UNIVERSITY OF ÉVORA

FOLLOW UP REPORT

May 2010

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of a follow up visit to the University of Évora, Portugal. The follow up visit was undertaken as part of the European University Association (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP).

Institutions that have gone through the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) have the possibility of requesting a follow-up evaluation two to four years after the initial evaluation. This allows these institutions – and IEP – to identify the impact that the initial evaluation has had on the institution's development, investigate the experiences gained from changes implemented after the initial evaluation and give further impetus for change.

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) guidelines state that the visit will be followed by a brief report to the institution written by the IEP team summing up the lessons drawn from the exercise, presenting an analysis of past changes and blockages and the suggestions made by the members of the institution for their further adaptation to change.

1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture.

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:
- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:
- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a 'fitness for (and of) purpose' approach:
- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does it know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2. The University of Évora, Portugal – University and National Context

Since the first IEP evaluation of the University of Évora, the legal framework that governs the Portuguese universities has undergone some significant changes. The publication of the new Legal System for the Institutions of Higher Education (2007) led to the rewriting of the Statutes of the University of Évora, and the publication of the Statutes of the University Teaching Career and the Statutes of the Polytechnic Teaching Career, in 2009. Added to these were three other major factors which caused a determinant impact at the level of management and organisation: the creation of the Agency for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), Law n° 66B-2007 which restructured the Integrated System of Management and Evaluation of the Public Administration (SIADAP), and Law n° 12-A, 2008, which altered the system of links, careers and scales of remuneration within the public sector.

From 2005 to 2009, the University experienced substantial budget cuts. Despite the fact that the Ministry has provided an 80% increase in the financing of higher education, this amount was totally spent on salary increases resulting from the career progression (compulsory under the Statutes of the University Teachers Career), on salary increases in the public sector and on discount increases to the Civil Service Pension Fund.

In addition, the regulation governing the *numeri clausi* of 1st cycle courses was not altered (the number of 1st-year students cannot, thus, be increased), and the Law on the Financing of Higher Education Institutions has kept in force a formula that indexes public financing to the number of students, irrespective of the size of the University. In the case of the University of Évora, the financing justified by the number of students could not guarantee, by itself, the economic sustainability of the institution.

However, in January 2010, the Portuguese Government, the Universities and the Polytechnic Institutes signed a "confidence agreement" by means of which the University of Évora sees its budget increased by 15% in relation to the final appropriation of the previous year. This appropriation covers the next four years and commits the universities to offering certain pledges to be agreed with each one of them and monitored by the A3ES.

1.3. The follow up evaluation team

The self-evaluation report (SER) of the University of Évora along with the appendices was sent to the Evaluation Team in January 2010. The visit of the Evaluation Team took place between 23 and 26 February 2010. The report of the original evaluation was published in December 2007.

The Evaluation Team consisted of:
- Alojz Kralj, Former Rector, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Chair
- Páll Skúlason, Former Rector of the University of Iceland, Iceland
- Viorel Proteasa, Student, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Timisoara, Romania
- Andy Gibbs, Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom, Co-ordinator

The Evaluation Team wishes to thank the University for the excellent arrangements made for its visit and work, for the hospitality offered and for the opportunity to follow up the original evaluation. It was a great pleasure to come to the University of Évora and to discuss with staff, students and external stakeholders the challenges which the University of Évora faces in its next phase of development and the various strategies currently being adopted to meet these.

1.4. Key areas of focus

The exact form of the follow up evaluation depends on the specific situation in each institution. Generally, it takes account of new changes in the educational environment, the progress made by the institution in implementing the reforms while examining the challenges and obstacles faced.

The Evaluation Team was well briefed on the changes that had taken place since the original evaluation thanks to a comprehensive Self Evaluation Report completed by the University. The Evaluation Team reviewed the IEP follow-up SER and noted that the University had highlighted three issues of focus. Added to these were the three issues identified by the institution in their letter of application, giving six key areas of focus for the follow-up visit. These were:

1. Policy of Quality: Evaluation and quality monitoring as the most disputable, controversial issues in the University.
2. Strategic Areas: The definition/selection of University's Strategic Areas and how this is related to the policy of quality.
3. Autonomy issues: The autonomy of organic units and desired administrative decentralisation; how is it determined and validated.
4. Bologna studies and business sector
5. Credible teaching: Relationship between research and high quality studies.
6. Student-centred learning and institutional support: services, care, assistance, monitoring.

