

INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE LEIRIA
EVALUATION REPORT

January 2011

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1. Introduction

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?

Since 1998 participants of the IEP have been offered the opportunity of a follow-up review. This incorporates the key elements of the initial IEP exercise as outlined above such as a self evaluation report and a visit from the evaluation team.

The rationale of the follow up review, as outlined in the IEP follow up guidelines, is to allow institutions to identify the impact that the initial review has had on the institution's development; to investigate the experiences gained from changes implemented after the first evaluation and to give further impetus for change. In most cases several members of the original evaluation team take part in the follow up process and, in accordance with IEP policy, each team includes a student member.

1.2 The Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (IPL) follow-up review

This report is the result of the follow-up evaluation of the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (IPL), Portugal. The Institute was evaluated by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) with the resulting evaluation report issued in June 2007. The follow-up evaluation took place in November 2010.

The follow up evaluation visit to IPL was originally scheduled to take place in April 2010 and IPL prepared and submitted its self-evaluation report to the Team accordingly. The report was submitted in March 2010. Additional information requested by the Team was also submitted in advance of the scheduled visit. In the end the visit had to be postponed as air travel across the wider European space was brought to a standstill during the week assigned. The visit was rescheduled and took place from 2-5th November 2010. IPL was invited to provide a brief update to its self-evaluation report to cover the intervening period and this update was submitted in October 2010.

During the visit the Team met members of the IPL community: The President; the Vice-Presidents; Directors; head of academic, research and administrative units; other academic staff, researchers and students. External representatives were also met. On behalf of the Team, the Chairman presented an oral report of its findings at the end of the visit. This written report builds on the oral report.

The follow-up evaluation team, referred to as “Team” in this report, consisted of:

- Professor Henrik Toft Jensen, Chair, Former Rector, University of Roskilde, Denmark.
- Professor Gintautas Braziunas, Rector, Vilnius Kalgija/University of Applied Sciences, Lithuania.
- Mr Tobias Walser, Student, ETH Zurich, Switzerland.
- Dr Teresa Lee, Quality Enhancement Manager, Irish Universities Quality Board, Ireland.

Professors Henrik Toft Jensen and Gintautas Braziunas, together with Dr Teresa Lee were members of the original review team in 2006/2007.

The Team would like to thank the President Nuno Mangas; IPL Vice Presidents João Paulo Marques, José Manuel Silva and Luis Lima Santos; IPL staff and students, for the warm welcome afforded to the Team and for the open and frank discussions which took place during the course of the visit. Special thanks are also extended to Carlos Silva and Liliana Santinhos for their support during preparations for the visit. In addition the Team were grateful to the translators who made everyone's work so much easier.

1.3 IPL and the national context since 2007.

The Team first visited IPL in 2006 and early 2007. Since those initial visits there have been a lot of changes and developments at the Polytechnic. At the same time the national environment of higher education in Portugal has undergone many changes with resulting alterations in the conditions for Portuguese polytechnics and universities.

There have been important changes in the law concerning higher education in Portugal which has resulted in alterations in the composition of the general boards and academic councils (including a greater number of representatives of the general community on the General Council) as well as the way budgets are allocated to the polytechnics. They are now treated as one institution with one budget for all the institution as opposed to previously when the constituent units of the polytechnics (the faculties) had full financial autonomy. This has placed polytechnics, such as IPL, in a better position for planning and development purposes as they can act as single entities, with the associated benefits this brings, as opposed to numerous faculties acting independently with no collective goals or objectives set out.

During the first IEP visit in 2006/2007, prior to the introduction of any changes in the law, IPL was already well advanced in its move towards becoming a more united entity, with collective goals and objectives outlined. The changes in national law in the intervening period has served to allow IPL to move further in its goal of bringing more coherence in its teaching, its research, its administrative and other associated activities.

IPL have put a lot of effort in building up its research capacity and it is of note that one of its research centres, the Centre for Rapid and Sustainable Product Development, has achieved the status of being a centre of excellence from the Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation (FCT). Several new research centres have been established and IPL is seeking to promote its research further and to have more research centres recognised as having a high standard of research by FCT.

