EUA (European University Association)
Institutional Evaluation Programme

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ALGARVE
EUA REVIEWERS' REPORT

July 2002

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1.0 Foreword

In 1993 the CRE, now the European University Association (EUA), decided to offer its 500 member universities the possibility to be reviewed so that their strengths and weaknesses in the area of strategic management including quality management might be assessed. To date about eighty European universities have requested a CRE review and some have subsequently asked for follow-up visits to monitor progress made.

The goal of the EUA review is to offer to the university an external diagnostic by university leaders who have experience of different higher education systems in Europe. This diagnostic considers the quality issues and the main actors in the university's daily decision-making process. The EUA does not wish to provide the university with a blueprint for its development; rather the review process is consultative and should be seen as a tool to help institutional leaders as they prepare for change.

By reviewing institutions in different countries the EUA hopes to disseminate examples of good practice, to validate common concepts of strategic thinking, and to elaborate shared ideas on quality that will help member universities to reorient their strategic development while strengthening a quality culture in Europe. During the review the university is helped to examine how it defines its medium and long term aims, to look at the external and internal constraints shaping its development, to discuss strategies that will enhance its quality while taking account of these constraints.

The CRE Review Team for the University of the Algarve consisted of

Professor Dirk Bresters, former Rector, University of Amsterdam, Holland (Chair)

Professor Winfried Müller, Rector, University of Klagenfurt, Austria

Professor Don McQuillan, Director of Quality Assurance, National University of Ireland Dublin, UCD (Secretary).

Originally the team also included Professor Emil Spjøtvoll, Rector of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. However Professor Spjøtvoll fell ill and was unable to attend the preliminary visit. To our utmost regret he died soon after. In consultation with EUA it was decided to carry on with a team consisting of three members.

2.0 Introduction

The Review process consisted of several phases. The University first produced a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) prepared by the Evaluation Unit. The report was a valuable source of information for the Review Team. It laid out clearly and succinctly the academic, administrative and resource structure of the University, and it was reasonably reflective and self-critical. It explained the background to the establishment of this young institution which has a structure that is essentially unique in Portugal, consisting as it does of a university sub-system and a polytechnic sub-system of about equal size. It is an institution in the process of defining its internal relationships, a process that entails a great deal of debate at all levels within the University. This debate is ongoing and is being conducted in a vigorous and open manner by staff and students. New statutes have been recently agreed, faculties and schools established and formal department structures are being organised.

The SER points to several issues and problems yet to be resolved. Two of these merit special mention here since they arose time and time again in discussions with the Rectorate and staff throughout the two visits. The first of these is the need to develop a harmonious and fruitful relationship between the University and polytechnic sub-systems. It seems that successive governments have given no indication of a clear national policy in this area and this has had an inhibiting effect on developments. However the Team would like to suggest that this lack of initiative on the part of the government could present the UA with an opportunity, and a challenge, to develop its own strategies and to create something unique and valuable in Portuguese higher education. The second issue is the need to achieve a balance between teaching and research. The initial drive to achieve a good research profile was quite natural in a young institution, but now there is a need, as the University is well aware, to take stock of its obligation to provide a first class teaching and learning environment for its students.

It is clear that senior members of the University made important contributions to the preparation of the report. What was not clear however was the level of involvement of staff generally, of the student organisations, or of stakeholders. A section explaining the methodology employed in its preparation would have been helpful.

The Preliminary Visit took place on 17-19 February 2002. This enabled the Team to become acquainted with the University, to focus initial consideration on the areas of

Organisation and Governance,

Evaluation and the Quality Process,

Resources,

Autonomy,

Capacity for Change,

and to identify areas of more detailed questioning for the Main Visit. Subsequently the Team requested some further documentation and this was provided. The Main Visit took place on 5-8 May 2002.

Over the two visits the Team met with a large number of people. These included the rector, the two vice-rectors, the pro-rector, deans and other members of the faculties and schools, members of the evaluation unit, members of the senate, members of the administrative council, professors, students, senior administrative staff, representatives of trade unions, employers and representatives of regional authorities and industries. The Team visited the Gambelas Campus, site of the University sub-system, and the Penha Campus, site of the Polytechnic sub-system. We also toured several faculties and visited the impressive new Library building and the Computing Centre.

The discussions held were always helpful, open, friendly and frank. At all levels the goodwill and strong commitment to excellence were clearly in evidence.

On the final day of the review visit the Team presented the oral report indicating the principal conclusions and recommendations to an audience consisting of University leaders invited by the Rector. This written report is a full exposition of the Team's conclusions.

We would like to acknowledge warmly the co-operation and wonderful hospitality we received throughout the two visits. A special word of thanks is due to the rector, Professor Adriano Pimpão, the vice-rectors, Professor Isabel Cruz and Professor José Ferraz, and to the pro-rector Professor Conceição Abreu who were especially helpful during the two visits. We trust that our joint efforts will together provide a sound springboard for the University as it moves into the next phase of its evolution.