The Evaluation Team concentrated on these issues and noted that there were other areas of development and issues of interest which were not explored in such detail. The team did not request further documentation or evidence or consider issues of, *inter alia,* privatised management, specific development of research capacity.

2. QUALITY

2.1. Quality – Observations

The IEP team made four recommendations in their original report concerning quality. These were:

- The European Standards and Guidelines for the EHEA should serve as a reference for the enhancement and operationalisation of the QA system at University of Évora.
- All departments, units, staff and students should contribute inputs to the enhancement of the QA system. This is essential for establishing shared and wide ownership.
- It is essential the system provide transparent, timely and immediate feedback to students, staff and university main bodies. The responsibility for acting must be transparent, simple and clearly defined, including the timing for action.
- Existing practices should be further developed to enhance the skill level of teachers and the quality of learning.

The establishment of a policy of quality has been a dominant feature of the last four years. The Pro-Rectory for the Policy of Quality and Innovation has been created together with a programme for quality promotion (PROQUAL). This adopted the recommendations made in the IEP evaluation report and in The European Standards and Guidelines for the EHEA. This programme of internal evaluation was supplemented by the Agency for the Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), which obliges all universities to present the accreditation applications for all their courses by the end of March 2010, and by the recent evaluation of the research units made by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT).

Additionally some concrete measures are being undertaken:

- Partial implementation of the Programme for Quality Promotion (ProQual)
- The implementation of the Integrated System of Management and Evaluation of the Public Administration (SIADAP)
- The implementation of the Framework for Evaluation and Responsibility (QUAR)

The implementation of ProQual, which was approved by the Senate in November 2009, intends to monitor many sectors of activity of the University, providing reports on: Curricular Units, Teacher, Course, Department, School and Research Unit (most including a field for regular self-evaluation), through questionnaires to students, teachers, staff and employers, and through the construction and dissemination of a set of indicators of quality monitoring.

The implementation is intended to provide an ongoing analysis of the functioning of the institution so that timely interventions and improvements can be made and to ensure quality in key sectors of the institution.

The Evaluation Team noted the excellent progress made with development of ProQual and recognises the importance of this. Although the University reported the implementation of quality systems as the most disputable, controversial issues in the University, the Evaluation Team views this as an inevitable part of the process of implementation and encourages the

University to continue engaging staff with the process, listening to dialogue and dissent as a way to review, refine and further develop the system. The introduction of cyclical reflection on practices will provide a purposeful conduit for discussion, dissension and debate.

The Evaluation Team was pleased to note that some improvements in practice were in place, most notably tutorship which was favourably commented on by students.

The Evaluation Team identified a number of issues that may enhance both the implementation and understanding of internal quality assurance within the University. There was uncertainty about feedback loops that improve things from cycle to cycle. In other words, how the information obtained would be managed and how a response would be determined. The prioritisation of issues and linking these to benchmarks drawn from comparator institutions would be helpful as would comparators across internal units. This would also introduce measures of cost efficiency and efficiency giving more purposeful goals to the system. This would address the feeling amongst many staff that information is collected without any meaningful purpose.

It was noted that some areas had already started to utilise this information in such a way and the Team noted and commended this. The University is encouraged to identify these good practices with a view to making them universal, perhaps by introducing peer review as a means of dissemination. This peer-to-peer working may also reduce the observed reliance on the application of rules and regulations, consequently moving from a compliance culture to a quality culture.

These steps will also help to reduce the perceived excessive reliance on external systems such as the accreditation and assessment council and increase ownership of responsibility for quality amongst individual members of staff. For example, procrastination on the establishment of Assessment Council and the lack of rules and modus operandi is hampering the development of a quality culture.

2.2. Quality – Recommendations

▶ Ensure QA systems are operating in a closed loop with clearly articulated quickly responsive time-frames and that the desired impact is evaluated.
▶ Develop a strategic approach towards developing a Quality Culture.
▶ Reference performance towards agreed national and EU institutional indicators by means of benchmarking.
▶ Activate the Assessment Council without further procrastination

3. STRATEGIC AREAS

3.1. Strategic Areas – Observations

The University identified that the definition of strategic areas is another crucial aspect to be considered in the evolution of the University. Directly related to the policy of quality, it has raised some difficulties, although now is the time to approach it clearly and objectively.