IPL has made great progress in increasing access to its educational programmes for a wider range of student types. The number of evening students has grown significantly from approximately 700 evening students in 2006/2007 to about 2,200 in 2009/2010. This is substantial given that the total number of students at IPL is in the region of 10,000. There is also a significant increase in the number of distance learning programmes being provided by IPL. Only one was in operation in 2007; today there are four such programmes.

It is clear that IPL has made significant advances in developing its facilities. Such work was in train in 2006/2007 with facilities such as the new building for the School of Health Science having just opened at that time. This facility is now fully operational. The Team learnt during the current visit that other Schools are also benefiting from

the drive to improve facilities; one such instance being the new buildings that house the School of Tourism and Maritime Technology in Peniche.

It is noteworthy that in 2006/2007 IPL indicated that it placed a strong emphasis on increasing the PhD qualification level of its academic staff and a substantial number of staff were working towards their research degree at that time. The results of such concerted efforts are in evidence today with the number of staff in IPL holding the qualification of PhD having, according to the self evaluation report, more than doubled from 74 in 2006 to 152 by the end of 2009. Efforts are continuing to increase this number further and IPL continues to facilitate its academic staff members to gain the qualification of a PhD degree. The Team learnt during the visit that teaching obligations are reduced for such staff and staff members can select to have a reduced workload spread over the period of their studies or have it assigned to specific periods of their studies such as during the final year of research and/or when they are preparing for the final submission of their work.

2. Follow up on 2007 recommendations

In 2006/2007 the review team offered a set of recommendations. Part of the follow-up process involved exploring the extent of implementation of these recommendations, taking into account the changes at both the institutional and national level in the intervening period, and providing suggestions where necessary to promote their achievement. For the sake of brevity the original recommendations are summarised in some cases. The full text is available in the original report of June 2007.

2.1 Strategic Planning

Recommendation 1: *Develop a strategic plan that will serve as a lighthouse for the institution and which is strong and inspirational/*Recommendation 2: *Develop a mission statement that describes the particular perspective of this institution of higher education and which takes the quality and the duties of the IPL into account.*

There has been substantial progress in the area of strategic planning undertaken at IPL since the first IEP evaluation visits of 2006/2007. The current Team learned that IPL was about to commence the implementation of its next strategic planning cycle of 2010-2014. In line with the recommendations of 2007, IPL developed a plan that took the particular perspective and the quality and the duties of the institution into account. This in no small part reflects the fact that the plan was developed following wide consultation within the community of IPL and was also informed by inputs from the regional community in the wider Leiria region.

IPL established a smaller number of priorities and seven strategic priorities/axes were identified. The strategic goals of each axis are outlined in the Plan and the measures necessary to achieve each strategic goal are indicated. The axes focus on the core areas of IPL: Education; Research, development and innovation; Internationalisation; Teaching and non-teaching staff; Students; Regional enhancement and development and; Organisation and management. The balance achieved between internal and regional needs is welcomed as is the focus on increasing the international mobility of IPL's staff and students.

Recommendation 3: Create an action plan that includes targets, timelines and resource implications and which clearly indicates who is responsible for the implementation of each action item.

The 2010-2014 Strategic Plan clearly indicates that IPL recognises that an effective plan requires monitoring and follow-up processes to be included. IPL has included provisions for annual evaluation of progress on each measure, including the 'gathering of information on the level of completion, the results attained and the difficulties encountered'. This process is designed to ensure that the Institution can evaluate the progress made. Such information will be updated annually. To ensure that there is active monitoring of achievement of each strategic axis defined IPL indicates that a person will be nominated for each axis who shall perform semestrial follow up. In addition, persons are to be assigned responsibility for individual measures listed as part of the strategic goals associated with each axis.

The Team is confident that the planned annual institutional evaluation of the level of completion of the plan will serve to identify difficulties and provide an opportunity to implement corrective measures, if needed, in a timely manner.

Recommendation 4: Ensure that IPL's vision concerns itself with the development of quality and of services in the region/Recommendation 5: Ensure that the services provided to the municipalities and the industries of the region are continued and developed and make efforts to increase the visibility of these services.