3.0 Constraints and Institutional Norms

3.1 Profile of the University

The University of the Algarve in its present form was established in 1988 from the merger by government legislation of two institutions already in existence since 1979: the University of the Algarve and the Polytechnic Institute of Faro. The university sub-system is located on the Gambelas campus and the polytechnic sub-system on the Penha campus. The buildings on each campus are of course quite new and make an excellent impression. Nevertheless it emerged in our discussions that space is in short supply, especially for some of the new staff, a position that will hopefully be alleviated when planned new buildings are completed. The University has another campus in Portimão that has at the moment only temporary facilities, and a campus in Vila Real de Santo Antonio.

In academic year 2000/01 there were 10,398 registered students in the University, of which 9,658 were undergraduates. There is a relative balance between the number of undergraduates in each of the systems, with 4,420 in the university and 5,238 in the polytechnic system.

As of December 2001 there were 363 and 353 teachers in the university and polytechnic systems respectively, most of whom were full time. In the university system there are three grades of Professor, namely Auxiliar, Associado and Catedrático (for all of which a PhD is required), and two grades of Assistente. In the polytechnic system there are two grades of Professor, namely Adjunto and Coordenador (for each of which a Masters, or equivalent, is required), and two levels of Assistente. In terms of salary those of Professor Associado (university system) and Professor Coordenador (polytechnic system) are the same, as are the salaries at the lower grade of Assistente in each system.

The polytechnic sub-system offers a three-year bachelors degree followed by a two-year licenciatura. The university sub-system offers a four-year licenciatura, followed by a two-year Masters and a PhD.

The university and polytechnic sub-systems are divided into five Faculties and four Schools respectively as follows:

Faculty of Engineering of Natural Resources (FERN)
Faculty of Marine Sciences and Environment (FCMA)
Faculty of Economics (FE)
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences (FCHS)
Faculty of Sciences and Technology (FCT)
School of Education (ESE)
School of Technology (EST)
School of Tourism and Hotel Management (ESGHT)
School of Nursing of Faro (ESEF)

In addition the creation of the School of Health Sciences and Technologies was approved in 2001.

The statutes give full scientific, pedagogic, administrative and financial autonomy to the Faculties and Schools.

All the teaching in the University is organised by the Faculties and Schools, and financed by the Ministry of Education. Research is organised separately in Research Centres and financed by competitive grants from the Ministry of Science and various funding agencies. These arrangements may change since the new government has merged the two ministries.

3.2 Reason for participating in the EUA Evaluation

In its introduction the SER explains the reasons for the University's participation in the evaluation programme as follows:

"This is the right moment for the University of the Algarve to reflect upon its present situation in order to define and restate strategies, delineate measures and establish priorities, having present that a sound institution is characterised by its capacity to respond in a balanced and adequate manner to present needs and expectations, while at the same time preparing its own future.

Since 1995 the University has been developing an evaluation procedure involving external committees….The results will enable the University to improve teaching standards. The connection between teaching and research, and the transfer of knowledge to the productive sector represent additional problems which are fundamental to the future of the University and its consolidation in the national and international scene. The University has identified these problems and will try to answer them. However this self-evaluation report forces the University to undergo a self-analysis that will contribute to the identification of other problems, probably associated with present ones.

The application of the University of the Algarve to the 'Institutional Quality Audit Programme' is thus a request for an external assessment of the internal initiatives of the University. Some fundamental issues may be identified:

Has the University made the correct strategic options? Is the University aware of all its weak and strong points? Is the University ready to promote itself internationally?

Thus the evaluation of the University of the Algarve will help the University to prepare itself for future challenges, while knowing that they are constantly changing and aware of the competitive and global nature of the world."

3.3   Position of University, Mission

The University of the Algarve is a new institution with a young and enthusiastic staff who have brought to the University a wide and varied experience of other systems and other approaches to higher education. Add to that the existence of the University and polytechnic sub-systems, equally balanced (both in terms of staff and student numbers) under the same roof, and it is clear that the University of the Algarve faces an exciting future of challenge and opportunity. The Team understands that the University of Aveiro has similar sub-systems but in that case the university sub-system significantly outweighs the polytechnic.

Thus the University of the Algarve is in a unique position within the Portuguese higher education system, and in the view of the Team is well positioned to fulfil its obvious national promise, especially if it can successfully meet the challenge of the merger of university and polytechnic. Already the University is attracting students from all parts of the country and its research profile has improved steadily over the years.

The University has a strong regional position and is highly regarded in the Algarve. This was very evident in our meeting with local authorities, industrialists and entrepreneurs in the course of the Preliminary Visit when all of them, without exception, spoke with obvious pride of their University. Their relationship with the rector was warm and clearly of long standing. As the SER notes in its introduction ''the identification of the University with the region has generated a great amount of expectation in the companies, public institutions and general public, thus highlighting the University's social responsibility''. The polytechnic sub-system seems to be especially well embedded locally, with excellent job prospects for its graduates, and close relations with local industry especially tourism and building.

