



## **INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE BEJA**

### ***EVALUATION REPORT***

*November 2010*

Team:

Professor Régis Ritz, chair  
Professor Lucija Čok  
Professor Gintautas Bražiūnas  
Dr Howard Davies, coordinator

## **Contents**

1. Introduction	3
2. Governance and government	5
3. Strategic planning	8
4. Internationalisation	10
5. Research and development, innovation and knowledge transfer	12
6. Quality assurance	14
7. Conclusions	16
8. Summary of recommendations	16

## **Introduction**

This report is the outcome of the evaluation of the **Instituto Politécnico de Beja** [IPBeja], Portugal. The evaluation took place between March and October 2010.

### **1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme**

The **Institutional Evaluation Programme** [IEP] is an independent membership service of the European University Association [EUA]. It 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, rather than the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

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

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

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

### **1.2 Name of the institution and the national context**

IPBeja is a public Polytechnic located in a region which is experiencing demographic and economic decline. In an attempt to reverse this tendency, regional planners and entrepreneurs have embarked on a number of large-scale development and regeneration projects, in which IPBeja intends to play a significant role. It has taken advantage of the suite of higher education reforms initiated by the Portuguese government – and which encompass qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, institutional governance, academic career structures, and other dimensions of HE – to undertake a radical re-shaping of its structures, processes and personnel. In particular, it has brought its four discrete Schools into a framework in which

strategic planning and resource allocation are centralised under the leadership of the presidency. IPBeja considers that this will enhance its capacity for proactive response to regional issues, in the face of increasingly severe cuts in public spending. Its mission is clearly articulated: to produce and disseminate regionally relevant knowledge in a lifelong frame.

### 1.3 The Self-Evaluation Process

The self-evaluation process was undertaken by a steering committee, chaired by the *Presidente* and composed of pro-presidents, directors of organic units, senior administrators, and representatives of staff and students. A smaller drafting group, led by the heads of the Quality and Evaluation Office and the Strategic Planning and Development Service, conducted the SWOT analysis and provided supporting statistical information. The self-evaluation report (and its 37 annexes) gave a detailed and comprehensive overview of the mission, the national and regional contexts, the academic and administrative staff profiles, the internal processes and the resource position of IPBeja. The evaluation team requested supplementary information, which in the main consisted of updating developments in the fast-moving strategic planning process.

### 1.4 The evaluation team [the Team]

The Self-Evaluation Report, along with the annexes, was sent to the evaluation Team in February 2010. The visits to Beja took place in March and October of the same year. Between the visits IPBeja provided the Team with additional documentation.

The evaluation team consisted of:

- Professor Régis Ritz, former *président* of the Université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux III, France
- Professor Lucija Čok, former rector of the University of Primorska, Slovenia
- Professor Gintautas Bražiūnas, director of Kolegiya Vilnius (Vilnius University of Applied Sciences), Lithuania
- Dr Howard Davies, EUA

The Team wishes to express its gratitude to Professor Vito Carioca, *presidente* of IPBeja, for his warm welcome and his responsiveness to its inquiries; to the liaison person Professora Sandra Lopes and her colleagues in the *Serviços de Planeamento e Desenvolvimento Estratégico* for their tireless facilitation of the team's work; and to all other members of IPBeja – academics, administrators, students, support staff – for their readiness to explain their working context and to share their experience.

## **2. Governance and government**

2.1 In the recent past, IPBeja's operating environment has been far from favourable. While student numbers have declined, in line with the depopulation of the Alentejo region, the unit of resource has been reduced by central government. The combination of downward demographic and financial pressure is unlikely to be reversed in the short term. On the contrary, the renewed financial crisis of 2010 will doubtless bring further cuts in public spending. Moreover, measures to stimulate growth are more likely to be taken in the coastal conurbations of Lisbon and Porto, to which much of the qualified labour migrates. Finally, IPBeja, which is a small institution with an approximate 3,000 students, has a catchment area which is bounded by those of the universities of Algarve and Evora.

2.2 Taken together, these factors constitute a significant challenge; failure to address it would have serious consequences. In its discussions with internal and external stakeholders, the Team was reassured to discover that IPBeja is fully aware of the threats and opportunities presented by context and circumstance. Positive factors exist: regional regeneration is under way, notably through the construction of the Alqueva hydro-electric facilities and the refurbishment of the former military airbase. There is scope for the expansion of lifelong learning provision, as well as for the transfer of applied knowledge into existing and incubated enterprises.

