

**UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA**

***EUA EVALUATION REPORT***

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## **0. Introduction**

0.1 At the invitation of Professor Dr Fernando Seabra Santos, rector of the Universidade de Coimbra [UC], the Institutional Evaluation Programme of the European University Association [EUA] agreed to conduct a peer review exercise.

0.2 It therefore convened a team, comprising:

- Professor Hélène Lamicq (chairperson), former Présidente de l'Université Paris12, Val de Marne, France
- Professor A. Lee Fritschler, George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, and former President Dickinson College, USA
- Professor Carles Solà; former Rector of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Catalunya, Spain
- Dr Howard Davies (secretary), Head of European Development, London Metropolitan University, UK

0.3 As a first step in the process, UC was asked to draft a Self-Evaluation Report. Following receipt of the report, the EUA team made a two-day visit in December 2006, during which it held talks with staff, students and stakeholders and viewed facilities. It met the UC Vice-Rector, Professora Dr Cristina Robalo Cordeiro (who acted as liaison person with the EUA team); the self-evaluation steering group; external stakeholders, including the mayors of Coimbra and Cantanhede, representatives of the corporate sector, local entrepreneurs, the heads of specialist research centres and the president of the Instituto Pedro Nunes innovation centre; and finally, the Deans and the Vice-Deans of six of the eight Faculties. These conversations proved extremely helpful and informative.

0.4 In the course of its December visit, the team also visited four of the Faculties: Ciências e Tecnologia [FCTUC], Direito [FDUC], Economia [FEUC], and Letras [FLUC], as well as the splendid new Museu da Ciência. It also toured the impressive historical buildings of the University.

0.5 It then requested further information regarding the impact of the 'autonomy law' of 1988, the amendments to the statutes since that date, the strategic planning and decision-making processes, the age structure of the academic staff, student failure and drop-out rates, student support services, research policy and management, and the Bologna course portfolio.

0.6 On receipt of this supplementary documentation, it undertook a second – three-day – stay in April 2007, during which it renewed its discussions with the rectorate and the self-evaluation steering group. It also met the staff responsible for international relations, management information systems, financial administration, and human

resources, as well as members of the Senate. The team resumed its series of very productive visits to the Faculties, this time meeting with Ciências do Desporto e Educação Física [FCDEFUC], Farmácia [FFUC], Medicina [FMUC], and Psicologia e Ciências da Educação [FPCEUC]. In addition, it was warmly received by the Instituto Pedro Nunes, the Centro de Estudos Sociais [CES], the Centro de Neuro-Ciências [CNC], and the Instituto de Investigação Interdisciplinar [III]. It also visited several central services and facilities, including libraries.

0.7 At the end of the second visit, the EUA team chair delivered an oral report to the Rector and his colleagues, the self-evaluation steering group, and the Deans of the Faculties. The oral report consisted of observations and recommendations, which are elaborated in this written report.

## **1. Foreword**

1.1 Following comments received from the University, the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme resolved to make a third visit to UC. It did so in order to observe the changes in the University's internal and external operating environments in a period of particularly rapid evolution. The third visit was undertaken in April 2008, one year following the previous visit in April 2007.

1.2 In its long and distinguished history, the University has experienced many episodes of flux and transformation, as well as long periods of stability. These have not necessarily been passively endured; indeed, the University has acted sometimes as a powerful force for liberalisation, at other times as a force for conservation.

1.3 Moreover, the prestige it has enjoyed since its foundation in medieval times has made of it a national treasure, a globally accepted reference for Portuguese intellectual achievement.

1.4 In some respects, this special status facilitates its day-to-day business at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A modern university needs to be able to demonstrate its contemporary expertise in pedagogy, research and innovation, knowledge transfer, quality enhancement, internationalisation, human and physical resource management, and – above all – strategic vision. Tradition can be of assistance here, but it can also act as an impediment.

1.5 The current situation in Portugal is particularly challenging for all Portuguese institutions. For UC, this is even more the case, since its historical structures make it unique. Against this background it has taken initiatives in line with government policies elaborated in the run-up to the completion of the European Higher Education Area in 2010. These policies are enshrined in:

- the requirement in Decreto-Lei 42-2005 and Lei 49-2005 that universities convert their course portfolios to the model agreed by ministers of the Bologna Process signatory countries;
- the decision to establish a new regime and a new agency for quality assurance in higher education (Lei 38-2007 and Decreto-Lei 369-2007);
- and finally, the legislation giving legal autonomy to HEIs (Lei 62-2007).

1.6 The EUA team conducting the third visit wishes to place on record its estimation of the response to these challenges made by the University. Five areas of activity merit particular attention: the alignment with Bologna norms; the reform of governance currently in train; the process of putting in place new management information systems; the integration and rationalisation of the research effort; and the consolidation of knowledge transfer activities in the local and regional context.

1.6.1 Between 2006 and 2008, 150 courses operating in all three cycles have been converted to the Bologna template. Such non-Bologna Bachelor courses as remain are residual and in the process of being phased out. At Master and doctoral levels, restructuring continues and will be completed by the beginning of the 08-09 session. A range of initiatives in course development, notably a portfolio of double degrees to be delivered with the University of Salamanca, as well as in the EU-funded ERASMUS MUNDUS programme, are planned. In addition, a cross-Faculty Bologna observatory – with student, academic and administrative staff participation – has been set up to monitor implementation and to conduct periodic impact assessment. Bologna has also stimulated work on in-house staff development, student drop-out rate, deployment of mobility instruments, and a new system of teaching quality assessment.

