

**INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE BRAGANCA**

***EUA EVALUATION REPORT***

***June 2007***

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## **1. Foreword**

The review of Instituto Politécnico de Bragança took place within the framework established by the Memorandum of Understanding between the Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES) and the European University Association (EUA) of November 2005. The Terms of Reference contained therein outline that 10 Portuguese higher education institutions (public and private universities and polytechnics) would be evaluated by EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme in 2006-2007. These 10 institutions were selected to receive co-funding for this evaluation by MCTES on the basis of an open call to all Portuguese HEIs in early 2006. The individual evaluations followed EUA's standard practice for institutional review. For each institution, a separate report will be issued.

### ***1.1. The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)***

The European University Association (EUA) represents and supports higher education institutions in 46 European countries, with at present more than 700 European universities and 34 National Rectors' Associations as its members.

EUA plays an essential role in shaping the European higher education and research landscape and has a mandate in the Bologna process.

As part of its services, EUA offers to HEI an Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), which has its own independent steering committee. The IEP takes its point of departure in the mission and objectives of the institution under evaluation. It focuses on its capacity to change, including its strategic planning and its overall quality management. The purpose is to support the institution in its efforts to improve its strategic and quality management. The strengths and weaknesses of the institution are judged primarily in light of its own mission and not against external criteria.

It is the declared aim of the IEP programme to strengthen institutional autonomy and to support institutional change in higher education institutions. Strong emphasis is put on decision making processes and institutional structures and on the effectiveness of strategic planning, and – in this context – on the functioning and relevance of internal quality processes.

The distinctive features of the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme are that:

- It has a strong emphasis on self-evaluation;
- It is undertaken from a European and international perspective;
- It is undertaken by peers, who are rectors or former rectors of universities;

It is independent and non-profit.

The evaluation methodology is guided by four central strategic questions:

- 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?

Up until now more than 170 higher education institutions have been evaluated under the IEP.

The standard procedure of the Institutional Evaluation Programme foresees that the institution presents a self-evaluation report. On the basis of this report, a team consisting of 3 rectors or former rectors, and the team secretary conducts two site visits within a period of a year at most. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> visit, an oral report is presented, first to the rector, and immediately afterwards to a larger public. Within 3 months after the visit, the team issues a draft report, to which the institution may respond. In the particular case of the Portuguese universities, the MoU stipulates that the final report is to be made public.

### ***1.2. Evaluation procedures for Instituto Politécnico de Bragança***

The evaluation of IPB was carried out in several steps, in accordance with the IEP guidelines.

In October 2006, the IEP Steering Committee appointed an evaluation team composed of:

- Bent Schmidt-Nielsen, former Rector of The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Copenhagen, Denmark (Team chair)
- Jacques Lanares, Vice-Rector of the University Lausanne, Switzerland
- Gintautas Braziunas, Managing Director of the Vilnius College of Higher Education, Lithuania
- Michael Gaebel, EUA Secretariat, Brussels, Belgium (Team secretary)

Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB) appointed a self-evaluation committee which prepared a self evaluation report. On the basis of the self-evaluation report, the EUA Team undertook a first visit to IPB in the period from 11-13 December 2006 and a second visit in the period from 6-9 March 2007. The second visit was concluded with the oral report, which was presented to IPB in a public session.

## **2. Introduction**

### ***2.1. Purpose of the EUA Evaluation in the institutional and national context***

The EUA IEP Review of IPB and 9 other Portuguese HEIs took place in a period of strong governmental interest in assessment of the HE sector and its potential for change and development. The TOR mention the review as a contribution to the efforts made by the Portuguese government regarding the integration of the Portuguese HE system at European level, the protection and improvement of the quality of academic teaching and learning, the promotion of diversified systems of HE coping with heterogeneous publics, the enhancement of access and enlargement of student populations, the support for research and innovation and the development of a national QA procedures. The Team has taken note of these overall goals, and has considered them during the actual review of IPB, along with the general principles of the IEP, which dedicates special attention to governance mechanisms, access rules, institutional autonomy, funding, internationalisation and other relevant higher education policies.

In addition to the EUA Review of Portuguese HE institutions and its own national procedures for evaluation and quality assurance, the Portuguese Government commissioned two more system-wide evaluation initiatives in about the same period of time: an evaluation of the Portuguese quality assurance system by the European Quality Assurance Agency (ENQA), and also an evaluation of the HE system as a whole conducted by OECD.

The EUA Evaluation Team took particular note of the OECD report, which was available as a draft by the end of 2006, since the overall analysis of the Portuguese HE sector provided was found to be useful for the understanding of the institutional situation. In particular it allowed the team to distinguish between specific challenges of IPB and issues related to sector-wide structures.

The OECD report draws an overall critical picture, in particular as it perceives the standing of the Portuguese HE sector in the wider social-economic environment as relatively weak when seen in the European and international context.

The general economic and social situation is characterised as not-knowledge-based. The problematic state of secondary school education with its high drop-out rates and low levels of achievement, in particular in mathematics and natural sciences, as described in the report, clearly prove that the long-term substantial improvement cannot be achieved by changes in the higher education sector and the efforts of individual institutions, but require general educational reform and modernisation. Decreasing student numbers pose a problem, not only for the labour market, but also for HE institutions. Naturally, this concerns especially the institutions in the less populated and economically less developed central regions, among them in particular the polytechnics.