2.3 Government intervention has not been limited to reductions in the state grant. Since 2005, it has implemented a raft of reforms that has transformed the landscape of Portuguese higher education. Decree Law 49/2005 asserted the right of all citizens to lifelong learning opportunities; it introduced the three Bologna cycles, with their concomitant transition from knowledge-based to competence-based learning; and it generalised the use of the European Credit Transfer System [ECTS]. Decree Law 74/2006 consolidated the Bologna qualifications framework and required full implementation by the 2009/10 academic year. Decree Law 369/07 enshrined in law the statutes of the new national quality assurance agency, which would operate in line with the agreed European Standards and Guidelines [ESG].

2.4 Perhaps most importantly, in terms of defining the scope for action enjoyed by higher education institutions in Portugal's binary system, Law 62/2007 [known as *RJES*] set down the detail of the legal status of the public and private polytechnics and universities. It confirmed that the mission of the polytechnic sector is to deliver high quality and high level (up to Master level) provision, with a strong vocational and professional orientation. Under Law 62/2007, polytechnics enjoy statutory, pedagogic, scientific, cultural, administrative, financial, patrimonial and disciplinary autonomy vis-à-vis the state; these various expressions of autonomy are to be referenced to their fitness for purpose.

2.5 Law 62/2007 also prescribed the setting up of three legislative and executive agencies at institutional level: the general council (*conselho geral*); the presidency; and the management committee (*conselho de gestão*). However – in line with the principle of ‘fitness for purpose’ – it left considerable scope for local variation and elaboration. IPBeja saw in Law 62/2007 provisions which would allow it to develop a capacity for rapid response to the challenges of its location. It took the opportunity to make a radical transition from a dispersed to a centralised structure, from decision-making processes based on elected participation in a complex web of committees to processes steered by a powerful presidency. Its new statutes, customised within the framework set down by Law 62/2007, were approved at ministerial level in September 2008 and were being implemented throughout the period of the IEP evaluation. They were the backdrop to the debates which informed the self-evaluation report and the Team was able to peruse them in detail following its first visit. It is on the basis of the new statutes and its on-site observations that the Team makes the recommendations contained in this report.

2.6 IPBeja consists of four schools: agrarian studies [ESA], education [ESE], technology and management [ESTIG], and healthcare [ESS]. These retain the status of organic units in the new statutes, but much of their autonomy has effectively been transferred to the overarching entity – IPBeja. At the same time, schools are better able to benefit from economies of scale and from the rationalised provision of such services as library and student accommodation. Within the schools, there has been devolution of decision-making and managerial competences to departmental level, where course-based administration has been strengthened. The heads of school, meanwhile, who do not sit on the IPBeja management committee, which is decision-making, participate instead in the advisory academic coordinating council (*conselho coordenador*) with the president and the heads of department. Previously elected, they are now nominated by the president.

2.7 These structural reforms, and the trade-offs they involve, are understandably experienced by different schools, and by different persons in different schools, in different ways. In the view of the Team, it cannot yet be said that centralisation has been endorsed by a full consensus of internal stakeholder opinion. The Team appreciates that not everything can be addressed at once. Yet, given the urgency of the challenges facing IPBeja, it suggests that the following points regarding governance are worthy of consideration.

2.7.1 New councils and committees, with new remits, new compositions and new memberships need time to acquire operational, as opposed to statutory, legitimacy. IPBeja has a strong focus on the construction of comprehensive management information systems. It is also – in the support of student recruitment – addressing the issues surrounding the creation of an integrated institutional brand and identity. The team considers that matters of internal communication have no less priority:

the dissemination of a shared sense of mission, the intelligibility and accessibility of the decision-making processes, the optimal participation by all internal stakeholders – all these can be facilitated by effective information and opinion exchange. This is particularly true in a centralised model, in which transparency is easier to achieve than in a dispersed structure.

➤ **The Team recommends that IPBeja consider ways of further improving internal communications to support the institutional restructuring**

2.7.2 One of the features of the centralised model is the appointment of pro-presidents. Statutes 43 and 45 permit the president to make such appointments for particular tasks to be fulfilled, giving relief from teaching and research duties for the duration. The Team met three pro-presidents, charged with matters relating to quality assurance, marketing and public relations, and strategic planning. It was impressed with the energy and the focus which they brought to their areas of responsibility. At the same time, the Team – in its deliberations – became aware of other policy lines which, in its view, would benefit from a similar investment of human resource. These lines are specified later in this report (see sections 5 and 6 below).