1.6.2 As far as governance is concerned, UC is bound by the timetable set by government. This requires the approval of new statutes and the rationalisation of organic entities by June 2008, the implantation of new structures by the end of 2008. UC has convened an elected constituent assembly which is working to the above timetable in collaboration with external stakeholders. It envisages a structure achieving a new balance of participative democracy and efficiency.

1.6.3 In anticipation of these structural reforms, UC has moved swiftly to put in place new and improved corporate information gathering. It has decided to replace the previously fragmented data collection mechanisms with a set of interoperable systems, rather than with a single overarching capability. Existing faculty-based student records, for example, will be reconfigured in such a way as to allow easy interfacing with other systems – for example, the web-based academic support programmes accessible by students. Alumni tracking is now on-line and will give longitudinal data over a 20-year period.

1.6.4 UC has also anticipated the new governance structures by embarking on a rationalisation of its many and various not-for-profit research entities. These have now all signed protocols with the University which commit them to the payment of overheads and which bring them into the scope of an integrated system of research

management. New project management expertise will be brought in to consolidate the uniform application of full-cost models across the range. For the first time, it will be possible to draw up a comprehensive research strategy in line with local, regional, national and European priorities.

1.6.5 Since the previous visit by the EUA team, the Instituto Pedro Nunes has doubled its incubation capacity to accommodate 40 spin-off companies. This capacity is now nearly full. It will mean an intensification of UC's knowledge transfer activities, which have already yielded 100 new hi-tech firms employing 900 people and generating over €40m in revenue. IPN's success rate now stands at 80%. Other activities have involved the monitoring of 61 innovation projects, 20 invention disclosures and five patent applications. The University has also broadened the range of its enterprise education provision and set up an employability observatory. These and other measures will reinforce its status as a major player in the regional development agenda. The list of economic and cultural activities linking UC and the city of Coimbra is being systematically extended.

1.7 The remarks and observations contained in this section have deliberately been introduced as a foreword. This is in order that readers of the 2007 report (which follows in sections 2, 3 and 4) may appreciate the speed, the scope and the substance of UC's response to the challenges which it faces.

April 29, 2008

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## **2. *Preliminary observations***

2.1 The team wishes to place on record its appreciation of the efforts undertaken by Vice-Rector Cristina Robalo Cordeiro and the members of the self-evaluation group to collect, collate and edit the voluminous documentation. It realises that the time available was short. It realises, too, that this was the first time the University, throughout its long history, had embarked on such an exercise. Moreover, the work ran alongside the onerous task of reconfiguring the course portfolio to the Bologna template. Finally, the run-up to the rectoral election meant that the period was particularly eventful.

2.2 The team visited as many of the University's units as it could in the time available, relatively short for such a large and complex University. It encountered much that is positive in the work of the University. It was very impressed by the wide

range of initiatives (including extensive multidisciplinary study in some scientific fields), by the commitment to teaching as a core activity and by the energy invested in the implementation of the Bologna Process. In most fields of activity, it saw evidence of recent innovative practice. The quality of the students, their articulacy and their pride in belonging to the University were particularly striking. Above all – and for this the team is very grateful – there existed on the part of all parties a willingness to engage in dialogue, to share experience, to express opinion and to improve. The willingness of those with whom the team met to discuss problems and opportunities openly reflects well on the leadership skills of those at the top of the University structure.

2.3 Clearly, it had proved difficult for the self-evaluation group to capture the information required and difficult to derive an accurate overview from it. In the view of the EUA team, this was caused to a significant degree on one hand by the shortfall in reliable across-the-board management information available at institutional level, on the other hand by the lack of experience – in the different units of the University – in building a shared and comprehensive view of the institution based on reliable data. This, in turn, was a consequence of the character of the relations which link the Faculties, the rectorate and the central administration. These topics are addressed in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.9 below.

2.4 Certainly, it was difficult for the EUA team to avoid concluding that UC's view of its activities is partial rather than global. The picture that emerged was one in which, on one hand, the central knowledge of the Faculties is incomplete and in which, on the other, each Faculty's knowledge of the wider institutional context is constrained by low levels of lateral communication. In addition, the team noticed, in some parts of the University, little evidence of interest for the activities of the other units. In all those to whom it had the opportunity to talk, the team nevertheless found an undoubted sense of affiliation and of belonging to the University, as well as real pride in it. This sense, however, was independent of, and unsupported by, any great familiarity with what constitutes the University as a whole, but obviously linked to the historical and current prestige of the institution. This issue was clarified in part when the team met with the group of high level administrative officials at the end of the visit.

2.5 In this regard, the team's site visits corroborated the impressions volunteered by the self-evaluation group. While the documentation received by the team was of good quality and well analysed, it served to illuminate the extent to which UC lacks internal transparency. The self-evaluation group, which included two students, acknowledged that it had had difficulty involving all relevant actors; its work had suffered from the slow supply of information by internal agencies and from the absence of an active and effective deliberative forum. It had found that its main task was to make explicit what hitherto had been implicit. This then, of necessity, opened up new perspectives, bringing recognition of trends that had not been appreciated – for example, the steep rise in the number of PhD candidates from 100 to 1000. In consequence, the self-evaluation group felt the self-evaluation exercise to be an extremely valuable first step, but nevertheless only a beginning: follow-up by the University will be essential. The EUA team welcomes this conclusion. It trusts that both the University's self-evaluation work and the team's own observations and recommendations will help render this new transparency sustainable.