This made it easier for the Team to understand and discuss the present task of HEI in Portugal.

The Team took also note of the OECD report's recommendation to the Portuguese Government to maintain and strengthen the binary structure and to define distinct missions for universities and polytechnics. With reference to international experience, the report also acknowledges the difficulty in drawing a sensible borderline between the two types of institutions, an issue which is referred to in the concrete case of IPB further below.

## ***2.2. General impressions***

The Team gained the impression that the process of preparing the self-evaluation report had been embraced as a collective challenge, involving all parts of the IPB, and has supported institutional integration and raised the awareness of institution-wide cooperation opportunities. It resulted in a comprehensive report, which, together with the annexes and supplemental information prepared prior to the second visit, provided a solid basis for the evaluation.

On the occasion of both visits, the team met representatives of all member groups of the IPB, from all schools and institutional bodies, including students. It also had the occasion to meet external stakeholders: representatives of the municipalities, the private sector and the communities of Bragança and Mirandela. Again, these meetings were well prepared and scheduled, which allowed the Team to gather a maximum of information and impressions in a very short period of time.

The oral report was presented to IPB in a public session attended by university members, representatives of local and regional governments, of stakeholder organisations, and the local press, in total some 250 people. The presentation was transmitted through video conference to the IPB campus in Mirandela. The effort made by IPB in presenting the report to members and the wider public underlines the importance it attached to the evaluation; the strong attendance seems to underline that the communities of Bragança and Mirandela have a strong interest in the Institute and its work.

The entire evaluation went very smoothly and efficiently, and took place in a very friendly and reliable atmosphere.

## **3. Present state and opportunities for institutional change**

### ***3.1. Major assets of IPB***

When looking at the present state of IPB, and despite the fact that the general situation of higher education institutions in Portugal, and in particular in the regional environment, is in many aspects critical, as mentioned above, the Team gained the impression that IPB has some

particular assets which are very favourable to institutional change, and which therefore have been followed up throughout the report:

- As a polytechnic in a provincial surrounding with a rather weak economic structure, IPB has a central role in Bragança and Mirandela to fulfil in contributing to the economic, social and cultural life of the region of Trás-os-Montes. While this is certainly in many aspects a much more challenging positing than the one experienced by HEIs in the coastal regions, it also eases IPB's task to gain a certain public attention, and to develop local and regional networks with the most active stakeholders in business and society, based on mutual loyalty and trust.
- IPB's members – its leadership, staff members and students – appear to be highly motivated and show an inspired attitude towards the institute and institutional change. Staff consists of experienced well seasoned staff members that in their majority lead and support innovation. Though the average age of staff members is low, many of them appear to be very well qualified. They seem to be content with their social living conditions in Bragança and Mirandela, and with the career development that the institution offers – in particular as it offers access to research and supports PhD's – provided that it result in tenure positions. The fact that currently more than 60% of IPB's staff is engaged on the basis of temporary contracts posses an issue of special attention.
- Among its members, there also is a dominating feeling that time for change and reorientation has come. There is a strong consciousness that all change will be about enhancing quality in its many aspects: academic quality in teaching and research, quality in services to the community and the economy of the region, and quality in competition at national and international level.

It appears essential that IPB maintains and further develops these strengths. It is not hard to understand that economic and social changes within the region, the country, at European or global level could contribute to a devaluation of these assets, and that a positive and optimistic milieu can only be sustained if tangible improvements can be achieved, and the institution's members stay convinced that they are contributing and that their contribution matters. Therefore, the following 3 recommendations appear to be overarching all further institutional development at IPB:

*Recommendation 1 IPB should introduce a mechanism for analysis and targeted development of its local and regional positioning*

*Recommendation 2 It should develop appropriate measures for improvement, maintenance and further attraction of highly qualified and committed staff.*

*Recommendation 3 It should enforce and embed the aim for quality within the institution.*

While these are certainly among the key recommendations, they only support what IPB is actually doing at present. However, quite evidently, these overall recommendations are of a rather complex nature, as they involve a multitude of issues to be followed up coherently at different levels and in different parts of the institute.

E.g. attraction of staff requires the establishment of staff development plans, which would have to deal with academic priorities, remuneration and attractive working conditions, as well as social aspects like general living conditions.

Quality development would not only be a matter to be solved via the establishment of a formal QA chapter, and a QA system, which is indeed required (see below), but to maintain and further develop quality in a broader sense, which today contributes so much to the attractiveness of IPB. While individual departments and staff members are key players, it has to be assumed that it is the overall performance of IPB that makes its local and regional standing successful and enduring, and underlines its role as an attractive partner for innovation and development.

Therefore, the following analysis concentrates on a number of issues which have been identified by the Team, and which, if not tackled appropriately in an intermediate period of time, could prevent IPB's positive assets from developing their full potential, and could endanger the reform and development aspirations that leadership and staff voice with so much enthusiasm and engagement.

### ***3.2. Institutional management and governance structures***

A main goal of the evaluation was to review the management and governance structures of IPB, and to assess their potential for further institutional development.

IPB is currently composed of 5 schools, 4 in Bragança, and 1 in Mirandela. In line with the legal regulations; IPB has established a range of committees, councils and assemblies at central, school and at departmental level.

