



**European University Association  
Institutional Evaluation Programme**

**Interim report on institutional evaluations undertaken in  
Portugal in academic years 2006-07 and 2007-08**

*May 2009*

- This report summarises the conclusions of 20 institutional evaluations, initiated by the Institutional Evaluation Programme [IEP] of the European University Association [EUA] in Portugal between 2006 and 2008 and completed by April 2009
- It precedes a third round of evaluations scheduled for 2009-10
- The first two rounds covered Higher Education Institutions [HEIs] from different sub-sectors – polytechnic, university, private, public – and with wide geographical distribution (coastal, inland and island)
- In all cases the evaluations were conducted at the request of institutional leaderships, with the support of the Portuguese government which provided co-funding for 17 HEIs

## **Preamble**

1 The years 2006 to 2008 saw dramatic changes in the legal framework of Portuguese higher education [HE]. However, these changes neither began nor ended in the two-year period. They began to take effect before – and they continue after. Moreover, within a timetable set down in law, institutions embarked on the reform process at different speeds and with different strategies.

2 This report does not set out to compare the outcomes of two successive years of institutional transformation. It is too soon to make a systematic post-hoc impact assessment, and – in any case – a third round of evaluations is about to begin.

3 This is an interim report. It indicates the legislative and policy backdrop. It describes the methodology of the EUA institutional evaluation programme. It notes the general tenor of the evaluating teams' conclusions and offers brief comments. It does not set a detailed agenda for the third round of evaluations.

## **The legislative background**

4 Early in its current mandate the Portuguese government determined that it would reform the Portuguese higher education system, aligning it with developments in the Bologna Process (of which Portugal is a signatory) and tailoring its ethos and operational parameters to accord with those of the European Higher Education Area [EHEA]. The Bologna signatory countries had agreed that the target date for the inception of the EHEA would be 2010.

5 Accordingly, a substantial body of legal measures was enacted, at the initiative of the competent ministry – the *Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior* [MCTES]. The principal instruments addressed such issues as the three-cycle qualifications framework, mobility, quality assurance, governance structures, lifelong learning, competence-based learning, access to HE by non-standard entrants, and

student loans. The full diet of legislation can be viewed at <http://www.mctes.pt/?idc=19&pos=0>

6 Against the background of this legislative programme, MCTES issued **Despacho 484/2006** in January 2006. It set out the means and timeframe according to which the HE system – with its university and polytechnic, public and private sub-sectors – would be evaluated in its entirety. The evaluation would be international, independent, transparent and searching. Its outcomes would inform the reform process, by allowing implementation to be referenced against international good practice.

7 It was not intended that the binary character of the HE system be placed in question. The specificity of the university and polytechnic sub-sectors would be retained, while reorganisation would add value to each by securing their more effective integration into the EHEA. The quality assurance of both, meanwhile, would be undertaken at system level to international standards.

8 The *Despacho* was issued in order to further the government's strategic objectives in respect of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda, notably:

- To create a higher education system fully integrated into the EHEA, particularly in respect of quality, participation rate and employability
- To establish an internationally recognised system of quality assurance
- To widen participation and to put in place effective lifelong learning provision
- To promote research of international standard and to foster innovation and knowledge transfer, to the benefit of Portuguese society at large

9 According to the *Despacho*, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] would be asked to assess how far the Portuguese HE system was aligned with the EHEA. OECD would examine issues relating to access, qualifications framework, employability, research, governance, funding, accreditation and evaluation, regional development, internationalisation and student mobility.

10 At the same time, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [ENQA] would undertake a close examination of accreditation and quality assurance procedures.

11 Both the OECD and ENQA investigations would produce reports and recommendations by December 2006. In the event, the ENQA report appeared in November 2006 [ <http://www.engq.eu/files/EPHEreport.pdf> ] and was followed one year later by the OECD's review of tertiary education policy in Portugal [http://www.oecd.org/document/14/0,3343,en\\_33873108\\_33873764\\_39713934\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/14/0,3343,en_33873108_33873764_39713934_1_1_1_1,00.html)

12 Complementing the investigations undertaken at system level, the *Despacho* also provided for **institutional evaluations**. These would be conducted by EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme [IEP] in conjunction with the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education [EURASHE], calling on the services of non-European experts, notably from the USA and Canada, when appropriate. They would shed light on how a range of issues, including governance, access, autonomy, funding, internationalisation, were addressed at institutional level. Following their completion, EUA would present an overarching national report.

13 While OECD and ENQA would be commissioned by government to prepare reports delivered to its own specifications, the institutions themselves would invite EUA to undertake its evaluations, as per normal IEP practice. The evaluations would thus – from the point of view of the *Despacho* – be voluntary. On this basis the Portuguese government agreed to co-fund ten institutions per year. It nevertheless registered its long-term objective of making the external evaluation of Portuguese HEIs obligatory, once the new national quality assurance agency was fully operational.

## The IEP methodology

14 In the last fifteen years, the EUA's **Institutional Evaluation Programme** has conducted 250 evaluations in 39 countries. At the invitation of the institutional leadership, it investigates how mission, goals and objectives are set and achieved, scrutinising the processes of decision-making, monitoring, and implementation. Specifically, it asks:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is it trying to do it?
- How does the institution know that it works?
- How does it change in order to improve?

15 Evaluation begins with a self-evaluation report produced within the institution and approved by it. This is followed by two site visits made by an expert panel appointed by the IEP Steering Committee and composed of current or former rectors and vice rectors, presidents and vice presidents, a student, and a team secretary with significant experience in higher education management. EURASHE contributes a panel member to all visits paid to polytechnics. Institutions can also request a North American expert if they so choose. In the two rounds so far conducted, six HEIs did so. In total, some 50 panel members from 22 different countries undertook the 20 evaluations.

16 The purpose of the site visits is to discuss and assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified in the self-evaluation. On the basis of these reflections, the IEP team makes recommendations in oral and written reports.

