

# Combining the European Prevention Curriculum (EUPC) and Universal Treatment Curriculum (UTC) in a Master's Degree in Addictions

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**INTRODUCTION:** The European Prevention Curriculum (EUPC) and The Universal Treatment Curriculum (UTC) are paradigms of the efforts to achieve an international standardized training for drug demand reduction. Both curricula are based on evidence-based knowledge and practice and follow the quality standards established by important international institutions such as the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). In addition to training directly aimed at professionals, it is important to include academic undergraduate and postgraduate programs with these standardized curricula, both for students and professionals. The experience of establishing the EUPC-UTC Master of Addictions at the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB) constitutes a pioneering example of an academic study that blends the two international curricula. The article aims to present the design and implementation of this the first version of this Master's

Degree Program to highlight eventual best practices for other academic institutions interested in a similar format. Also, it adds to the body of comparative literature on the experience of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in the addiction science field. **METHODS:** This qualitative-descriptive article is based on an analysis of the master's program documents, meetings with students, and the lectures offered. **RESULTS:** Students emphasized that a broad perspective on addictions is required, along with also blended and participatory learning practices. Lecturers emphasized the importance of teaching evidence-based interventions and a good working knowledge of resources, institutions, and networks. **CONCLUSIONS:** The Master of Addictions program at University of the Balearic Islands demonstrates that the practices for adapting and teaching the standardized contents of EUPC and UTC in an academic and university setting could be exported to other similar academic programs are those related to adapt.

**Keywords** | Addiction Science – Academic Training – Evidence-Based Interventions – Treatment – Prevention

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Addiction science has come a long way in terms of its conceptualization, the accumulation of evidence on effective interventions and policies, and the development of methods based on scientific research (Miovsky et al., 2016). As a multidimensional issue, treatment and recovery is complex and requires incorporating many components with a solid scientific basis to ensure effective solutions. Therefore, treatment and recovery require well-trained professionals who can create, implement, and evaluate effective interventions. For substance use prevention, trained professionals still play a minor role in actual practice and terms of investment and provision of resources. The institutions and organizations responsible for this area often implement prevention strategies that have no scientific basis confirming their effectiveness or scientific grounds supporting them. Evidence suggests that the successful interventions in addictions' treatment and prevention depend on the availability of effective initiatives and also on the training of the professionals who implement them (EMCDDA, 2019).

To develop undergraduate and postgraduate studies in addiction science, it is important to create a body of literature that describes and analyzes the different initiatives in the field. (Ferrer et al., 2021; Henriques et al., 2019; Miovsy et al., 2016, Miovsy et al., 2019, Miovsy et al., 2021). Having information from existing programs enables informed decision-making and, in turn, helps to export good practices for future academic program initiatives in addiction science.

With advice from Charles University in Prague, especially Professor Michal Miovsy, and with the support of *The International Consortium of Universities for Drug Demand Reduction* (ICUD-DR), the University of the Balearic Islands designed a Master of Addictions that includes the contents of the European Prevention Curriculum (EUPC) and the Universal Treatment Curriculum (UTC). The Master's Degree Program consists of 60 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits and was launched in the 2020–2021 academic year.

The decision to create a postgraduate and not bachelor's level was driven by previous qualitative research on the demands and needs of Spanish addiction professionals for comprehensive and current expertise in evidence-based interventions. The master's degree aims to prepare professionals through academic training sessions, raise awareness of the importance of treatment and prevention in society, and to have an impact on culture and practices at all levels of the addiction field.

As the first step in this process, the University of the Balearic Islands, through the educational and social training and research group (in Spanish *Grupo de Investigación y Formación Educativa y Social*, GIFES), participated in the European UPC-Adapt project. This resulted in the adaptation of the Universal Prevention Curriculum to the European context (European Prevention Curriculum, EUPC) and the elaboration of the Spanish version of the EUPC UPC-Adapt (Implementing a prevention training curriculum in Europe: Adaptation and Piloting -HOME/2015//JDRU/AG/DRUG/8863). The Spanish contribution to this process is explained in detail in Orte

et al. (2021). The EMCDDA has published EUPC manuals in different European languages. The Spanish language version was published in collaboration with the Spanish National Plan for Drugs.

The Master of Addictions is a unique postgraduate course aimed at professionals and would-be professionals in healthcare and social care who will be trained from both a theoretical (knowledge) and practical perspective. This training aims to disseminate and promote evidence-based addiction prevention and treatment at all levels (policy decision-making, intervention design, organization and management, implementation, and evaluation).

As in the Prague case (Miovsy et al., 2019), the UIB master's degree is more oriented toward the broader context, the application of prevention and treatment to other disciplines, and evaluation. It introduces professionals to European-level criteria and strategies for the most effective evidence-based interventions and strategies and to international standards in treatment and prevention in professional practice.