It was recognised by the Evaluation Team that visited IPL in 2006/2007 that IPL had a strong ethos of seeking to provide services and support to the local community, the municipalities and the industrial and business providers of the region. At the time the Team saw fit to urge IPL to continue to promote its engagement with these local sectoral communities and the Team advised IPL to include this aspect of its work as part of its strategic vision and strategic plan.

The current Team are pleased to see that the vision statement of the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan includes reference to the need for the promotion of regional

development and one of the seven overarching strategic axes of the plan “Regional enhancement and development” specifically addresses this matter. Several measures are outlined that promote engagement with the regional stakeholders in order to achieve the stated strategic goals to ‘Enhance IPL’s role as a cohesion factor of regional identity and development’ and to ‘Involve the IPL along with the community in fostering the development of several scientific, cultural and artistic areas’.

IPL includes measures that seek to engage actively with regional strategic initiatives and to contribute to regional entity’s bodies. The plan proposes measures that seek to promote regional discussions with a view to identifying activities for the strengthening of regional identity and development. The IPL plan also indicates that it will seek to invite regional entities to participate actively in internal IPL sessions. Various measures are included that should deepen the relationship that IPL has with its civic partners as they will provide additional services to the community and will provide opportunities for the community to become aware of and engage with IPL activities.

In conjunction with the specific focus on regional enhancement and development, the strategic plan provides for the tailoring of education or training to the needs of local institutions and companies and, in the context of knowledge and technology transfer, aims to place the Institute as a preferred partner at regional level.

External partners met by the Team as part of the current visit indicated that they welcomed the opportunity to contribute to IPL’s deliberations and ongoing development. They appreciated the fact that through forums such as the General Council they were provided with direct contact with IPL’s senior management. Such members saw their role in providing IPL with the perspective of the ‘outside’ world as having an important part to play for ensuring IPL’s activities continue to meet the needs of employers in the region.

2.2 Governance and Management

Recommendation 6: Clarify the governing structure at IPL/Recommendation 7: Care is taken to ensure that the management teams which have being built up in IPL are provided with clear leadership into the future and IPL guards against drifting in the pursuit of fulfilling its goals and ambitions as articulated in its new strategic plan/Recommendation 8: Leadership and direction is provided for the proceedings of the General Board

The introduction of new legislation for higher education institutions in Portugal has resulted in many changes for institutions including changes in governance and management. Law 62/2007 established the legal framework of higher education institutions including regulations pertaining to their constitutions, functions and

organisation. Following this decree, IPL revised its statutes. Aspects of the changes introduced include the inclusion of external stakeholders in the General Council as discussed previously.

It is also evident that staff and student members of the General Council play a greater role and such members indicated that they appreciated having the opportunity to contribute to the development of IPL. The openness with which information on the deliberations of the Council is provided to the IPL academic community in general was welcomed by the Team. Staff and students of the wider academic community reported that they can now indirectly inform deliberations through their representative members on the council if they choose to do so. Likewise, having increased access to information on Council deliberations and decisions was welcomed and is seen as having promoted transparency and increased confidence in the decision making process at IPL.

The Team welcomed the increased level of transparency and was appreciative of the fact that IPL has already met, to a degree, a measure outlined in the current strategic plan for 'broadening the dissemination of decisions made by different bodies'. It would be anticipated that IPL will apply the same degree of transparency to many of its other decision making entities.

In 2006/2007, during the time of the initial evaluation visit, the Team was aware that the centralisation of processes was in progress with a view to establishing IPL as a single institution of many schools. It was noted at that time that IPL staff and management were positively engaged and supportive of increased integration. The current Team was pleased to see that substantial progress has been made in achieving this goal and it was evident that IPL members continue to be supportive and actively contribute to the ongoing development of new systems, procedures and processes.