### 3. *The University*

#### 3.1 The Bologna Process

The team notes the concerted effort to implement Bologna within the framework of national legislation. It notes too that:

- students, staff and committees are fully engaged;
- in one programme already in operation, the switch from teacher- to student-centred mode has been systematically addressed; there is a need to identify best pedagogic practice and to disseminate it appropriately across the University...
- ... and to conduct a comprehensive impact assessment at University level

3.1.1 The team received details of the 45 new and 96 adapted courses which, consistent with Portuguese national legislation, make up the Bologna portfolio. This represents a significant achievement by the committees of staff and students involved, but there is nevertheless a widespread realisation that the conversion to Bologna is a long-term project.

3.1.2 Some students looked forward to full implementation with optimism: Bologna would bring more group-based study, a greater stress on initiative and activity, better job prospects, even if the reforms were likely to benefit full-time rather than part-time students. Others were less confident that UC could successfully negotiate the transition from teacher- to student-centred learning, particularly in the more traditional Faculties. However, in one programme already in operation, the switch had been systematically addressed, despite adverse resource conditions, and it is possible that the lessons learnt there will be of general applicability. The issue is in part being guided or influenced by the adaptation of facilities to successfully implement this mandate.

3.1.3 In some Faculties, the team was told, Bologna had been introduced too hastily and then rationalised post hoc. Use of the European Credit Transfer System [ECTS] was still based on attendance and on a final examination. In one instance, ECTS points had been assigned by splitting the difference between staff and student estimates of workload. Courses, it appeared, would still be delivered to large classes held in historic buildings, which are not adapted to new pedagogical practices. The tradition of 20 contact hours per week would continue unchanged and still induce high rates of absenteeism. One group of students stressed to the team that the absence of



continuous assessment meant that the skills they acquired would not be acknowledged or credited.

3.1.4 These comments, gathered in various forums, demonstrate the importance of monitoring the implementation of the Bologna Process in UC. There is an urgent need to identify best new pedagogic practice and to disseminate it appropriately across the University. One Faculty, aware that Bologna should mean smaller groups, more teaching hours, fewer formal lectures and more individual supervisions, plans to conduct an impact assessment – on pedagogy, assessment, teaching space, research outputs – and the EUA team believes that such an exercise should be conducted in other units and at University level. In this connection, it welcomes the setting up of the Gabinete de Intervenção Pedagógica [GIP] and is pleased to learn that the Bologna commission (established internally to prepare the new Bologna course portfolio) will make an input into the strategic planning process. It is reassured that – whether they act jointly or separately – the two bodies will constitute a concerted response to the task of undertaking institution-wide impact assessment. It will also be helpful for them to gain a wider view of the implications and implementations of the Bologna Process in other Portuguese and European institutions, thus avoiding too narrow an interpretation of the process.

3.1.5 At the same time, the team was informed – most emphatically – that the obligation to implement Bologna coincides with a substantial cut in government funding. Staff workload will inevitably rise, according to many interlocutors, at the expense of other activities and particularly of research. In this context, reliable impact assessment will itself depend on effective quality assurance procedures, efficient management information systems, and modes of governance allowing rapid and successful response to changes in the operating environment. It will certainly imply new procedures for the distribution of financial and human resources across the institution, as well as new criteria for the assessment of staff performance. It is difficult to comment with certainty on these points. To the extent that the team feels that it has sufficient information, these matters are covered by the Report in the paragraphs which follow.

## 3.2 Quality Assurance

The team finds that despite a range of initiatives, a generalised quality culture, as understood in the Bologna Process, is not yet in place. Teacher quality assessment varies in intensity and in efficiency from Faculty to Faculty – and there is little that is systematic University-wide, making comparisons impossible.

- No systematic central support for quality enhancement exists, either to audit and amend assurance procedures or to monitor course delivery
- The quality control of research is left to external agencies, as is

appropriate in most disciplines, but is not explicitly linked to the formulation of a comprehensive University research policy

3.2.1 While the team appreciates the pioneering efforts made to secure compliance with ISO norms for administrative services, at central and at Faculty levels, it is conscious that the implementation of the quality processes recommended by the Bologna Process is not far advanced. Despite a range of initiatives, a generalised quality culture is only beginning to grow and is not yet fully in place.

3.2.2 In particular, teacher quality assessment varies in intensity and in efficiency from Faculty to Faculty. In one Faculty, the team learnt from the staff that a system was up and running, but the students dissented from this view and disclosed that they operated their own confidential assessment procedures. In another Faculty, the students expressed similar scepticism and were unaware of the pilot project set up in 2005 in the computer engineering, economics, history and mathematics areas, even though their own field was included. In a third Faculty, by contrast, the students reported the existence of a system of paper-based confidential questionnaires, which drew a 50% response rate and in which they expressed their complete confidence.

3.2.3 Yet another Faculty runs a dual system of confidential questionnaires and focus groups. The outcomes are reviewed by the pedagogical council, on which students are represented, but these outcomes have no impact on staff promotion or employment procedures. It is noteworthy that, as a general rule and even where quality assurance arrangements are in place, there is – as elsewhere in Portugal – no mechanism for removing ineffective teachers, and there are few initiatives to help them improve. It is beyond the brief of the EUA team to comment on matters of legal substance (the law restricts university autonomy in matters of recruitment and promotion). The team understands, however, that in theory academics are appointed according to their research profile even if, in practice, staff numbers are high and new appointments are rarely made, while at the same time Faculties are required by law to hire assistant professors who gain their PhD qualification. It is unclear to the team how pedagogic and research criteria affect recruitment and promotion in practice, or how they inform strategic planning and human resource management. What does seem clear is that a number of staff, especially younger ones, feel that success in teaching and research is not sufficiently rewarded or incentivised.

