrance system. No doubt, everything is conditioned by those decisions made by those stakeholders who, belonging to the University field, go further with the implementation of European policies.

University entrance exam for candidates over 25 years old, over 45 years old and over 40 years old with professional experience

Success in the university entrance exam for candidates older than 25 or 45 provides access to the different university degrees which are linked to the subject the student has been successful in the examination process. The entrance exam for candidates over 40 with labor or professional experience is intended for those who do not have any academic qualification that enables them, following other procedures, to participate in the University entrance exam system, but who can prove professional experience in relation to some University degree. The exam is divided into two phases, a general and a specific phase; however, the contents differ.

I. General phase: it aims to appreciate the candidates' maturity and suitability to follow university degrees successfully, as well as their reasoning capability and written expression ability. It consists of three exercises:

-First exercise. Candidates must choose between a text commentary, with brief comprehension questions, or the development of a general topical theme, which will be developed as a written composition. This exercise lasts one hour and a half.

-Second exercise. It is about the Spanish language. Two topics from the teaching programme are offered and applicants choose one of them and develop it in writing (essay). This exercise lasts one hour.

-Third exercise. It concerns the Foreign Language chosen by the applicant (German, French, English, Italian or Portuguese). The exercise consists of a direct translation of a non-specialized text of about 250 words in the language chosen using no dictionary. This exercise lasts one hour.

II. Specific phase: The goal here is to assess the candidates' skills, capabilities and abilities to pursue successfully the different university modules related to each one of the areas of knowledge around which degrees are arranged. For this reason, this phase is divided into five options linked to the five areas of knowledge. It consists of two exercises, lasting an hour and a half each, on two subjects that belong to the option chosen by the candidate. Options and subjects are as follows:

-Option A (Arts and Humanities): Artistic drawing, History of Art, Literature, History.

-Option B (Sciences): Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology.

-Option C (Health Sciences): Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics.

-Option D (Social and Legal Sciences): Mathematics, History, Business and Literature.

-Option E (Engineering and Architecture): Technical drawing, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry.

The exercises for the two subjects are based on the programmes established for that purpose by the respective Universities. Thus, the mark for the general phase is the

arithmetic average of the grades obtained in each one of the three exercises that compose it; in the specific phase, the grade is the arithmetic average of the marks obtained in each one of the two exercises that compose it. The mark for each of the exercises, in both phases, is determined with a score from 0 to 10, expressed with two decimal digits. The final grade is the arithmetic average of the grades obtained and it is expressed with three decimal digits. The candidate participates in the entrance exam when he gets a minimum of five in the final grade or rating.

Candidates over 45 years old also have to participate in an interview -which in fact is also assessed- to adjust the entry system to the suitable university degrees. In the case of the university entrance system for candidates over 45 years old with professional experience, candidates must prove such experience with a detailed report on their professional activity (certification of working life by the social security system; certification by the company where he has gained the experience; attended or taught professional modules; work skills, etc.). A tribunal is created ad hoc and it proves the candidate's degree of suitability to pursue the university degrees linked to his professional experience. This may take place in the form of an interview to compare the professional achievements claimed. Currently, this is one of the possibilities which has greater potential for access to the entrance system to university degrees by European workers, if it is linked with the accreditation systems of professional skills implemented in the countries of the European Union (Escudero, 1996).

Entrance system with foreign studies

Like the previous one, the university entrance system for students with foreign studies is a possibility that, gradually, will have to achieve higher prominence as the European Higher Education Area develops. At present, students with foreign studies endorsed by

the Spanish Government have access to university degrees without the need to sit any exam. The National University for Distance Education (Spanish acronym UNED) –it must be remembered, the only one at national level- issues the student's credentials that show the equivalence in the university degree and the grade depending on the studies completed.

University Access for vocational training students

Vocational training in Spain is structured in three stages: initial, intermediate and upper. Those students who are in possession of the Certificate of Upper Vocational Training can access university degrees. It is a path of interest, but sparsely developed since, similarly, vocational training in Spain is, reasonably or not –we do not value it- socially and professionally discredited. The procedure for accessing university degrees after having had vocational training is similar to the entrance exam for Upper Intermediate Secondary Education students: the degree obtained in the Certificate of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education is replaced by that obtained through Upper Vocational Training. These students can take part in the specific phase to get a higher grade. It is an entrance access possibility to university degrees that, in the same way as the entrance exam for older students with professional experience, must be reviewed, considered and valued.

