

FERNANDO PESSOA UNIVERSITY

FOLLOW UP EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Introduction

This Report is the result of the Follow up evaluation of Fernando Pessoa University (FPU), Porto, Portugal.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

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

The distinctive features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of the IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management,
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

The evaluation is guided by four key questions, which are based on a 'fitness for (and of) purpose' approach:

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

1.2 FPU and the national context

FPU was one of the first ten Portuguese institutions of higher learning to be evaluated under the IEP in 2006–07, and these reviews were part of a broader initiative by the Portuguese government. Early in 2009 FPU applied to the IEP for a Follow up review.

FPU was founded in 1992 and was recognized as a public interest organisation by the Portuguese state in 1996. At the same time Ponte de Lima College was also defined as a statutory body of FPU. The 'Founder' was a professor of linguistics with experience in academic administration, and continues to be Rector of the University. FPU is sponsored by Fundação Ensino e Cultura Fernando Pessoa (FECFP), a 'family

foundation' that, in accord with Portuguese law, is "responsible for ensuring the conditions necessary for the normal operation of the University". The Mission of FECFP is:

The development of activities to sponsor education, culture, research and vocational training.

Under the Portuguese regulations governing private universities, FECFP is the principal legal entity that represents FPU in all financial and general administrative interactions with external bodies. Revised Statutes for FPU were published formally in late October 2009 in *Diário da República*, the Portuguese Government's official newspaper (which is a necessary legal requirement for their coming into effect). An English translation was immediately supplied to the Team. Under the new statutes the responsibilities of FECFP for the administration of FPU are extended significantly.

The motto of FPU is "Nova et Nove" (new things in new ways) and on the English section of FPU's website, its Mission statement is:

"[T]o provide high quality education services and to be an internationally recognised European teaching and research university, contributing [to] the promotion of private higher education as a public good, associated with private benefits and based on the over-arching principle of public responsibility. The University understands that it has a key role to play in the scientific, cultural, social and economic development of the society and aims at continuously strengthen[ing] its position as a member of the international community of scholarly institutions."

FPU is one of the more important private institutes of higher education in Portugal. It has about 5000 students taking undergraduate and postgraduate (including doctoral) programmes in three faculties (Health Sciences, Human and Social Sciences, Science and Technology), one School of Health Sciences and one autonomous unit (Ponte de Lima College).

1.3 The evaluation team (later Team)

The Follow up self-evaluation report (FU SER) of FPU along with appendices was sent to the Evaluation Team on 30 September 2009. The single visit of the Team to FPU took place on 2—3 November 2009. In between the supply of the FU SER and the visit, FPU efficiently provided the Team with additional documentation requested.

The Team consisted of:

- Professor Régis Ritz, former Rector, Université de Bordeaux, France, as chair;
- Professor Hannele Niemi, Vice-Rector, Professor of Education, University of Helsinki, Finland;

- Christian Schneijderberg, Doctoral student, International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER-Kassel), University of Kassel, Germany;
- Professor Jim Gosling, former Director of Quality, Professor emeritus of Biochemistry, National University of Ireland - Galway, Ireland, as Team coordinator.

The Team members thank the Rector Professor Dr Salvato Trigo, the Liaison person Dr Nadine Trigo, the Chair of the Self evaluation committee Professor Ana Fonseca, the members of the Self evaluation committee and all others the Team met, or who supported the Team in so many ways. The quality of the meetings and discussions with staff and with students; the frank engagement of all at UFP staff with review process; the effectiveness of the preparations were all appreciated greatly by the Team. In general the students, teachers and administrative staff at FPU and FPU's external stakeholders seemed dedicated, dynamic and happy people.

1.4 The Self Evaluation process

The Self evaluation committee had 14 members that included seven teaching staff, six non-teaching staff and one student representative. Most of this committee's members had participated in the IEP review process in 2006–07.

The Self evaluation committee was clearly committed to the task of drafting the Self evaluation report, which the Team found to be an informative document. The FU SER outlined in some detail how FPU had responded to the 2007 IEP report. However, the Team had the impression that this committee and its officers were left largely on their own in completing this task. The Team also felt that a greater degree of consultation and participation would have aided the report. In addition and perhaps more importantly, greater participation would have contributed to improving levels of participation and commitment by staff at FPU — the sort of opportunity that no institution should neglect.