The Team concentrated the discussions in particular on the functioning of central and school governance, in order to understand how they contribute to the success of IPB, and would like to propose the following remarks:

The current governance and management structures at institutional and school level are rather complex and not very efficient when it comes to institutional change. Some of the committees are too large; others take decisions on specific issues, without considering the overall situation of IPB. Out of 4 central bodies, to give an example, 2 seem to work rather independently, mainly in decision making. Their core function lies in decision making, rather than in the preparation of decision making or consultation.

The school level replicates the structures for decision preparation and making of the institutional level. Each school is very much an entity in itself, with all features attributed to an autonomous entity. Therefore each school develops vital policies and initiatives all by itself, without any inter-school coordination, and little coordination with the central leadership. This prevents cooperation and exchange between the schools, systematic sharing of lessons learnt, and joint capacity building. Schools are not challenged to develop horizontal missions or contribute to them, regarding issues that would concern the entire institute or several schools and departments, such as ICT, teaching methods, quality enhancement (see examples 1-3 below).

Due to the internal autonomy of schools (and departments) and external regulations, the President's ability to take strategic decisions is reduced to a minimum and is strongly dependent on the President's personality and acceptance. Quite obviously, there are a number of issues

where central institution and the schools have a vital interest to coordinate and cooperate. However, it appears to be quite ambitious to maintain and develop these links through the range of existing governance bodies and still do this in a transparent, functional and innovative way (i.e. going beyond routine communication and procedures). As the present formal structures and bodies at level of schools and institute are not as efficient as they should be regarding decision making and task sharing, this has provoked processes of informal communication and decision making to achieve a certain functioning and coherence at institutional level. The fact that a scientific committee has not yet been established suggests that its important tasks are currently fulfilled via other, more informal mechanisms.

As a consequence, the current governance and management scheme impedes a continuous and monitored process for development and implementation of an integrated IPB institutional strategy, to which all schools have to commit and which is required to ensure the endurance of all parts of the institution for the future, and to enhance its capacity and capability to respond to external challenges at local, national and international level.

The following examples illustrate the findings:

**Case 1:** For the establishment of new Master programmes in 2006, IPB collected suggestions from all schools, compiled them and submitted them to the Ministry. At the end, 5 of 29 programmes were accepted, which is a good result, compared to other PT. But it also means that not all Bachelor programmes will be continued with a Masters programme. This has to have consequences for future selection and submission procedures at institutional level. The leadership of IPB would have to develop jointly with the schools a mechanism for developing a strategic approach in the submission of attractive and competitive programmes and for developing Master programmes which are accessible to students from different schools, and potentially also attractive to new students from outside IPB. IPB will have to shift from a compilation mode to an integration mode.

For the future, this will require more cooperation and exchange between schools, an enforced position of the central leadership, and clear governance and management structures.

**Case 2:** At present, the schools develop their promotion completely independently from each other, supported by a central office. In consequence, they have developed sets of completely different-looking promotion materials, sporting the individual school logos. An IPB brochure featuring the individual schools does not exist. Each school for itself participates in fairs and undertakes promotion visits to secondary schools all over the country, to attract new students. Quite obviously this has consequences not only for the work and cost effectiveness, but also for the identity, public visibility and attractiveness of IPB, and thus for its competitiveness.

**Case 3:** The decision to use student feedback sheets is apparently taken at school or departmental level, or even by individual staff members, due to lack of legal obligation. This not only leads – as for promotion materials – to a multiplication of work, but also prevents IPB from using student feedback sheets as a means for quality assurance and quality monitoring.

Leadership and a part of the staff members supported the findings of the team in principle, and suggested they reflected their own thoughts. Student representatives confirmed a certain fatigue

regarding their involvement in some of the larger administrative bodies at school and institution level, while they felt that they can make an impact at departmental level. From this one may assume that a process of rethinking and reshaping the governance and management might be on the way, but it needs guidance and means to develop.

The Team recommends as follows:

*Recommendation 4 : IPB should put as top priority the establishment of a coherent corporate identity and team spirit.*

- The present structure of the Image Office should be enforced. In addition to the technical staff, it might be useful to appoint a proactive and experienced academic director, whose main task would be to oversee and drive forward the development of IPB's identity and its overarching promotion and visibility policy. Such activities are practically already undertaken by some staff members, but only at the level of schools. These efforts have to be seen as part and parcel of the definition of IPB's mission and the development of an institutional strategy.
- Preparation of promotion materials and initiatives would be coordinated and implemented by the Image Office, with strong participation of the schools.
- Promotion materials would present IPB, and would have add-ins or special sections presenting the schools.
- IPB should develop visibility guidelines and enforce them. This should ensure that school visual identities only appear along with the IPB logo and appropriate relation regarding style and size.
- The Image Office and the related staff members in charge at the level of schools would play a key role in ensuring the visibility of the IPB in all outside relations

In discussions some of the IPB's constituencies referred to the fact that despite acknowledged shortcomings in the governance and management scheme, the institution and its schools would still perform quite well. This is certainly true, but it is the Team's conviction that the current governance and management system is not responsible for the success of the schools and IPB so far. This has more to do with the fact that dedicated and sensible people positioned at the top of the institution and of the schools look for creative solutions, which are – as indicated – often found and developed outside the official governance and management bodies.