➤ **The team recommends that IPBeja increase the number of Pro-Presidents, in order to complement and support the restructuring and to promote particular policy strands**

2.7.3 Statutes 59 and 60 define the office of the student *Provedor*, or ombudsman. The Team understood that this person, who serves a two-year term, may be a student, an academic, or an external person, perhaps an alumnus/alumna. It seems likely that *Provedores* drawn from these constituencies will have quite different – and possibly unequal – scope for receiving and considering complaints. The Team was not convinced that the office of *Provedor*, as currently defined, gave sufficient guarantee of effective intervention and problem resolution. Nor, in the view of the Team, did it afford the *Provedor* the opportunity either to appreciate the full institutional context in which complaints might be made or to report publicly on the range and volume of his or her activities. One view presented to the Team was that the *Provedor* had ‘influence but no power’, which suggests that the efficacy of the office is not yet widely accepted and that, at the very least, its visibility could be increased.

➤ **The team recommends that IPBeja consider ways of giving the Student Provedor an *ex officio* seat on the General Council**

### 3. Strategic planning

3.1 The Team devoted considerable time to assessing IPBeja's capacity for strategic planning and implementation in its new statutory framework. Specifically, it discussed with Presidente Carioca the action plan, on the basis of which he had secured his mandate. It noted the degree of continuity between this and the Self-Evaluation Report, the *Contrato de Confiança* submitted to (and counter-signed by) the Minister, and the Strategic Plan for the period 2010-13. It twice met the self-evaluation group and discussed at length with the pro-president responsible for strategic planning. It raised relevant issues in all its meetings with staff and students.

3.2 The Team noted that the Strategic Plan updates the statistical data presented in earlier documents. The broad lines of analysis, however, remain the same: a declining and ageing population with a high level of illiteracy; student numbers falling to 2773 in 2009/10; public funding down, with an increased reliance on own resources; a new legal and statutory framework as the platform from which to plan.

3.3 The planning context is not only statutory, academic, regional, but also financial. IPBeja is small and its local catchment population is not rich. One third of its students are scholarship students; the majority of the total number depends on heavily subsidised meals and/or accommodation or both. The Team is aware of the huge financial pressures. It learnt in its discussions with the *Presidente* and the *Administradora* that state funding covers salaries but little else. While centralisation will make for economies of scale, two particular challenges remain: to achieve a situation in which fixed costs can be covered from sources other than tuition fee income; and to diversify revenue streams. Currently the Polytechnic is obliged to impose a 25% overhead levy on externally generated income, with the attendant risk of disincentive.

3.4 With the publication of the Strategic Plan, the planning cycle entered its second phase. The preliminary mapping of IPBeja's operational context had effectively been undertaken by the self-evaluation group. Three further implementation phases were envisaged: the drawing up of an action plan, with specified time and budget frames; the mobilisation of internal and external stakeholders; monitoring and evaluation.

3.5 The Team was impressed with the quality of the documentation and with the vigour and focus of the leadership provided by the presidency, ably supported by the *Serviços de Planeamento e Desenvolvimento Estratégico*. Two prior conditions of the successful transition from a dispersed school-based structure to the centralised model are the development of integrated management information systems and the creation of an institutional culture to which staff and students feel that they can belong. The Team was reassured that the first condition is being energetically addressed: reliable data collection, using compatible software, is progressing,



although not yet comprehensive (the Team learnt, for example, that the database of staff qualifications has still to be set up). The second condition, precisely because it is not technical, is more difficult to satisfy; it depends on the building of a consensus which, in the view of the Team, will in turn depend on enfranchisement, wide-ranging debate, transparency, and equity. In the Team's opinion – and at this early stage in the implementation process – IPBeja is on the right path. It is in the light of this positive appreciation that it offers the following considerations and recommendations.

3.5.1 The Self-Evaluation Report provided a clear and realistic assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of IPBeja, as well as of the attendant threats and opportunities. It proved an excellent instrument of guidance and inquiry for the Team, as well as – as noted above – a scoping and mapping exercise intrinsic to the strategic planning process. The group which prepared it was representative of all internal constituencies in IPBeja. It included the pro-presidents, whom the Team came to regard as key actors in both strategic planning and implementation, but who are not members of either the Management Council or the Coordinating Council. In discussion with the Team the group offered incisive analyses driven by a strong awareness of the need to generate a holistic understanding of the Polytechnic's actual and potential capacity. This being so, and in view of contribution it could make to improved internal communication, the Team considers that the group should retain a watching brief on the strategic planning process, in order to assist future monitoring.