The University is aware of the need to build strong relations with foreign institutions at both the research and pedagogic levels. However the University, as a young institution, decided to prioritise the strengthening of its position both regionally and nationally. Of course the Bologna and subsequent Declarations are bound to have consequences for the University, with issues such as readability of degrees, employability of graduates across borders, and accreditation to be faced sooner rather than later.

We shall return to these topics in later sections of the report. They are closely related to how the University sees itself developing over the coming years and the suitability of the mission, aims and objectives of the University, Faculties, Schools and Departments.

The stated mission of the University of the Algarve (SER, Section 2.2.1) is "to create, transmit, and promote the dissemination of culture, science and technology''.

 Its fundamental aims are the following:

- Humanist, cultural, scientific and technical education;

- Fundamental and applied research;

- Community service on a reciprocal basis;

- Scientific, technical and cultural exchange with similar national and foreign institutions;

- Contributing, in the course of its activities, to international understanding, especially in connection with countries whose official language is Portuguese as well as with European countries;

- Contributing to the development of the country and particularly of Algarve.

The Review Team also received a document entitled ''Key strategies in the University of the Algarve Development Plan for 2000-2006''. The ''Programme of Candidature'' of the present rector was also available. Subsequently, and at the request of the Team, a document was made available containing the objectives of each Faculty and School.

All of these documents make valuable contributions to an understanding of how the University and Faculties see their role and their aspirations for future development. As might be expected there is considerable overlap. For instance most of the Faculties and Schools speak of

- Improving the quality of teaching;

- Introducing new courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level;

- Partnerships with other institutions both national and foreign;

- Fostering links with business and companies;

- Strengthening scientific potential by applying for scientific project funding.

Certainly all of these objectives are consistent with the stated mission of the University, and are highly desirable. The fact that these objectives, and several others, feature in so many of the documents implies that they are in fact University-wide objectives and not just local. However there is no impression that they are the result of a coherent University-wide drive to articulate a common vision of the future with regard to these and many other desirable goals. As well as that they speak only of what should be done but we hear nothing about how and when they should be done. They are aspirational with no indication of a time scale for implementation or of the instruments that will be employed to implement them.

With this in mind, and in spite of the statement that "the University does not intend to do in the short term any further changes to its mission statement (SER, Section 2.2.1)'', it seems to the Team that the University community should come together to agree on a coherent, encompassing mission statement with a detailed set of objectives. The basis of

such a statement is already available in the present mission statement and fundamental aims of the University, together with the documents from Faculties and Schools.

At this crucial time in its development, facing so many challenges and opportunities, the University needs an overarching mission statement that is commensurate with its potential to become a centre of excellence. Such statements usually include not only a vision of where the institution would like to be ten or twenty years from now but also a Strategic Plan for development over the medium and long term, with clearly stated goals and a timetable for their completion. We suggest that each Academic Department, Faculty, School and Administration Section should have its own mission statement. These statements should of course be consistent with each other and with the overarching mission Statement of the University. It might be helpful to use comparisons with the strategies adopted in other universities

The process we are suggesting requires a great deal of consultation within the University. However experience elsewhere indicates that the University that carries through this task successfully, and mobilises its staff behind the effort, improves its overall performance, and by focusing on agreed goals makes better use of its scarce resources.

The Merger of Polytechnic and University

Any discussion of the future goals and aspirations of the University of the Algarve must include the issue of the merger between the original University and the Polytechnic, and how the merged institution may evolve over the coming years. It is fair to say that this was the single most discussed topic in the course of the two visits.

The Review Team comes to this question well aware that we are outsiders who, after a few short days on the two campuses, are unlikely to be in a position to appreciate all the nuances and sensitivities involved. In the discussions we held with staff and rectorate some of the obstacles to moving forward were pointed out to us: the historic differences between universities and polytechnics, with the associated loyalties to tried and true ways; the potential for damaging competition in a small number of areas; the staffing divergences noted above in paragraph 3.1.

In addition we understand that successive governments have been slow to provide the University with a policy on how it should proceed in this matter. As we said earlier this may be a blessing in disguise, giving the University time to develop its own strategies as to how the merger should evolve, and to exploit the synergies inherent in the merging of two dynamic organisations whose educational goals are not so dissimilar. The prospect of creating a successful institution that is unique in Portugal must surely be a tempting one, and we urge the University to devote its energies to its realisation.

3.4   Organisation and Governance

The top management structure of the University is established by Law and consists of the University Assembly, the Rector, the Senate and the Administrative Council.   The University Council decides on statutes and elects the Rector, while the remit of the other three elements follows in general terms the usual norms.   It is also laid down that each Faculty and School shall have a Representative Council, an Executive Council and a Scientific, Pedagogical or Scientific-Pedagogical Council. The University of the Algarve has established by statute separate Scientific and Pedagogical Councils and in addition two other councils, namely the Advisory Council and the Administrative Council, in each Organic Unit.

