



EUA (European University Association)
Institutional Evaluation Programme

INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE LEIRIA

EUA EVALUATION REPORT

June 2007

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1. Introduction

Background

The EUA has a strong reputation in quality assurance having conducted, as part of its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), in excess of 150 institutional evaluations in more than 30 countries across Europe and other continents over the last 12 years. Some Portuguese universities have already participated in EUA evaluations and of these a few have engaged in a follow-up process.

In Portugal a system wide extensive, independent, voluntary and objective review of higher education institutions (universities and polytechnics, public and private, and their units) is being conducted by the EUA following international criteria and paying special attention to governance mechanisms, access rules, institutional autonomy, funding, internationalisation and other relevant higher education policies. The Ministry for Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES) has facilitated institutional evaluations for up to ten Portuguese institutions per year, as determined on a voluntary basis, that wish to gain institutional evaluation experience and to have an international supportive evaluation by EUA aiming at improving management practices and quality assurance procedures. The review of individual institutions follows EUA's standard practice for institutional review. It also includes some additional objectives which in simple terms are to:

- identify the overall positive characteristics, development status and opportunities available for improvements;
- examine governance and management systems with suggestions for improvements;
- explore institutional capacity for adaptation, development and change;
- learn how students — including non-traditional students — are recruited, life long learning is facilitated, and the knowledge-base of the Portuguese population are improved;
- examine student exit routes including types, relevance and utility of available qualifications and;
- make recommendations that foster the institution's rationalisation and diversification.

The EUA reviews of individual institutions are complemented by two other recent evaluation exercises of higher education in Portugal which concluded in 2006. Firstly, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) reviewed the accreditation and quality assurance practices of Portuguese tertiary education. Secondly, an OECD review of the tertiary education system and policies is examining the performance of Portuguese tertiary education by reference to other OECD countries and will provide recommendations for its improvement.

The overall exercise is designed to ensure that the tertiary education system in Portugal gains maximum benefit and input from comprehensive evaluations by teams of experienced international experts and that procedures and processes in place can be benchmarked against best international practice. The results from all these

complementary exercises will form part of a broader initiative by the Portuguese government.

The Evaluation Team

The Steering Committee of the EUA institutional review programme appointed a Team for the review at the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (IPL). This Team was composed of:

- Henrik Toft Jensen, Professor of Geography and former Rector, University of Roskilde, Denmark, as chair;
- Mollie Temple, former Vice-Chancellor, University of Bolton, UK;
- Gintautas Braziunas, Director, Vilnius College in Higher Education, Lithuania;
- Teresa Lee, Programme Manager, Irish Universities Quality Board, as secretary.

The National, Regional and Institutional Context

In Portugal, higher education is organized into a binary system consisting of university and polytechnic institutions which are either public or private. Currently there are in the region of 160 higher educational providers in operation in Portugal. Higher educational providers are governed by numerous laws or decree-laws which regulate statutory, scientific, pedagogical and financial affairs. Within this framework however the providers, in both the polytechnic and the university sector, operate with a certain degree of autonomy. Universities do however enjoy a relatively greater level of autonomy than do the polytechnics when it comes to such matters as the development and provision of programmes and the level of control over matters such as staffing.

Since 1998, polytechnic institutes can confer licenciatura degrees and since 2005, masters degrees. Regarding research, polytechnics are required to conduct research that is applied in nature and which has a vocational or professional outlook. Universities by contrast also undertake basic research.

In Portugal *numerus clausus* specify access into higher education. The number of vacancies or places for each institution and each degree is fixed annually. Students compete for entry into programmes on a national basis. They enter the higher education system by means of a national access procedure that is run by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education. They are then placed in an institution and in a degree programme in accordance with their preferences and classifications or grades. The minimum grade in the national access examinations for entry to all higher education is set at 95/200. In the academic year 2003/2004 the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (IPL) set its minimum grade for entry at 100/200. The minimum number of students per degree programme required for public funding from 2006/2007 is 20. Prior to this the number required was 10.

Quality assurance of higher education in Portugal is based on the *Higher Education Evaluation Act*, Law 38/94. The system is essentially programme focused and is centered on a self evaluation and an external review process. The National Council for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CNAVES) acts as a global coordinating body of the evaluation system for the four higher educational representative evaluation councils of the universities and polytechnics (public and private). Two rounds of programme orientated evaluations have taken place. The first round took place from

1995 to 2000 and focused primarily on the public universities. The second round included programmes from all the higher education institutions including those provided by the IPL and took place from 2000-2005. In all nearly 1600 programmes were evaluated over the entire 10 year period. However, to date no government has taken any action based on the programme evaluation reports produced.

The Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (IPL) is a State-run institution of higher polytechnic education which commenced its academic activities in 1987 with just one school and 70 students enrolled. Today, it has five schools and two other organic units directed towards training almost 10 000 students of which approximately 9,000 are on undergraduate study programmes (2005/2006 figures). The range of programmes on offer comprises of technological specialization courses (post-secondary but not higher education) undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

The five schools of IPL are the:

- School of Education (ESE) in Leiria;
- School of Technology and Management (ESTG) in Leiria;
- School of Health Sciences (ESS) in Leiria;
- School of Fine Arts and Design (ESAD) in Caldas da Rainha and the;
- School of Maritime Technology (ESTM) in Peniche.

The IPL is physically present in the main urban areas of the Leiria region with a geographical spread of campuses and centres across the district. There are five higher education schools, based on three campuses, and training centres working under the Centro de Formação para Cursos de Especialização Tecnológica - FOR.CET (Learning Unit for Technological Specialization Courses). The Leiria district is considered to be one of the most highly populated areas in Portugal and the district has significant economic and industrial importance. The area is known for its commercial activity, some with an international dimension, namely the crystal and glass, moulds, plastics and ceramics industries, amongst others. The region has numerous agricultural activities, particularly in fruit and vegetables and is known for its fishing industry. Peniche, the location of one of IPL's campuses, is the second largest fishing port in the country.

2. Process

In accordance with the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme methodology and guidelines and in advance of the preliminary visit the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (IPL) sent a 31 page Self-Evaluation Report to the EUA Team; analysing the national and institutional context; the norms and values of IPL; its organisation and resources and its approach to quality monitoring and quality management. This Self Evaluation Report was accompanied by detailed annexes. The EUA Team appreciated the work completed for the Self Evaluation Report and considered it to be comprehensive. The Team also received further relevant documents during its visits to IPL including extracts from the institutional Strategic Plan 2007-2011, which at the time of this review was still in draft format. Reports on activities and research and general presentational material were also received by the Team during each site visit from the schools and from other units.

The Evaluation Team came to IPL for the preliminary visit from 5-7 December 2006 and for the main visit from 27 February – 2 March 2007.

During its two visits, the EUA Team held detailed discussions with a wide variety of persons, both from inside and outside the academic community. These included:

- the IPL President and Executive Vice-Presidents;
- the IPL General Board;
- the IPL Management Board;
- the Self-Evaluation Steering Group established for the EUA review process;
- the Executive Board Presidents;
- the Presidents of the Students Associations;
- School Executive Directors/Executive Board Presidents, staff, researchers, Student Representatives and students from the five Schools: Education (ESE); Technology and Management (ESTG); Fine Arts and Design (ESAD); Maritime Technology (ESTM) and Health Sciences (ESS);
- a cross-section of academic programme directors;
- members of the Executive Boards of the Institute of Investigation and Development and Graduate Studies (ISCED) and the Distant Learning unit (UED) together with leaders from the four IPL research centers (Sociological and Pedagogical Research Center, Centre for Rapid and Sustainable Product Development, Institute for Systems and Computer Engineering, Technology Transfer and Information Centre) and a research leader involved with the national Institute of Telecommunications-Leiria
- members of the Executive Board of the Learning Unit for Technological Specialization Courses (FOR.CET);
- staff and students at the FOR.CET facility in Nazaré;
- the Chief Administrative Officer and staff from the Student Support Services (SAS);
- the chief administrators of the central office and computer units;
- other administrative staff members from the central and the school administrative and computer units;
- representatives of IPL stakeholders and partners in society.

For its main visit, the Team requested documentation relating to the newly created central Board and councils outlining their relationship with existing school boards and councils. The Team also requested an overview of the current pedagogical approaches in use together with an outline of any future strategies. A report on how IPL plans to monitor staff progression on PhD programmes together with an indication of how IPL will determine, in a timely manner, if its goal of having 50% of staff with a PhD by 2009 is achievable was also requested. Finally clarification was sought on whether the IPL action plan regarding non completion rates on certain programmes had been revisited. These issues were discussed during the preliminary visit but were not fully

reflected in the self evaluation report. This additional information was provided to the Team in advance of the main visit.

On the final day of the main visit the Team presented the oral report indicating the principal conclusions and recommendations to an audience that included IPL leaders and representatives of the Student Association. This written report is a full exposition of these conclusions and recommendations.

The Team would like to warmly acknowledge the co-operation and hospitality received throughout the two visits. The Team members wish to thank the IPL President, Luciano Santos Rodrigues de Almeida; the Executive Vice Presidents, João Paulo dos Santos Marques and Nuno André Oliveira Mangas Pereira; the school executive directors and presidents, and all the staff and students, as well as stakeholders from outside the Institute, who actively supported the Team during both visits. The Team wants to put on record their appreciation for the open manner in which it was received across all parts of IPL. Meetings were always helpful, friendly and frank. During these meetings the Team was able to discuss a very wide range of issues linked to the ongoing development of IPL and the role played by quality processes in this development. The Team trust that the joint efforts of all involved will together provide a sound springboard for the Institute as it moves into the next phase of its evolution.