17 Evaluations take place in a framework, which is explicitly one of peer review. They are voluntary and relatively open-ended. They do not recommend one-size-fits-all solutions. Their findings are based on criteria which, in the first instance, are set locally by the institution, in the light of its perception of its regional, national and European contexts.

18 On the whole, the self-evaluations were critical rather than bland, and showed a readiness to identify institutional strengths and weaknesses. They were informative, but almost always prompted requests for more information. This revealed the shortcomings of the management information systems, rather than a lack of assiduity on the part of the self-evaluators. As a result, HEIs lacked the overview necessary to derive strategy from synthesis. The evaluation teams endeavoured to bring their experience to bear in this regard; their recommendations derive in many instances from their work in helping self-evaluators articulate their own implicit conclusions. It is for this reason that this interim report tends to understate the positive and to

accentuate the negative. The full set of institutional evaluations, on which it draws, is available on the MCTES website at

<http://www.dges.mctes.pt/DGES/pt/Instituicoes/Avaliacao+das+Instituicoes/>

## The immediate context

19 By the time the series of evaluations began, HEIs had virtually completed the conversion of their programmes to the Bologna template, in accordance with **Decree-Law 74/2006**. Due to delays in deciding the relative duration of the full-time Bachelor and Master cycles, they had been given very little time in which to complete this onerous task. In most cases courses, even when up and running, had not had time to produce successful graduates.

20 **Law 62/2007** (on governance) had been anticipated during the first round of evaluations, but came into effect only at the beginning of the second round. It required HEIs, inter alia, to have new statutes in place, in line with the law, by October 2008. The lead-in period of one year included the approval of the new statutes by the Ministry. In practice, the process in a number of instances took longer.

21 **Decree-Law 38/2007**, meanwhile, setting up the new national quality assurance agency – the *Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior* [AAAES] – is yet to be fully implemented.

22 More legislation is promised: on the academic career structure, the *Estatuto da Carreira Docente Universitária* [ECDU]; and the establishment of a *Conselho Coordenador do Ensino Superior* [CCES], which, if the recommendation of OECD were to be followed, would be chaired by the Prime Minister and charged with managing institutional performance contracts. Both, if passed into law, are likely to impact significantly on the boundaries of institutional autonomy and the ways in which it can be used. At this stage, IEP does not know whether or when this might happen.

23 All the above are important components in a context which is shifting rapidly in line with government policy. But although the directions are clear, the modalities and timeframe of implementation are much less so. HEIs are being asked to gear up to the EHEA, reasonably well defined at European level, in a national operating environment in which past practice still weighs heavily and in which the effects of the global economic crisis have yet to be fully felt. This should be borne in mind when reading the thematic sections of this report.

24 What picture of Portuguese HE emerges from the large sample of evaluations already undertaken? It is time to turn to the themes which featured most prominently in the evaluations: research, employability, regional development, human and physical resources, learning and teaching, lifelong learning, internationalisation, quality assurance, governance.

## Research in the polytechnics

25 In some areas it is appropriate to distinguish between the polytechnic and university sub-sectors. This is the case in research. In the Portuguese binary system the polytechnics (private and public) are expected to engage in applied research

supporting their vocational orientation. In EU policy terms, this is consistent with the revised Lisbon Agenda. It also chimes with the aspirations of the institutions and their teaching staff. IEP teams encountered several examples of thriving research units and reported high levels of commitment.

26 In the 2006-07 round of evaluations, the debates occasioned by the preparation of law 62/2007 were already in evidence. The new law would allow polytechnics to deliver Master degrees – again, as appropriate to their vocational orientation – and would confirm their inability to offer doctoral provision. The ratio of students to doctor/*especialista* would have to be at least 30:1, while a minimum of 15% of the teaching staff would have to have PhDs and at least 35% be *especialistas*.

27 Many polytechnics had already achieved these ratios and percentages (in overall terms, if not in respect of individual departments) and had set themselves more ambitious targets. It was clear that an active research culture was being energetically promoted. One of its most intense expressions was to be found in the enrolment of individual academic staff members in university-based doctoral programmes. Unfortunately, while the universities clearly benefited from this arrangement, it often created a centrifugal effect in the polytechnics. The research undertaken was motivated individually and not necessarily embedded in polytechnic human resource and research strategies. If such strategies were typically not well articulated, this was at least in part due to the fact that staff regarded the university, rather than the polytechnic, as the proper locus of their research activities.

28 Moreover, while national legislation ensured that academic staff would formally be able to design and deliver Master level courses likely to contain applied research components, it gave no guarantee that they would have personal experience of applied or interdisciplinary research. Nor could it guarantee the synergy of teaching and research which EUA and other stakeholder bodies working at European level regard as essential. On the contrary, many academic staff retained their active affiliation to university research centres, where they engaged in basic research of a kind not directly transferable to the polytechnic environment.

29 Accordingly, IEP teams typically made a set of linked recommendations:

- that polytechnic research budgets be increased and effectively targeted
- that they include sufficient resource for sabbatical leave and for attendance at international conferences
- that portfolios of EU-funded research projects be built up
- that competent project-management agencies be set up in each polytechnic to provide support and technical assistance
- that polytechnics develop research-focused internal quality assurance procedures, to complement assessments made by external agencies and to enhance the polytechnics' capacity to undergo them

30 Specifically, IEP teams encouraged the polytechnics to extend their already significant activities in the field of applied and regionally focused research, particularly into areas in which they could avoid duplication with university-based projects. They also sought to encourage a greater volume of collaborative research – undertaken with other HEIs, as well as with regional partners. They regarded collaboration with universities as important – indeed, law 62/2007 allows the setting up of trans-binary research units – but so too was the building of critical mass with peer HEIs, at home and abroad. These measures would help to dissolve the problem highlighted in paragraph 27 above.