Student and teaching staff representation is extensive, with parity required between elected student and staff numbers. Many other constituencies have a legal right to be represented.   While the Law gives the University a great deal of discretion in the number of elected members it has in fact opted for larger rather than smaller numbers.   For example in the Senate, for each Organic Unit there is one student representative ex officio and four elected student representatives. With ten Organic Units (if we include the new School of Health Sciences and Technologies) this gives a total of fifty student representatives.   Given the parity condition and all the other constituencies to be represented this makes for a very large Senate indeed.

The Review Team recognises that in a new University it is important to give a public voice to many people. This is obviously an important part of building a new academic community and forging links between the many diverse elements that go to make up a large and complex organisation. In this context it is also crucial to have student participation.

However the Review Team has the impression that the University is overly organised, with too many committees, committees which must overlap significantly given the requirements on wide representation.

More importantly we feel that the Senate and the University Assembly are simply too large to function effectively and within reasonable time limits.   The establishment of the Co-ordinator Committee in the Senate (SER, Part II, page 2) may help to alleviate the problem in that body but the basic difficulties will remain. Lengthy meetings that often end inconclusively, with special constituencies engaged in fighting their own corner, may lead to inertia.

In the interests of good and effective governance the Review Team suggests that this is a good time in the development of the University to look again at the statutes pertaining to the number of elected representatives in the top management bodies, especially the Senate and the Assembly Council. This should be accompanied by a drive to perfect the internal communications capacity of the University to ensure that all will have an input into the decision-making process.

The new statutes create in the Senate two so-called Education Committees, one for the university and one for the polytechnic sub-system. These committees will meet separately to

(a) Propose appropriate measures for the development and financing of the sub-system
(b) Approve the creation, modification, suspension or elimination of courses of the sub-system

A decision of these committees becomes final unless the President or the majority of members of the committee proposes its ratification by the Senate plenary.

The Team has mixed feelings about this arrangement. It understands the wish of each sub-system to drive its own spending plans and to control its pedagogic offerings. Nevertheless this statute will make the evolution to one corporate identity difficult, and brings us back to the question as to how the University sees its future. In addition we feel that an unnecessarily heavy burden is placed on the Rector by the provision that, acting alone, he may send a decision of an Education Committee to the Senate for ratification. We suggest that the interests of the University and of the Rector would be better served if the option to intervene in this way were taken by a small committee chaired by the Rector.

3.5   Resources

The Self Evaluation Report gives a clear and detailed account of the University's revenue, with 59% coming from the Ministry of Education, 20% from student fees, services rendered, etc, 8% from research funding, and 12% from PIDDAC, a framework for government investment and expenditure (2001 figures). The total budget for that year amounted to Euro56,889,257.

The sum allocated by the Government meets the basic expenditures of the University and has been steadily increasing over recent years, with a jump of 13.71% in 2001. The amount is calculated on the basis of a national formula and this same formula is then used in the allocations to Faculties and Schools. Staff expenditure absorbs the largest slice of this money, accounting for 85% in 2001. Money from student fees, services rendered, etc can only be used to improve the quality of higher education, for instance the acquisition of equipment, books for the Library, and so on. Research funding is obtained mostly from external agencies, the majority from the EU. PIDDAC funds are used for the construction, maintenance and repair of buildings.

It is clear that the University has little room for manoeuvre in the area of finance. The Research Centres will of course continue to apply for more grants, and the Team applauds the good intentions of the Faculties in this direction expressed in the documents on future objectives. There is an obvious need however to find new ways of generating funds, however modest, to assist the University to fulfil its mission. This need is by no means unique to the University of the Algarve, so it may be of interest to note ways in which universities elsewhere have tackled this problem through making use of their academic expertise and their good will in the community.

Many universities around the world have formed a University Fund Raising Committee to seek funding in a systematic fashion. These committees are often highly successful in attracting money to the university, and especially in obtaining support for special projects. Here the good will already established by the University in the Algarve could be important in attracting prominent people of influence in the community to serve on such a committee.

Another possible source of revenue is to be found in the area of continuing education, a theme mentioned in our meeting with employers and already on the agenda of the University. Joint research projects, both local and international are also possibilities. These activities are of course pedagogically and scientifically important in themselves, but can also be important sources of funding.

In this connection we make a final suggestion. One of the fundamental aims of the University is to develop closer ties with countries whose official language is Portuguese. We note that many institutions in Europe are attracting fee-paying students from abroad and they have found that significant funds can be generated in this way. For example each year English and Irish Universities receive many hundreds of students from English speaking countries for a semester or two and these students pay realistic fees. The University might explore the possibility of emulating this practice by attracting students from Brazil on this basis. This initiative would of course require sound organisational back-up and a clear and complete description of the courses on offer, a topic which we will discuss in more detail in 4.4.1 Teaching and Learning.

3.6   Evaluation and Quality Processes

The Review Team met with the Head of the Evaluation Unit and with the Co-ordinator of Evaluation in the polytechnic sub-system. In addition we had at our disposal the document explaining the legal framework of the national evaluation system entitled "Evaluation of the Higher Education System'' (Law of 21 November, 1994), together with a protocol on the role of the Foundation of the Portuguese Universities (CRUP).