Special thanks is extended to João Paulo dos Santos Marques and his staff for their great efficiency in organizing all the documentation, for liaising with the Review Team and for maintaining the daily schedule, no easy task in a multi-campus institute. The visit was extremely well organised. A word of thanks goes also to the translators who worked tirelessly with the Team throughout each site visit and who provided an excellent service.

3. Constraints and institutional norms

The Portuguese Situation

The current climate for Portuguese higher education is one of change. Evaluations have been undertaken by the OECD and by ENQA of various aspects of the systems and policies in place in higher education and the EUA are undertaking institutional evaluations of individual providers. There is an expectation that these system-wide and institute evaluations will influence the future development of the Portuguese higher educational sector. During many of the discussions with management at IPL it was evident that there is support for the government focus on integrating Portuguese higher education fully at the European level in terms of quality, levels of participation and the employability of graduates. There is evidence to show that IPL is planning to implement or has already implemented some changes to bring its processes in line with the Bologna requirements; that it is looking to improve its quality processes; is working to increase access to higher education and to increase the level of participation in higher education of the population in general; that it is making efforts to increase IPL's international dimension and to maintain and improve on links with industry and the local community; that it is seeking to increase its research capacity and is making progress on improving the quality of teaching and learning activities. These initiatives and developments are discussed as part of this report.

The Review Team met several examples of governmental regulations where it was obvious that the close regulation of the educational programmes, the governance and the finances of the polytechnic restrict its capacity to change and to develop to the benefit of students and to the region. The Review Team were also aware of the current situation in Portugal; that there are plans for new legislation; discussions are taking place concerning the autonomy of institutions of higher education; and that there are changes underway relating to institutional structure. The Team recommends that the detailed regulation of higher education is reduced.

The legal framework which regulates public polytechnic autonomy is the Polytechnic Autonomy Act (Law 54/90) which gives polytechnic institutes such as the IPL statutory, administrative, financial and patrimonial autonomy. At the same time scientific, pedagogic, administrative and financial autonomy of the polytechnic schools is also granted. This 'duality' in legal responsibility and autonomy adds an additional layer of complexity for governance, for decision making and for the organizational management of polytechnics such as the IPL.

Whilst universities essentially have full autonomy, for the creation, delivery, suspension or cancellation of degree programmes, public polytechnics are more tightly regulated. They must submit all proposals for new programmes, or the suspension or cancellation of existing programmes for approval to the Ministry (General Director for Higher Education at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education). Internally, the Team were informed that any programmatic changes must be considered by various polytechnic boards and councils before a submission can be made to the Ministry. Therefore quite a substantial amount of time can elapse from the initial proposal for change to the time that a decision is received back from the Ministry. Such delays obviously have implications for the speed and ability with which polytechnics such as the IPL can respond to community needs and market changes.

The career progression path in a polytechnic is structured such that by law an academic staff member can be promoted on a permanent basis to the highest academic teaching post, that of co-ordinating professor, once they have a master's degree. However, this progression pathway is not always available as an option as the number of permanent academic positions in a polytechnic is set by the Ministry. To get around this problem many polytechnics, including the IPL, hire staff on what are known as 'special contracts'. Of a total of 531 academic staff working in IPL in the academic year 2004/2005, 56% were on such contracts. The fact that such staff are not permanent places them and the Institute at a disadvantage for planning and for continuity purposes. Permanent staff numbers are normally agreed when an institute is established and is based on the number of students expected to enrol. IPL's self evaluation report states that the student number predicted at the Institutes inception was only 3000 students. However, the numbers rose to such a degree that this figure was quickly considered outdated. In 2005/2006 alone they were in the region of 9000 undergraduate students. Any changes to the numbers of permanent staff in response to a change in student numbers have to be negotiated. IPL states in its self evaluation report that since 1997 it has submitted requests to the Ministry to revise the situation but no answer has been obtained to this request. It was also noted in the self evaluation report that non-academic staff are all employed on a contract basis.

The Team were made aware that legislation and regulations pertaining to higher education can change frequently in Portugal. Furthermore, in certain cases it was emphasised to the Team that changes introduced can, in principle, be contrary to or in conflict with regulations already in place. Two recent changes, which apply equally to universities and to polytechnics, are intricately linked to the number of staff with a PhD qualification. As already mentioned, there is no legal imperative for teaching staff at polytechnic institutes to obtain a PhD as they can attain the highest position in their career once they hold a masters degree. However, the proposed changes place an increased emphasis on the need to have more staff employed with a PhD.