➤ **The Team recommends that IPBeja prolong the life of the Self-Evaluation Group throughout the period of implementation and review of the Strategic Plan**

3.5.2 The Team notes that phase four of the planning cycle involves the mobilisation of internal and external stakeholders. It met a number of the latter during its first visit – including leading local private and public sector figures with a strong focus on regional development. It was impressed with their commitment to the region and to the role that IPBeja will be called upon to play. The Team had sight of the collaborative agreement which links the Polytechnic to the municipality and which extends to cooperation and development work in Africa. In large conurbations the external stakeholders may well be unfamiliar with each other's work and may well be relatively unknown to the staff and students of the institution concerned. In Beja – where the interactions of Polytechnic and city are underpinned by networks of kinship and other affiliations – this is less likely to be the case. There exists, therefore, a real opportunity for IPBeja's Strategic Plan to bring internal and external stakeholders together in activities that gain strength and momentum from their very visibility.

- **The Team recommends the systematic involvement of external stakeholders in the implementation of the Strategic Plan; and that this be supported by vigorous promotional activity**

3.5.3 The Strategic Plan (para.4.1) features six axes and twenty domains in which IPBeja intends to move forward in the period 2010-13. These represent an ambitious, coherent and comprehensive programme of engagement with local and regional needs. The Team feels that these are wholly appropriate and that the Polytechnic has articulated a mission which displays fitness of purpose, as well as a programme of measures which, when accomplished, will ensure that the commensurate fitness for purpose is secured and maintained. This Report will return to some of the axes and domains in subsequent sections. At this point, it wishes to endorse what it heard from a wide range of IPBeja colleagues: namely, that there is an ongoing need to review the levels and scope of taught course provision. It is true that a process of more or less permanent review has been put in place by the Bologna reforms and by other recent trends in the Portuguese polytechnic sector. In common with other institutions, for example, IPBeja raised the number of its *CET* (short specialist technology) students from 22 in 2005 to 234 in 2008. The new operating environment now in place, however, offers the possibility of developing Master programmes. It also – with the strengthening of academic leadership at departmental and course levels and the concomitant weakening of the boundaries between the Schools – gives greater scope for interdisciplinary course development, as well as for incorporating elements of the enterprise education provided by IPBeja's Centre for Knowledge Transfer (*CTC*) and for meeting the community's needs for lifelong learning.

- **The Team recommends the review and rationalisation of the course portfolio, in line with the need to further develop knowledge transfer, regional development and service to the community, including lifelong learning provision**

#### **4. Internationalisation**

4.1 In its discussions with the staff responsible for promoting the international dimension at central and School levels, the Team encountered expertise, commitment and aspiration. It also found, however, a situation which IPBeja shares with many other institutions, large and small: an almost exclusive focus on student mobility, manifest in the limited scope of the English language website; a very small mobility and cooperation office supported, with difficulty, by under-resourced school-based academics; an extensive portfolio of inter-institutional agreements, many of which appeared to be dormant; a number of active international collaborations managed in the departments and beyond the practical remit of the office; two

development projects, undertaken with external stakeholders, in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique; finally, the historic absence of a viable quality-controlled internationalisation policy embedded in the strategic planning cycle.

4.2 In the light of this, the Team welcomes the designation of internationalisation as one of the six axes of the Strategic Plan 2010-13. It particularly welcomes the idea that IPBeja should identify preferential institutional partners with which to collaborate. It welcomes, too, the inclusion of ERASMUS coordination and other partnership activities in the draft teacher evaluation policy. It is perhaps inevitable that in straitened circumstances academic staff will be required to multi-task; the Team feels that IPBeja is correct to give formal recognition to this. Recognition is only a first step towards resource and, of course, cost is an obstacle to the expansion of any activity that has yet to attain critical mass, but the Team is of the view that in this area there can be a real return on investment: a better-resourced infrastructure can allow the realisation of the potential synergies which exist between international, EU and national funding programmes, between student mobility and student recruitment, between collaborative research, joint course development and regional interventions.