3.2.4 In these circumstances, the team believes that the adoption of quality assurance measures in line with Bologna will make for greater transparency, more effective participation and an environment in which academic strategy can more reliably be implemented. Currently, however, there is insufficient comprehensive central support for quality assurance, either to audit assurance procedures or to monitor course delivery. The team hopes that the outcomes of the pilot project will inform good practice and help to implant a robust quality culture. This is important if learning outcomes are, in line with Bologna, to be measured and attained; and strategically even more so, if it transpires that the new quality assurance arrangements put in place at national level are linked to funding mechanisms.

3.2.5 As far as research is concerned, quality assurance is left to external agencies. The Report takes up this matter in paragraph 3.5 below.

### 3.3 Management information systems

The team acknowledges the University's awareness of the lack of the comprehensive data sets necessary for effective management and strategic planning. It notes that:

- the University is putting in place an integrated student record system sufficiently versatile to satisfy all purposes, including financial accounting and human resource management
- the lack of a central research database is a weakness and the existing data does not appear to be systematically used to drive the University's activities

The team believes that a fully integrated information system is desirable, in the interests of transparency, a greater degree of mutual knowledge, accountability, effective governance and informed leadership, as well as better communication with external stakeholders. Such a system can act as a crucial lever for change, identify economies of scale and help raise productivity.

3.3.1 As noted above, the self-evaluation group experienced difficulty in collecting the data which it needed. The student drop-out and failure rates are cases in point, both of them key elements in the quality assurance and general management processes. The team understood that tabulations which included rates of 100% were driven by ministry templates designed to collect mid-year data for national purposes. It was further explained that the 100% was a statistical anomaly indicating the decision, by a whole cohort, not to proceed to a further course to which its success on a previous course entitled it. In discussion, Faculty staff agreed on the need for more efficient accounting of student numbers; one Faculty believed that many drop-outs were misattributions. The EUA team believes that available data on withdrawals and failures must be precisely stated and appropriately configured for internal use.

3.3.2 The University is clearly aware that it lacks the comprehensive data sets necessary for effective management and strategic planning. This is true also at Faculty level, and not merely as regards the interface between Faculties and the central administration. The team learnt that UC is putting in place an integrated student record system sufficiently versatile to satisfy all users; at present only PhD registrations are collected on a university-wide basis. Commercial software has been purchased, which will allow the progressive integration of student records and financial administration on a cost-accounting basis. 2005 had been the first year of consolidated accounting; 2007 will see the first consolidated financial report. Likewise, the allocation of teaching space will be managed centrally. These are encouraging steps forward and the University is to be congratulated on moving forward on so many

fronts simultaneously. Comprehensive alumni tracking, linked to more concerted and focused marketing, will be a further step, which will enhance the relations with the external world addressed in paragraph 3.7 below. The team was impressed with the energy and skill levels with which the staff was approaching these challenges.

3.3.3 At the same time, the construction of a central research in progress and research accomplished database is underway. The team hopes that it, too, will be completed as soon as is feasible, in order to ensure that the University gains a global view of its stakeholders and an accurate map of its scientific, pedagogical and institutional external relationships at regional, national and international levels. The team believes a fully integrated management information system to be in the interests of transparency, a greater degree of mutual knowledge, accountability, effective governance and informed leadership, as well as better communication with external partners. It can act as a crucial lever for change, identifying economies of scale, helping to raise creativity and productivity, updating the self-perception and the external image of the University.

### 3.4 'Inbreeding'

Effective recent data collection has given the University a clear view of its academic human resource profile, showing it to be characterised by 'inbreeding' (i.e. the high incidence of appointment of UC graduates to academic posts).

- Inbreeding has been prevalent for so many years that rates now range from high to very high
- They indicate a stagnant academic labour market and increase the risk of an inward-looking ethos
- The team recommends that the University take all possible corrective measures to minimise this risk, which is increased by the current low number of new appointments

3.4.1 'Inbreeding' refers to the high incidence of appointment of UC graduates to academic posts within the University, as in many other large Portuguese institutions. It is indeed high, in terms of what might be expected in other European countries. Data collected at the request of the EUA team shows that only 7% of UC's 1511 teaching staff received none of their qualifications and training at the University of Coimbra.

3.4.2 In the view of the team, the data indicate a troubling conception of the academic labour market, as well as the stagnant internal application of recruitment procedures. They increase the risk of an inward-looking ethos. Specifically, they limit the possible importation of new scientific fields and of good practice from elsewhere, while lowering the ceiling for knowledge and know-how transfer at precisely the moment when the Lisbon Agenda and the demands of a global academic environment set it at a premium.

3.4.3 There are some mitigating factors. It is true that a number of the teaching staff are undertaking doctorates in other institutions, in Portugal and abroad. It is also true that the Coimbra and Utrecht Groups provide mobility opportunities for teachers and administrators, and that these are taken up. Nevertheless, the team believes it inappropriate to regard inbreeding either as an inevitable consequence of the socio-economic profile of the region or as a structural feature which claims to be a guarantor of academic excellence, as was suggested by some of its interlocutors. It also heard that foreign researchers find it difficult to secure permanent positions in the UC career structure, but this is not specifically a UC problem.

3.4.4 In view of the dynamic of the Bologna Process, which seeks to help universities open up to wider horizons, the team recommends that the University take all possible corrective measures to dispel the inward-looking ethos referred to above.