31 Finally, the evaluation teams pointed to the need for the polytechnics to develop comprehensive research strategies – integrating issues of financial resource, staff development, quality assurance and regional development. These strategies would set achievable goals and timeframes against a background of performance indicators, wide consultation and periodic review. Managerial responsibility should be located at a high level. Technical assistance for project management should be available to all active researchers.

32 As indicated already, the start of the second round of evaluations coincided with the promulgation of law 62/2007, which set an eighteen-month deadline for polytechnics to reach the staffing ratios mentioned above. (It should be noted that the grade of *especialista* had not yet been defined in law.) The institutions visited were therefore deeply engaged in drafting new statutes, which would allow them most effectively to discharge the mission conferred upon them by the new legislation.

33 In general, IEP teams reiterated the recommendations offered the previous year and found the institutions either receptive to them or already moving towards implementation. The teams stressed the need for polytechnics to build research portfolios and to have sufficient resources (less than 2% of annual income was not enough). They should aim for parity of esteem with the universities, while maintaining their distinctiveness. Only in one mono-disciplinary instance (nursing) did a team urge the transfer of an institution from the polytechnic to the university sector.

## **Research in the universities**

34 The research mission of the university sub-sector is different. Universities engage in fundamental, as well as applied research; they deliver PhDs. Many have international reputations in particular fields. Yet the two rounds of evaluations elicited recommendations from IEP, which echoed the issues rehearsed above. Not every university had a well articulated research strategy. Most had no internal quality assurance procedures, depending instead on the assessments made by external funding agencies. In the case of the national *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia* [FCT], these were frequently long delayed. Many universities had low profiles in collaborative and inter-disciplinary research.

35 Aspiration and commitment were not lacking. Nor was awareness of the strategic imperatives. The inadequacies derived rather from financial and structural problems. Universities, as well as polytechnics, had insufficient resources and were not yet able to exploit ways of generating more. Focused, detailed and cogent research strategies, elaborated at institutional level, were not in evidence.

36 Indeed, the universities' devolved structures militated against such corporate action. Faculties and research centres were too far removed – from one another, as well as from institutional leadership – preventing the identification of synergies and the full articulation of research, learning, teaching and curriculum design. The research centres themselves enjoyed such a degree of autonomy that their activities (costs, policies, productivity) fell outside the scope of the financial management systems located at the centre. It was difficult for IEP teams to appreciate the complexity and heterogeneity of the legal forms taken by the research units – some of which are associations in law, independent in their research activities, while collaborating as external partners in course delivery. Their role and position in institutional governance was, to say the least, obscure. What was clear was that they

were not responsible to central institutional management. In such conditions the production of coherent research strategies is extremely difficult.

37 In the light of its evaluations conducted thus far, IEP considers that there is an urgent need for university research activities to be rationalised and effectively anchored – by the institutions themselves in the context of their deliberative and policy-making functions. Until this is complete, universities will be handicapped in the contribution that they make to, for example, the nurturing of early stage researchers, graduate schools, regional development, and collaborative research at European level.

38 It must be pointed out that universities do not display the same deficiencies to the same degree. There is a strong case for capacity building based on the dissemination of good practice.

39 At the level of detail, IEP teams identified three particular issues which it is appropriate to include in this report. They recommended that FCT accredit research projects – specifically in the case of the *Academia Militar* – in the areas of security and defence. They recommended, too, that an ethics commission be established at national level to give relevant guidance to institutions, as well as to private and public research funding bodies. Finally, they noted that Portuguese employment practices did not lend themselves to the easy absorption of international researchers; this could usefully be addressed in future legislation.

## **Employability and the regional dimension**

40 In its prescriptions on institutional governance (which will be examined more closely in the final section of this report), Law 62/2007 (article 81) specifies that 30% of each HEI's *conselho geral* will be composed of external members. They are to be co-opted by the elected staff and students. One of them will be elected as chair of the board. The new legislation is now coming into effect, as the Ministry approves the institutions' new statutes case by case.

41 Article 81 thus gives formal status to outsiders who may be major stakeholders in the city, the region, or internationally, and who represent the social partners and civil society. They are intended to bring to the HEI a greater capacity for targeting its activities.

42 Stakeholder involvement is not new in Portuguese HE. Several of the HEIs evaluated by IEP had consultative committees; others did not. In general, their existence or otherwise was not a good guide to the degree of interaction between the institution and, for example, commerce, industry and local government. Significant contact, strongly in evidence in many cases, often took place outside the deliberative and policy-making structures of the institution.

43 Public polytechnics were not necessarily more in touch with external stakeholders than universities, despite their vocational orientation. In the more geographically and structurally dispersed institutions on both sides of the binary line, stakeholders tended to relate to a particular discipline, department or research centre and, as a result, held widely differing views of institutional performance and potential.

44 Nor did it follow that private HEIs, simply because of their context and ethos, had better links with the 'outside world' to which they by definition belonged, or that

specialist institutions (in the healthcare, marketing and management, military affairs, and tourism sectors) were closer to their stakeholders than the comprehensive providers.

45 In general, the involvement of external stakeholders correlated with the acuity of the institution's perceptions of its context and opportunity and with the focus that it brought to its mission. In a few cases, these were impressively intense. In the majority of institutions, however, IEP teams saw a need for more sustained and efficient partnership between internal and external parties – to assist in the definition of mission and strategy and to render delivery more effective.

46 The evaluation teams therefore recommended in a number of cases that consultative committees be set up. These recommendations will now have been overtaken by the new legislation. There will still, however, be a need for impact assessment. IEP suggests that government convene all parties to determine criteria and a timeframe for a review of the effectiveness of the introduction of external stakeholders into the *conselho geral*.

47 IEP teams also recommended that HEIs adopt more systematic alumni tracking procedures, in order to identify potential external stakeholders with an affiliation to the institution already in place, as well as to harness their capacity for co-funding research and for advising on curriculum development. Alumni not only testify to the institution's high prioritisation of employability; they can also provide work placements and assistance to students seeking to access the labour market.