4.2.1 However, a necessary pre-condition is the creation of an adequately resourced International Office, equipped to prospect, manage and report on externally funded activities, as well as to make input to the strategic planning process.

- **The Team recommends the expansion of the Mobility Office – to become an International Office, with a broader remit to cover researcher mobility and international collaborative links**

4.2.2 Foreign language provision can also contribute to the development of synergies, facilitating student mobility, joint course development, collaborative research, all with preferential partners, as well as to service to the community. To some extent, it can become a supplementary source of revenue. In its discussions with academic staff, the Team noted a widespread wish that this aspect of IPBeja's capacity be prioritised.

- **The Team recommends that IPBeja develop a language policy, to be supported by a Language Centre open to students, staff and the general public**

4.2.3 Given that there exist opportunities of mobility for academic, administrative and research staff in the EU-funded programmes, the Team suggests that IPBeja consider ways of incorporating them into its staff development and teacher/administrator evaluation activities.

- **The Team recommends a stronger focus on international staff mobility for all categories of staff**

## **5. Research and development, innovation and knowledge transfer**

5.1 Although the mission of IPBeja and that of the Portuguese polytechnic sector as a whole includes a commitment to 'guided' or applied research, and although the Schools are organic units of 'teaching and research', by general consent the research activity of IPBeja is low. This is not to say that it is non-existent: on the contrary, the Self-Evaluation Report lists the numerous activities undertaken in the period 2005-09. These nevertheless appear to exist in disciplinary pockets and to be essentially school-based, rather than coordinated responses to an over-arching strategic imperative. Many teachers/researchers – such is the logic of the Portuguese binary system – are affiliated also to the classical universities in Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra; this creates scope for significant research output, but its dynamic – from the point of IPBeja – is centrifugal. The Team notes that, in response to this situation, the Strategic Plan aims to put in place a sustainable level of research activity, featuring significant contributions to employability, knowledge transfer, innovation and incubation, and regional development.

5.2 The growth of a vibrant and focused research culture is a long-term venture. However, the Team is confident that it is a realistic objective. A number of favourable factors exist, notably, the requirement of Law 62/2007 that the complement of teachers contain one PhD per 30 students, of whom at least 50% must be full-time staff. The presidency has launched a staff development programme in order to satisfy this requirement and the Team is optimistic that this measure will build the capacity to offer Master degrees, beyond those listed in Annex 19 of the Self-Evaluation Report, in line with the region's developing needs as well as in conjunction with foreign partners.

5.3 The Team appreciates the role that applied research will be called upon to play in the delivery of IPBeja's mission. A number of factors suggest that it be given greater visibility in strategic planning and in the day-to-day management of IPBeja. These factors are: the centralisation permitted by the new Statutes; the opportunities for course development at Master level and the need to maintain the link between teaching and research; the staff development programme referred to above; the need to maximise access to EU and national research funds in support of local, regional, national and international collaborations; the potential for raising the level of regionally-targeted innovation and IPBeja's contribution to regional development. The Team perceives a need for these to be drawn together, by a member of senior management in touch with all aspects of IPBeja's business, into a coherent and integrated research strategy.

- **The Team recommends the development of a research policy, supported by a Research Office and led by a new Pro-President responsible for coordinating research activity and liaising with the Vasco da Gama Centre**

5.4 The Team's meeting with a group of active researchers confirmed the view that it had formed in discussion with the Schools. Research activity is dispersed, lacking in critical mass, and supported by a small Project Management Office with technical expertise but little access to the strategic planning process. The Team learnt, too, that the Scientific Council is heavily burdened with administrative tasks, relegating discussion of research policy to a position low on its agenda. At the same time, researchers reported that they were active in the staff development programme to increase the number of doctorates among junior colleagues and that the programme would eventually lead to the setting up of accredited research centres. This is a desirable outcome: the Team believes that it will be more easily secured, and aligned with institutional mission, if senior researchers are given a collective voice and an input to institutional strategy.

➤ **The Team recommends that IPBeja consider the setting up of a Scientific Advisory Board, composed of active researchers, to advise on the formulation of research policy**

5.5 As mentioned earlier, the Team benefited from the opportunity to meet external stakeholders, one of whom is chair of the *Conselho Geral*. They included experts from the regional development agency, the Beja airport and Alqueva projects, the city council, the regional health administration, sectoral bodies and local businesses. It was impressed with the level of private and public investment in the region, as well as with the scope for intervention (education, training, research and consultancy) available to IPBeja, particularly in the broad areas of agriculture, engineering, health and tourism.