The Evaluation Team noted the strong actions that had been implemented by the Rector's management team in restructuring, reshaping and strengthening the University in response to past inertia, increasing national requirements and in preparedness for future challenges.

The Evaluation Team noted that the strategic response comprised of several concrete actions: to rationalise costs and increase revenues, to improve governance and students' satisfaction, as well as to foster and promote scientific research. These are fully elaborated in the Self Evaluation report and include actions which address teaching and training, support to students, scientific research – including the creation of the Institute of Research and Advanced Studies, governance and administration – including the adoption of a new organic structure which reduces the number of decision-makers.

The key thrust of the strategy addresses essential issues of excellence, innovation, competitiveness, effective synergy of operation and increasing visibility. These decisive actions have an important and far reaching impact on the University. The Evaluation Team recognise and acknowledge the leadership demonstrated by the Rectorate team in not only identifying but also in implementing these wide ranging measures. The Team strongly supports these measures and understands that their implementation is not without controversy and that the institution's capacity for change has been tested. The Team makes the following observations which are intended to support the continuing implementation. They are intended as supportive and should not detract from the excellent proactive work which has commenced.

Principally, the leadership and responsibility demonstrated by the Rectorate needs to be disseminated and distributed throughout the University. On one level, this is a structural matter as new units determine their relationships with others, and on another, it is about personal responsibility, attitudes and autonomy and how the University fosters these.

In general terms there is no elaborated and common shared vision. The "confidence agreement" signed between the University and the Portuguese Government in January 2010 could be elaborated to incorporate how each goal will be achieved and form the basis of an effective action plan and vision. This seems a reasonable approach given that future budget uplifts are tied to the achievement of goals in the confidence agreement.

The team observed good progress in co-ordination of schools many of which have risen to the challenge of strategic planning and goal setting, but again this action is not universal. It is noted that the good progress is often the consequence of individual enthusiasm and motivation; it may be worth exploring how this can be rewarded as well as disseminated to others. The mobilisation

of individual motivation is critical as the Team observed widespread individual inertia, whereby many were expecting someone else to do something prior to taking action themselves.

The development of effective working relationships between schools, centres and IIFA is pivotal to the success of the new structure. The Evaluation Team believes that the success of these relationships should be determined mutually between the schools and IIFA and that the sole responsibility for success does not rest with the Director of IIFA – it is incumbent on schools to engage with the new structure and develop effective working relationships. Having said this it is clear that there remain too many centres and some have outlived their purpose. A rationalisation of centres with clear success criteria will increase clarity of purpose and potential for productive relationships between schools, centres and IIFA.

The Evaluation Team noted the efforts to increase involvement of its key stakeholders and agreed that this is essential both to generate and develop new knowledge and increase the visibility of the University. This development, coupled with transfer of knowledge will support national and regional development and, for the University, contribute to income and funding diversification. Continuing and continual building of closer links with local community, for example by: recruiting and involving local members, with substantial business interests, on the General Council; building up the image of the University by sponsoring and promoting public activities; increasing involvement of students in community and civil life; exploring innovative new relationships with local companies and other external partners.

3.2. Strategic Areas – Recommendations

▶ Adopt a well-shared vision and mission statement ensuring the widest possible ownership amongst all constituencies of the University of Évora.
▶ Research centres can be rationalised using clear success criteria and ensuring critical mass.
▶ Maximise the benefit of being part of the community - enhance engagement, in such a way that each activity complements and builds on another and increase profile.
▶ Develop norms and values for common action to address internal and external challenges.

4. AUTONOMY

4.1. Autonomy – Observations

The original IEP report in 2007 highlighted that the then fragmented structure had created a confederation of autonomous departments, research centres and some units. The departments have a dominant influence in regard to appointing and promoting staff, with insufficiently developed internal quality processes, academic based management, and collective responsibility which drastically reduce the capacity for change. Furthermore, academic collective decision-making does not promote accountability, efficiency and excellence but supports averaging and solidarity. The outside world, demands of society, the region, the economy and competition are changing much faster compared to the ability of University of Évora to adapt and change.