1.5 This Follow up report

Although in general, this Follow up Report has been written as an independent document, it is best considered (particularly by FPU management, staff and students) in conjunction with the 2007 IEP Report. In fact, at the end of the Follow Up visit, it was quite clear to the Team that the 2007 Report remains topical, both as a source of still pertinent advice and as a reference framing the context of the present Report.

Also of relevance is the statement in the FU SER that the Self evaluation committee did not receive many significant reactions to the 2007 IEP Report, due perhaps to people not understanding the importance of the IEP process or because the report was released only in English. Neither were reactions by managers, staff or students to the IEP report sought in any formal or substantive way.

Therefore, it seems logical that the potential contribution to the development of FPU of the whole IEP review process (into which FPU has invested so much already) should be maximised by parallel or joint publication in English and Portuguese of the 2007 Report and the present Follow up Report. This could be accompanied by a preface or supplement written by the Rector. Such a supplement could indicate the progress already made in implementing the initial recommendations. If seen to be appropriate by the Rector, the supplement could also outline how the engagement, commitment and professional discipline of all management and staff are essential to full implementation of reforms arising from the IEP recommendations and the achievement of FPU's full potential.

Finally, this Report does not set out a series of new recommendations and does not contain simple repeats of the previous recommendations that are yet to be (fully) implemented. Rather, in this Report emphasis is put on a few key areas in order to:

- Promote further discussion on how all these areas are interdependent, and
- Underline how wider involvement and commitment by managers and staff are essential to the achievement of FPU's goals and ambitions.

2. Governance, Quality and Improvement

2.1 Involvement, planning and performance

Under often difficult conditions FPU has grown and expanded for the last 17 years. However, in the context of an uncertain and hard to predict future, the continued success and ambitions of FPU will require careful implementation of the new governance provisions outlined in its 2009 statutes.

Presently FPU has strong leadership and an efficient administration supported by a well resourced family foundation. Inevitably in the next ten to twenty years the personnel involved in FECP and in all aspects of management and administration of FPU must change. The unique character of FPU means that these changes must be carefully planned, or the invaluable legacy of the Founder, and all of the staff who have contributed so much, will be in danger.

If one were to imagine an FPU that is 'future-proofed' (in so far as this is possible) its governance would involve all its stakeholders, inside and outside the University. Management, teaching, administrative staff and researchers would be fully involved and would identify with their responsibilities. High quality outputs and work would be recognised explicitly where justified, by means of incentives (promotion criteria, financial bonuses) or well publicised awards. There would be a strong 'esprit de maison' and a collegiate culture that respected high professional standards (for example, timelines for the completion of standard processes) as well as appropriate democratic principles. In other words, there would be professionalism with a true

human dimension, and a strong sense of humanism in accord with the outlook of Fernando Pessoa. Some of these characteristics exist already, but many only in part.

The very recent official publication of its new statutes is a great opportunity for UFP to ensure that its governance is 'fit-for-purpose'. It is important that the new bodies operate together as a well-functioning system with widespread involvement. Elsewhere it has been found that such fundamental reforms require leadership training for all members and special training for key actors. It is especially important to achieve a collaborative culture in which 'top down' and 'bottom up' processes combine successfully. Some people may have to accept that more commitment to the University and its mission is a fundamental part of their jobs.

This may also be the best opportunity for some time to improve significantly the overall institutional functioning of FPU, 'within' as well as 'between' and 'above' the faculties, schools and its statutory college at Ponte de Lima. For example:

- Definition of the relationships between the new councils and existing University-wide boards, committees and functions (e.g. the Office of the Rectorate's Deputy) and their roles in providing advice to the executive and in making decisions,
- Procedures for appointments/elections to the new boards and committees that ensure balanced representation and involvement,
- Publication of records of attendance at all management groups and other 'incentives' to ensure that all University and faculty bodies are well attended and used by the university and faculty communities,
- Regulations (and 'training' in their interpretation and application) to ensure that the appropriate bodies or officers (e.g. the pedagogical boards) are not unnecessarily bypassed or otherwise ignored by management, staff and/or students.