This implies also that change and development rely to a large extent on the good will, preferences and interests of individual staff members. It would be of the utmost importance to develop a strategic institutional development plan with clear goals and indicators, and an implementation scheme that is clearly structured and binding.

The Team would also make the point that at present the full potential of interdisciplinary and horizontal synergies and of cooperation with external stakeholders (see below) is far from being explored. However, both would be major assets in coping with increased competition at regional and national level, but also for accommodating the needs of the local and regional environment.

A restriction when introducing changes is obviously that the present governance and management structures obey governmental rules. However, it is felt that this might leave a lot of scope for internal institutional regulation. The current degree of autonomy is used to its full strategic advantage. Lack of governmental regulation often translates into individual, departmental and school 'niches'. This may eventually lead to fragmentation, in particular if the external framework conditions were to change.

The Team recommends as follows:

*Recommendation 5 IPB should make a concerted effort to streamline the governance and management structures in order to make them more functional.*

- IPB should look into ways and means to establish and enforce central administration structures.
- It would have to establish an institutional vision and a strategic plan of how to reach it, providing principles, guidelines and development goals, which would serve as a framework for the establishment of strategies, planning and implementation mechanisms at institutional, school and department level.
- The institutional plan and vision would have to be promoted at all levels, in order to ensure a proactive participation of all members of IPB.

The recommendations are deliberately provided in a rather general manner, as the Team is not in the position to deliver a blueprint for a better governance and management structure. There is a huge fund of international experience in best practices in HE governance and management to be consulted, but finally, IPB will have to develop governance and management solutions in line with its mission goals, the demands of its environment, and the financial and technical means that it can acquire for change and enhancement.

Nevertheless, the Team would like to add some body to its recommendations, which may be helpful for guiding this process:

The institutional strategy and action plan should take a holistic, forward and outward-looking approach. It should not be imagined as a mere compilation of the plans of different schools and bodies, but as a creative process, to be undertaken collectively: What is the overall mission of IPB as an institute, what are the priorities, what are the means and methods to achieve this? This would require the establishment of one body which consults and supports the presidency in policy and strategy development and implementation. This could be the group of Deans.

However, this alone might not induce the innovation that Portuguese HE requires. Therefore it is suggested that a group be established. This should be made up of innovative, outward-looking and future-orientated individuals from different academic subject areas and areas of work and public life. None of them should hold an official position within IPB. The group would serve the institute as a think-tank or a future committee, in developing key inputs for the institutional strategy and development.

The proposed measures should not give way for a rigid centralisation, but should help to establish better coordination at institutional level while maintaining the enthusiasm at school-level. It is very important, in particular with regard to reactions of many staff members experienced during the site visits, that the reforms are well explained and promoted within the institution.

### ***3.3. Embedment in the external environment: local, national and international agenda***

While an evaluation can be expected to assess in first line teaching, research and services offered by an institution, in the case of IPB the Team found it important to consider under what circumstances and to what demand the institution is responding and could respond. This was expected to give some indication regarding concrete development opportunities for IPB.

Currently, IPB has activities and maintains relationships at local, regional, national and international level.

***At local and regional level***, IPB is the only public tertiary institution of Bragança and Mirandela, and it is also an important economic and cultural factor, which despite tough competition from coastal institutions, manages to attract and maintain highly qualified staff and students.

It entertains a number of relations for the delivery of courses and research with other institutions, with universities and polytechnics. It was noticed that – in particular for the purpose of doctoral education and research – individual members have relations to universities in the coastal region. This is apparently encouraged by the institute or school as a contribution to institutional capacity building, but is – in particular in the humanities – not based on formalised relations, but remains an individual affair.

IPB sees – fully in line with development trends observed elsewhere – a growing need for more ***inter-institutional cooperation and exchange***, at bi- and multilateral level. The leadership is convinced that an Association of the Northern Polytechnics could be of mutual benefit, in particular for the provision of joint Masters courses, research collaboration and the provision of services to external partners. Staff members supported this view, both for their disciplines and with a view of enhanced opportunities for students and junior teaching and research staff.

IPB is also committed to ***community services and provision of services to enterprises*** in the region of Trás-os-Montes, an activity which strongly underlines its regional identity. Enterprises are generally small and medium size, and can be described as local or regional. IPB contributes through provision of skilled labour (students, graduates, staff members) services, particularly in the area of quality control (agricultural products), development of technical solutions and through consultancy aiming at improving processes and solving specific problems. Industry and community appear to be little knowledge based. The fact that solutions cannot be developed in-house is quite obviously a reason for depending on IPB, its staff and students. Most of the

services required are in agriculture, engineering, and in applied sciences, mainly biology and chemistry, and are provided at non-profit or cost covering basis.

While the situation for industry cooperation is far from ideal and of little relevance for institutional funding, it has an impact on its teaching and research programmes.

Furthermore, the improvement of the social and economic situation in the region clearly seems to be at the heart of IPB and is an explicit mission goal. Therefore, external partners are formally involved in the IPB General Council, but this might not yet be the most efficient involvement.