Legislative changes have facilitated integration at IPL with financial responsibility now resting with the central administration. The Team was of the view that this success in integrating processes is facilitated by the fact that the rector is elected. The academic community in electing their rector, endorsed the position taken by management to continue on the path of closer integration across IPL activities and indicated their support and enthusiasm to work with management towards achieving this goal. This support and enthusiasm was evident to the Team. However, staff from the schools indicated that a certain degree of autonomy and an increase in transparency regarding the allocation of funding was desirable. The Team is supportive of such a position and would therefore advocate that ***a balance be achieved of having responsibility for financial matters remaining at a central level with the implementation of a transparent funding formula that allows schools to achieve some control over their financial path.***

It is clear that IPL has made great strides forward in developing its research capacity. This is as a result of the increased qualification level of IPL's academic staff and of the increase in the number of research units associated with IPL schools from 4 in 2006/2007 to 12 in 2010. The Team was made aware that there are close contacts between the schools and the research centres. Academic staff undertake research in the centres, as do many masters' students. Indeed the Team found that some undergraduate students also contribute to research projects in the centres.

This cross-fertilisation of school and research centre activities is important in order that research can actively inform teaching activities; that faculty members can continue to develop their research activities in a dedicated research environment; and it provides a means of ensuring that research centres do not 'drift' in their work and operations but remain closely aligned with the schools and the Institute as a whole. IPL must ensure that a balance is achieved between the independence of the research centres and the maintenance of the continuing positive linkages with the schools with which they are associated. ***In this regard the management of the research centres should be carefully steered to ensure some convergence with the activities of the schools.***

2.3 Bologna and Internationalisation

Recommendation 11: *Promote the implementation of all parts of the Bologna process.*

IPL has made great progress in implementing the Bologna requirements and it is obvious that IPL has increased its focus on internationalisation activities. Indeed, relatively recent legislation, as in Decree Law 107/2008, requires that all higher education providers must produce an annual report on progress in implementing the Bologna process.

The Team learned that since 2007/08 all IPL undergraduate programmes comply with the requirement of Bologna. They are now of 3-years duration, with the exception of those which are of a more professional inclination which are 4-5 years in duration depending on the specific discipline requirements. ECTS credits are assigned to programmes and learning competencies (or as they are more generally known across the European educational space: Learning outcomes) are defined for the curricular units and for the overall programmes.

It was reported that in many cases the programmes on offer have benefited from being of a shorter duration. However, the team learnt that in some cases the work experience element of the programmes has to be provided as an extra curricular activity, taken during the summer and other holiday periods. By all accounts IPL has supported students in achieving these extracurricular placements and students who

seek to include them as part of their programme can achieve this as part of their training.

Lifelong learning and access to education are facilitated and IPL has established a dedicated unit (Centro de Formação de Activos [Employees Training Centre] - FOR.ACTIVOS) for the purpose of promoting active, lifelong learning. IPL has increased its activities in the provision of post secondary programmes for learners. The numbers of these programmes have increased significantly since the Evaluation Team first visited IPL in 2006/2007 when 11 such programmes were available. In 2009/2010, 23 such programmes were available. IPL also provides back-to-education training for returning students to ease their transition to higher education after prolonged periods.

Such initiatives are to be commended and reflect the changes in legislation for Portuguese higher education providers which allow for greater flexibility in admissions and access to higher education, in particular for students aged over 23 and those that meet certain educational qualification criteria. This has resulted in a widening of the student recruitment pool.

Other legislative measures which have opened up access to higher education in Portugal and which will provide opportunities for IPL into the future are provisions that allow individuals to attend and receive certification for individual curricular units; provisions to allow students of programmes to attend and receive certification for curricular units not on their cycle of studies; and provisions to allow students to attend programmes on a part-time basis.

IPL has already increased its part-time programme provision from 1 to 4 programmes as previously discussed. The other provisions provide a means for IPL to introduce individuals to the academic offering of the Institute with the added potential of recruiting them into a full programme of study. There is also the potential to increase the attractiveness of IPL's programme offerings by allowing enrolled students to have some flexibility in choosing academic units that are outside the specified programme curriculum. In this way students can add to their *curricula vitae* in line with their own expectations for future careers.

Recommendation 9: Increase the international mobility of students and staff/Recommendation 10: Develop performance indicators which can be benchmarked internationally and actively promote the creation of international networks.