It was explained to us that the evaluation scheme was begun by CRUP in the first instance, and later the government entered the picture and made an agreement with CRUP. Later this was extended to Polytechnics and private Universities. Our understanding is that in practice the evaluation is of teaching and related topics only, and not of research, although in fact Article 3 of the Law mentions research specifically. There are separate Boards to oversee the evaluation of Universities and Polytechnics and the evaluations are on different cycles. Research Centres are evaluated by the Foundation of Science and Technology when they apply for funding, and this usually involves review by foreign experts, though not exclusively. At the request of the Team we were shown extracts from the National Evaluation Reports on two courses, one from the FCMA and one from the FCT. Finally the Administrative and Financial Services are reviewed by law every two years.

In addition to these formal external evaluation procedures, internal evaluation of teaching takes place in some Faculties and Schools, with questionnaires distributed to students.

This seems to be quite informal and dependent on local initiatives. Furthermore some of the students we spoke to were unhappy with the lack of transparency and follow-up in this process, and it seems that as a result of this some students intend organising their own questionnaires on courses and teaching.

It is important that the University be seen to use the information that has been collected in student questionnaires. The feedback from students can help in the on-going discussion on Teaching and Learning and can lead to the initiation of continuing dialogue between professors and students, an important element in developing a climate where improvements can take place. This will also have a long-term positive effect on the process as a whole since students will become convinced that their views are being taken into account. Staff development is closely related to the points considered here, and we note the SER's concern and interest in this area. It is important that professors get some training in teaching and modern presentation skills... indeed this should be part of the University's routine activity. This is particularly true of professors who have been working in the non-university sector and come to teaching later in their careers. We will return to this point when we consider Teaching and Learning.

It is difficult to gauge the effect, if any, that the national evaluation scheme has had on the departments and courses evaluated so far. In principle the recommendations made in the evaluation report are supposed to be implemented. The reports are also sent to the Minister who has the legal power to impose sanctions for failure to implement. However it seems that the Minister has never intervened to date and is unlikely to do so in the future. Thus it is difficult for the Team to comment on the effectiveness of the national scheme. It has certainly introduced an element of public accountability for the way in which Universities do their work since the results of the evaluations are made public and commented upon in the press. On the other hand quality improvement must also be an indispensable outcome of an effective review system and indeed quality improvement is explicitly mentioned in Article 4 of the Law where one of the stated objectives is "to promote the quality increase of the activities performed''.

From various comments made to us we got the impression that in general teachers are not enthusiastic about the evaluation programme. This is a common reaction by academics everywhere, especially when the scheme is externally driven. It can easily lead to a defensive 'them' versus 'us' attitude with the result that the process becomes a valueless paper exercise and a waste of time. Recent developments in the UK point to the dangers inherent in this approach to evaluation. In Portugal on the other hand we understand that the evaluation scheme is essentially owned by the Universities and since the Ministry is maintaining a hands-off attitude the way is clear to fulfilling the spirit as well as the letter of the law.

With this in mind we would like to make the following comments. Due to pressure of time in a busy schedule and the obvious language difficulties it was not possible for the Review Team to study any of the Self-evaluation Reports prepared by departments for the national evaluation. We do not know the level of detail required or of hands-on involvement of the teachers. However the careful preparation of an analytic and reflective self-evaluation is believed by many experts to be the key to an effective review.

When conscientiously and honestly prepared, with input from staff and students (both past and present), employers and other users, and the courage to face up to the true state of affairs in the department, it can have a truly transformational effect. It can be the driver to achieving excellence in all aspects of the work of the department. Indeed quality improvement will be an almost inevitable consequence of that procedure. The site visit by peer academics and the subsequent report then become a validation and not an intrusive audit. Such a procedure also has the merit of bringing together the two systems already in place, namely the formal national process and the local initiatives in Schools and Faculties.

The process outlined above is, as H.R.Kells notes in his book ''A Guide to Self Evaluation in Higher Education'' (Oryx Press,1995), characterised by an emphasis on

(i)   self-assessment, on self-regulatory activity in general and on the infrastructure for it in the University

(ii)   institutional goals, and on the decisions for improvement that are made following a review involving external assessors.

He goes on to say "Universities act more maturely in these matters if they are treated as trusted adults...and if they are wise enough to seize the responsibility for controlling the evaluation scheme and for self-regulation. The less government uses reductionist indicators and comparative data...the more effective, useful, and change-oriented the schemes become".

The creation of such a process is related to other important issues mentioned in the SER and will have beneficial consequences elsewhere. Care of students will improve, an important issue to which we will return in 4.1.2 Student Care. The University will be more attractive to new students, an important consideration in light of demographic developments and the resulting need to be competitive. And of course good quality procedures have an important part to play in the context of the Bologna and Prague Declarations and the creation of a European Higher Education Area.

A problem that many universities meet when they start on this road is a reluctance on the part of some staff to face the challenge of change, or even to accept that any change is necessary. While the University of the Algarve is clearly aware of the problems inherent in managing change, the Review Team would like to emphasise at the outset the crucial role that the leadership of the University can play, and should be seen to play, in the missionary work necessary to convert the doubters. And of course dialogue between all members of the university community is central to creating good will, if not total and enthusiastic acceptance.