The course is designed to provide professionals in social intervention, health intervention, and the substance use prevention, as well as those responsible for decision-making, opinion-forming, and design of addiction policies with essential knowledge on treatment and prevention regarding the most effective evidence-based interventions and approaches. Thus, the master's degree is aimed at graduates and professionals from a range of fields in social intervention related to health and the substance use treatment and prevention: graduates in social education, social work, psychology, pedagogy, medicine, nursing, and policymakers in these fields. The course is also aimed at professional groups directly or indirectly involved in addiction treatment and prevention, such as professionals in the police force and the judiciary.

The master's degree features the collaboration and participation of teaching staff from several UIB departments: pedagogy and specific didactics, medicine, nursing, and psychology, as well as institutions working in the addictions field (*Proyecto Home Balears*). Regarding training needs, it is worth noting that this is the first master's degree in addictions in the Balearic Islands. To date, students and professionals interested in the subject had to go to other cities in Spain or study through distance learning.

The master's program consists of three modules (*Table 1*), each allowing an individual certification of University Expert. The first module (15 ECTS) is introductory.

The second module (15 ECTS) is devoted to prevention science and includes the contents of the EUPC adapted to the Spanish context. The third module (17 ECTS) addresses treatment, using the UTC content. The three modules enable the comprehensive training of professionals from a range of disciplines who work in or would like to work in the field of addictions. This structure allows a certain level of specialization and/or in-depth study depending on student interests. The master's program structure is based on the curriculum of the master's degree in Addictology of the Psychiatric Clinic, 1st Medical Faculty, Charles University, in Prague.

**Table 1** | Course structure (60 ECTS)

Introductory course (16 ECTS).

Course	ECTS
Physiology and Pharmacology for Prevention and Addiction Professionals	4
Introduction to Addiction	2
Data Analysis of Monitoring Centers	1.5
Program Evaluation	1.5
Probation and Mediation Work and addictions in the criminal justice system	1.5
Institutional contexts and infrastructures in the addiction field (including prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services)	1.5
How to develop your career (incl. supervision, intervention, prevention of burnout, etc.)	1
Ethics for Addiction Professionals	2
Preparatory course for Master's Thesis	1

EUPC module (15 ECTS)

Course	ECTS
Introduction to the European Prevention Curriculum and the role of prevention professionals	1
Epidemiology of substance abuse and prevention science	2
Basics of Prevention Science and Evidence-Based Intervention	0.5
Evidence-based Prevention Intervention and Policies	0.5
Monitoring and Evaluation of Prevention Interventions	1
Family-based Prevention Interventions	1.5
School-based Prevention Interventions	1.5
Workplace-based Prevention Interventions	1.5
Environment-based Prevention Interventions	1.5
Media-based Prevention Interventions	1.5
Community-based Prevention Implementation Systems	1.5
General Description of Prevention Contexts	0.5
Ethics for Prevention	0.5

UTC module (17 ECTS)

Course	ECTS
Treatment for Substance Use Disorders – The Continuum of Care for Addiction Professionals	3
Common Co-occurring Mental and Medical Disorders – An Overview for Addiction Professionals	3
Basic Counselling Skills for Addiction Professionals including Motivational Interviewing	3
Screening, Intake, Assessment, Treatment Planning, and Documentation for Addiction Professionals	2
Case Management for Addiction Professionals	2
Crisis Intervention for Addiction Professionals	2
Specific populations for addiction counselling and treatment (women, children, aging people, tobacco users, refugees, minorities, etc.).	2

Master's dissertation (12 ECTS)

	ECTS
Final Master's Thesis	12

Teaching staff (15) are either university lecturers or drug addiction professionals, mainly from psychology, psychiatry, medicine, and social education. Specifically, 66.6% have a PhD, and 80% are university lecturers. Teaching staff includes two doctors who work for public healthcare, and one educator who works for *Proyecto Hombre*, a drug prevention and treatment NGO.

The 2020–2021 master's class included 11 students enrolled from psychology, medicine, social work, social education, pedagogy, and business. Regarding these students, 100% were female, 27.2% were psychologists, 27.2% were social workers, 18.1% were social educators, 9.1% were doctors, 9.1% were pedagogues, and 9.1% were graduates in business management and administration. Almost all of them were active in the labour market during their studies, though not all were in positions related to addictions.

Classes had a blended format, and students were asked to work on the contents using both EUPC and UTC Standard curriculums and in-depth, cutting-edge readings and activities.

Although the 2020–2021 master's program was developed within the Covid-19 restrictions, face-to-face instruction was the normal dynamic. The blended program combines face-to-face classes with UIB Moodle online learning platform activities and student/lecturer counselling meetings.