48 In the matter of alumni tracking, too, law 62/2007 has created a requirement (article 23), to which article 24 adds the further prescription that institutions monitor graduate employment rates and destinations according to a methodology and in a database established by the Ministry. IEP found evidence that students make their choices of institution partly on the basis of its supposed employment rates; if this is true in general, they will no doubt welcome better quality data.

49 IEP teams identified varying degrees of sensitivity to the importance of employability (which is one of the action lines of the Bologna Process). In some cases – as a result of regional location, specialist mission, and perhaps also of the *numerus clausus* set by government – employment rates were high. One private institution was able to guarantee its graduates one year of employment in its own associated companies. In regions with a high index of emigration, or in which employment patterns were mainly low-skilled and seasonal, HEIs were obliged to address the national labour market, with a lower guarantee of success.

50 HEIs in which IEP found established practices of enterprise education or problem-based learning, both of which enhance employability, were the exceptions rather than the rule. The existence within the institutions of dedicated careers guidance agencies likewise could not be taken for granted.

51 Typically, IEP teams found that the institutions evaluated could do more to build their commitment to regional development. Once more, this was broadly true of all categories of HEI and whether the region was one of economic growth or economic decline. It may be that a number of factors limit the sensitivity of institutions to the opportunities provided by greater regional insertion: the fact that the regions defined by the European Regional Development Fund [ERDF] do not correlate with those of the Portuguese administration; and the fact that regional development agencies, where they exist, have limited strategic functions. Most HEIs appear to steer a course between the requirements imposed by central government and the scope for

collaboration with municipal authorities. In this, they can encounter tensions, particularly in regions where municipal authorities feel that their needs have not been fully recognised and addressed by Lisbon.

52 Portugal's knowledge-based regional economies are located primarily in the littoral and immediate hinterland of Lisbon and Porto. IEP nevertheless found excellent examples of knowledge transfer agencies in these and in contrasting regions. Through their efforts, HEIs were building impressive track records in job creation, company incubation and spin-offs, innovation, patents and design rights, regeneration of industries in decline, interaction with SMEs, consultancy, science and society, as well as a range of community services of a lifelong learning character.

53 Such good practice could be generalised from the few to the many. This would require a series of measures, incentivised by government, including an initial mapping of actual and potential regional interventions, infrastructural expertise in ERDF project management, more sustained cooperation with private and public interests, more targeted public relations, and above all, a strategic frame in which outreach in all its forms were better articulated with mainstream curriculum and research.

54 In respect of some regions, either IEP teams or HEIs themselves evoked the possibility of regional HE consortia, set up to secure more effective intervention, complementation of expertise and sharing of investment costs. Cross-border collaborations were also mentioned, as were institutional partnerships with foreign HEIs operating in similar regional circumstances. Both types of initiative should be explored, with government support.

## **Human and physical resources**

55 Issues relating to human resource policy are cross-cutting in a report of this nature. They have special significance where research is concerned, particularly in polytechnics, where – as mentioned earlier – the level of academic qualification must by law be sufficient to sustain the delivery of second cycle programmes. Particular staff development needs are associated with the switch to student-centred learning. These are taken up later. So, too, is the evaluation of teaching staff in the context of quality assurance.

56 In general, it is important to note, the IEP teams were impressed with the quality of academic and administrative staff. Terms like 'committed', 'dynamic', 'enthusiastic' recur regularly in the reports.

57 The evaluations took place against the background of the promised legislation on the academic career structure, although the likely content of this was not known. As things stood in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 sessions, the universities were severely constrained in their freedom of action, and polytechnics even more so. The key factor was the dominance of civil service employment practices, which seriously undermined institutional autonomy. Many reports considered that HEIs needed to enhance their ability to recruit, reward, retain, develop, and if necessary dismiss staff, and that a coherent human resource strategy could be generated only within an overarching strategic plan over which the institution had a considerable measure of control. Institutional leaderships were typically obliged to rely on a high percentage of part-time and short-term contract staff, or – as was sometimes the case in private

institutions, on retired public sector employees. This, together with rapid turnover, undermined team cohesion and continuity.

58 If HEIs were deficient in this regard, it was due to other factors as well. It was often the case that faculties, schools and departments enjoyed such autonomy that the imposition of a central steer proved impossible; in these instances, the development of inter-disciplinary teaching and research also suffered. It could also be that the degree of in-house recruitment ('in-breeding'), so embedded as to be perceived as automatic, inhibited the institution in its attempts to innovate and to diversify; IEP teams were very critical of this burden of endogeny.

59 Senior managers were conscious of these issues. When they expressed frustration, it was because budgets were insufficient to address some of the problems, while structural features prevented them from making the best economic and most academically creative use of their staffing resources. Institutions operating matrix systems had greater flexibility, but could not wholly escape the effects of rigid employment law.

60 The level of response to these challenges was uneven. Some institutions were commended fulsomely; others were urged to get to grips with the problems. Underlying the reality, however, was the need to receive and/or generate sufficient financial resource to ensure that academic staff had time to discharge their teaching and research (and clinical) duties and that administrative staff likewise could rise above the volume of mundane tasks to evaluate and adopt better management systems. It is difficult to progress along this route as long as employment practices remain unchanged.

61 As for physical resources, the picture was varied. IEP teams, in the course of their two site visits to each institution, had ample opportunity to visit teaching and laboratory facilities, libraries, student accommodation, sports and canteen facilities. No pattern emerged regarding the distribution between private and public, polytechnic and university, single and dispersed campuses. The most serious problems occurred where premises were used by one institution but owned by another. The property audit required by law 62/2007 and due to be completed by all HEIs in April 2009 will hopefully allow more systematic surveys to be undertaken and remedial action to be planned.

62 As far as student services were concerned, IEP teams in general found that standards were high. While there was always room for improvement and for a higher level of investment, facilities for computing, healthcare, residential accommodation and sports were all found – and were said by students – to be good. Only in respect of library provision did the teams sometimes comment on inadequate supply of workstations or book stock.