The evaluation of the current university entrance system: guaranteed access and mismatches in the admission processes.

The experience of the university entrance systems to university degrees has, in Spain, a tradition over the last forty years, with a thorough follow-up by stakeholders and with

not inconsiderable technical analysis of the students' achievements (Escudero, Arana and Palacian, 1999). From our experience in the development of the entrance examination to University recently, the overall evaluation could be characterized in terms of two emerging and conflicting aspects:

(i) On the one hand, it is a guaranteed system; i.e., transparency in the elaboration of the exam contents, anonymity and objectivity in the grade assigned, and the review process, are ensured throughout the procedure. Equal opportunities are guaranteed both in the regulations and in the process itself, year after year. In the forty years it has been implemented, no irregularity has been detected. This is one of the greatest achievements of the entrance exam system. The university entrance system works, it is effective.

i') However, the capacity for discrimination in the exams is low, i.e., the entrance system is not efficient. The success rate in the entrance examination process (students who get a score equal or higher), is estimated at around 80-90% success in the first call. Discrimination is not located in the university entrance process but in the admission process that focuses on the cutting-off grade required for admission to certain degrees; currently, Medicine stands out with a bid admission from a difference in tenths or thousandths of the student's grade. In other words, it is an entrance system that focuses on –is even obsessed with- the procedure that ensures the principle of equal opportunities; a guarantee that ends up, in fact, being unfair for the student. In this initial evaluation, we must clarify some of the essential components, by limiting our attention again to the evaluation of the extended university entrance exams, i.e. the university entrance system through the University entrance exams, because the other candidates (those over 25 years old, for example) are a minority and, in some cases, negligible.

(a) *It is a system that guarantees transparency in the procedure, anonymity and objectivity in the grade assigned*, among other criteria that, ultimately, has had consequences when offering *equal opportunities* for all students in the University entrance and admission process to the degree they choose.

The university entrance system, based on a final grade derived from the mark obtained in the different exams that constitute the University entrance exams and the student's average grade in the Upper Intermediate Secondary Education stage, has been applied in Spain -with different variations but still retaining the system- for more than forty years.

Over the years, this system has never been questioned. Incidents regarding the exam contents or particular arbitrariness in the students' grades have been resolved according to the prescribed procedure. It is convenient to insist on this evaluation: the procedures determined guarantee the quality of the University entrance system (Álvarez and Lázaro, 2002). The staff involved both in the Administration, as in the management and assessment of the different magistrate courts, is highly competent and responsible.

b) Throughout the forty years, *the University* entrance system has been adapted to the provision of and demand for university places⁶.

The increasing competition to gain access to some degrees, which we refer to further on, gave rise, in 2010, to the distinction, which we have already mentioned, between a general and a specific phase. In the specific phase (vid. supra), the student can be

⁶ Procedures have been adapted to the new information technology management system that allows for the guaranteeing of the process of distributing exams among teachers, the establishment of criteria and assessment procedures, as well as the supervision –and revision process- if there is significant disagreement in the marks awarded by the same teacher. In this sense, we must highlight, for instance, that any change across the whole process is reflected so it is an objective process, and the revision process in case of disagreements.

awarded up to a total of 14 points. This change, which allows for a better adjustment to the final grade in the entrance process, makes difficult, in turn and paradoxically, the entrance system for the most popular degrees, in which only such marks are valued, without considering any other criteria. Among them, for example, the academic and political criteria that could generate changes, with regards to the restrictions in the places.

(c) The system almost *guarantees access to more than 90% of the candidates*. According to the latest official information (MECD 2013, CRUE 2013), the most relevant statistical data with regard to the University entrance examination system are as follows:

-In 2011-2012, 71,9% of the students who applied for a degree programme at public face-to-face universities were successful through the University entrance exam.

-In this same year 271.163 students took part in the university entrance exam (10,8% more than the previous year) and the percentage of those who passed the exam approaches 95%.

-The distribution between men and women is proportional to the population, with non-significant statistical differences.