### 3.5 Research

The team visited vibrant research centres, imbued with a sense of mission and a vocation of outreach. It also notes that:

- beyond the recent desire to promote interdisciplinary work, no research policy is articulated at University level;
- there are few, if any, target funding levels or prioritisations by discipline or by focus (basic/applied);
- the structures of the research centres are very diverse;
- there is as yet no complete central research database, or quality control system, or clear mechanism for taking account of the results of external evaluations;
- there is little central expertise regarding external funding sources

3.5.1 The EUA team visited a number of vibrant research centres – CES, CNC, III, albeit a small sample of the impressively high number – and found an evident sense of mission that transcended the boundaries of the University. The team became very well aware of the range, the volume, and the quality of the research activities, as evidenced by internal documentation and by the ratings made by the Fundação do Ministério de Ciência e Tecnologia [FCT].

3.5.2 Nevertheless, the team noted in various discussions a wealth of negative comments, which demonstrate both the intensity of UC's research activity and aspirations, and the extent to which its structures and infrastructure are inadequate. What lies at the origin of these criticisms? The team ascribes them to the fact that for many years research activities had been obliged to find their own way in order to flourish, in the face of the very bureaucratic attitudes prevailing at national level. These, in turn, meant that no comprehensive research policy had been articulated at University level, such as would have put in place coherent and sustainable systems allowing research activities to develop in a manner appropriate to the range of scientific competences active in UC. The coexistence of huge research potential,

heterogeneous research structures, the absence of a research policy designed to address the diversity of funding levels, the high publication rates and commitment to doctoral studies, the support for knowledge transfer, the national and international networking activities – all these are factors that indicate the volume and unequal distribution of UC's commitment to research, as well as the difficulty which it has experienced in managing its research effort in recent years.

3.5.3 The desire to promote interdisciplinary work – a very important and positive decision – is the first orientation recently formulated as an element of the University research policy. Apart from that, there appear to be no prioritisations by scientific field or by focus (basic/applied), few target funding levels, and until recently no comprehensive knowledge transfer policy and no elaborated technical assistance to support applicants to the EU's FP7 or to international research programmes. For historical and institutional reasons, the research decision-making process is dispersed at Faculty level and subject to ratification by national agencies; central institutional incentives are not in evidence. Moreover, there is no central research database or quality assurance procedure, no comprehensive monitoring of patents, no central record of papers published, no knowledge of total research income. In such conditions, it is difficult for UC's members to draw an exact picture of their complete research potential, even when most of them regard it as impressive. The team believes that all those engaged in UC's research activities will gain in self-confidence, pride and conviction once they know better what has been and is being achieved by UC's research effort.

3.5.4 Partly this situation has remained unresolved as a result of factors already discussed – the absence of a shared quality culture and the shortfall in reliable management information. Partly it derives from the fact that much research activity – in order to avoid bureaucracy – takes place in independent research structures, such as 'associations', about which the University has incomplete knowledge. (The Report returns to this issue in paragraph 3.8 below.)

3.5.5 Set against this rather bleak view is the progress made by the "III" office, the setting up of which was a significant step forward. Its remit is to identify interdisciplinary R&D opportunities, to improve intra-university communication, building critical mass and creating economies of scale where appropriate. The office focuses on promotional work (internal and external), disseminating calls, project management, science and society, oversight of the 10 PhDs sponsored by the University, and procurement of specialist equipment (such as the supercomputer for computational physics). In addition, it has three main projects with a regional focus. In contrast to some of the research centres, the "III" office is very small. Nevertheless, the team was impressed by the scope of its work and by its potential to become a more powerful focal point of research activity. The work of centralising a research database and a quality control system is at an early stage and the team trusts that it will progress rapidly. The team welcomes the decision to consolidate the work of the "III" office and to assure better articulation with the recently established Gabinete de Apoio às Transfêrencias do Saber [GATS]. At the same time, it notes that the Faculties, which tended to regard themselves as autonomous and sovereign in matters of research

policy, have not yet been fully persuaded of the likely benefits to be brought by the “III” office.

3.5.6 To summarise, the team found great potential and shared aspirations, unsupported by consensus on policy and unattached to a well-grounded research infrastructure. It understands that UC intends some consolidation of the research centres, including the “III” office, as well as more effective internal and external networking of researchers. In the opinion of one Faculty, there is an urgent need for new revenue streams which can be used to incentivise research-inactive staff, but it thought it unlikely that these would be found in the private sector in the region; funding must therefore be sought from farther afield. In general, applications to FP7 and to other international funding bodies demand clarity of intention at Faculty or research centre level, with the explicit support of the University, backed up by financial and legal competence at institutional level. Equally, the Bologna Process requires research that informs effective teaching and stimulates productive knowledge transfer. The present combination of opportunity, intellectual resource and organisational structure constitutes a major challenge for the University, to which all involved must – in the view of the team – respond constructively, in order to consolidate UC’s research identity. Some measure of devolution upwards from Faculties to University centre is, in its opinion, desirable to gain critical mass, productivity and efficiency. However this is accomplished, the University should make certain that the heavy hands of a centralised bureaucracy do not dampen or retard the admirable innovative spirit which currently exists in the most active research centres.

### 3.6 Governance

The governance of a university with a long history, such as that of UC, is a constant search for equilibrium between the central institutional level and the level of the Faculties/departments and disciplines. This is one of the main challenges to UC’s governance today. There is a widespread view that the decision-making processes are complex, laborious, time consuming. The team recommends that the University:

- clarify and make more explicit the decision-making levels and processes,
- review the size of the Senate,
- implement the most effective level of participation for constituent groups (students, academics, administrative and technical staff, etc),
- enter into formal, and ideally reciprocal, relations with external persons and stakeholders and decide at which level of governance they may best be deployed

3.6.1 It was because of its interest in management information systems (cf. paragraph 3 above) and the relationship between the administrative centre and the

Faculties (cf. paragraph 9 below) – and because of the evident range of strong opinion which emerged whenever the topic was raised in discussion during its first visit – that the EUA team requested further information on the ‘autonomy’ law of 1998. It asked to know in what respects UC is affected by it and what amendments had been made to the statutes of the University since that date. It also sought an overview of the strategic planning process – its periodicity, its scope, its involvement of internal and external stakeholders, and its monitoring. Finally, it requested a precise description of the decision-making process as it operates at university level. This information provided an important context for the conversations that took place during the team’s second visit in April 2007.