63 It was in the provision of academic tutorial support that the general level left something to be desired. Government's ambitious and laudable attempt to convert the Portuguese HE system to student-centred learning is the subject of the next section.

## **Learning and teaching**

64 Of particular importance in the move from teacher-centred to student-centred pedagogy is the issue of learning outcomes. The *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA* [ESG] strongly recommend that these be used as the

basis of curriculum design, of student assessment, and therefore also of quality assurance at course and institutional levels. IEP teams found little evidence of the restructuring of curricula in terms of learning outcomes. This, no doubt, is a task for the future, once the AAAES becomes fully operational, at which point institutions will have the opportunity to re-examine their use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System [ECTS], as well as of the national qualifications framework.

65 IEP teams looked carefully at the process of the conversion of courses to the Bologna template, in order to assess to what extent student-centred learning was being implemented. As mentioned already, institutions had been given little time to plan. Moreover, they were working against a background of teacher-centred learning solidly embedded in the secondary sector, as well as a degree of resistance from their own academic bodies.

66 The HEIs visited were well aware that student-centred learning goes beyond curriculum design, involving physical infrastructure, pedagogic method, learning resources, deployment of staff time, and the necessary financial capacity. The teams found that institutions had reached different degrees of preparedness: some had set up dedicated learning and teaching units to adapt course delivery and to assure staff development; others were proceeding on a pilot basis, asking one particular faculty or school to identify transferable good practice; others had converted their courses and then begun to confront the resource and pedagogic implications. Examples of responses to the challenge of student-centred learning were found across the range, from weak to excellent.

67 This shows that the task confronting the Portuguese HE system is essentially that of generalising the good practice which already exists within it. This is particularly true in the areas of academic tutorial provision, work placement provision, the development of e-learning and the appropriate IT platforms, the bench-marking of library stock and space against international norms, and the adoption of innovative pedagogies such as problem-based learning.

68 The key to full implementation of student-centred learning will be the operation of the pedagogic councils, with equal membership of staff and students, which, under law 62-2007, each faculty, school or department is required to have. However, such councils are not required to exist at institutional level. IEP teams found in a number of instances that the setting up of a Learning and Teaching Committee, located in a central location and within the remit of a vice-rector or vice-president, was desirable. Its purpose would be to provide a steer from senior management, to ensure that good practice was successfully transferred, to receive and act on feedback from the quality assurance procedures, to organise voluntary development sessions for staff and students, and to form an overview of the impact of implementation, against which drop-out and failure rates could be monitored and assessed.

69 In respect of the some of the mono-disciplinary institutions visited, IEP teams noted that certain categories of staff with strong responsibilities towards students – non-military teaching staff at the *Academia Militar* or hospital staff, for example – should be fully involved in the bodies set up to deliberate on pedagogic affairs.

70 The remarks above have no particular binary application – they apply equally to both sub-sectors. So also, in the view of IEP, does the long-term desirability of devolving the course approval function from the Ministry to institutions, something which should prove feasible in the new national quality assurance system.

## Lifelong learning

71 With the exception of e-learning and other forms of distance learning, the best opportunity for Portuguese institutions to develop the lifelong dimension lies in the local and regional activities discussed in paragraphs 40 to 54 above. Some HEIs have successfully targeted students in the 23+ and 55+ age ranges. Others have a substantial track record in delivering professional development programmes to nurses and to secondary school teachers.

72 On the whole, however, IEP teams noted that the lifelong learning project had not progressed far beyond government policy declaration and institutional aspiration. On a number of occasions, they pointed to a lack of strategic thinking and to the need for staff development. They found the primary focus to be very much on full-time standard-entry students. The widening participation agenda – and within it the lifelong learning imperative – remains largely a challenge still to be taken up.

## Internationalisation

73 All the institutions visited were conscious of the need to internationalise. All were aware of the opportunities presented by the Bologna Process. Most had some engagement with EU-funded mobility and research programmes and most devoted special attention to students from lusophone countries in Africa and Latin America. In many, the internationalisation agenda was set and overseen by a member of the senior management team – a Vice-Rector or Vice-President.

74 Whatever the level of activity, two general views emerged from the evaluations, irrespective of the sub-sector to which the institutions belonged. First, that the level of activity could be raised. Secondly, and more importantly, that the activity should be mainstreamed.

75 The IEP teams made a number of suggestions regarding the intensification of international activity. They felt that better information could be provided internally and that institutions could better project themselves externally, by extending their English-language websites, and by seeking greater involvement in the activities of the Bologna stakeholder organisations (European Students' Union [ESU], EUA, EURASHE) and others operating at European level.

76 Staff and student mobility could be increased by raising the number of joint curriculum development and research collaborations, including *co-tutelles*, and by providing incentives. More extensive transnational networking would bring in its train opportunities to benchmark international activities against those undertaken by successful peer institutions in other countries. It would also assist in the recruitment of international teaching staff.

77 Language policy was mentioned in a number of reports, usually in relation to taught course provision: recommending either more Portuguese-language support for incoming students, or more support for outgoing students in languages other than English, or programmes delivered in English and targeting international students.

78 Ultimately, these suggestions – prompted by particular circumstances in particular institutions – all point in the direction of mainstreaming. As a general rule, international activities were undertaken by enthusiastic staff members, with the distant support of international relations offices which were too small and too far

removed from the principal policy-making instances. International initiatives tended to be isolated. They should be mapped, consolidated, rewarded, and integrated into the strategic vision of the institution.

79 The challenge facing the majority of institutions evaluated is three-fold. To identify the synergies that will impel activities undertaken at regional, national and international levels to reinforce each other. To frame them within a strategic plan which sets targets, assigns a time schedule, monitors delivery and assesses impact. And finally, to support them with an adequate infrastructure, which assures career incentives, resource, technical assistance and management information.