-With regard to socio-economic status, almost one-third of the students who enter University have a father and/or mother with higher education studies; slightly over one-third are those students whose parents have Secondary Education studies and a fourth are students whose parents only have a basic education. The ratio also corresponds to the distribution of the population.

Analysing the data, the University entrance exam is considered a major access option. It is evidenced how the system guarantees equal opportunities, as the percentage distributions used (men-women⁷ and socio-economic status) show a standardized and consistent distribution with the distribution of the Spanish population.

The most significant data is, however, the percentage of successful students, which reaches 95%; i.e., more than nine out of every ten candidates pass: here is evidence of one of the paradoxes of the University entrance system, since it is easy to pass, but difficult to obtain the minimum grade for admission to some degrees.

d) The difficulty thus lies in reaching the cutting-off grade for admission to some degrees.

Special data derived from official statistics must be considered: the cutting-off grade; i.e., the minimum university entrance grade necessary to be admitted to a specific degree. The disparity here is evident and increasing, as it intensifies every year.

For all of the Spanish universities the cutting-off grade was determined for a maximum of 12,580 Health Degrees. Furthermore, if we consider the cutting-off grades of the University of Zaragoza, the result is as follows (Figure 3⁸). As mentioned before, The University of Zaragoza can be considered a model Spanish University, thus it is a good example to show the distribution of the grade admission process in the different university degrees.

⁷ However, school failure and dropping out of the university degree is higher for men than for women, being noticeably higher the number of women at university, compared with men.

⁸ *J*, indicates that the admission process ended in June; *S*, that candidates who applied in the September call were admitted; if there is nothing, it means all candidates were admitted.

Figure 3: Cut-off grades for admission to degree programmes at the University of Zaragoza (2013-2014).

TITULACIONES ZARAGOZA		
ADMINISTRACIÓN Y DIRECCIÓN DE EMPRESAS	5,168	S*
BIOTECNOLOGÍA	11,570	J
CIENCIA Y TECNOLOGÍA DE LOS ALIMENTOS	7,637	J
DERECHO	7,296	J
ECONOMÍA	5,000	
ENFERMERÍA	9,547	J
ESTUDIOS CLÁSICOS	5,000	
ESTUDIOS DE ARQUITECTURA	7,849	J
ESTUDIOS INGLESES	6,958	J
FILOLOGÍA HISPÁNICA	5,000	
FILOSOFÍA	5,000	
FINANZAS Y CONTABILIDAD	6,176	S
FÍSICA	6,944	S
FISIOTERAPIA	10,477	J
GEOGRAFÍA Y ORDENACIÓN DEL TERRITORIO	7,009	S
GEOLOGÍA	5,000	
HISTORIA	5,000	
HISTORIA DEL ARTE	5,000	
INFORMACIÓN Y DOCUMENTACIÓN	5,000	
INGENIERÍA DE TECNOLOGÍAS INDUSTRIALES	5,000	J
INGENIERÍA ELÉCTRICA	5,000	
INGENIERÍA ELECTRÓNICA Y AUTOMÁTICA	5,000	
INGENIERÍA EN DISEÑO INDUSTRIAL Y DESARROLLO DE PRODUCTO	9,287	J
INGENIERÍA EN TECNOLOGÍAS Y SERVICIOS DE TELECOMUNICACIONES	5,000	
INGENIERÍA INFORMÁTICA	5,000	J
INGENIERÍA MECÁNICA	5,000	
INGENIERÍA QUÍMICA	5,000	
LENGUAS MODERNAS	6,598	J
MAGISTERIO EN EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL (*)	8,290	J
MAGISTERIO EN EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA (*)	7,730	J
MARKETING E INVESTIGACIÓN DE MERCADOS	5,370	S*
MATEMÁTICAS	5,000	
MEDICINA	11,905	J
ÓPTICA Y OPTOMETRÍA	5,000	
PERIODISMO	10,261	J
PROGRAMA CONJUNTO DERECHO/ADE	10,973	J
QUÍMICA	5,000	
RELACIONES LABORALES Y RECURSOS HUMANOS	5,000	
TERAPIA OCUPACIONAL	6,623	J
TRABAJO SOCIAL	5,000	
TURISMO	5,000	
VETERINARIA	10,160	J