Formal strategic planning at FPU is difficult; the external context is subject to rapid changes in demand for programmes and new pressing opportunities become visible without much notice. The new Strategic Plan (2009–2014) and the associated Research Plan are useful and informative documents but they could be more complete and more focussed on FPU, and have more emphasis on quantitative performance.

Also, it was not clear to the Review Team that the process used for their development was sufficiently participatory. Development of the next plan starting in 2014 (if not earlier if the present plan is seen to be becoming outdated) should be seen explicitly as another opportunity to promote involvement and commitment. Obviously the new Strategic Council will be centrally involved and its role could be supplemented by means of a balanced combination of 'top down' and 'bottom up' input processes.

Good planning and decision-making benefit greatly from comprehensive information on the current state of FPU and its performance, in both absolute and comparative terms. While, because of its efficient administration, new data management systems and relatively small size, FPU is well capable of generating relevant data on its operations, it could benefit greatly from a unifying expert system for information and performance management. The term 'institutional research' is widely used (especially in the US) for this function that values institutional information as an important resource (see: Guidelines of Good Practice for Institutional Research in Irish Higher Education, http://www.iuqb.ie/info/good_practice_guides.aspx). For example, while the Team appreciated the information available from a range of surveys of students and staff carried out since 2007, response rates were low and, in some cases, the planning/analysis/presentation of the resulting data was deficient.

Planning at FPU could contribute much more to its success if it had even greater emphasis on:

- a. Recognising that 'planning', 'performance' and 'quality' are closely linked,
- b. Having agreed performance indicators (equivalent to those used elsewhere) that cover all key aspects (with respect to both quantity and quality) of teaching, research, finance, and resources,
- c. Setting a number of key long term strategic aims (with associated performance indicators) that highlight the special profile of the UPF,
- d. Creating a broad understanding of the above factors through the use of 'bottom-up' combined with 'top down' consultative and communication processes.

2.2 Quality, Bologna and teaching

The effective promotion of improved quality in the administration, services, teaching and research in a university cannot depend on an individual project or even a series of projects. It must be a continuing, integrated broad process promoting a quality culture across the whole institution. Good quality procedures are actually quite prosaic and identifying appropriate practices (e.g. for internal reviews and surveys) and adapting them to local conditions is usually the most effective approach; attempts at significant originality or innovation can be distracting. The most decisive aspects of success of a quality management system are a stable basis, persistence in its goals, unspectacular in daily life and ongoing as a continuing process.

The work and reports of *ProjEst-Q*, the *Working Group for FPU's Quality Assurance* and the *Bologna Process Monitoring Group* represent good standards that can be improved upon, and the Team greatly appreciated the translations provided.

The report on 'Internal Quality Assurance and Self-Evaluation Processes' provides a detailed picture of current practices in the context of the University's goals and national legal requirements. Clearly, while much has been achieved, a lot remains to be done to establish and institutionalise procedures that meet fully the legal and University objectives. One common challenge is to make transparent how student feedback is coordinated and used to bring about improvements (including the hardest to achieve such as reducing drop-out rates). Clearly, the result should be (and to some extent, already is) that students are aware that their opinions are taken seriously, and acted upon when necessary. The roles of the new Self Assessment Committee (New Statutes, Article 4) and its relationship with ProjEst-Q and other existing groups will be crucial.

The reports of the Bologna Monitoring Group are also informative and the energy and commitment exhibited by this Group (and other working groups that the Team met) indicate the great potential for more widespread participation and commitment. FPU's wholehearted efforts to implement the Bologna reforms and the achievements since the IEP review in 2006–2007 are impressive. Continued tuning of the Bologna process is a key opportunity to raise the quality of teaching and learning. An ongoing common challenge is to continue to raise the commitment of each teacher and student to 'deep' student learning.

It is obvious that the University has ambitious aims to improve the quality of its teaching from the Strategic plan 2009–2014, sections 2.2 to 2.6 of which emphasise improvement, tuning and student participation. These aims are supported fully by article 39 'Duties of Teaching Staff in the new Statutes', which demand very high standards of skill and commitment.