## **Quality culture**

80 Quality assurance figures in all the policy strands discussed above. It therefore loomed large in the evaluations undertaken by IEP. In general, institutions were conscious of the implications. They were aware of developments at European level – in particular, ESG. They knew, too, that the Portuguese government intended to create a new national agency charged with implementation. Awareness was widespread. Pro-activity was less so. A few HEIs had acted already in anticipation. In one instance, the IEP team noted the existence of ‘an excellent internal quality assurance structure’, which could ‘serve as benchmark’ to the remainder. For some others, the self-evaluation report requested by IEP was the first excursion into internal quality assessment.

81 This, however, was the exception. Across the range, IEP found institutions in different degrees of transition. Most institutions were unable – and many said so quite frankly in their self-evaluation reports – to demonstrate the quality of what they were doing, even where that quality existed by common consent. An academic quality culture, in other words, was not in place. The fact that a considerable number of HEIs had implemented ISO 9001:2000 for their administrative services – while it confirmed their sense that formal quality assurance procedures were essential – threw into sharp relief the absence of an overarching quality assurance structure consistent with ESG.

82 The IEP teams thus typically found themselves in dialogue with institutions which aspired in their mission to quality provision, and which in many cases displayed strong informal relationships between, for example, professors and students, but in which the combination of scientific and pedagogic committees was unable to deliver quality assurance to the standard required by ESG. This section of the report lists the main areas in which the HEIs fell short. As has been the case in respect of other policy initiatives, it should not be read as a blanket condemnation. Elements of good practice were seen in many places. The task for the Portuguese HE community is to identify and generalise them.

83 Indeed, a few institutions had already embarked on this process – by running a pilot project in one particular school or faculty, with a view to building credible and durable quality assurance procedures which could be extended to the remaining organic entities. This was the positive side. At the same time, and at the risk of labouring the point, many HEIs consisted of school and faculties which enjoyed such autonomy that the central authorities had difficulty in introducing any measures at institutional level.

84 For this reason the evaluation teams recommended the setting up of an internal quality assurance unit with an institution-wide remit. It would be responsible to a

Vice-Rector or Vice-President, would develop procedures covering the range of institutional activities (administration, academic course provision, research and knowledge transfer, student services), and would ensure that all stakeholders (notably students) were participant and in routine receipt of its findings.

85 The credibility of such a unit would derive from a number of factors: from the transparency of its procedures and from the knowledge that these procedures had been tried and tested elsewhere; from its level of human and financial resource and from the fact of its disaffiliation from the organic entities which were competing for resources; from its location in the central administration and its links to the national agency; from the quality, relevance and volume of the management information which it received; and – most importantly, from its ability to connect directly with the grass roots of student and teacher constituencies and to foster the growth of a quality culture from the bottom up.

86 Such a unit would monitor student performance (drop-out and failure rates, progression to higher levels, employability) against national benchmarks and make appropriate recommendations regarding remedial teaching, pastoral care and other forms of support.

87 The quality assurance of academic staff performance frequently came under the scrutiny of the IEP teams. They found little evidence that students were significantly and reliably involved. The practice of administering student questionnaires was patchy and left much to be desired. They might be paper-based or on-line, signed or anonymous, optional or compulsory. Feedback to students was erratic. The pedagogic councils, which sometimes formally received summative reports, had no power to take action in cases of sub-standard performance by teaching staff.

88 The teams were reassured to some extent by the introduction of *Provedores* (usually translated as *ombudsmen*), but failed to secure assurance that these would have seats on influential committees. Certainly, there was some evidence of staff development programmes, set up to expedite the shift to student-centred learning, but there were no established procedures for dismissing incompetent teachers.

89 A central quality assurance unit operating at institutional level would also oversee the process of curriculum development. One of the challenges facing Portuguese HE in the future will be the quality assurance, within the framework of ESG, of the courses converted to the Bologna template but as yet unproven. This will be a cyclical task, for which ongoing capacity building will be needed. A mature quality culture, nourished by the full participation of all constituencies, will be indispensable.

## **Governance**

90 Under the broad heading of governance may be found the related issues of autonomy, diversity of mission, institutional management and capacity for change. Law 62/2007 covers all these themes, directly or indirectly. It distinguishes between private HEIs, public polytechnics and universities. The final section of this report deals with each sub-sector in turn.

### ***Governance: the private institutions***

91 IEP teams visited four private sector institutions, two with comprehensive profiles, two with a strong disciplinary and professional focus, all located in the conurbations of Lisbon and Porto. All had thrived in the early years of expansion, but none was immune to the impact of demographic decline. All displayed a strong public service ethos. Because they were principally dependent on fee income, they were sensitive to competition and to changes in their operating environment. The fact that they were private did not mean that their facilities were better.

92 One visiting team drew a distinction between institutional government and governance. Indeed, while all the institutions possessed energetic leadership, this was either expressed within a tight line management structure or dispersed by an excessive degree of faculty autonomy. This tended to depend on the extent to which the private HEIs tried to replicate the model of the traditional Portuguese public university. Where the constituent organic entities enjoyed too much autonomy, there was an absence of efficient bottom-up consultation processes and no reliable mechanism of policy implementation.

93 In general, the IEP teams were impressed by the vitality of the private institutions and by their commitment to quality. Pro-activity and a capacity for rapid response to external developments; relatively flexible employment practices; a constant concern for cost-effectiveness; a potential for internationalisation enhanced by the existence of sibling operations established elsewhere in the lusophone world; – these characteristics were all in evidence.

94 Nonetheless, formal governance structures were not such as would guarantee positive outcomes. The absence of advisory boards with external representation was noted. Strongly recommended was the establishment of an over-arching strategic planning body, charged with identifying synergies, setting priorities, ensuring consultation, monitoring delivery in relation to mission, fixing periodic reviews within a multi-annual perspective, and demonstrating accountability with transparency. Such a body would provide an element of continuity at crucial moments of institutional development, such as change of ownership and/or leadership, neither of which are clearly referenced in the formal governance structures.