**At national level**, IPB is one of the more successful polytechnics, and competes in some areas with the best of universities. However, it still feels threatened due to the decrease of student numbers at national level, and the competition of more attractive institutions of the coastal region.

The successful establishment of the Campus of Mirandela during recent years is probably a good example of a regional development initiative, which could have an impact at national level. Its challenging technical and infrastructural situation has been embraced by staff, students, and the local community with a lot of commitment and enthusiasm. The school has an important role to play within in the region, but it is also felt that, in the medium term, it will strengthen IPB's national competitiveness, as it attracts students who would most probably not have taken up their studies in Bragança.

**At international level**, quite in line with European and global trends, international cooperation and exchange can be seen as an area of growing importance for IPB. It participates in EU programmes, and is currently undertaking steps for joint degree courses with European partners. Development of international affairs is spearheaded by the vice-president, in close cooperation with coordinators at school-level and supported by a very young and enthusiastic International Relations Office.

The Team recommends as follows:

*Recommendation 6 IPB should principally maintain its broad approach of local, national and international aspirations, but develop them in a more focused and strategic manner in the framework of an overall institutional strategy.*

**General**

- The Team is convinced that IPB's future lies in the **active response to the opportunities and challenges provided in its local and regional economic and social environment, in competition at national level for students and participation in strategic alliances, and also in the cautious exploitation of international opportunities.**
- It is therefore recommended to **continue activities on all three levels, local, national and international, in the framework of strategic planning**, as suggested in the previous chapter. This should encourage the development of a **clear institutional profile and**

**mission**, and also the cultivation of **particular areas of excellence**, which should also benefit IPB's research aspirations.

- The multi- and interdisciplinarity of IPB's teaching and research should be further strengthened, as it is a clear asset for developing novel, creative and holistic solutions to the complex problems of the region.
- The academic skills and institutional capacities of IPB should be used to **monitor processes and assess outcomes**. The emphasis should not be on enhancing internal competition, and on finger-pointing failures, but to encourage a culture of calculated risk-taking, with transparent procedures for assessing what works and what does not and the possibility to readjust or reconsider, as appropriate, according to agreed indicators and time frames for each initiative.
- **Promotion and marketing** should underpin these activities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the leadership requires active support at all levels. Therefore, common goals have to be discussed with involved staff members, and made transparent and understandable throughout the institution.
- At regional, national and international levels, there should be special emphasis on the **development of strategic alliances**. A concrete example is the proposed Association of the Polytechnics of the North, which could be a very useful platform for pooling resources, and attracting research and project funding. However, these alliances should be concluded in order to strengthen IPB in its institutional identity, not to implant or supplement elements which are not in line with its profile and overall mission goals.

#### *Regional level*

- In the framework of the institutional strategy, the present state of external stakeholder cooperation should be assessed and further developed. As stated by IPB's members, the development of training and cooperation relations with alumni and their economic activities may play an increasingly important role. There are potentially other ways of enhancing cooperation, which have not yet been fully explored.
- The interest of external stakeholders should be channelled into an institutional body or structure which allows for an innovative and inspired dialogue between both sides. This might also be an appropriate forum for communicating that serving local and regional community and economy are important tasks, but that IPB also retains important responsibilities in research and teaching, and would have to balance these different and occasionally conflicting demands.
- **The Campus and School of Mirandela should be further developed, as regards their specific identity, their contribution to the overall strategy of IPB in research, teaching, and cooperation with external stakeholder.** This would, in particular, require a clearly designed complementary portfolio of disciplines, requiring also an appropriate naming of the school. With regard to nationally decreasing student enrolment, the school needs an attractive profile and identity, in order to establish a clear position within IPB's portfolio.

#### *National level*

- Competition at national level will clearly be about students, highly qualified staff and the tapping of education funding sources. IPB would be well-advised to promote itself as a **thriving polytechnic** which gives access to multiple academic and professional

opportunities, also at international level, and highlight campus facilities, but also living conditions. Initially, it might be useful to seek professional support in this regard.

***International level***

- The existing structure of the international office and its staff appear to be efficient and dynamic, and the present “black-box” approach in developing cooperation and exchange links is appropriate. In the framework of the institutional strategy, efforts should be made to link the local, regional and national profile to international cooperation. This could take place in areas where IPB has developed particular strength, and/or in relation to its regional environment and its cooperation with regional external stakeholders.
- Student exchange is a key activity of IPB. Exchanges require the attention of senior leadership and cautious evaluation. Where possible, they should take place in the framework of institutional alliances and partnership, combined with staff exchange; should be reciprocal not in number, but in principal; and should serve strategic interests beyond the actual benefit of individual students. Student satisfaction, regarding teaching, contact with regional social and economic environment, is an important condition for the success and continuation of these programmes. This includes language proficiency of staff members, and also efficient language training programmes offered to both students and staff. By using the instruments provided by ECTS, it has to be ensured that students are fit for exchange, and will benefit from it to a maximum.

The Team acknowledges that most of these issues have already been addressed by IPB, and are also pursued by the central leadership and in the individual schools. However, current efforts seem to lack focus regarding the scope, and determination regarding the realisation, which has to do with the present institutional fragmentation.

Governance and management, joint planning and implementation include cautious risk-taking and rigorous monitoring of progress and evaluation of outcomes. It is therefore crucial that the recommendations of this chapter are read and considered in the context of the ones made in the previous chapter.