This article presents the UIB Master of Addictions as an example of integrating prevention and treatment in a single curriculum, based on two standardized international curricula. The article describes how this integration is carried out in a master's degree format using the international standardized curricula of the EUPC and the UTC. As mentioned above, this contributes to the body of comparative literature on university programs specializing in addictology (Miovsky et al., 2016).

## 2 METHODS

To gather information in a systematized way on the implementation of the master's degree, the study team completed a documentary analysis of the program's design and application process and collected information from students and participating teaching staff.

Information was gathered from the eleven students who completed the degree and the seven lecturers who attended the final assessment meeting. Of the participating teaching staff, 50% were from the Department of Pedagogy and Specific Didactics, 33.3% from the Department of Medicine, 16.6% from the Department of Psychology, and the remaining 16.6% from the Department of Public Law.

The information collection process included a 60-minute course evaluation meeting with the master's program students. Eleven students and the two program coordinators attended the meeting. The topics discussed included the teaching and learning methods, workload, the focus on addictions and emerging addictions, the importance of focusing on evidence-based interventions, and the students' different academic and professional backgrounds and how these fit in with the master's program contents. In addition, a final 75-minute evaluation meeting was held with the master's teaching staff, covering the same topics discussed with the students, to compare their responses. Finally, documentation was collected regarding the UIB process of validating the master's degree, as the University's own degree.

For the information analysis process, a content analysis of the two meetings was performed to compare the information provided by the students and the teaching staff. The master's degree documentation was analyzed to describe the program's structure, justification, and contents.

### 3 RESULTS

Regarding the preparation and training of lecturers for delivering the master's content, the prevention teaching staff are university lecturers and part of the research team that participated in the UPC-Adapt project. Therefore, they have first-hand knowledge of the EUPC materials as well as accreditation to teach this material. The treatment teaching staff are drug addiction professionals and university lecturers who are familiar with the concepts, theories, and praxis in the treatment of addictions. They built their lessons from UTC materials, adapting them to the Spanish context and adjusting the methodology to ensure the acquisition of the required addiction professional competencies.

Also, the evaluation of the first offering of the Master's of Addictions raised some reflections and tips to consider in future offerings; reflections and tips extracted from the student and lecturer contributions at the final evaluation meetings.

Regarding lecturers, emphasis was placed on the relevance of working with cutting-edge research and raising student awareness of the need to work with evidence-based interventions. To do that, students must have a good working knowledge of academic and professional networks (ICUDDR, International Society of Substance Use Professionals, (ISSUP)) and resources on international addiction studies. In addition, they should be trained in how to search within databases and best practice portals such as Blueprints, NREPP, or the like from SAMHSA; Xchange from the EU; resources from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Cooperation Program between Latin America, Caribbean, and the European Union on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD), Plan Colombo, and other international institutions and networks; as well as the most important academic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus. One significant hurdle limited English language skills among Spanish students, reducing their access to the most recent papers in the field of addictions. Therefore, it is necessary to increase student awareness of the need to build their English-language proficiency.

About students, the first of the reflections encompasses the contents and the importance of providing a broad perspective on addictions in the curriculum by also including emergent behavioral addictions such as online gaming, internet addiction, and pornography, amongst others.

Students highlight the need to align the goals of the master's program with their interests. The program integrates both prevention and treatment, and students come from the professional fields of either prevention or treatment. In student opinion, the introductory module in the first term, was a good opportunity to align their different backgrounds.

The study noted the importance of considering students' time availability, with many of them working and/or with family responsibilities. According to them, the balance between the workload required and their availability should be considered in advance.

The student evaluation gave lecturers who combined classical explanation with participatory methods (such as case studies and debates) the highest score in satisfaction, underscoring the importance of diverse and creative teaching methods. Student evaluations also stressed the relevance of advisory and counselling work.

During the course, students are required to write three long essays at the end of each trimester, related to each module: general background, prevention, and treatment, along with a final dissertation. At the beginning of the program, students received a training session on the final dissertation, which they reported was very useful. To promote further in-depth, specialized theses, students must find synergies between the term essays and final dissertation. The essays students produced both at the end of each module and at the end of the program linked the contents of the course with their own interests in very different fields of research, with most of them coming from their field of expertise or professional arena. Three dissertations adopted the gender perspective within both prevention and treatment: "Drug addiction treatment of imprisoned women," "Gender perspective in the literature about drug addiction," and "Pregnancy and drug consumption." Two theses addressed the family from different approaches: "The role of trainers and key aspects in family adherence in family prevention programs" and "Family involvement in an addiction treatment program (*Proyecto Hombre*)." Other researchers dealt with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in hospital emergencies associated with substance use, new treatment possibilities from neurobiology, treatment resources, evaluation tools to assess social addictions, and the importance of the therapeutic bond in treatment in dual pathology.

### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section points out the main contributions of the master's degree to the comparative study of academic training in addiction science at the international level, especially at the postgraduate level. It also points out the main limitations detected and proposes action for future implementations of the master's program.

According to the organization of the academic degree study program described by Mioovsky et al. (2019) for the Prague case, three main issues and challenges emerged in the adaptation and implementation phase: technical, teaching staff, content, and context. In the Spanish case, significant differences exist in how the academic degree study program has been designed, and therefore different challenges have emerged.

However, some of the questions settled by Mioovsky et al. (2019) when describing the Prague academic experience remain the same. One of them is who is/should be an addictions professional? Should it be a general (able to work in prevention and treatment) or a specialized profession? In Spain there is no bachelor's degree in addictions. Therefore, the teaching staff and the students have very different backgrounds. The Spanish program would partially fit the type 3 model of addictions academic programs described in Mioovsky et al., (2021) since it is a clinically oriented master's program.

In our opinion, a minimum quality standard in addiction professionals' formation is required (Mioovsky et al., 2021). Still, the fact that the UIB master's program embraces students from generalist backgrounds and very different disciplines is considered a positive issue, as it allows interdisciplinarity and prepares professionals to work in multidisciplinary teams and with different perspectives. As in the case of Ola et al. (2021), we have underlined the interdisciplinarity aspects that allow accurate perspectives for real practice from different educational programs. Having different backgrounds has contributed to different competencies and perspectives in primary prevention, addictive behavior and emergence and development of behavioral addictions.

Certain professional areas might not always be familiar (or at least to a sufficient degree) with vocabulary, concepts, or even skills in addiction prevention or treatment, especially prevention, evaluation, and evidence-based interventions. On the one hand, this fact demands special attention to these particular contents (EUPC-UTC) and implementation methodologies to ensure the acquisition of the needed competencies and a wide knowledge embracing specialized areas (treatment, prevention). On the other hand, the different backgrounds and expertise of teachers and students have allowed us to enrich and complement the contents of the EUPC and UTC, combining theoretical and practical work with real, local examples from addiction professionals' daily practice.

Regarding people who graduated from the first offering of the master's program and their current or possible job in drug intervention: some of the students were already working in drug prevention or treatment jobs, and master's equipped them with broader knowledge and skills. In at least one case, the master's program helped a student with no former training find a new drug-treatment related job in an NGO.

Regarding the combination substance use prevention and addiction treatment in one program: as stated in the results, students welcomed this combination, and they highlighted the introductory module as an opportunity to prepare for both itineraries. This combination of prevention and treatment in one study program has been both a challenge and an opportunity that contributes significantly to the state of the art of addiction programs.

An important limitation that needs to be amended for future offerings is that this edition of the master's program has not included an in-service period, mainly due to Covid-19 restrictions in the majority of institutions that would have been able to offer in-service practice. Although the master's teaching methodologies combine theory and practice, we consider in-service training as essential in developing addictions professionals' skills and competencies, and it must be included in their formation.

Another limitation is the lack of standardized evaluation instruments to evaluate the implementation of the master's program. Specifically, for future editions, a satisfaction survey will be designed for students and teaching staff, as well as a pre-test/post-test instrument, to assess student knowledge before and after the master's degree. Lastly, in future editions, the role of the teacher-tutor will be reinforced. Student evaluations emphasized the importance of greater "advisory" and "counselling" work by the teaching staff, to better guide students' interests.

Regarding this master's program's contribution to the comparative analysis of academic studies in addiction science at the international level, different aspects must be highlighted. First at the level of program contents in addiction science, and second at the pedagogical and teaching levels. In terms of academic content, the master's program represents a pioneering example of the integration of standardized prevention and treatment content, specifically the European Prevention Curriculum (EUPC) and the Universal Treatment Curriculum (UTC). This is a step toward homogenizing academic training in addiction science with standard internationally-designed content that pursues evidence-based training and promotes the need for evidence-based scientific intervention. Moreover, this program was carried out under the auspices and supervision of ICUDDR and provides an example of local and international collaboration between a university and an academic network. At the pedagogical and teaching level, it is worth noting that the master's program features a learning method that places students at the center through participatory methods, reading, and debate on the most recent scientific discussions. It emphasizes working with evidence-based interventions, stresses the importance of referring to the main bibliographic databases, and gaining familiarity with accounts and reports available from main international reference institutions and scientific and academic societies.

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**Authors' contributions:** CO, JA and AMG designed the study and proposed study design. AMG designed the initial form of the manuscript. JA conducted a literature review and summary of related work. BP

participated in the preparation of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the emergence article and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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