Internationalisation has been given a higher priority in IPL as is reflected in its inclusion as a primary strategic axis in the new strategic plan with its goals defined as to 'increase and diversify international mobility' and to 'reinforce and enhance

cooperation activities'. Internationalisation is also promoted under other strategic axes such as in education and research.

IPL clearly identifies the measures to be followed that will serve to assist it in achieving its stated goals. Such measures are: to 'promote extracurricular apprenticeships 'for students in national and international institutions/companies; to 'promote 1st and 2nd cycle joint programmes through national and international partnerships'; to 'promote doctoral programmes at IPL by establishing partnerships with national and international higher education institutions'; and to 'promote research with external national and international entities' through partnerships, the 'fostering of participation in joint projects', research exchanges or research networks, with the 'integration of external researchers in IPL's research activities'.

The measures outlined provide a comprehensive framework for IPL to work on as it seeks to increase the internationalisation of its teaching and research portfolios and should serve in allowing IPL to benchmark its activities with national and international entities. There is already evidence of an increase in the mobility of students and to a lesser extent of staff. An increase in agreements for national and international collaborations in IPL's academic offerings in teaching, as well as in research and other activities, were also in evidence. IPL is encouraged to continue its efforts in these areas.

IPL is urged in particular to focus on the language needs of students and staff. ***This should include an increased use of English as part of the teaching of the curriculum.*** For those programmes that are provided through the medium of Portuguese and which have international students present in the classroom the Team recommend to IPL: that it is mindful of the language difficulties of those students who may not have a full command of Portuguese in order to benefit fully from the teaching provided. In a classroom setting where most students are Portuguese it is easy for a teacher to forget that non-native speaking students are present.

It is clear that IPL has set itself the goal of increasing the provision of programmes through the medium of English and also that IPL staff are extremely supportive of international students who come to study at IPL. This support was widely acknowledged and appreciated by international students met by the Team.

2.4 Teaching, Learning and Programmes

Recommendation 12: *Develop a strategy for the increased use of Information Technology based teaching and learning methods/Recommendation 13*: *Develop and increase the number of evening and part time courses available and expand the number of places available in further education programmes.*

Some matters pertaining to teaching, learning and programmes have already been discussed in the context of Bologna and internationalisation. It was clear to the Team that IPL is moving more in line with Bologna in many areas such as in its change from the use of a teaching centred to a learning centred pedagogical approach. This is underpinned by IPL's statement in the self evaluation report which indicates that the institution is moving towards a 'wider application of theoretical-practical teaching methodologies and a strengthening of experimental and project work components' in its programmes.

The Team found that there is increased use of learning platforms such as *Blackboard* and that part-time provision, evening and distance education programmes are provided, with the number of programmes being provided by these means increasing. In 2009/2010 IPL offered 43 undergraduate degree programmes; 15 of which were provided as evening classes and 4 of which were by means of distance learning. Bachelor degrees are being provided through distance education in the areas of: primary education; mechanical engineering; marketing; and marketing and tourism. IPL's self evaluation report indicates that it is the only Portuguese institution, apart from the Open University, with authorisation to grant degrees by means of distance learning.

The introduction of master programmes has provided additional opportunities for IPL graduates to train to a higher level. According to the self evaluation report IPL has 40 masters' programmes in place across its various schools. This has provided a means for IPL to attract students from other institutions in Portugal and from abroad. It was reported that students (IPL graduates and graduates from other higher education institutions) are already choosing to study at IPL for their masters' qualification. Teachers and students met by the team welcomed the additional opportunities and understood the value of the provision of higher degrees to IPL.

Recommendation 14: *Continue to work towards reducing the drop-out and failure rates/Recommendation 15*: *Conduct more research into the reasons why students drop out or fail in their academic programmes.*

The Team learnt that the success rate of students has increased. In discussions with staff and students this was in part attributed to the increased qualification level of the teaching faculty, and in part attributed to the better facilities and support in place which have motivated students in their studies.