3.6.2 The team found a general view that governance was problematic and that opportunities to institute good practice and to consolidate the infrastructure had been missed during the last 25 years. After 1974, UC had adopted a fully participatory model, grafted on to a highly segmented Faculty and departmental structure. The result – and the team encountered this analysis repeatedly – was a system so complex and consequently so slow that it did not allow appropriate efficiency in the decision-making processes. After years of enjoying full participation, the general view was that the University has now too many committees operating at too many levels and is not susceptible to rational self-management. Decisions take months to implement, if indeed they are implemented at all. This relatively high level of institutional inertia was now seen as a brake on the modernisation of the University. This was the view of senior management.

3.6.3 The self-evaluation group endorsed this position. It spoke of a surfeit of democracy: a proliferation of scientific, pedagogic and executive councils (one each per department) in each Faculty – a total in excess of 50 committees in the largest Faculties, hundreds across the University. It felt that the cumulative burden of time and energy expended and frustration endured stifled communication and innovation.

3.6.4 The students themselves were in agreement, happy to see the committee structure slimmed down, as long as their percentage representation remained secure. There was some support for their position among the academic staff, who regarded proposals to reduce the level of student representation as something which would undermine the democratic ethos of UC. By contrast, the team spoke to others who considered the current level (for example, 36% of the membership of the 290-seat elected Assembly) as excessive and as an impediment to reform.

3.6.5 In respect of the Senate, the senior decision-making body after the Assembly, the team heard that with 75 members it was too large. It appeared to be mainly reactive, having no remit for formulating or monitoring the implementation of strategy, but acting rather as a forum for inter-Faculty debate – perhaps the only one. Even in this respect, it was not regarded as efficient. It had spawned a number of sub-committees – pedagogic, scientific, patrimonial, disciplinary, while a new finance committee was under discussion. Nevertheless the Senate is the body where central decisions are discussed; this makes it one of the few places in UC where members can acquire transversal knowledge of the University.



3.6.6 Faculty Deans agreed that change was required, but some among their number held that simply scaling down the deliberative structures on a pro rata basis would not of itself achieve greater integration and cohesion. There was concern that there should also be amendment to the one-Faculty one-vote system operating in the highest decision-making bodies, which put the largest Faculty on a par with the smallest.

3.6.7 The EUA team, in the time available, was evidently unable to test these assertions by participant observation of the decision-making processes – this is not part of its methodology – but it found the testimonies of all parties to be most eloquent. The almost universally held view is that the processes are complex, laborious and time consuming; the team therefore recommends to the University that it review the size of the Senate and other relevant bodies and implement the most effective level of participation for their constituent groups.

3.6.8 In spite of many difficulties, some improvements to University governance have recently been made. The team is reassured that the current Rector has sought a more explicit and effective model of governance, having convened the Assembly on a number of occasions to determine the amendments to the University's statutes now enshrined in Despacho Normativo 30/2004. A basis of accountability and participation is thus in place, on which the University can build structures which maximise synergies and consensus, allowing the introduction of rigorous quality assurance and effective strategic planning.

3.6.9 Consistent with the model of university governance evolving at European level, however, is the incorporation of external stakeholders. These do not currently figure in the formal procedures of the University. In institutions where this is so, in the view of the team, it strengthens the links between the university and the city, creating a deliberative space in which the employability of students, the relevance of the courses offered and the application of research may be discussed with greater purchase on the processes of regional development. The team therefore recommends the University to enter into systematic formal, and ideally reciprocal, relations with external persons and stakeholders and decide at which level of governance they may best be deployed.

### **3.7 Extra muros**

The team noted the efficient organisation of international collaborative links. It recommends that the University develop its foreign language policy and consolidate its international profile. The team commends the degree of outreach evident in some Faculties activities, but encourages the University and its constituent units to:

- identify the benefits of a more mutually supportive relationship between University and city and to strengthen these initiatives;
- beyond the city, to work for a greater degree of partnership with higher education providers in the region...

- and to do so in the context of a regional development programme which best utilises the strengths of each

3.7.1 The team visited the central international relations office, appreciating its efficient organisation and its good links with most of the Faculties and departments. The wide range of international institutions involved in student mobility with UC, as well as their high level, demonstrates a real capacity for international networking. In some Faculties, however, student mobility could be promoted more, especially in relation to the implementation of the new Bologna courses. In most of the Faculties, staff mobility could be better supported and rewarded, in order to develop more common European activities, such as joint degrees. The team believes that the recently implemented policy for foreign languages has to be supported in the medium and long term, for the benefit of students and staff, and as a condition for improving international mobility. The team encourages a more systematic mapping of the existing international relations for pedagogical, research and institutional purposes, and a wider dissemination of this information across the University as well as externally, in order to consolidate and increase the value of UC's international profile.

3.7.2 The University (together with the University Hospital – with which, despite the name, it is not linked in a formal organisational sense) is the city's largest employer. Formerly powerful local industries (food, textile, and ceramics) have all declined dramatically. Tourism offers a genuine prospect of substantial economic development – and the University has responded to this by a bid to UNESCO for world heritage status. Meanwhile, the predominant public perception of UC remains – as indeed it has for centuries – that of a classical university with strong law and medical Faculties. Until recently, the predominant attitude of UC, as an institution, reinforced this view. But the EUA team found general acknowledgement that it is important to shift this perception by increasing the speed and scope of innovation and by raising its profile.