The dispersion is evident. The cut-off grades range from 5.000 to 11.905. The highest grade is in Medicine (11.905), leading the degrees with a requirement of more than 10.000 points in the university entrance grade achieved (Biotechnology, 11.570; Physiotherapy, 10.477; the double degree in Business and Management, 10.973; and

Veterinary Medicine with 10.160). In a second block, those upcoming degrees with a cut-off grade higher than 6.000 (among others, classic degrees such as Nursing stand out with 9.547; and Teacher Training with 8.290; as well as new degrees created after the implementation of the European Higher Education Area, such as Science and Food Technology with 7.637). In the last block, those degrees in which admission is almost guaranteed by requiring a cut-off grade of around 5.000. In this last block, we observe that the Engineering degrees which, in previous years, reached cut-off grades of 10.000 have in recent years fallen by half.

d) These data are essential to our understanding of two mismatches in the university entrance exam system:

-On the one hand, *the access system is effective but not efficient*; it achieves its aims but with costs overvalued. The investment of human resources as well as material resources is very high; however, it only helps to discriminate admission in specific degrees.

-On the other hand, and in our opinion, of paramount importance, the university entrance exam system falls into the paradox of ensuring full equality of opportunities, with a student's fair grade; opposed to the actual impossibility of studying the desired degree.

This last reasoning calls into question the system because effective admission to the university degree the student wants to study for depends –exclusively- on the cut-off grade.

This possibility, of an effective but not efficient entrance exam system is developed in the analysis of the possible strategies for improving the situation, and the subsequent changes in the different access systems (Escudero, Arana and Palacian 1999).

The planned regulated changes or the persistent dilemma between access and admission.

The process in which many Spanish politicians are immersed leads each new Government in power to introduce new legislation that opposes existing legislation. When it is the case of educational policies, the legislative change becomes obsessive in the two major political parties: if the change in the Government wings from the ruling party, one (the Socialist Labor Party being left-wing) disables the reforms undertaken by the previous party (the Popular Party is centre). Thus, for example, there has been an Education Act which, even though approved, has not been applied. In this respect, to consider the feasibility of the planned regulated changes is risky. Therefore, we will distinguish two referents in the evaluation of the university entrance systems: on the one hand, a brief reference to the planned legal changes; on the other, the relevant aspects on which, after more than four decades of development, it would be appropriate to reflect.

Changes in the legal regulations of the university entrance system, and in particular in relation to the greater part of that system, the university entrance examination process, on which we have insisted, are included in the recently approved Organic Act 8/2013 of 9th December for the Improvement of the Quality of Education (Spanish acronym LOMCE). Article 38 of this Act implies the elimination of the University entrance exam system as well as the remodeling of the different access possibilities⁹. The elimination

⁹ “Article 38. Admission to the official university degrees with the Certificate of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education or similar.

1. Universities will be able to determine the admission for university degrees of students who obtained the Certificate of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education or similar exclusively by means of the final evaluation criteria obtained in the Upper Intermediate Secondary Education stage.

of this system has been applied as a result of introducing a final exam at the end of Primary, Secondary and Upper Intermediate education stages. The latter, the final exam in Upper Intermediate Secondary Education replaces the previous university entrance system. The Certificate of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education allows access to university education (LOMCE, article 37). To obtain it, the final exam in Upper Intermediate Secondary Education needs to be passed by the student. This exam is defined in the Act as external to High Schools and established by the Central Government (by prior arrangement with the regional governments). The final grade of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education is the result of the weighting between a) and b): a) with a weight of 60%, the average of the numerical grades obtained in each of the subjects of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education; and (b) with a weight of 40%, the grade obtained in the final evaluation of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education. The implementation of the new Act implies changes not just in the University entrance

2. Moreover, Universities could also determine the admission procedures for university degrees for students who obtained the Certificate of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education or similar, with regards to the basic regulations the Government can establish, among which, respect for equality, non-discrimination, achievements and capacities will be considered. Those procedures will use, together with the final grade obtained in the Certificate of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education, some of the following evaluation criteria:

- a) Specialization and subjects studied in Upper Intermediate Secondary Education bearing in mind the university degree chosen.
- b) Grades obtained in specific subjects of the Upper Intermediate Secondary Education stage or the final grade obtained in that school stage.
- c) Complementary professional and academic training.
- d) Previous Higher Education studies.