These ambitious aims, if they are to be achieved, require a continuous staff training program at the whole university level as well as at the faculty and departmental levels. The FPU-Academy is the present structure that works to support these aims and, while the Team heard of the effectiveness of its activities, it is important that its plans and resources are in accord with the new aims. It may also be useful to append long term plans of pedagogical training to the University's Strategic and the faculties' action plans.

The winning of a 2008 Sakai fellowship by a member of staff in the 'UFP virtual university' is highly encouraging with respect to this area and its important projects.

2.3 Student representation and communication

Across Europe, the more explicit and more substantial involvement of students in quality processes is perhaps the greatest procedural innovation seen in recent years. IEP evaluation teams (such as the present Team) now have a student as a full member, and members of the 'student panel' (from which they are drawn) attend the general IEP training seminar each year. Most importantly, fully implemented, the Bologna process requires the participation of students as full partners in all relevant areas, including definitions of their role(s) and tasks, voting rights and

responsibilities. Logically, this requires resources to be provided so that their capacity and independence are assured.

A fully functioning student union, with at least one union officer given paid sabbatical leave for his/her/their term(s) of office, is a precondition for effective student participation (internally and externally, nationally and internationally). It also enables substantive contributions by students to high level discussions, on what are often complex issues. Following a recommendation in the 2007 IEP review Report and debate within UFP, a single University-wide student union was formed and the older faculty and Ponte de Lima unions dissolved. While all who spoke to the Team saw problems with the new system, they (including the student representatives) also saw these problems as solvable and held the view that the new system can work. It is important that the necessary reforms be carefully considered and implemented quickly.

Examples of student union systems that FPU and its students may learn from can be found on the following websites: www.esu-online.org, www.syl.fi and www.vss-unes.ch.

Efficient multiple communication systems are essential to a university, and FPU is to be complimented on having commissioned the substantial 'Study on FPU Internal Communication Processes', completed in May 2009. The associated 'Internal Communication Plan' looks to be carefully thought out and comprehensive. Elements of the Plan aim to promote collective and individual involvement, encourage the expression of personal opinions, promote the 'esprit de maison' and facilitate change and reform; all issues very close to the main trusts of this and the previous IEP report. It is important that the recommendations in this Plan (after a good discussion of the proposed mechanisms) be implemented as a matter of urgency.

Perhaps an equivalent study on 'FPU external communications processes' would be timely.

3. International; Europe and the world

While the International Office, its ambitious policies, project descriptions and publications (e.g. the International Student Handbook) are truly impressive, there is a certain discrepancy/décalage between these and the reality of very small numbers of participating students and staff. Clearly factors external to FPU play major roles in inhibiting progress. These include student reluctance and restricted student financial resources (in spite of a fees waiver by FPU).

Consequently, the numbers of outgoing students (Erasmus) are still quite low. However, the educational advantages to individual students can be immense and increasing numbers of 'more rounded' graduates could influence significantly the perception of the quality of FPU graduates. Therefore, the International Office

should persist in its efforts and all University and faculty officers should make explicit commitments of support, perhaps (as suggested by the International Officer) through a new 'internationalisation task force'. One major aim for this task force could be the identification of ways to obtain the full commitment of all relevant staff in support of internationalisation.

Efforts to convince parents, as well as students themselves of the huge advantages of mobility (with respect to personal development and employability) should be maintained and if possible expanded. For some study programmes, consideration should be given to making a period in another college abroad obligatory (e.g. the 'International Studies programme'); perhaps with specific support from external sponsors and/or from FECFP. (Effective 'advertising' of such support schemes could raise significantly the external profile of FPU as an *international university*.) Small but regular and accumulating increases in outgoing student numbers are surely feasible.

The number of in-coming students is greater (a sure sign of the attractiveness of UFP and its activities in this area) and the high number of different countries of origin is good too. The new 'task force' referred to above, could also support the Office in its plans to increase in-coming students numbers. While it is clear that the majority of in-coming undergraduate and graduate students and researchers enjoy greatly FPU and Porto, the University should monitor carefully and support students and researchers who may feel isolated, either socially or with respect to their research projects.