3.7.3 There is strong evidence that the University projects well in a number of ways. Some Faculties offer services to the community on an outreach basis. UC's cultural activities have a high profile – the new science museum is an excellent example. Moreover, the University has approximately 1000 contacts with local business and industry and the team was able to confirm this when it met the Mayors of Coimbra and Cantanhede, together with representatives of local corporates and spin-off ventures. It learnt that the banking sector liaises closely with some Faculties, provides internships, and holds shares in certain spin-off companies; it enjoys a high quality relationship with the University, giving it full support and benefiting through staff recruitment.

3.7.4 In general, the external partners saw the University's strengths as lying in its historical image, the quality of its research, the technical support available for patenting, and its ability to offer effective mutual promotional activities. On the other hand, UC was considered to be a victim of the inertia embodied in national and EU financial regulations. Moreover, it had a short track record and needed to be more proactive. The directors of the spin-off companies spoke highly of the incubator facility located in the Instituto Pedro Nunes, which had no vacancies, but considered that research staff in the University had insufficient incentives to innovate and to bring new

products to market. The team was unable to discuss in detail, either with the University or with local government or the private sector, the performance of GATS, which was set up to facilitate collaborative inter-sectoral ventures. From the wider discussion with the external partners, the team nevertheless formed the view that UC's focus on applied research was not strong enough and that the Instituto, successful in its own terms – semi-entrepreneurial, with a commitment to job creation and technology transfer – was not properly integrated into the University.

3.7.5 The team commends the dynamism of the outreach activities and encourages the University and its constituent units to identify the benefits of a more mutually supportive relationship between University and city and to strengthen these initiatives. It trusts that closer cooperation between academic and municipal authorities – in the framework suggested in the paragraph on governance above – will accelerate a symbiosis to the benefit of both.

3.7.6 The team learnt that the University had proposed a regional network of public higher education institutions (two universities and five polytechnics), while at the same time exploring the possibility of closer links with private institutions, specifically to build progression routes to Master courses. It supports attempts to work for greater integration of higher education providers in the region, assuming that this can be done in a climate of confidence, mutual respect and on equal terms. It recommends working within the framework of a regional development programme which best utilises the strengths of each and allows each to develop to its full potential. This will require a new level of taskforce and research support, in order to identify how to combine the strengths of the different institutions. In so far as this encourages the implantation of new growth industries, whether manufacturing or service, it will also necessitate, as suggested above, the mobilisation of public authorities and private sector in a common labour of skills auditing and attraction of inward investment.

3.7.7 The team also noted the proximity of active universities and polytechnics – Aveiro, Porto – in the neighbouring regions. The team considers that it could be fruitful, from the point of view of institutions in Coimbra, to contemplate a larger higher education and research network or pole. Such a network would take advantage of the macro-regional concentration to gain complementarities, confer higher visibility, and better enhance the value of its important scientific potential at European and international level.

### **3.8 The mapping of the perimeter**

The identity of UC appears obvious. Its name evokes exquisite historic buildings, high academic prestige and vibrant student traditions. The long evolving history of the University, the diversity of its sites and activities, and the heterogeneity of its units, all signal a different, more complex, profile. The team considers that a stronger sense of urgency will derive from a clearer sense of corporate identity:

- the University's profile is blurred by the coexistence of different legal entities, notably the public and the private not-for-profit,

and different degrees of autonomy;

- in particular, the declared affiliation of some research units to the University is circumstantial;
- this does not assist the University's efforts to position, to promote, and to partner;
- nor does it help it make the best use of its resources

The team therefore supports the University in its efforts to:

- clearly designate the perimeter in internal and external documentation
- and apply this in more effective policy and strategy formulation

3.8.1 In its consideration of the interface between the internal and the external, the EUA team was concerned to assess the clarity of UC's corporate identity and its power of projection beyond its perimeter – regionally, nationally and internationally. As already indicated, the team was told by various staff members that, despite – or perhaps because of – its long history, external perceptions of the University do not acknowledge the wealth of activity to be found within it. In the light of matters discussed above (incomplete management information, partial quality assurance practices, unwieldy governance structures) and still to be discussed (the relationship between the centre and the Faculties), it is clear that the task of presenting a clear image to the outside world remains problematic. This is a challenge which is not unique to UC. Comprehensive universities around the world should be doing a better job of showing their modern side to a changing public not accustomed to seeing it.

3.8.2 The situation at UC is exacerbated by the large number of successful "satellites", especially research centres which are associations in law, rather than organic entities within the legal framework of the University. The team understands the associations, which are private not-for-profit organisations, to have the right to hire their own non-teaching staff and at the same time to run taught course provision jointly with Faculties. They participate in the executive and pedagogic councils of Faculties, where appropriate, and are accountable to some extent to the Deans. Their link to UC can thus by-pass the central administration. The team remains unclear to what extent the collaborative guidelines approved by the Senate in 2005, and which set out to clarify and codify the relationship of the associations to the University, cover the different relations between associations and Faculties, on the one hand, and associations and the centre, on the other. It is important that a balance be struck between centralisation and decentralisation, in order to secure the existence of innovative research centres.