It was also clear that targeted measures in particular programmes, such as mathematics support in engineering programmes for example, have proved beneficial. It was noted in IPL's self evaluation report that targeted activities of the Student Support Service (SAPE) also serve to address success rates. Measures included: the provision of psycho-pedagogical and academic support in those units that have higher rates of failure; the availability of personal and social guidance and monitoring; and access to psychological support and career guidance. All such measures have contributed to an increase in success rates for students.

The previous Evaluation Team were aware of the importance of the availability of lecturers to students. The present Team learnt that lecturer availability to students has not diminished and students continue to appreciate the accessibility they have to their teachers. The importance of this for supporting students, academically or otherwise, during their time with the Institute is recognised by IPL as an important contributing factor for the success of students.

IPL is encouraged to continue monitoring the success rates and completion rates of students especially in view of the fact that IPL is increasing the number of its part-time, distance or evening degree programmes. As it changes the means of providing programmes so also will the profile of the IPL student body change. Each student type brings with it its own unique challenges. With careful monitoring IPL can address specific needs and can adapt its teaching and support mechanisms as it sees fit.

Recommendation 16: Investigate the nature and structures of the jobs obtained by IPL graduates.

Portuguese higher education institutions must now by law (Law 62/2007) track their alumni with respect to employment rates and destinations according to a methodology and in a database established by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education.

It is evident that IPL is seeking to maintain the close connection of programmes to the job market (employability). IPL indicated that it has used the results of the Ministry's study to analyse the destination and employability of graduates of each school and programme of study. IPL also reported that it undertakes a study of employers in the region with a view to determining the nature of the careers pursued by its graduates, in addition to matching their skill sets to the demands of the market.

Other measures taken to enhance the employability of its graduates include the maintenance of connections with employers through extracurricular internships and

partnership arrangements with programmes for inclusion into the working life, with students undertaking real projects for business and companies. It was also found that there is an offer of training in the area of entrepreneurship at the level of second cycle programmes.

Such ongoing measures and initiatives will serve to ensure that IPL's academic offerings prepare students for the workplace. Students are provided with opportunities to apply skills, learnt as part of their academic training, as part of work experience placements. Students met by the Team enthusiastically embraced these opportunities and they felt that the placements gave them an advantage over graduates from the university sector where placements are not the norm. Employers also welcomed the opportunity provided to engage with IPL students.

2.5 Quality Assurance

Recommendation 17: Develop robust and systematic quality assurance systems making use of the structures currently in place/ Recommendation 18: Systematically coordinate the quality assurance systems within schools and across the Institute/Recommendation 19: Develop consistent protocols of assessment for use within programmes/ Recommendation 20: Ensure the effectiveness of the newly created Council for Assessment and Quality.

Quality assurance considerations have changed significantly since the first visits of the IEP Evaluation Team to IPL in 2006/2007. In part this has been in response to Bologna considerations as already discussed and in part to the changes in the Portuguese legislation.

There is a new legal framework for the assessment of higher education (established under Decree Law 38/2007). Decree Law 369/2007 provides for the creation of the Higher Education and Accreditation Agency (A₃ES). Both instruments were designed with the purpose of ensuring the quality of higher education through assessment and accreditation of institutions and their programmes of study. Other changes allowed for the creation of a National Qualifications System (Decree Law 396/2007) and provided for the establishment of the National Qualifications Agency (Decree Law 276-C/2007) which is concerned with the quality of vocational and professional education and the fostering of access to third level education.

These and other changes have led to a greater flexibility in access to higher education; are intended to create the potential to have greater flexibility in the provision of the curriculum; and have created conditions to foster national and international mobility of students and graduates. On the other hand there is a greater focus on the quality of provision of all aspects of the operations of higher education institutions.

Today IPL, together with other HEI's in Portugal, must participate in the mandatory requirement for quality assessment of each HEI which includes self assessment and

external assessment of the study cycles, the faculties, schools and/or social care services. Programme and degree accreditation processes are now in operation; performance assessment of academic staff is being implemented, and the assessment of lecturers by pedagogical councils has been introduced. Other layers of quality activities include the provision for an increased role of course co-ordinators in the quality management and monitoring of study programmes. These layers of quality management are to be coordinated by a newly created Evaluation and Quality Office.