### ***3.4. Teaching***

The evaluation team got the impression that students and student representatives at IPB were generally happy with the teaching, teacher availability, the facilities at IPB, student support and quality of life in Bragança and Mirandela. However, so far, there are no homogenous approaches to assess student satisfaction, and to improve teaching.

Therefore, it is somehow curious that the IPB statistics show a high number of student drop-outs. However, IPB staff explained that these students are mainly newly enrolled students, who never actually started their studies at IPB, as they have taken up more attractive study vacancies in other institutions.

A matter of concern is that there is no incitement for students to attend classes, which apparently at some schools undermines regular participation. Some schools and departments manage to deal

with the issue with a certain determination. It has been mentioned that with the Bologna regulations, the presence of students would become compulsory.

The attraction of 23+ students<sup>1</sup> is clearly a success for IPB, as it managed to attract 600 students into this programme – more than any other institution in Portugal. Promotion has been mentioned as the main reason for this success. Problems concerning time-tables, recognition of prior learning and assessment have been mentioned.

Interestingly, suggestions for improvement came mainly from foreign students, and the 23+ students. Besides occasional remarks regarding teaching methods, they were mainly concerned with language problems and student services (foreign students) and the problem of teaching schedules for working students (23+ students).

Student representatives confirmed that they are involved at almost all bodies at institutional, school and departmental level, though they felt that they only had a real impact at the level of departments and courses.

One external driving force for institutional change in Portugal is certainly the Bologna Process, which aims at enhancing convergence among the European HE systems. IPB has understood Bologna as an opportunity and has started at an early stage to implement the reforms. Fully in compliance with the present governance scheme, the implementation of Bologna reforms has been taken up by schools and departments individually, without any major coordination between them.

Bologna, once implemented, can be expected to bring about significant change on IPB's structure and rationale, far beyond the actual technical, pedagogical and curricula concerns considered at present. The Bologna Reform includes the introduction of a two-cycle system of 3 year Bachelor and 1-2 year Master. As a result, IPB now has Master courses, which previously could only be realised in cooperation with universities. The fact that the 4- to 5-year programmes previously given will be substituted by 3-year 1<sup>st</sup> cycle and 1-2 year 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programmes could lead to a situation where the actual number of students leaving IPB with a bachelor degree would result in lower student numbers in total. Student population in number and quality would depend on how many courses at Bachelor and Master level IPB will be able to offer. As these reforms are still under implementation, it is difficult to assess their impact at national and IPB level. There is some indication that the number of Master courses in particular will be limited, and that this will have an impact on the academic and public reputation of institutions such as IPB. The attraction of graduate students other than its own graduates would be an additional opportunity for national competition and recruitment of talent.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to enhance participation, in 2006, the Portuguese Government modified the entry regulation now allowing HEIs to admit students who have not passed the national entry exams provided that they are at least 23 years old. Under the previous regulation, students had to be 25 years or older, and to sit a special national exam.

The fact that polytechnics are not allowed to confer Ph.D. degrees can in some cases be a hindrance to further development of teaching and research at the highest level. This is a result of the Portuguese binary system as it is today

The Team recommends as follows:

*Recommendation 7 The provision of attractive, diverse and responsive quality teaching and services is of key importance for the number of students choosing IPB as a destination and therefore has a major impact on its further existence*

- While IPB offers some excellent student services (libraries, PC and photocopying facilities) and most students met are satisfied with the teaching provided, the size of IPB and the commitment of its staff should allow further enforcement of tutoring and student care, in particular for groups like 23+ and foreign students.
- A high dropout rate is a critical indicator for quality, and an institution-wide approach should be made to analyse and reduce this. Since it has direct influence on funding, it deserves special attention. A technical way is to improve the statistics in order to distinguish between students who have actually enrolled and taken up their studies and those who did not. In addition IPB should launch measures to influence the decision of students (e.g. through e-mailing and mailing campaigns and phone calls).
- A central unit or task force monitoring teaching and learning, and encouraging and facilitating innovation and improvement in this area could support the quality. The school of education could logically play a key role in this.
- Long-term advantages of attracting 23+ students and special regulation students would require that IPB takes more account of their special needs. Beyond the immediate outcome – improving teaching and services to LLL students, this would be an opportunity to develop alternative teaching which could be the first step to a LLL agenda, including e-learning. IPB should consider whether and in what areas (academic learning, professional courses, special skills such as languages etc.) and at what level (short courses, graduate programmes) LLL study programmes would be of strategic interest. This should also be a key issue in the context of its external stakeholder cooperation (see previous chapter).
- It would seem logical that the School of Education would take a special lead in these issues, thus taking up a horizontal mission within IPB, involving the other schools.
- Since quality assurance is not restricted to teaching, but extends to all structures and activities of an institution, including services and research, the lack of an institution-wide QA approach has been noted in particular with regard to teaching and learning, which is – as is usually the case at HEI – the main activity of IPB (see also below).

### **3.5. Research**

Research activity has for the past 20 years been IPB's main priority for maintaining and improving its reputation and attractiveness.

IPB aims at attracting staff with PhD degrees and research qualifications, and provides incentives to keep them. Its schools and departments are involved in research projects, some of them to the benefit of local community and industry.