The University's Evaluation Support Unit will have a crucial role to play in such an enterprise. Its existence will have to be formalised, with full time staff and appropriate office space, as the University is well aware: "it may be necessary to widen and strengthen the scope and competencies of the Evaluation Support Unit in order to consolidate its role in the University and at the same time promote its consonance with strategic perspectives of the University (SER, Section 3.3.2)''.

Several other procedures affect the quality of performance at the University of the Algarve. These include the appointment of new staff, the number of students accepted, the selection of entering students and the related issue of their formation and motivation, as well as the examination and selection system. All of these matters are raised in the SER and the extra documentation supplied to the Team. The academic staff appointment procedures are common to all Universities in Portugal and are quite rigorous and transparent. The selection of new students is out of the hands of the University as it is based on a national applications system. As to formation of students as they pass through the University, their motivation, and the examination system, it is difficult for outsiders to comment on the basis of two brief visits. In this section on quality issues we merely observe that the failure rates in most courses seem quite high. Comments from some students indicated a certain level of unhappiness with the quality of teaching and an over emphasis on research. Lack of transparency in the information available on course content was also mentioned. All of these issues are related to student care and will be discussed in 4.1.2.

The number of students seems set at 10,000, and the University feels it can maintain this number over the coming years. We have already observed that given the demographic changes forecast for coming years it will be important for universities to be able to attract the desired number of students. Competition for students between universities will almost certainly become a factor in the future, possibly exacerbated by the creation of new universities. The University is aware of all this. With this in mind we note that the polytechnic sub-system has begun gathering information systematically on their students, where they come from, where they go on graduation, and so on. This is an excellent initiative and the Team urges the University as a whole to build and extend this type of database for many reasons, not least because it will prove invaluable in the more competitive environment envisioned above.

4.0 Capacity for Institutional Change

4.1 Scholarship

On page seventeen the SER spells out a basic issue. ''The problem between the role of teacher and researcher is extremely evident in the Portuguese situation. On the one hand, the central element for promotion in an academic career is scientific activity (namely, through a Mestrado degree in the polytechnic career and PhD in the university career), which has resulted in a devaluation of the pedagogical activities. On the other hand, the expansion of the system, the heterogeneity of the target publics and the levels of failure have again placed the emphasis on teaching methods and techniques as decisive elements for the success of the learning process.'' This problem, which of course is not unique to Portugal, has been exacerbated by the system used to fund universities, which meant that teaching was financed by the Ministry of Education while research was financed by the Ministry of Science and Technology. The latter consisted of modest grants to finance specific projects. The block grant to the University from the Ministry of Education covered running expenses including teachers' salaries, and as the SER makes clear this leaves little over to meet other needed expenditures.

The new government has joined the two ministries into one so there is some reason for optimism that the situation may be about to change. Certainly the Team feels that change is necessary. While all staff members are adversely affected by the low level of funding for research, the system is particularly hard on new young staff members. We heard complaints from many of these that they were faced with two problems. One is lack of space. However we were assured that this problem will be greatly alleviated when planned new buildings are completed. The other is the difficulty of getting start-up funds to get their research going, which will in turn enable them to apply for project funding. Research publications are the basis for promotion so the pressure to be active and productive is great.

The student perspective is different. In many of our discussions with students they expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching they were getting in the University, though this dissatisfaction was more pronounced in the University rather than the polytechnic sub-system.

4.1.1 Teaching and Learning

Faculties, Schools

In our extensive discussions with the Deans, staff in general, and students, there was very little opposition expressed to the new structures. There was general agreement that the University was now ready to move ahead.

It is important however that close collaboration should be maintained. We urge the Faculties and Schools to work closely together in their research and teaching activities,

and to avoid the 'fortress faculty' phenomenon that is prevalent in many universities. In particular it should be possible for students to move across boundaries to take subjects suitable to their study plan. In this connection the Team applauds the decision of the University ''to consider the possibility for students to take up optional subjects from scientific fields other than those associated with each specific course'' (SER, Section 2.2.1).

We emphasise again that it will be crucial to achieving harmonious development that the Faculties and Schools have clear and mutually consistent statements of mission. These statements will include a strategic profile spelling out details on research, interdisciplinary activity, student care, and so on. Timetables for the achievement of goals should be included. As we noted previously It would be helpful to use comparisons with the strategies adopted in other universities.