With respect to quality assurance IPL has responded to external influences by developing its internal structures and supports. IPL statutes have established an Assessment and Quality Council which is charged with responsibility for establishing the mechanisms of self evaluation of the performance of the Institute, its units and scientific and educational activities in preparation for national evaluation and accreditation exercises. It is also responsible for ensuring that IPL is in compliance with the law as regards such exercises. In conjunction with these responsibilities it is charged with developing a multi-annual plan of the areas that are to be assessed; propose evaluation standards to be applied and establish quality standards; define levels of proficiency that quality standards should achieve; and establish measures for the correction of weaknesses that are identified during the course of its work.

At the programme level, course coordinators report on quality matters to the pedagogical and technical-scientific councils of their school, and to the newly created Assessment and Quality Council. Thus, in addition to their role in the management and coordination of the running of the academic programme, coordinators are required to play a larger role in the preparation of proposals for accreditation exercises. The coordinator must also prepare an annual report on programme activities which includes such data items as: a report on the number of student that drop out; completion rates; classification distributions by curricular unit and by final classification; information on teaching methods; workload and teaching performance. It must also include the opinion of the Scientific and Pedagogical Committee with regard to the various indicators returned and its opinion of the corrective measures to be adopted where these are deemed necessary.

It would be expected that the additional layers of quality assurance will serve to improve the level of quality in IPL's academic, administrative and service provisions. There is a greater expectancy of accountability for higher education in Portuguese HEI's as there is for HEI's across the Bologna signatory countries. ***However, care must be taken to ensure that the focus on external accountability is balanced with a consistent focus on internal quality management and assurance and most importantly IPL must continue on its path of quality enhancement and the creation of a quality culture.***

Recommendation 21: Continue with the development of new common databases/
Recommendation 22: Systematically use the newly available data for the purpose of enhancing quality and resource management/
Recommendation 23: Ensure that study programme directors have access to relevant information in the new IPL databases and that such access is facilitated by providing the information in a clear and understandable manner.

It is clear that the quality measures described so far are supported by supportive platforms such as the various committees and boards, the Assessment and Quality Council and the Evaluation and Quality Office, which serve to facilitate management and decision making processes.

The Team also learnt that IPL is now in the final stages of development of an impressive data management platform which was being tested at the time of the Team's visit. When operational, this platform should provide a means of accessing data and information for course coordinators, directors and other management and decision makers through a single platform or 'one stop shop' data system. This will serve to support the comprehensive system of quality control and assurance.

The introduction of information processing and data management platforms will obviously facilitate the work of the course coordinators. However, course coordinators indicated that reporting workloads are already high so care must be taken to ensure that additional reporting needs do not take time away from valuable teaching, and research activities, of the academic staff. The Team were aware that secretaries are in place within the schools who serve to assist the coordinators in their work. However, the Team learnt that such secretarial support is limited given the number of programmes in place.

In that regard the data platform should be a means of facilitating coordinators' work as opposed to adding to their already heavy workloads. In addition care should be taken that the reporting demands made of the coordinators are not designed simply to meet the needs of the recent legislative requirements but should in addition serve as effective improvement tools. In this way ***IPL can maximise the use of the reporting systems in place and can utilise its extensive data platform in a manner that is effective for internal, and external, assurance and enhancement purposes. Furthermore, IPL should be mindful of focusing on collecting data that is needed as opposed to collecting data that is nice to know.***

3. Future Challenges

The Team was very impressed with IPL's progress and with the fact that IPL were able to turn the recommendations from its initial IEP evaluation in 2006/2007, to a great extent, into reality.

It was clear to the Team that IPL is continuing on a path it envisaged for itself in 2006/2007 of being an Institution with one leader; a unified staff; and a unified student body. The enthusiasm and drive to achieve its goals is still very much in evidence across the academic community. With such momentum and support in place, with its Strategic Plan which provides for specific measures and follow-up processes, with the introduction of new structures and supports for quality assurance and improvement across the institute, the Team is confident that IPL, with careful management, will succeed in its ambitions for the future.