5.6 In its subsequent discussions with staff from the Centre for Knowledge Transfer and the Vasco da Gama Centre, the Team found that there was scope for strengthening the interface between Polytechnic and the region. The *CTC* looks both inwards and outwards, delivering optional credit-bearing modules on enterprise and entrepreneurship, bringing external speakers into student workshops, and supervising student projects. Its three members of staff, however, are all on part-time secondment from academic departments and not well placed to expand *CTC*'s activities in general or to extend work placement provision in particular. Vasco da Gama, meanwhile, faces outwards. As a private not-for-profit entity, set up to qualify for external funding for which IPBeja, as a public institution, is not eligible, it has a strong rationale. It, too, however, in setting up multi-disciplinary teams to address regional needs, is obliged to call on already overstretched staff. The Team believes that the outlook for both centres is positive: there exists the possibility that they might move into new premises; they will benefit from improved internal communications and from an incisive research and development strategy; their readiness to respond to regional needs is limited only by insufficient critical mass.

- **The Team recommends higher levels of human and material resource for the Vasco da Gama Centre and for the Centre for Knowledge Transfer**

## **6. Quality assurance**

6.1 As mentioned earlier, data collection and management systems capable of integrating information generated at School and department levels are only now beginning to gather momentum. This task has been undertaken by the Quality and Evaluation Office. Indeed, the whole quality assurance apparatus, dependent as it is on very recent legislation and on the policies and procedures yet to be put into effect by the new national quality assurance agency, is still under construction.

6.2 A key feature will be the Quality and Evaluation Council set up by the new statutes. It will establish a multi-annual schedule of self-evaluation activities and define a methodology in line with good practice at European level and with ESG in particular. Its peer review character is strengthened by the participation of four external members drawn from other higher education institutions. Its scope will certainly include programme review, teacher evaluation, and the quality assurance of ancillary services. The Team was left uncertain as to whether research activities will also figure in its brief: it believes that they should, given the link between research and teaching, the centrality of applied research to the IPBeja mission, and the need for internal assessments of research activity to complement evaluations undertaken by the national funding body. Overall, however, the Team is reassured that quality assurance procedures are being developed as a matter of high priority and that the scope for generating a creative and participatory quality culture is substantial. The Self-Evaluation Report notes that these developments do not take place in a vacuum and that IPBeja has considerable accumulated experience of academic quality assurance and self-assessment.

6.3 It is nevertheless important that new policies and procedures put in place at Polytechnic level remain sensitive to specific disciplinary needs; the Team found that certain groups of staff had anxieties on this score. While views regarding library provision varied, there was strong consensus across the Schools that teachers were over-stretched and that their heavy workload impacted on the quality of service they could provide. In this regard – and in order to consolidate an authentic quality culture – the Team notes the need to ensure that quality assurance is managed in the interests of transparency and equity and that its outcomes are fed into the strategic planning process.

- **The Team recommends that IPBeja consolidate the steps already taken to develop a strong quality culture, in the sense defined by the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance [ESG]**

6.4 ESG regards the student body as a key agent in the quality assurance process. While the Team appreciates the role of the pedagogic committees and the use of student questionnaires in programme review and teacher evaluation, it was not clear that these were used uniformly and with effective feedback. It is true that teaching ability is given little recognition in national labour agreements; on the other hand, students felt strongly that the shortening of first degree courses by the Bologna reforms required quality assurance to be much more vigorous than previously. The Team's comments on the office of the Student *Provedor* have already been stated. It hopes, too, that the four school-based student associations will follow the logic of consolidation and centralisation, in order to ensure that they continue to have a strong voice in quality assurance and enhancement.