In the past, the government did not ask polytechnics to carry out research activities, and research funding was not provided. A recent government statement seems to indicate that Polytechnics are also invited to contribute to research, and research grants from the national research foundation can be obtained. IPB has limited research resources, and at present no defined research agenda. Individuals and departments plan and carry out research without an institutional framework, and often in cooperation with universities.

The Team recommends as follows:

*Recommendation 8 IPB should retain its involvement in research, and develop a concerted research strategy and agenda for the entire institution, which would also consider impacts and interrelation with other mission goals.*

- While IPB's focus must be clearly on teaching, it is very much advised to retain research and development activities (R&D). This appears to be important with regard to the concrete services requested from regional external stakeholders, in particular in the field of agriculture, medium and small production enterprises, which require "regional solutions".
- Research is also an important asset for the overall regional development. As it is the only higher education institution in this periphery region of Portugal, its presence is of crucial importance for ensuring the progression towards a more knowledge-based society and economy throughout the country.
- With regard to the Bologna discussion on the character of Bachelor and Master degrees, the Team supports IPB's ambition to retain education at Bachelor and Master level research-based, while putting strong emphasis on transferable and professional skills. This appears in fact as an important asset for both the employment and career development of individuals. Again, without IPB, an entire region would be excluded from any research-related teaching and learning.
- In view of its limited resources and funding, IPB requires an institutional research strategy and the identification of research priorities. It is important to establish proper mechanisms, so that all levels of IPB (schools and departments) will be involved in its formulation. In particular this should encourage synergies and cooperation across the disciplines, and also a central mechanism for dissemination of research funding opportunities. Research cooperation with other institutions – be it for projects or for developing PhDs – should be assessed on the basis of medium and long-term impacts on IPB's own research profile.
- While departments, schools and a research council may be best advised to determine the relevance of research from an academic point of view, their final decision on research priorities, projects and cooperation relations would have to be a governance and management decision, to be taken by the institutional leadership for strategic reasons, and with regard to the institutional mission and its available resources.

### 3.6. Quality Assurance

The absence of a quality assurance system does not indicate that an institution or programme does not possess quality, and IPB is certainly a good case study for proving this. However, it makes it difficult to demonstrate quality to the institution's members and also to an outside world. While this may be perceived as a lack of transparency and diminish trust to the latter, it is of crucial importance to the former for staff motivation, as is the indication of areas for quality improvement and measures for its realisation. In a nutshell, this gives all the good reasons why IPB requires a light and functional QA system, in order to enhance its quality and ensure its reputation among its external stakeholders, at regional, but also growingly at national and international level.

Elements of Quality Assurance have been established at the level of schools and departments and by individual staff members, and, under various assessments and evaluations, data has been gathered to demonstrate the quality of parts of the institute. But IPB has not developed a fully integrated system.

On the other hand, it is felt that research activity and academic degrees are presently overemphasised as quality indicators, thus nurturing a rather one-dimensional perception of quality which does not serve the interest of the majority of students, staff and stakeholders. A PhD degree does not necessarily qualify a good teacher; and a department may enjoy an outstanding reputation for its brilliant research work, while it is very inefficiently run.

The Team recommends as follows:

*Recommendation 9 IPB should develop a light and robust QA approach, based on European and international best practices such as EUA's concept of quality culture.*

- The QA process should provide the means for enhancing quality in various areas and at different levels of the institute. It should be transparent to all members in order to promote a comprehensive and holistic notion of quality within the institution, and to demonstrate it to constituencies and external stakeholders.
- Responsibility for quality would be a collective one, it would require a central unit to guide and coordinate. It is very important that the QA initiative is spearheaded by people who are able to promote the course, and motivate staff members at all levels to engage themselves. The QA system should take up and further develop efforts made at school level to enhance quality. While key responsibilities should remain at school and departmental level, the establishment of certain unified procedures is necessary in order to conclude data and facilitate an overall assessment.
- The already existing central IPB database would be an important tool for gathering and evaluating relevant data, thus support monitoring and assessment of the performance of IPB and its schools and departments.

It is of crucial importance to keep the QA efforts in line with staff capacities and costs, and to avoid unnecessary bureaucratisation. One suggestion would be to invite individual departments

and schools to suggest priorities and procedures, and to launch pilot initiatives for developing these for the entire institute.

Ideally, internal and external QA should respond to each other. A critical point in this regard is that the external national QA system is currently under revision. This would be another good reason to enhance QA at IPB.

#### **4. Recommendations and conclusion**

IPB's core mission is clearly dedicated to educational, social and economic needs of its local and regional environment. However, IPB can only fulfil this mission in a successful, sustainable and competitive manner if it also provides research-based education, undertakes research in some clearly defined areas, and reaches out at national and international level in order to establish strong cooperation and exchange relations. Only under this constellation, IPB will be able to retain its attractiveness and innovative nature in order to cater to the educational needs of a population, which is deprived of any immediate access to university education, to respond to the knowledge needs of the local and regional economies, and to establish itself in the region and the national and international environments.

The crucial importance of undertaking diverse activities, which include local/regional, the national and the international context and also the demands of teaching, research and services to community and enterprises has been understood by the IPB and its staff members. It has been taken forward throughout the 20 years of its existence, and has become an implicit goal.