3.8.3 Once again, the team is aware that there are historical reasons for this complex situation, and that the arrangements are enshrined in statute. However, the visitors feel that a stronger sense of corporate identity is needed. At the very least, the identity should be clear in the way in which the University presents itself to the outside world. Staff should proudly trumpet their place of employment. The University's profile is blurred by the coexistence of different legal entities, notably the public and the private

not-for-profit, and the differing degrees of autonomy; in particular, the declared affiliation of some of the research units to the University appears quite inconsistent. This does not assist the University in its efforts to position, to promote, and to partner; nor does it help it make the best use of its resources. The team therefore supports the University in its endeavours to designate better the perimeter in internal and external documentation and to apply this in more effective policy and strategy formulation. This should be done politically (or in a public relations sense) and not necessarily in a stultifying legalistic way. It will help the University address two issues: to know if, how far and by which means it fulfils its basic missions – higher education and research; and to map its own perimeter in order to better define what falls exactly within the scope of its institutional, financial, scientific, pedagogic, social, and ethical responsibility.

### 3.9 The centre-Faculty relationship

The team has noted that the University's knowledge of itself is partial; this derives from the varying degrees of transparency and opacity in the interface between Faculties, departments, research units and the central level of administration and governance. It considers this to be – in part – a challenge in respect of:

- data collection, processing and utilisation
- strategic planning
- evaluation
- the efficient deployment of financial and human resources
- the elaboration of infrastructure consistent with a high European profile
- the building of durable relationships with regional and international partners

3.9.1 The team found – in UC's internal structures, too – boundaries which are drawn inconsistently and which constitute an impediment to effective strategic management. Once again, there are historical reasons for the fact that, for example, some Faculties are autonomous and others not.

3.9.2 The team understands that each Faculty manages its own budget, whether autonomous or non-autonomous, and that the budget is not necessarily transparent when viewed from outside. The autonomous Faculties are directly accountable to the ministry, even though their funding is indirect, having passed through an internal allocation procedure operated at University level. It seems to the team that a high level of structural anomaly makes cohesive participation difficult.

3.9.3 In the course of discussions, a range of vigorously expressed views was heard. There is consensus that the University does not function as well as it might – but only developing consensus on how the current situation might be remedied. Seen from the

point of view of the model of the university evolving at European level, UC's central administration is strikingly weak in form but not in leadership insights, competences and aspirations. The Rector's team leadership power has been compromised by historical inertia, custom and practice. Most Faculties are strong and some are regarded, and regard themselves, as strongly conservative in the modernisation or management sense. Each has its own strategic plan, independent of that of the Rector, although not necessarily out of line with the central plan.

3.9.4 In other words, the relationship between centre and Faculties is one of discontinuity and partial opacity. However strong the teaching and research base in each Faculty, the team is of the view that the relationship can be improved in respect of data collection, processing and utilisation; strategic planning; efficient deployment of financial and human resources; links with regional and international partners and the elaboration of infrastructure consistent with a high European profile. It is evident, for instance, that the support to student facilities (libraries, sports, health assistance, dormitories) could be improved; the appropriate level from which to initiate and manage such an effort could well be the central administration of the University, in order to secure economies of scale.

3.9.5 However, cuts in public spending at national level have been translated into reduced budgets for the University, even as student numbers go into decline. This has stimulated a welcome move to inter-disciplinary work, visible in research and in course design, as well as in services such as libraries. It spreads the student body across a broader range of institutes and departments within Faculties – or, as in the case of FLUC's new language centre – draws students across Faculty boundaries. This propitious development, academically so positive, argues for much less cumbersome policy- and decision-making processes in the Faculties, as well as a streamlining of their interfacing with the centre. Certainly this was the view of some of the students, some of the professors and some of the researchers with whom the EUA team met.

3.9.6 It is evident to the team that the prevailing tensions between centre and Faculties are disturbing in a period in which the University needs to be more creative, if it is to gain in visibility and attractiveness. Yet, in discussion with senior staff, there did appear a readiness to acknowledge that complementary forms of internal balance might be explored. The Deans agreed that the volume of inter-Faculty collaboration might be increased and considered that greater internal student mobility would create a stronger sense of institutional identity. The team recommends that the University proceed in this direction – initiating projects, supporting initiatives and facilitating processes – and that it do so on the basis of sound quality assurance procedures, better management information systems, more integrated research activity, and under the umbrella of a strategic plan capable of being articulated and implemented by agreement.

## 4 *Concluding remarks*

4.1 In summary, the team notes and recommends that:

- there is a need to strengthen the centre, in order to further stimulate existing innovation at Faculty, departmental and unit levels and to capitalise on its effects;
- the opportunity to reach out more widely and more consistently to the city, the region, Europe and the world is one that should not be missed: it is of vital importance to the University
- there is also a need to clarify the division of labour between the centre and the Faculties, as well as to reduce the number of decision-making bodies

A wider vision will impel demand-led activities and a greater responsiveness to need and to opportunity. It will also ensure that the University's historic prestige is successfully re-energised and re-focused into a new effective self-confidence.

4.2 Finally, the team wishes to reiterate its warmest thanks to Rector Fernando Seabra Santos and to Vice-Rector Cristina Robalo Cordeiro for their invitation, their hospitality and for the kind attention which they dispensed. The team met many members of the University and was treated by all with the greatest courtesy and openness. It was a privilege to visit such a historic and prestigious institution at a time when UC, like virtually every European university, each in its own local and regional context, has become subject to powerful trends and pressures originating elsewhere. The question of how to turn these developments to the advantage of students, staff and local communities is one that the European higher education sector is addressing corporately as well as individually. The unique situation of the Universidade de Coimbra in the evolving Portuguese context turns this general question into a specific challenge, to be faced in connection with neighbouring higher education and research institutions. There is no doubt that this experience will be watched with great interest by its peers. The team is confident that the University has huge intellectual resource and a significant capacity for innovative and sustainable growth. It wishes it well.