- **The Team recommends that IPBeja consider measures to further raise the level of student involvement in quality assurance; and that the four student associations consider merging in order to participate more effectively in quality assurance**

6.5 IPBeja's mission commits it to the provision of education, training and research which have practical application. The focus on the use of learning outcomes in curriculum design prompted by ESG is particularly appropriate. Once the national and local quality assurance systems are up and running, student assessment and teacher evaluation can be re-shaped accordingly. The Team suggests that IPBeja use the new parameters in its review of the course portfolio mentioned above (para.3.5.3), with a view to completing the transition to Bologna and to embedding good practices of student-centred learning. In addition to small group work and problem-based curricula, these might also include blended and internal distance modes, some of which, in turn, may be deployed in the context of services to the community and in-company training. The Team's visits to the Schools showed that such practices exist, although without constituting the dominant mode of course delivery. No doubt one aspect of the shift of emphasis to departments and of centralisation will be an audit of the variety of learning and teaching modes, in relation to national benchmarking, accompanied by analyses and rationalisation of teacher and student workload, and backed up by staff development. This is a task of some magnitude and one that implies both strong leadership and appropriate input to institutional strategy. As in the case of research and development, therefore, the Team believes that IPBeja should consider locating a specialist responsibility in the presidency.

- **The Team recommends that IPBeja strengthen its focus on student-centred learning and on e-learning; and that this task be given to a new Pro-President for Learning and Teaching, charged with putting in place appropriate staff development programmes**

## 7. Conclusions

7.1 It has been a privilege to observe IPBeja in its efforts to confront its challenges. Such was the rapidity of the Bologna reforms in Portugal, so significant have been the decline in public funding and the demographics of the region, that the Polytechnic has been unable to enjoy a gentle transition period between old and new regimes. The IPBeja community is to be congratulated on its response, articulated by a combination of strong leadership, acute and sensitive self-evaluation, the mobilisation of external stakeholders, and a body of staff and students with high aspirations.

7.2 The Team is fully aware that many of its recommendations imply investment at a time when IPBeja is driven by the shortfall in public funding to seek supplementary sources of revenue. However, it believes that none of them are luxuries and that all are in line with the explicit or implicit objectives in the Strategic Plan 2010-13. Critical mass cannot be invented *ab nihilo* and the Team believes that there are synergies which are still to be fully exploited. It trusts that its recommendations can assist in the consolidation of the gains achieved by the restructuring and help create the sense of institutional identity that can carry IPBeja forward.

7.3 The Team remains persuaded that quality assurance and enhancement are integrating forces, particularly when all constituencies are participant. It is confident that IPBeja's policies and procedures, when fully up and running, will translate into institutional strategy and supply the credibility needed in the search for preferential partners at home and abroad.

7.4 Finally, the Team once again thanks all of those whom it had the pleasure of meeting during its two visits to Beja. It wishes them – collectively and individually – a very successful and rewarding future.

## 8. Summary of recommendations

8.1 The Team recommends that IPBeja consider ways of further improving internal communications to support the institutional restructuring

8.2 The team recommends that IPBeja increase the number of Pro-Presidents, in order to complement and support the restructuring and to promote particular policy strands

8.3 The team recommends that IPBeja consider ways of giving the Student Provedor an *ex officio* seat on the General Council

8.4 The Team recommends that IPBeja prolong the life of the Self-Evaluation Group throughout the period of implementation and review of the Strategic Plan



8.5 The Team recommends the systematic involvement of external stakeholders in the implementation of the Strategic Plan; and that this be supported by vigorous promotional activity

8.6 The Team recommends the review and rationalisation of the course portfolio, in line with the need to further develop knowledge transfer, regional development and service to the community, including lifelong learning provision

8.7 The Team recommends the expansion of the Mobility Office – to become an International Office, with a broader remit to cover researcher mobility and international collaborative links

8.8 The Team recommends that IPBeja develop a language policy, to be supported by a Language Centre open to students, staff and the general public

8.9 The Team recommends a stronger focus on international staff mobility for all categories of staff

8.10 The Team recommends the development of a research policy, supported by a Research Office and led by a new Pro-President responsible for coordinating research activity and liaising with the Vasco da Gama Centre

8.11 The Team recommends that IPBeja consider the setting up of a Scientific Advisory Board, composed of active researchers, to advise on the formulation of research policy

8.12 The Team recommends higher levels of human and material resource for the Vasco da Gama Centre and for the Centre for Knowledge Transfer

8.13 The Team recommends that IPBeja consolidate the steps already taken to develop a strong quality culture, in the sense defined by the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance [ESG]

8.14 The Team recommends that IPBeja consider measures to further raise the level of student involvement in quality assurance; and that the four student associations consider merging in order to participate more effectively in quality assurance

8.15 The Team recommends that IPBeja strengthen its focus on student-centred learning and on e-learning; and that this task be given to a new Pro-President for Learning and Teaching, charged with putting in place appropriate staff development programmes