FPU has very good international connections through a network of partner universities, particularly in Portuguese speaking countries. As most universities in Portugal have partnerships in the 'Portuguese world', FPU's external profile could benefit if FPU were to define and exploit a distinctive and specific profile in this respect. Not least, this could differentiate FPU clearly from all the other Portuguese universities networking in South America and Africa. The joint international graduate programmes and the proactive (foreign) roles of the Rectorate's Deputy are evidence of commitment and progress.

4. Research: Networking and the ERA

For most of its short existence FPU has been "a teaching university" and its major output has been at the undergraduate level. But FPU has always aimed to be a 'university' with all that is implied by that term, and to be seen as such. Therefore, FPU and the FECFP have for some time promoted research projects and supported applications for external research funding. The plans to strengthen graduate and doctoral level education and substantial research groups are impressive, but will be demanding. The abilities and future careers of the graduates from the present and new graduate and doctoral programmes will be indicators of success, and in this

respect, the University's own internal procedures to monitor regularly and to assure the quality of new programmes may be decisive.

As in many other countries, Portuguese national practices have developed in a context where all significant research in higher education institutions took place in public institutions. So it is not surprising that FPU (where all research is relatively small scale or new) feels itself to be at a disadvantage relative to public institutions in obtaining public funding. Therefore, (as is already happening to a large extent) FPU must focus on its advantages (like its focus on interdisciplinarity, supports in seeking 'industrial', national and international partners and 'seed money' from FECFP) to continue to develop its research programmes. If any regulations, criteria etc. of national funding schemes can be *proven to be* discriminatory, action should be taken, with real success stories used skillfully to exert pressure for change.

Since the 2006–2007 IEP review, there has been significant progress at UFP in terms of research facilities and organization. Research centres are more substantive, and numbers of PhD students (Portuguese and from abroad) are greater, and participation in international networks, and efforts to increase and diversify external funding have grown. Financial support from FECFP continues to be made available to foster new ideas and projects. However, the Team is not aware of processes or guidelines governing applications, progress reports or limitations with respect to FECFP funding for research.

The most important issues that the Team would see as relevant to research and advanced education at FPU have already been identified by FPU, but perhaps it would be useful to emphasise some of them here:

- The quality of projects and programmes (people involved; facilities, contacts and cooperation with other HEIs in Portugal and abroad) and, in particular the quality of the research outputs (refereed articles, books, patents etc.) will determine success. Quantity is also relevant.
- The appointment of a 'head of research' and creation of a small central research office could bring many advantages.
- Further development of co-supervision of PhD students with partners in other institutions in Portugal and abroad is important.
- Completion rates and completion times for doctoral students are key performance indicators for the students, the supervisors and the university. Therefore, FPU should approve only good projects, recruit only competent students, monitor progress carefully and act effectively when necessary. Since students from abroad face somewhat different and greater challenges, they are at greater risk of under-performing and deserve greater support and monitoring.

It is clear that FPU is acting appropriately in the building of a competitive and efficient European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Bergen commitment, 2005). The European Research Area (ERA), which was initiated by the EU at Lisbon in 2000, is also directly relevant to FPU. FPU is already contributing, especially through its cooperative research programmes to the building of a strong ERA. ERA policies and programmes should always inform and be exploited fully (see: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/index_en.html) to support research at FPU

5. Conclusions

The progress made at FPU in response to the IEP Report since 2006–2007 is substantial and many other important developments have been completed or (such as the impressive FPU hospital) are now at the planning stage. The Portuguese government has approved new statutes for FPU that will now enable FPU to implement further measures related to the IEP recommendations, particularly with respect to governance. These reforms will facilitate the further measures that should be taken soon to assure the legacy of the Founder and the long-term development of FPU.

All of this and the achievement of the ambitious goals of FPU in a highly competitive environment will depend on attention to quality within FPU and extensive cooperation to achieve strategic advantage and ‘critical mass’. Finally it should always be kept in mind that:

- Cooperation in research and teaching is based on mutual trust,
- Competitive advantage in research and teaching is based on quality.