The first change, introduced in 2006, relates to the funding formula used to determine the state funding of higher educational providers. The formula takes consideration of certain factors including the qualification level of the teaching staff, as measured by the fraction of PhDs in the total number of teachers of each institution. In 2006 only 11% of academic staff in IPL had a PhD qualification. It is also of note that the formula takes consideration of a graduation rate, the measurement of which is based on several indicators, one of which is the number of master and PhD degrees awarded, in terms of teachers holding a PhD. This is despite that fact that polytechnics cannot confer the award of PhD and have only being allowed to confer the award of master's degree since 2005.

Another anticipated change could have a major affect on the ability of institutes, such as IPL, to continue to function as higher educational providers. IPL's self evaluation report refers to Decree-Law (74/2006) which is expected to come into effect in 2009/2010. This decree-law will require that 50% of an institute's teaching staff hold a PhD or be a specialist (defined as a teacher hired exclusively through public tests and given the position of associate professor or coordinating professor) in order for the institute to continue to teach undergraduate programs. As IPL's core business is the provision of undergraduate degree programmes and as only 11% of IPL's staff currently holds a PhD title, the decree-law, if implemented, could have serious implications for the continued existence of IPL as a higher educational provider.

The IPL has responded to the funding model change and in particular the new decree-law (74/2006) by seeking to increase the PhD qualification level of its staff to 51% by 2009. This is an increase of 40% in 3 years. This requires a significant allocation of its resources. However, IPL cannot afford to ignore the decree-law as its introduction will undoubtedly affect its core business, that of undergraduate training. It cannot be denied that regardless of the eventual decision by government concerning decree-law 74/2006, an increase in the qualification level of IPL's academic staff will bring significant advantages for IPL in terms of staff research performance and output. This should enhance and be of benefit to its teaching programmes. It should also serve to increase IPL's allocation of state funding under the new funding formula.

It is noteworthy that as of July 2006 in the order of 58% of IPL academic staff had enrolled in PhD study programmes. This is a strong indication of the spirit of ownership, the sense of pride and the commitment that staff have for the IPL.

Polytechnic and Quality

The IPL strategic plan of 2001-2006 indicates that one of its strategic goals was to evolve from a polytechnic into a university. This goal was not realised during the life of the plan and in fact there is less focus on this discussion in the new strategic plan. The efforts put towards increasing overall quality at the IPL by supporting staff to study for a Ph.D. and the work undertaken to increase the quality of teaching and

research is admirable. However the Team were of the view that it is of greater importance to be aware of quality and to increase the level of quality in all activities than to discuss the type or name of the higher educational institute. It is of greater value to be a good institution of higher education delivering excellent public service to the region and to the nation regardless of the institutional status. The team were also of the opinion that differences created by Government in matters such as autonomy and finance should be understandable in terms of the mission and the quality of the provider and should not be due to the name under which the provider operates whether that be polytechnic or university. External stakeholders were happy that IPL should remain as a polytechnic and should continue to focus on training students as a major priority. They stated that they would rather have a good polytechnic in the region than have a poor university. However, the external stakeholders realized that an increase in research activities was important and that it could bring additional benefits to the region. Regional government and businesses were therefore supportive of the current IPL focus on increasing its research involvement.

During the course of the evaluation visits the Team met many students. Invariably they declared that they are quite proud of their Institute. They have close relationships with their course directors and with the teaching staff and they see the school as being a 'school of life' where they can grow as individuals and as professionals. The family like environment and support provided at IPL is greatly appreciated by the students and they did not think they would get such supports in a university environment. The practical orientation of the programmes on offer was considered to be a major advantage and by all accounts the employment prospects for graduates of IPL are high. Students feel that the education provided at IPL is equal to any that would be provided at a university. However, the students were dissatisfied with the prejudice they see in Portugal towards polytechnics and towards polytechnic graduates. They blamed the government for not doing more to promote an awareness of the work of the polytechnics and of highlighting the quality of the graduates that emerge. The government could take action to change the situation where students feel that they are underprivileged in the view of employers and society in general.