95 It was not in the IEP remit to examine the relations between the private HEIs and the founding bodies that sponsored them. As a result, the individual reports did not focus on the articulation of the not-for-profit to the for-profit entities or on the possibility that the HEI might be required merely to operationalise a strategy elaborated above it in an ethos of commercial sensitivity. These two factors nevertheless impinge on institutional autonomy, as understood in the EHEA. There will no doubt be opportunity to reflect further on them when the new legislation has come into full effect.

### ***Governance: the public polytechnics***

96 Turning now to the public institutions, also subject to new legislation, the binary division of mission is well defined. As reported above, the polytechnics have a more vocational and professional orientation, their research is applied rather than fundamental, and they are not allowed to deliver doctoral qualifications. The binary system is nevertheless sufficiently complex to accommodate a number of different positions. During a sequence of historical rationalisations, many mono-disciplinary institutes of higher education were integrated into comprehensive institutions – either polytechnics or universities, depending on their location – while others remained 'non-integrated'.

97 Two of the **'non-integrated' HEIs** were evaluated by IEP with the assistance of EURASHE. In the case of one, the visiting team strongly urged that it be incorporated, as a faculty, into a university. It did so on the grounds that the discipline which it taught had attained an academic maturity sufficient to warrant study at doctoral level. In the second case, where the dominant issue was rather one of critical mass and the sharing of premises with another HEI, this recommendation was not made. In both cases, however, the IEP teams focused on the opportunities for increasing the level of autonomy. They commended the existence or urged the introduction, as appropriate, of a strong role for external stakeholders, of student participation, of good lines of internal and external communication, and of medium- and long-term strategic planning.

98 As for the **polytechnics** proper, it is fair to say that all were conscious of the need to redefine their autonomy in the manner most likely to maximise cohesion and corporate identity. The IEP teams, which included EURASHE experts, were sympathetic to the predicament of polytechnic directorates, operating from a lower resource base than universities and subject to a greater degree of ministerial micro-management. Indeed, the influence of government on governance, financial appropriations, student and staff numbers, course approvals – at least in the 'old' regime which will prevail until the full implementation of law 62/2007 – was decisive. It seemed to the evaluators to reduce dramatically the number of instances in which the term 'autonomy' might reasonably be used.

99 Moreover, in many cases, polytechnic presidencies operated in an environment in which constituent schools maximised their enjoyment of the legal, financial, administrative and pedagogic autonomy which law and statutes conferred upon them. The schools frequently had long independent histories prior to their integration and appeared reluctant to be absorbed. It was common for their autonomy to be reinforced by physical separation from the central administration, sometimes by several kilometres.

100 In practice, this proliferation of competing autonomies meant an absence – or only the very recent introduction of – consolidated financial accounting. Administrative structures were duplicated; software systems incompatible. In these circumstances, financial transparency and economies of scale were difficult to achieve. Internal resource allocation from the centre was doomed to be uninformed, inefficient and beyond the reach of audit.

101 Organic dispersion also brought a reluctance to embrace horizontal initiatives, as a result of which presidencies were relatively disempowered. Leaders could lead only if, by force of personality, they could overcome the inertia of the governance structures and the protectionist attitudes of schools. Corporate identity itself was problematic. Evaluation teams approached buildings on a number of occasions, only to encounter logos and signage showing no affiliation to the HEI they thought they were visiting.

102 Unsurprisingly, the teams tended to recommend a range of measures, all calculated to build the capacity of the institutional leadership: central advisory committees, centrally managed research, quality assurance and public relations agencies, and a deliberative and executive structure which would favour effective and participatory strategic planning, along the synergetic lines rehearsed elsewhere in this report.

103 However, as indicated above, all polytechnics are at various stages of striving for greater corporate cohesion. Once again, it will be important to observe and assess the impact of law 62/2007 in due course.

104 Between the public polytechnics and the public universities sits the **Academia Militar**, which refers to itself as an Institution of University Higher Education while not having the power to confer doctorates. The IEP report considered the Academy to be excellent in many respects, but noted that it does not – and cannot – enjoy the mode of autonomy now being generalised in the EHEA. Its decision-making processes are set within the framework of the military command structure, from which the civilian academic staff is excluded. While this might appear to favour rapid policy implementation, in fact the Academy's dependence on two Ministries often has the opposite outcome.

### **Governance: the public universities**

105 Finally, it is time to turn to the **universities**. Once again, some have anticipated the new legislation by internal reform, while others have focused their change management energies on the preparation of the new statutes required by law 62/2007. Once again, a central theme of the IEP evaluations is fragmentation and its remedies. The teams found widespread agreement that the principal challenge, as far as governance is concerned, is to find forms which combine participatory democracy and external accountability with the capacity to initiate change. The problem is to know which form is most appropriate to each particular institution and its context.

106 IEP teams frequently concurred with the diagnoses produced in the self-evaluation process. These speak of the proliferation of committees put in place in the aftermath of the 1974 Revolution, of the unwieldy size of some of the seemingly most powerful, and of the dysfunctional effect of unweighted voting systems.

107 At the same time, the teams welcomed attempts to move towards integrated management information systems, consolidated full-cost accounting, central research databases, and the like. They saw the consolidation of the institutional centre as the necessary corollary of the increasingly permeability of the faculties. The advantages were many. Universities would gain in corporate identity and become better able to project beyond national borders. They would increase cost-efficiency and have greater scope for investment in internal processes. The internal staff and student mobility on which inter-disciplinary collaborative research depends would be facilitated, making the institutions more competitive in the European research funding context. Above all, they would enable the setting up of viable strategic planning cycles, based on accurate and reliable estimation of intellectual, cultural and financial assets.