However, it appears crucial that these diverse activities are integrated in the institution's diverse profile and its diverse mission, which seems to require a more explicit and distinctive formulation, than the one currently in use. This process of developing profile and mission and of combining and consolidating diverse demands should not only involve the leadership, but also the larger stratum of senior people and representatives of all constituency groups.

As a next step, it requires an overall strategy and a clearly structured institutional planning, which delegates the development and concretisation of sub-goals and initiatives to the schools. Its implementation and its promotion, within and beyond IPB, would benefit from a more outspoken and rigorous approach, which again would be spearheaded by the institutional leadership, and actively coordinated by schools and departments.

This should enable a common understanding and shared responsibilities for priorities, processes and outcomes.

This certainly also entails risk-taking, with results to be measured in categories of success and failure, "it works" or "it doesn't". Part and parcel of this institutional culture of cooperation for the same institutional goals through different school and departmental agendas are agreed procedures for monitoring and evaluation of activities, and the institutional push for quality. Procedures developed and measures taken to this purpose should not become an additional

bureaucratic layer, or a mean of blame and shame, but serve as a mirror for reflection, a tool for assessing outcomes and a catalyst for enhancing planning and action at all levels.

Institutional change requires structures and people.

A particular strength of IPB is certainly the open and proactive attitude of its staff members towards reform and development. It should therefore not be too difficult to identify champions, and form pilot project teams in order to explore development opportunities, which once consolidated could be applied institution-wide.

Regarding the structures, the Team would like to underline once more that it does not suggest any rigid centralisation, which may easily result in a loss of enthusiasm at school level. But it is convinced that a revision of the decision making structure at IPB is essential for a sophisticated and productive integration of school missions under the wider institution mission. This requires redesigning the present governance and management system, or, in case that this is not possible for formal reasons, the further exploration of more flexible and practical procedures in the framework of the present structures, which however should be agreed and considered as binding by decision-makers at all institutional levels. This should provide more scope and more prominence to collective thinking – to develop a shared and meaningful responsibility for the entire institution.

It should also allow establishing a more straight-forward and mutually more beneficial communication and cooperation with representatives of stakeholder groups and community.

The following lists once more the recommendations, as developed throughout this report, for consideration and follow-up:

Recommendation 1 IPB should introduce a mechanism for analysis and targeted development of its local and regional positioning

Recommendation 2 It should develop appropriate measures for improvement, maintenance and further attraction of highly qualified and committed staff.

Recommendation 3 It should embed and enforce the aim for quality within the institution.

Recommendation 4 IPB should put as top priority the establishment of a coherent corporate identity and team spirit.

Recommendation 5 IPB should make a concerted effort to streamline the governance and management structures in order to make them more functional.

Recommendation 6 IPB should principally maintain its broad approach of local, national and international aspirations, but develop them in a more focused and strategic manner in the framework of an overall institutional strategy.

Recommendation 7 The provision of attractive, diverse and responsive quality teaching and services is of key importance for the number of students choosing IPB as a destination and therefore has a major impact on its further existence

Recommendation 8 IPB should retain its involvement in research, and develop a concerted research strategy and agenda for the entire institution, which would also consider impacts and interrelation with other mission goals.

Recommendation 9 IPB should develop a light and robust QA approach, based on European and international best practices such as EUA's concept of quality culture.

There is another part to institutional development, which constitutes external conditions, and, while the Team finds it particularly challenging to develop concrete recommendations over a period of time when the Portuguese Governments obviously assesses prospects and orientations for reforms at system level, it acknowledges the difficulty for IPB to take these up and implement them.

However, the Team believes it has considered these restrictions when phrasing its recommendations in a cautious manner, and would insist that their prudent implementation would be of immediate and long-term benefit for IPB. While reform measures at sector level are awaited, it appears to be crucial that individual institutions already take necessary steps forward, in order to build institutional structure and capacity favourable to change, and in order to keep pace with European and global developments in HE and research.

Reforms have already been launched under the joint Bologna Process, aiming at modernising HE systems and at converging the European HE systems. The Lisbon Agenda was launched to turn Europe into the most competitive economy by 2010, and the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme addressed universities to underpin it. National and regional processes clearly relate to global changes at political and economic areas, impacting modes of production, labour markets and also education. We find ourselves in a period of time when so many issues in higher education require attentive thinking, but also consequent acting. For its future, it would be of crucial importance that IPB explore actively the opportunities that result from these developments, and generates internal pressure in order to react proactively and achieve the maximum benefit.

## **5. Envoi**

The Evaluation Team would once again like to thank the President Prof. Joao Sobrinho Teixeira, the Vice Presidents Luis Pais and Orlando Rodrigues, and all the staff, students and stakeholders of IPB for their open and constructive contribution to the Team's evaluation and to this report, for the hospitality offered and also for the opportunity to get to know an impressive and interesting institution.

We would like to express our admiration for IPB's determination, commitment and readiness to address new challenges.

We hope that the analysis undertaken during our discussions at the two visits, in the present report, and the recommendations made can be helpful, and would like to stress that – beyond the formal requirement to make the Report public - it should serve as a tool for internal reform efforts, and external promotion.

The Team wishes the IPB and its partners the best for the stimulating future they are facing.