Teaching

Over the two visits the Team discussed the teaching methods, course and degree structure with representatives of teaching staff and students. The Team wishes once more to thank all those who took the time to meet with us. We were particularly pleased and impressed by the students, by their frankness and excellent facility with English. As we noted already it is difficult for us to appreciate fully all the nuances of an unfamiliar system. We have heard that the academic preparation of entering students is weak, especially in Mathematics and Portuguese, and that students often lack motivation. In this connection we applaud the University's initiative in establishing the Permanent Observatory for Teaching and Learning Quality. During the Main Visit we obtained a copy of their impressive publication ''The Voice of the Students'' (unfortunately for us in Portuguese, which makes for slow reading!) and the overheads from their presentation at the ISATT Conference in September 2001. In the latter the authors note that:

The lack of motivation is revealed by: lack of interest in the subject, low ratio of attending the classes, low level of importance given to the subject, negative teacher's personal and professional image, absence of motivation for interacting with the teacher, weak motivation on attending the examinations;

The weakest points of teachers' pedagogical practice are: understanding the students' needs and difficulties, lack of flexibility on the pedagogical/didactic approaches, the use of evaluation much more as a tool for punishing than for diagnosing and rescuing, lack of time for helping students, lack of environment for good interaction inside the classroom, scientific competence, teachers' absences.

Some of these points were made to us in our conversations with students. They also referred to the lack of transparency with regard to course content. Indeed the student information handbooks distributed by the Faculties and Schools contain only titles with no description of content, and the students reported that the content of some units changed from one year to the next without prior warning, even when the same teacher was involved. The Team was surprised that the students we met have never raised these issues in any of the fora available to them, in spite of the high level of student

representation at all levels in the University. If this is generally the case throughout the University it points to the need to initiate effective dialogue between the students and the teachers on the bread and butter problems perceived by students, and the provision of the structures and organisation necessary to facilitate this. We suggest that the University take steps to begin this process.

These problems are not unique to this University and some of them are replicated in institutions in many other countries. They may in part be consequences of the massification of higher education, as the SER points out, and may in part be accounted for by weak preparation of students in secondary schools and the pressure on teachers to be productive researchers. However the failure rates of students in the University seem to us to be very high, and while not out of line with other institutions in Portugal they are, in our experience, not comparable to rates elsewhere.

It is clear from the SER and our discussions with the rectorate and teaching staff that the University is aware of these facts. On page one of the SER we find that "at present, the University is primarily concerned with the quality of teaching'', and again on page eight the SER states that "one of the main priorities of the University will be to restructure the pedagogic structure of courses with the aim of improving academic achievement, while at the same time adjusting to the reorganisation resultant from the implementation of the principles laid down in the Bologna Declaration…..The discussion will focus mainly on the study plans of courses''.

Bearing all of these factors in mind the Team would like to recommend that the University introduce a policy of transparency in all of its teaching practices. Information on best practice in the academic and pastoral care of students is widely available and sources will certainly be known to the University's experts in the Permanent Laboratory for Teaching and Learning Quality. However, in light of the very specific issues raised by students in the course of our discussions with them, we would like to mention some steps that the University could take immediately.

We suggest that a set of Student Rights and Responsibilities should be discussed and agreed. Examples of this are available on the Internet and are quite straightforward, containing such obvious items as:

Students have the right to teachers who attend class on time

Students have the right to adequate access to teachers

Students have the right to receive a course outline, which includes a fair and explicit grading policy

Students have the right to participate in and have access to teacher/course evaluations

Students should commit sufficient time and effort for study and the use of the library and available computational facilities in connection with each course

Students should attend class regularly and on time

Students should recognise and respect that staff participation in research and scholarship in conjunction with teaching responsibilities, is vital to the University's ability to fulfil its mission

We would also suggest the preparation of a student handbook by each Faculty and School which would include a description of the content of each unit taught in each semester in each course, properly organised with prerequisite units clearly indicated. The content of a unit should be adhered to in a reasonable way and should not be essentially changed without reasonable prior notice to students. The handbook should contain an explanation of the overall aims, learning outcomes and purpose of the courses on offer, benchmarks for student learning and achievements each year, clear guideline on written and laboratory assignments, principles on marking and feedback to students.

The kind of reforms in the pedagogic structures of the University described above are of course important for the students and for the fulfilment of the University's stated aims, but they will also make a significant contribution to the processes envisioned by the Bologna Declaration.

Hand in hand with teaching reform is the need for staff development, a need that is identified in the SER and was alluded to more than once in the course of our interviews. The new emphasis on learning will highlight the necessity to provide guidance to staff members in the new approaches to teaching, in modern methods of communication, and in mutually beneficial interaction with students. This will require a structured approach and good organisation, so the Review Team suggests that the University establish a special unit with responsibility for staff development and training, as well as various support services in relation to new and experimental ways of teaching/learning.

4.1.2 Student Care

In section 2.2.4 the SER describes the social support for students provided by the state. The Team is not in a position to comment on this other than to note that students claimed that the financial support provided was inadequate. The SER goes on to describe the wide range of services that the University provides:

The Social Services of the University provide accommodation (591 beds in all), concession of study grants, canteen and snack-bar meals, medical and other services. They endeavour to provide the best lodging, study and integration conditions for the students, among whom a large number are from other regions of the country. Refectories function on the Penha campus, Administration Block and the Gambelas campus. These refectories provide students with approximately 5,000 meals per day at accessible prices. Seven snack bars are at present available to students: three on the Gambelas campus, three on the Penha campus, and one in Portimao. The Social Services of the University also provide study grants. The Team congratulates the University on the provision of these services, many of which we saw at first hand.