Centralised or Decentralised

At the time of the institutional evaluation the IPL was an institution in transition facing a lot of new challenges. It was at the implementation phase for introducing a new organisational structure. The new arrangement sees IPL organized into a structure of ruling bodies (IPL and five school units), Innovation & Development and Learning units, and the Student Support Services unit. The five schools will effectively cease to operate as separate entities and will operate as one sharing their resources but keeping the special identity of each school. The schools will capitalize on their synergies both academically and from an administrative point of view and in the future it is expected that students and staff will identify with IPL and not just the school they are in. Originally IPL was created as 5 schools. These are now all located at three main campuses in the Leiria region. The Team were informed that the matter of whether the schools or IPL should be the brand and the basis for the development of the Institution of higher education was one of discussion for several years. It was finally decided that IPL would be the brand and that the focus would be on developing three main campuses with the centralisation of services. This ensures that the IPL can still fulfil its mission of being an Institution that provides the province of Leiria with

readily accessible higher education possibilities. At the same time it can have administrative and (in the future) teaching and research functions which benefit from being one institution with close to 10,000 students, 600 teachers and a total of around 900 staff instead of just being five schools, each with a relatively small number of staff and students.

The question of the merits of critical mass and centralisation of function, with so called economies of scale, versus decentralisation which can enhance the ability to offer education at several different locations whilst facilitating ease of access for the general public, is one that is often debated. The Team learnt that students benefit from and are appreciative of the more family like relationships at the five smaller schools but at the same time they want to have all the benefits of studying at an Institute with more facilities. It was also discovered by the Team that the regions municipalities and industrial partners prefer the more dispersed structure of IPL as it allows for better access to the Polytechnic in all parts of the Leiria region. It also ensures that the towns and surrounding areas in which the campuses and facilities are based benefit due to their impact on civic society and due to the direct relationship that can exist with local business and industry. The balance IPL is developing with the centralisation of certain functions whilst maintaining the decentralised nature of the campuses and facilities seems to be the right strategy at the moment.

4. The capacity to change

In Strategy

In discussions senior staff articulated a strong and distinctive vision for the Polytechnic. This vision has grown from the values that the Institution currently holds and exhibits in its programmes and its activities and is a powerful statement of a higher education institution providing excellent professional and vocational education and responding to the social and economic needs of its region. The next version of the strategic plan which is currently being written should reflect these distinctive qualities and the particular position of the Institution and should seek to enhance and strengthen its capacity to provide excellence within its own terms. It is the Evaluation Team's opinion that a distinctive strategy will only emerge if the strength and vision of the current leadership is reflected in the formulations of the plan.

In many instances when asked to express their affiliation students invariably indicated that they associate themselves first and foremost with their school of study. The Polytechnic has a responsibility to their students to ensure that they feel that they are part of the Polytechnic as a whole and not just part of a school. The IPL has an opportunity to address this matter as part of its new strategic plan.

In Administrative Structure

The Polytechnic has initiated a number of projects to ensure that a corporate infrastructure is put in place. This includes the centralisation and pooling of resources from across the Polytechnic in such areas as Academic Services and Processes, Information Technology/Computer Services, Finance, Human Resources and the Library. The aim is to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness whilst at the same time respecting the autonomy of each of the school units. These developments appear to have the full support of all the staff involved and the Team anticipate that the

developments which are near completion will provide the Polytechnic with a robust and unifying operational framework.

The Team is aware that at the moment the Polytechnic is at a point when a lot of changes and initiatives have just been launched but which are not yet finalised. The Team are impressed with the changes and would support IPL's efforts to implement these changes. However, with so many initiatives being undertaken together the Team believe that the IPL should prioritise them.

The Institution should ensure that the learning and experiences gained with respect to methodology used in the development of the recent administrative service projects is applied more generally in areas of major change e.g. in the moving to a new school building. This should ensure that any disruption in the continuity of provision or any reduction of the quality of a school's academic programmes is kept to a minimum and that students, or staff, do not suffer as a consequence as happened with the recent move of the School of Health Sciences to new premises.

In Staff Development/Career Development

The intention at IPL is to provide opportunities for career development for both teaching and non-teaching staff. The target of having 50% plus 1 teaching staff with PhD's by 2009 is already being implemented.

Non teaching staff informed the Team that they too are supported to achieve undergraduate and master degrees which will further their careers.

All staff seemed to be very happy with the support and opportunities being provided to them.

In Research

The INDEA (Instituto de Investigação, Desenvolvimento e Estudos Avançados) centre, formed as part of the new organizational structures in IPL, aims to promote, support and co-ordinate research and development activities and to promote academic activities. The Team were given details about the creation of four research units which provide a focus for further advances in research. Such units appear to be enthusiastically developed by the teaching staff. The units provide a means of linking research and development opportunities with local industry and regional projects. The creation of the Technology Transfer Information Centre (OTIC) is seen by the Team as an opportunity for IPL to provide support for future income generating projects. Evidence was found of an increase in the level of research activity amongst staff in all five schools. The research, which is applied in nature, is viewed as supporting the aim of the Polytechnic to be involved in practice based teaching and learning.