In addition, in exceptional-cases, specific evaluations of the knowledge and competences can be performed.

The weighting of the final grade obtained in Upper Intermediate Secondary Education must be at least 60% of the final mark in the admission process.

Universities will determine the joint development of the whole or part of the admission processes established, as well as the relevance of the evaluations developed in the admission process” (LOMCE, artº 38).

system but also in the implementation of external evaluations as final exams for each one of the Primary and Secondary stages.

If access is guaranteed depending on the grade obtained in the Certificate of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education, article 38 also sets the conditions for admission to the university degrees. Once again, the initial distinction we highlighted between access and admission is a key: the student gains access with the grade obtained in Upper Intermediate Secondary Education, but each University (or group of universities¹⁰) may determine, at the same time, the criteria for admission to certain degrees. In this case, the weighting of the final grade obtained in the Certificate of Upper Intermediate Secondary Education must have a minimum value of 60% of the final mark obtained in the admission process (Escudero, Arana and Palacian 1999). The remaining 40% is up to each University, which may apply evaluation criteria that even this Act states in an open way. In fact, this new university entrance system is similar to the division of the percentages obtained in the old University entrance system (60%-40%). This is one of the possibilities that allow for a similar system to the previous one, except that with the new system each University or group of Universities establishes its own entrance exams. It is in admission, and not so much in access, where, in fact, the main issue to be considered lies.

Therefore, the first issue to be highlighted is: who controls access, and consequently, admission to the university degrees? The University or High Schools? If the weighting in the final access grade or admission grants 60% to the specific weight of the grades obtained in Upper Intermediate Secondary Education, is notably higher than both the

¹⁰ The diaspora with which we started this paper appears in a legislative text for the first time. A group of universities is the reunification of a set of universities on a single campus (for example, the University of Zaragoza and the Iberus Campus that integrates the Universities of Navarra, La Rioja and Lérida).

external final evaluation, and the criteria that may be established by Universities. This issue, in Spain and in the current situation, is not trivial. It introduces a hidden ranking between different High Schools and Upper Intermediate Secondary Schools, more or less demanding levels in the students' achievements, and especially in the ratings they deliver. This latent non-transparent competitive dynamic affects not only the traditional distinction between public or public-private schools, but all High Schools regardless of whether they are public or private. This means that, with the planned reform, the perversion of the previous access and admission system increases, as the specific weight of the universities is reduced.

The question of who decides that, as we have just noted, leaves the University with little role in the access and admission for university degrees and leads to a final issue that should be pointed out: the current controversy over university degrees offered by each University. If this conforms to the offer and demand processes, some university degrees, which are requested differently depending on the circumstances, fill up. In the current scenario, university degrees with acceptable professional opportunities and high social prestige -Medicine is the prime example- are in such demand that the University acts by establishing restrictions on places. University degrees that, in former times, had equal professional opportunities and were prestigious -e.g. Law- are now oversized. These mismatches, in the current highly restrictive period for public universities, mean that, in turn, students who cannot choose the degree desired decide to apply to Private Universities. The implementation of the European Higher Education Area makes this situation difficult. When implementing the Bologna process, the eminently professional character of the new university degrees forces market demands to be considered as quality criteria (Álvarez and Lázaro 2002) by the universities' managers –opposed to

the classic deep knowledge linked to the University degrees-. Those market demands emerge as a result of the analysis carried out in Europe, which later on the stakeholders will have to implement in the university admission system.

The maintenance of the current University entrance system, in this case, would permit the preservation of the students' equality of opportunities, merits and values in access and admission to university degrees which, for some other reasons, is in doubt with the planned reform.

The updating, beyond the conflicting political parties, should incorporate a selection procedure, both in access and admission to university degrees, beyond the strict grade obtained. In this sense, the question of the recognition of professional skills as well as the well-known life-long learning process approach (Arraiz and Sabirón 2012) would be a good starting point. Furthermore, the inclusion of qualitative evaluation and selection methods, such as a personal interview prior to admission to the degree, would considerably improve efficiency and relevance.

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Royal Decree 558/2010, of 7th May, under which the conditions for access to university
degrees and the admission criteria are determined in public Spanish Universities.