

PRESS STATEMENT

The OECD's Education Policy Committee reviewed Portugal's higher education system at its special session in December 2006. Since then, the Committee's report and recommendations, produced by an OECD Review Panel, have been discussed widely among education stakeholders and the general public in Portugal. Under the agreement with the OECD, the Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education is required to report back to the Education Policy Committee in two years on the progress made by Portugal on the Committee's recommendations.

In preparation of that report, the Ministry invited the OECD Review Panel members to visit Portugal in March 2008 to assess developments in higher education over the past year. The Panel reviewed the new legislations and other developments in the pipeline. It met senior officials of the Ministry, a number of rectors and presidents of public and private universities and polytechnics, students, teacher representatives, lawmakers and banks involved in the loan arrangements for students.

The Panel is greatly impressed by the breadth and the far-reaching nature of the reforms, and the speed with which they have been launched. Action has been taken in almost all areas of the Panel's recommendations. While the full benefits of these reforms and initiatives will only be realised over many years, the Panel noted that many positive effects are already visible. It is quite evident that Portugal's Higher Education system is on the move.

The Panel is particularly pleased with the following aspects:

- Wider student access and participation has been achieved and steps have been taken to improve these further over time. Greater access is focusing on the Polytechnics, whose role has been clarified, and study programs have been made more relevant to the labour market. There has been significant growth in the number of CET programs and enrolment in them.
- There have been major rewards from the ambitious programs to promote science and technology and to build research capacity with a series of international networking arrangements, which have good potential for improving Portugal's research and in reaching world class standards.
- Far reaching changes have been made to the system of institutional governance that will, when fully functioning, make higher education institutions more responsive to meeting student needs and societal, economic and industrial objectives. These changes include external participation in institutional governance, the option of public higher education institutions becoming non-profit foundations, and the creation of an advisory board to assist the Minister in developing strategies for the sector. Planning capacity

in the Ministry is being strengthened, particularly with the provision of information and indicators that can assist all stakeholders.

- Major steps have been taken to improve the quality of education through the implementation of the 3-cycle Bologna degree structure and the establishment of an independent accreditation and evaluation agency.
- The process of reform has been characterized by clear vision and strong leadership. It has been based on wide-ranging consultations with all stakeholders.

The Panel feels that these reforms and policy developments in the pipeline provide a sound basis for continuing action to further improve the quality, responsiveness and cost-effectiveness of Portuguese higher education. Educational reform process is always a difficult one and Portugal is no exception. The Panel notes that many stakeholders are enthusiastic about these reforms while others are not so engaged. The Panel hopes that there would be greater engagement by all stakeholders in progressing with these reforms, which are clearly important for achieving Portugal's broader societal goals, especially in the European context.



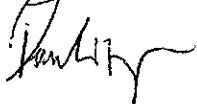
Abrar Hasan (Former Review Leader)



Daniel O'Hare (Ireland)



Michael Gallagher (Australia)



Paavo Löppönen (Finland)



Jon File (UK)

Lisbon, 7th of March 2008