In Teaching

The setting up of the centralised Pedagogical Management Board under the newly agreed Institute Statutes (February 2006) seems to provide a vehicle for the further introduction of quality assurance mechanisms at IPL. Under the new Statutes of IPL the powers and duties of this quality board includes proposing to the General Board, qualifying, scientific and pedagogical management update programmes for the teaching staff. It is therefore now possible to look at the pedagogical and scientific

training needs of the academic teaching staff right across the Institute and to provide a structured approach to the updating of teaching and learning skills.

In Internationalisation and the Bologna Process

The restructuring of programmes to conform to Bologna structures is underway but is not yet complete. Up to 1997, 1st cycle Programmes in Portugal were predominantly of a five year duration leading to the award of Licenciatura. This was then reduced to four years and finally in response to Bologna to three years when Portugal decided to make this the normal duration of 1st cycle programmes. There is nevertheless the possibility to keep the duration of a program longer. Polytechnics awarded the traditional Bacharelato after a three year programme of study up to 1997. After this they were allowed to award the Licenciatura which required a further two years of study. IPL has aligned its degree programmes with the Bologna requirement as agreed in law in Portugal. The duration of most IPL programmes that lead to the award of Licenciatura is now four years. A small number are three years in duration. Several in the Engineering or the Art and Design disciplines are still of 5 years duration following a 3 + 2 year model (bacharelato + licenciatura).

It is recognised that IPL must continue to explore and implement other Bologna recommendations such as the development of learning outcomes/ competencies and the allocation of ECTS credits for each programme and its constituent units/modules.

The Review Team were aware that whilst the Polytechnic is conscious of the need to benchmark itself internationally it has not as yet made any statements about possible benchmark partners. The development of benchmarks and performance indicators that could be compared internationally would be of great value to the IPL as it moves forward and seeks to align itself on the international stage.

In E-Learning

It was evident to the Team that some elements of a managed learning environment are already in place. A number of staff already make teaching materials available to students by electronic means. In some schools notices of information such as exam results are available electronically. Students already have e-mail addresses and password access to the Polytechnic. The IPL indicated its intention to implement *Blackboard* as a corporate platform from September 2007. Whilst there is no evidence of the substantial use of e-learning at the Institute the Team are of the opinion that what is in place could be used more systematically. During discussions with staff and students the Team were informed that the use of e-learning for work placements is often restricted by the electronic capacity of the organisations which are hosting the students. One issue raised by students was that in several instances the training required to work with an electronic platform was not received by all students of the targeted group.

5. Quality Assurance

There is some evidence of the introduction of quality assurance measures at the Polytechnic in the form of: the Pedagogical and Scientific Management Boards; the Council for Assessment and Quality which is to be put in place shortly; the evaluation of teachers and teaching by students; and the introduction of Programme Directors.

Staff: Student interactions are high at IPL and this is a direct means of modifying and improving practices at the programme level. The recent streamlining and development of administrative and information systems should provide more systematic data with which to inform quality enhancement actions and decision making processes.

The self evaluation report outlines actions taken to address the problem of student dropout and failure at IPL which has been a matter of concern at the Institute for some time. Actions taken include the development of student assistance services in terms of cognitive and social competences and proposals for the training of teachers who teach on courses that are experiencing high drop out rates. The self evaluation report refers to a recently funded project: “Promotion of School Success and Fighting Failure and School Abandonment in Higher Education”. This is a strategy for providing support and scientific-teaching supervision at IPL and is to be directed towards the two schools with the highest failure rates – the ESTG and the ESTM – with particular focus on the courses with the most worrying results within this structure. The project tackles student dropout and failure in two ways. One is by means of providing pedagogical training for teachers. The second way is to develop a student assistance service which will focus on providing: psycho-pedagogical support; personal and social orientation and supervision; and psychological support and careers advice. When fully operational the project as proposed could provide support and contribute to improvements in the academic success of around 300 students each semester. The self evaluation report also outlined several measures that have already been used to tackle the problem of non-success. This included the provision of additional training in areas of weakness such as mathematics which is serving to increase the success rate of students in programmes in the engineering and business disciplines. Other measures used for programmes included changes to the assessment methods in use in order to spread the workload more evenly through each semester, the splitting up of practical classes into smaller numbers and the closer alignment of the theoretical and the practical content of courses.

All of these quality assurance measures are seen as positive developments for the IPL.

It would appear that the response to student feedback on teaching and courses is inconsistent within some schools. It would also appear that there is no systematic use or any Institute wide use of the information collected. Students suggested that there was potential for subjectivity and unfairness in assessment during work placements due to the fact that tutors/assessors frequently change and are not trained in assessment practices. A more systematic approach to these issues would provide the means to enhance quality across the IPL with a minimum of effort.