108 IEP teams, in common with university colleagues, were unable to form a clear view of the likely effects of law 62/2007. Certainly, its dual insistence on *fitness of purpose* and *fitness for purpose* is wholly in line with the IEP philosophy. Whether it will strengthen institutional leaderships or the traditional faculties is a question which, when posed, elicited irreconcilable responses. It will be a great challenge for universities to evolve viable corporate autonomy out of the guarantees of statutory, academic, cultural, scientific, pedagogic, disciplinary, administrative and financial autonomy afforded by the law both to the whole and to parts of institutions, as well as out of the structures prescribed to secure them. As in the case of the private institutions and the polytechnics, IEP believes impact assessment within an appropriate period to be essential. It should be international, independent,

transparent and searching – in other words, undertaken with the same concern for efficacy as shown by the manner in which Despacho 484/2006 established the ongoing review of Portuguese HE.

### ***Governance: the case of the 'integrated' public universities***

109 In another response to the reality or the threat of fragmentation, some universities had developed or begun to develop matrix systems. More frequently they were those which had integrated polytechnic schools (of nursing, for example) and which were confronted by the task of absorbing into the academic community bodies of knowledge and staff funded to a lower level than the indigenous departments.

110 Such arrangements in principle benefited both parties. The polytechnic entities were able to participate in collaborative research projects. Teaching resources and facilities could be shared, access to EU-funded programmes could be facilitated, and staff seeking doctoral supervision could find it close at hand. At the same time, the Universities could strengthen their engagement with the local and regional communities.

111 IEP evaluated four such 'integrated' institutions, three by full evaluation, one on a follow-up basis. The results are interesting. In one case, the evaluation team was clear in its view that there had been a 'failure to coalesce'. There had been no joint planning for the Bologna reforms; an excessively heavy committee structure, topped by two parallel senates, barred the way forward by making concerted strategic thinking too difficult to achieve. The evaluation team welcomed the reform agenda of a newly elected rector and backed it by recommending the strengthening of central agencies for research and internationalisation. At that stage it was too soon to anticipate which new statutes would be brought forward under the provisions of law 62/2007 or which workable governance structures might be put in place.

112 In another – contrasting – case, polytechnic units had been much more effectively integrated. While there was still a need for better articulation of overall strategy, as well as for more trans-binary access routes for students, both the institutional leadership and the academic community had recognised the opportunities which integration created for regional development and for lifelong learning provision.

113 The salient feature of this institution was its **matrix system**, which gave it a flexibility, a speed of initiative and response, and a capacity for inter-disciplinary teaching and research uncharacteristic of the Portuguese HE sector as a whole. The IEP team regarded the matrix system as a strength and explicitly endorsed it. It was administratively more labour-intensive, but this was largely because its committee structure had to be supplemented by the faculty-referenced structure required by law. Of itself, the matrix system – and the absence of faculties – did not make the tasks of full-cost accounting and internal resource allocation significantly more difficult.

114 In a third instance of university-polytechnic integration, planning for yet further integration had reached an advanced stage. The institution saw significant opportunities to accelerate knowledge transfer into its region and to develop a portfolio of first and cycle programmes, in which the academic and the professional dimensions would be complementary.

115 Here, too, there was a matrix system, this time based on degree programmes, run by degree councils with managerial and quality assurance responsibilities. True, there was also the unnecessary complexity caused by the doubling up of committee

structures. Nevertheless, the gains in flexibility and in the capacity to maximise the synergy of teaching and research were, in the view of the IEP team, impressive. It commented on the innovative character of the curriculum and went so far as to endorse, not only the institution's plans to absorb more polytechnic elements, but also its call for an enabling funding allocation from government.

116 Finally, in the fourth example of trans-binary integration, the institution in question was seeking to use the framework of law 62/2007 to extend and strengthen its matrix system. It intended to gather its departments into Centres of Competence. These would be complemented transversally by colleges (charged with management and oversight of course delivery) and innovation institutes.

117 Once again, the IEP team warmly endorsed the intention, but stressed in its recommendations that the levels of devolved autonomy between the *Conselho Geral* and the Centres of Competence be 'clearly defined in the university by-laws and sufficiently limited to enable the General Council to be effective in its overarching governance role'. It also considered that 'the nature of the working relationship between the Centres of Competence and the Colleges be clearly set out in the university by-laws.'

118 In summary, of the four instances of trans-binary integration, three were deemed by IEP teams to be successful institutions, well managed and with a proven capacity to change. These three universities operated matrix systems designed in-house with an explicit appropriateness to mission and fitness for purpose. This – in the view of the evaluators – gave them an acuity of self-analysis and a readiness to innovate which allowed them to respond efficiently and imaginatively to regional and national needs.

119 It is striking that none of them are situated in the Lisbon and Porto conurbations. In these areas mono-disciplinary institutions are more likely to have the sufficient critical mass needed to remain 'unintegrated'. It is away from the mainland littoral, that the three successfully integrated, and matrix-based, universities offer excellent case studies of how to turn demographic decline to educational advantage.

## **Concluding remarks**

120 As indicated already, a third round of evaluations will take place in the 2009-10 academic session. By that time, the legal framework of Portuguese HE will have further evolved and new institutional profiles will have emerged. Not sufficiently, however, for the third round to function as a formal impact assessment. Emerging trends will doubtless be visible. IEP looks forward to continuing its work, in conjunction with EURASHE, and to contributing further to the incorporation of Portuguese HEIs into the EHEA.

121 IEP has already expressed its thanks to the institutional leaderships which invited it to evaluate, as well as to the bodies of academic and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders who so freely gave of their time. Everywhere, IEP experienced a warm welcome and benefited from the informed opinions which have been used to compile this interim report. IEP takes this opportunity to reiterate its gratitude.

122 IEP wishes to thank also – and equally warmly – the sectoral bodies which have supported the two evaluation rounds: APESP, CCISP and CRUP. Finally, to the

Minister and officials at MCTES, IEP expresses its deep gratitude for the confidence placed in it.

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