Taking this as a point of departure and bearing in mind those observations already made the Team have the following reflections and recommendations to make:

1. IPL has moved from a structure consisting of 5 schools to one structure with a centralised management, which has created a very innovative and dynamic institution and more efficient administrative services. This has helped IPL to brand itself as a strong polytechnic in the region as well as to other institutions in Portugal and abroad. It also facilitated the flow of information across the Institution and has contributed to enhancing IPL's financial management processes. **However, it is recommended that IPL establish effective and transparent guidelines for the distribution of funds to organic units, to make sure that they also have greater decentralised responsibility. Such guidelines should be approved by the Management Council after discussion by IPL bodies at all levels.**

2. IPL has shown that it is successfully taking actions in order to become a more internationalised institution. The number of incoming and outgoing students has increased significantly as have the number of international research collaborations. Whilst it is clear that IPL recognises the importance of meeting regional needs the Team is mindful of the need to balance this with the requirements of maintaining a more internationalised focus. Therefore, **IPL is encouraged to continue in striving to find a balance between fulfilling regional needs and in increasing its international visibility. In addition to this IPL is advised to consider providing English, an important language in research institutions, as part of its programmes of study.**

3. IPL is currently establishing a promising evaluation system which is supported by a sophisticated indicator database. Whilst this is recognised as being a valuable tool from a quality control perspective **it is important that the system is also**

developed in such a manner that it promotes continuous quality enhancement and sets the ground for the creation of a quality culture.

4. IPL is legally required by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education to survey its graduates each year. However, the Team found that, except in a small number of cases, IPL had no other formal structures in place to maintain contacts with its Alumni. Given that IPL will be in contact with its Alumni each year as part of the Ministerial survey and given the fact that current IPL students are enthusiastic and loyal to IPL and to its staff it is recommended that IPL avail of these sources of untapped potential. **IPL should establish an Alumni organisation which would not only facilitate the recruitment of new students but which could serve as a source of funding for IPL and provide placement opportunities for current students. In addition, the Alumni could provide platforms for fruitful collaborations with business, social and civic partners.**

5. IPL has established a number of first and second cycle degrees in compliance with Bologna. IPL has also adapted programmes to the changing needs of its students. Evening and part-time programmes as well as programmes for adults are attracting new target groups. However, the Team found that the curricula are still rather fixed in structure – students have little flexibility to choose from different lectures. **The Team was of the opinion that a broader structure of the study programmes with degrees based on learning outcomes may increase their attractiveness to students. The provision of a broader curriculum in the earlier years of a programme, with specialisation taking place in the final year (or years) of the programme, would also help in allowing the programmes to adjust faster to the requirements of the labour market.** Such an approach would also facilitate an economy of scale in programme provision as classes could be larger for the first couple of years with smaller classes being provided when students specialise in their chosen area.

6. The dual structure of schools and research units has helped the research units to develop independently and has created successful research outcomes in a relatively short term. The research units provide an opportunity for staff to continue to develop their research work in a dedicated environment. The IEP Team supports IPL's strategy in striving to have 3-5 research units of excellence. In the long run however it is equally important that students continue to benefit from the linkages of schools and research unit. **Therefore the Team recommends that teaching and research are tightened closer together in order to ensure that**

students can continue to apply theoretical knowledge, gained in the classroom, in related research projects.

4 Conclusions

The IEP Team congratulates IPL, its staff and leadership on the progress made since the first evaluation in 2006/2007. IPL is to be commended for all the progress it has made in meeting the objectives included, directly or indirectly, as part of the recommendations put forward at that time.

In seeking to fulfil any such objectives IPL has also had to take into account the significant changes that have taken place in the legislative environment for Portuguese HEIs. From the Team's perspective, IPL has managed to continue its work in implementing the recommendations by dovetailing with the developments that were necessary in internal processes and structures in order that IPL could fulfil national needs. That said, the Team sees the need to caution IPL to continue to keep a focus on internal assurance and enhancement activities and to avoid a path of developing systems and processes only with a view to meeting external quality assurance needs. The Team however is confident, given its experience with IPL's management and academic community, that the Institute will keep 'quality culture', and not just quality control, at the core of any developments that take place.

The Team wishes IPL success in its work.