6. External Stakeholders

The Team met with representatives from local industry and local government. Without exception these representatives spoke highly of the contribution made by the Polytechnic to the local economy and the success of the Leiria region. They noted the relevance and value of the graduate skills and the availability of researchers for development projects (There are several industrial research and development facilities in the region). It was stressed to the Team that the distribution of the Polytechnic campuses across the Leiria region enhanced the townships where they are located. This value has been recognised in Peniche with the gift of land from the Municipal Council in order to provide a laboratory facility that could also be used by local

industry. External stakeholders were well informed of the activities of the Polytechnic and valued the opportunities and platforms available to make their needs and opinions known to the Schools and the Institution.

The Team were informed that Leiria is a region with industry which requires skilled labour from higher education for its continued success. Employers were anxious to continue to develop the skills base and they indicated that they would like to see this supported by further developments in adult, continuing education and part-time learning opportunities at the Polytechnic. This is currently not provided to their satisfaction.

7. Special focus

Governance

The Team were impressed with the recent creation of the central Scientific and Pedagogical Management Boards which will discuss the Scientific and Pedagogic policies of the Institute as a whole. The decision to maintain the School Pedagogic and Scientific Boards which will now be dependent on the Central Board for decision making is seen as being strategically important as this will ensure that ownership is still maintained at the school level when central ideas are being implemented.

Leadership

During the course of the Team visits and from the reports and documentation received the Team were well aware that the IPL leaders have introduced and managed some significant changes in the recent past such as: the setting up of a substantial building programme to provide the Polytechnic with good quality 'fit for practice' accommodation; the establishment of a reputation for relevance and quality of education in the region; the implementation of strategies to establish and maintain appropriate student numbers at a time of declining numbers of students at polytechnics; obtaining agreement to bring all schools into one Polytechnic wide structure; and the introduction and implementation of a substantial programme to create a new infrastructure for the Polytechnic. This work was undertaken in a collegial manner by what were essentially separate school entities all working together.

It must be highlighted that the Polytechnic has reached the end of its 2001-2006 Strategic Plan and is preparing a new one for the period 2007-2011. The President has indicated that this plan will be created after an open consultation process at the IPL. The Team is in sympathy with this decision. However, the current draft of the new plan would suggest that stronger leadership is needed if a focused and an effective plan is to be achieved.

Autonomy

Ample evidence and information was provided to the Review Team regarding the legal framework for polytechnics in Portugal which constrains the growth and development of Polytechnic programmes and activities. Examples of this include: the legal framework which creates a duality in the autonomy granted to the IPL as an entity and that granted to the school units; the constraints in law which deny autonomy in any real decision making regarding academic degree programmes; the

constraints placed on staff appointments and the delays experienced in aligning the permanent staff numbers with updated student enrolment figures; and finally the increased emphasis being placed on the number of staff who hold a PhD qualification as has happened in the formula used to decide the states allocation of funding to public institutions and in the recent decree-law (74/2006) which if implemented will only allow institutions to continue to act as higher educational providers, teaching undergraduate degree programmes, if they have greater than 50% of teaching staff with a PhD or being a specialist as defined in law.

From the Team's observations it is of the opinion that the institution is mature enough to be able to make decisions itself without being guided in all decisions by central government.

Access

Recent government ministries in Portugal have focused on increasing access to higher education and on facilitating the participation of those who have already left the educational arena. This is in an effort to improve the overall qualification level of Portuguese workers and to improve the flexibility of its labour force in the face of increasing international competition. A new legal framework expands the 'Technological Specialisation Programme' (CET's) which provides level IV courses offered mainly to students who have already completed an upper secondary education or who have the equivalent of a level III professional qualification. The Polytechnic has developed a portfolio of these level IV vocational programmes which are delivered at sites throughout the region. The majority of these programmes are offered in the evening. According to the information provided as part of its self evaluation submission the IPL enrolled 389 students in CET courses from the period January 2005 to April 2006. They also reported that in 2005/2006, IPL provided 18% of the training nationally under this initiative. IPL are strongly supported by local Councils and relevant employers and by the students themselves in this undertaking. Graduates have a very marketable qualification and they also have access to a place on the Polytechnic degree programmes. The Polytechnic is to be commended for this development.

During the course of discussions during both site visits and according to the self evaluation report it is evident that the IPL are seeking to improve access to higher education through a variety of initiatives. Such initiatives include the provision of preparatory courses for higher education to young people who, even after having concluded their 12th year of public high school, are unable to access higher education because their marks were not high enough. In 2005/2006 this initiative involved 42 students. In all 27 students were successful in passing these preparatory courses. The IPL also gives special consideration for applicants who are greater than 23 years of age. Each applicant's competency to enroll on IPL programmes is evaluated by means of examination and by means of an interview. According to the self evaluation report, the process allows for the recognition of competence and knowledge acquired through life experience and provides an opportunity for candidates who had given up their studies to return to a higher education programme. In 2006/2007, 149 applicants to IPL were successful in their evaluation. Of those who were successful the greatest numbers of students were for the School of Technology and Management (69) and the School of Education (46). The Evaluation Team find these initiatives of great

importance and an excellent contribution to increasing the educational level in the region.