In order to improve its capacity for change and adaptation the university needs to improve two areas in particular. Firstly, the services and understanding of society, customers' and stakeholders' needs, but also to improve the responsiveness to outside changes and demands. The team considers that these are areas where activity must accelerate and be more efficient in operation. These factors restrict the university's capacity to take a pro-active stance and reduce capacity to assist stakeholders for regional development.

Secondly, the perception of the Team is that the university culture, norms and values could be more orientated to external demands and may be quicker to respond to these without the need for external pressure. The University monitoring of opinions, demands and emerging opportunities needs to be decisive and coupled with the university strategic planning management at all levels. It should follow the aim of providing timely information, support and enough flexibility for rapid action and change. This may put the University of Évora in a position to respond rapidly and to capitalise on emerging possibilities in a much more profitable, efficient and rewarding way. The accountability for accommodating change must be embedded and fostered at all levels of operation. This demands adequate culture norms and values supporting change.

The SER identified as a discussion point which would further facilitate change, the autonomy of organic units. The University stated that the Directors of the Schools have already drawn their activity plans and have had the opportunity to account for them in terms of QUAR indicators. The desired administrative decentralisation shall imply the transference of competences to the schools which, in turn, implies the need to train staff and the command of information systems (GESDOC, accounting, and human resources, academic). The level of delegation of competences tends thus to increase and be proportional to the confidence in the systems flows.

The Evaluation Team agrees with this analysis and emphasises the need to continue to implement and embed these approaches and principles, ensuring that performance is monitored, evaluated and corrected to ensure that the autonomy of organic units is providing the expected progress, benefits and development. The restructuring of the University and the introduction of internal quality assurance will further reinforce these.

The Evaluation Team noted a number of actions which may assist and accelerate this process. Most notably the recently established General Council is not taking responsibility and is not accountable for their actions. The General Council, which is intended to provide leadership to the University and help it adapt and change to the needs of society and external influences, has largely focused on the selection of a new Rector and its own internal processes. The General Council should reflect on its role and responsibilities and determine how it can best fulfil these, undertaking training, benchmarking and seeking advice from similar established bodies in other universities.

Over time, units should have responsibility delegated from the Rector for financial and academic issues. There may be some perceived legal reasons preventing this; however the University must strive for clarity and transparency in its internal management. Certainly, the possibility of establishing a body that monitors financial operations to assist management and provide transparency should be explored.

Separating financial and academic issues, so that these issues are considered independently will help ensure continuing academic integrity, transparency of operation and bring clarity - the lack of which is currently inhibiting the autonomy of organic units. Although not strictly necessary for operational reasons, we suggest that during this transition period, the Rector should hold regular meetings with the directors of the schools. This was suggested by the School Directors and we can see some benefit in this.

Departmental Heads mentioned that there was no facility for them to hold lateral meetings, which would assist operations. We could see no reason in the statutes why this could not be organised amongst them and we would encourage this type of initiative as a demonstrable feature of their new found autonomy.

The introduction of a clear regular transparent planning process would build on existing actions and ensure articulation between school and University strategic plans. A clear understanding of the leadership, roles and relationships of key bodies in this (Management Committee, Rectorate, Directors of Schools) needs to be developed.

4.2. Autonomy – Recommendations

▸ Establish proper functioning of the General Council - ensuring development of a shared vision and mission with quality and performance indicators, representing the back-bone and reference for all University operations.
▸ The General Council, Rector and Directors of Schools need to build shared goals with priorities and clear means to co-operate to achieve them
▸ Consultation, accountability and transparency must pervade all aspects of the decision making structures.

5. BOLOGNA REFORMS AND THE BUSINESS SECTOR

5.1. Bologna reforms and the business sector – Observations

The implementation of reforms connected with the establishment of a European Higher Education Area reflect a process rather than a once and for all activity. The original evaluation report stressed the need to pay attention to all dimensions of the Bologna Process, including the implementation of an infrastructure and also stressing the need to develop attitudes and a positive orientation to the reforms. It is for this reason that we reiterate the original recommendation, however this does not imply that progress has not been made, rather that the process needs to be continuous.

The University requested that the Team focuses on Bologna Process issues related to engagement with the business sector.

The University should monitor employability in graduate related jobs. Students should be informed of labour market and employment prospects related to their programme, on application. This would help address labour market needs as employers currently report that it is hard to find skilled people in some areas, engineering fields for example, whilst there is an excess of supply in other subjects. The benefit of speaking to employers to determine priorities is clear. This should be extended to the wider community of stakeholders.