IPL are also seeking to ensure that there is provision made for those who are in full-time employment. It was reported to the Team that IPL provides an evening option for some of its full-time degree programmes in the engineering and business disciplines.

However, dimensions of a comprehensive access strategy at IPL could be developed further e.g. part-time, work based and access by experiential learning provisions could be generally available. The Polytechnic recruits sufficient students to fill its places but it could consider further its social responsibilities and the need for the additional up-skilling of the local workforce.

Student Services

The Team observed the student support services at the IPL and found the services to be good and to be functioning well. Students that the Team met were happy with the services provided and generally found the services were sufficient in fulfilling their needs. Students reported that in instances where they had requested changes or amendments to services that such requests were normally met. In the view of the Review Team the student support service at IPL is a big asset and could be used more in promoting the IPL in relation to *Erasmus* and other student exchange programmes.

8. Recommendations and Conclusions

In terms of the Strategic Plan

- ◆ Develop a strategic plan that will serve as a lighthouse for the institution and which is strong and inspirational rather than being bland and non-descript. Senior management provides the necessary leadership to ensure that this objective is achieved.
- ◆ Develop a mission statement that describes the particular perspective of this institution of higher education and which takes the quality and the duties of the IPL into account.
- ◆ Create an action plan that includes targets, timelines and resource implications and which clearly indicates who is responsible for the implementation of each action item. A high level committee or management group is established to oversee the implementation of this action plan and reports on progress on a regular basis.
- ◆ Ensure that IPL's vision concerns itself with the development of quality and of services in the region.
- ◆ Ensure that the services provided to the municipalities and the industries of the region are continued and developed and make efforts to increase the visibility of these services.

In terms of Governance and Management

- ◆ Clarify the governing structure at IPL not just formally but in practice so that there is a clear indication of who makes, who executes and who implements strategic decisions.
- ◆ Care is taken to ensure that the management teams which have been built up in IPL are provided with clear leadership into the future and IPL guards against drifting in the pursuit of fulfilling its goals and ambitions as articulated in its new strategic plan.
- ◆ Leadership and direction is provided for the proceedings of the General Board which is an important agent of change.

In terms of Bologna and Internationalisation

- ◆ Increase the international mobility of students and staff.
- ◆ Develop performance indicators which can be benchmarked internationally and actively promote the creation of international networks.
- ◆ Promote the implementation of all parts of the Bologna process and remove any difficulties that prevent the introduction of Bologna structures.

In terms of Teaching and Learning and Programmes

- ◆ Develop a strategy for the increased use of Information Technology based teaching and learning methods.
- ◆ Develop and increase the number of evening and part time courses available and expand the number of places available in further education programmes.
- ◆ Continue to work towards reducing the drop out and failure rates through better advising systems and the increased use of new types of teaching.
- ◆ Conduct more research into the reasons why students drop out or fail in their academic programmes.
- ◆ Investigate the nature and structures of the jobs obtained by IPL graduates.

In terms of Quality Assurance

- ◆ Develop robust and systematic quality assurance systems making use of the structures currently in place as a basis to move forward and ensuring that the quality culture that already exists is respected.
- ◆ Systematically coordinate the quality assurance systems within schools and across the Institute.
- ◆ Develop consistent protocols of assessment for use within programmes.

- ◆ Ensure the effectiveness of the newly created *Council for Assessment and Quality* and if it is found to be ineffective replace it with an internal board of quality assurance. The Council should play a leading role in the development of the quality assurance structures and procedures for the Institute.
- ◆ Continue with the development of new common databases and ensure that the information held in the school databases is compatible with that held centrally.
- ◆ Systematically use the newly available data for the purpose of enhancing quality and resource management.
- ◆ Ensure that study programme directors have access to relevant information in the new IPL databases and that such access is facilitated by providing the information in a clear and understandable manner. It should be stressed that the study programme directors have a responsibility to develop the quality culture around teaching activities and have responsibility for the development of the study programmes.

9. Envoie

We wish to thank the Institute once again for its generous hospitality and for the excellent arrangements provided for the Review Team. It was a pleasure to be in Leiria to discuss with students and staff the future directions of the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria. At this time of profound and far-reaching change in higher education the Institute is to be congratulated for its frank examination of its ability to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. In all our meetings we were struck by a strong sense of determination to see the Institute achieve its full potential as an institution of high standing. We hope that the Institute finds our comments and suggestions helpful, and we wish the Institute well for the next stage of its development.