At the same time, the University should endeavour to ensure that the focus of first cycle programmes is providing general employability and mobility skills and attempt to strike a balance between preparation for short term (first destination) employment at the expense of long term employability and mobility in the labour market.

5.2. Bologna reforms and the business sector –Recommendations

▸ Current practice in implementing Bologna reforms should be extended to promote the cultural and attitudinal components which accompany structural changes and enhance appreciation of the need for change, in keeping with the notion that Bologna is a process which encompasses all areas of university activity.

6. CREDIBLE TEACHING

6.1. Credible teaching – Observations

Teachers are regularly evaluated, but there is little evidence that this is working to improve teaching and learning. Not least because there is no motivation for students to participate and who should get feedback on the process. Responsibility for identifying, implementing and monitoring is unclear.

The evaluation needs to take place within a well defined teaching and learning strategy which states the teaching and learning approaches favoured by the University. The Team saw many examples of positive cross school and interdisciplinary teaching, and heard from students of the beneficial effects of the tutorship scheme. The Team also saw initiatives in peer teaching and assessment. These actions were all appreciated by students and the innovative approaches of many teachers are obvious. The University should capitalise on these innovations and attempt to harness them within an overall teaching and learning strategy which can seek to evidence good practice, measure the impact of such innovations and disseminate practice universally.

The Evaluation Team encourages the development of such a strategy which could plan to improve teaching and learning. Such a policy would need to embrace human resource management, introduce a staff development policy and seek ways to address the unequal workload which is not linked to effort and constrains cost efficiency. Alongside this, consideration should be given to the introduction of a system to reward success in teaching, such as teaching fellowships or awards – currently the only reward is a reduction in teaching load, which seems perverse.

6.1. Credible teaching – Recommendations

▶ To build upon existing good practice in some areas, it is recommended that a structured staff development programme is instituted which would enable further development of student-centred learning, e-learning and lifelong learning approaches within a strategic and institution wide context. Identification and dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning would also contribute to a more consistently positive student experience across the University.

7. STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

7.1. Student-centred learning and institutional support – Observations

As mentioned above, it is clear that in many areas the University is moving towards a greater concentration of student-centred learning. Our discussions with students demonstrated to us that engagement with the student body will yield a rich fund of ideas, which will help ensure that the University is developing suitable goals and monitoring these effectively.

The Team found that there is more scope to consider student views in programme development. At the moment this is limited, and yet if students are to be valued as equal partners in higher education, their voice needs to be systematically incorporated into all aspects of university life and decision making. This would additionally enhance the possibility of ensuring equal access to student support services, which is reported as absent at the moment. Furthermore a support service that is readily accessible to all students will be better placed to identify and respond to student need, thereby making student success a stronger possibility.

Amongst the views that students expressed were that option course choice is limited and more opportunities for cross disciplinary, interdisciplinary and international studies would be welcomed, particularly in the form of joint programmes.

Students recognised that amendments to courses had taken place as a result of the Bologna Process reforms however some identified that the allocation of ECTS appears arbitrary and not based on student workload.

7.2. Student-centred learning and support – Recommendations

- ▸ Consolidate and disseminate existing actions that support, empower and promote a holistic culture of success amongst the student body.
- ▸ Stimulate engagement in University life and decision making rather than compelling or obliging this.
- ▸ Increase student autonomy and choice in study options.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The Team has noted the progress the University has made since the original evaluation. The period between this and the follow up was marked by intense change, much of it imposed externally and some decided internally as a consequence of our initial report and the judgement of the Rector. Coping with such rapid and far reaching changes is a difficult task for a University and the establishment of a new School structure, but the creation of ProQual to support management and quality initiatives, setting up IIFA to focus research effort and the introduction of the General Council all provide evidence of positive response to change.

In addition the Team noted the strategic approach to attracting more central funds to the University. Although we learned that some of these decisions were tough ones and sometimes unpopular, they were taken in the best interests of the University. These all contribute to a sounder and stronger infrastructure more able to manage the further changes and challenges that the University will face.

The Team also notes that this report coincides with a change in personnel at the Rectorate level. The Team had a brief meeting with the incoming Rector and trust that the comments and recommendations will assist in building on the positive momentum and support his manifesto for continuing development.