However in our meetings with students reference was made to several areas where they felt improvement was needed. There is a lack of facilities for sporting activities and a lack of playing fields. We were told that only 6% of students participate in sports in the University. They suggested that the medical/nursing provision could be improved, and that there were long waiting lists to see the single psychologist.

We have referred above to the importance of providing a caring environment for the implementation of the University's aims in the area of teaching and learning, and have outlined some initial steps that the University could take in this direction. We urge the University to go further and consider the advances that have been made elsewhere in recent years in the approach to student care, and how these advances might be adapted for use in the University. As we already noted the Internet is an excellent source of information for developments in this area.

We would like to suggest that student care can extend to helping the students find work when they graduate, and Section 2.2.4 of the SER confirms the University's interest in this activity which is so important to student welfare. There the SER states that the integration of new graduates into the labour market is a concern of the University. An internal observatory has been established to monitor graduates in the labour market and record the problems that they face and "this leads to reflection on how to supply courses that will improve the career prospects of students''. During the academic year 1997/98 a survey of graduates was conducted by means of a questionnaire that had a 49% response rate. Early analysis indicates that in general graduates have been easily absorbed into the labour market and their employers are clearly satisfied with their performance.

On the other hand the SER continues that "although the University is currently making an increasing effort in this area, it may probably be considered one of its weak points for at present there is no consistent interface between the University and the business community''.

The commitment of the University to this important activity is evident. In this connection the Review would like to recommend that the University extend the function and the range of activities of the observatory. Many universities have taken the step to establish a 'Careers and Appointments' Office. The remit of this office usually includes the following: establishing contact between students and industry for the exchange of information on posts available and graduates qualified to take up the posts, helping students to prepare for interviews, inviting employers to speak to groups of senior students on employer expectations, arranging interviews, and building up a data base on its activities.

4.1.3 Research

"With the objective of accomplishing its mission and one of its fundamental aims the University has promoted and stimulated research, a cornerstone for the scientific, technological and technical development of the institution. Consequently, the University encourages the creation of Research Centres in different areas of study, bringing together teachers, researchers and specialised technicians'' (SER, Section 2.2.3(a).

Research activity developed slowly in the University as one would expect in a new institution (SER, Section 2.2.3); the number of research/teaching staff was small and guest professors were recruited from outside. However after the set-up of the Programme Science (Creation of Infrastructures for Science, Research and Development), and the organisation of the first Research Centres, the situation saw a significant improvement in the early nineties. In addition to the University of the Algarve Centres the University has local divisions of Centres from other national institutions, financed and assessed by the Centres to which they belong. In Annexe 5 of the SER there is a list of 23 Research Centres initiated between 1991 and 2000. Almost all of them are working on projects resulting from contracts with the Ministry of Science and Technology, the European Commission, and a number of public and private institutions and companies from different sectors. The University is to be congratulated on this record of achievement, and the Review Team encourages all concerned to maintain this excellent effort.

The University has a Service – Planning and Studies Services (SER, section 2.2.1) that provides administrative and technical support to researchers/teachers that intend to apply for EU programmes. It is not clear to the Review Team, however, what level of support the University provides to researchers when they are putting together a proposal for research funding. In many Universities a central Office for Research Funding exists to facilitate the process. This office disseminates information about EU programmes, prepares a common procedure for research proposals, trains administrative staff in proposal requirements, and creates a European research database. We recommend this idea for consideration by the University.

In Annexe 5 of the SER there is a summary of the Research and Development activities of the University. From this it is clear that the research performance varies across disciplines. In terms of publication rate per researcher some areas are disappointing. However it is always difficult to make comparisons without knowing the quality and international reputation of the journals involved. The University knows that creating a high international profile depends very much on maximising the rate of publication in referred international journals of high repute. Researchers should be encouraged to keep this in mind.

The Team would like to recall here the importance of integrating the research and teaching functions of the University. The Team does not subscribe to the view that good researchers do not make good teachers. On the contrary the enthusiasm for their subject and the freshness of approach that productive scholars can bring to the classroom are invaluable, and in fact irreplaceable. It is crucial that teachers in the Academy set themselves the goal of becoming first class academics with a full commitment to excellence in both research and teaching.

4.2   Internationalisation

"Due to its youth the University of the Algarve is still in the process of consolidating itself at national level. Therefore its priority is to continue investing in this process,

while carrying out the necessary adjustments that will allow the University to implement the Bologna Declaration'' (SER, Section 3.2.3).

Nevertheless the University has a policy document on Internationalisation that outlines three strategic approaches (SER, Part II, Section 1).

The first refers to research activities involving collaboration with Universities and Research Institutions in Europe, including the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Spain, Greece, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, as well as the United States and Canada. The European collaborations are included in Annexe A of SER (Part II).

The second refers to student activity, mainly within the Erasmus and Socrates Programmes. In the academic year 2000/2001 the University signed Socrates/Erasmus bilateral agreements with Universities in 18 countries, and Leonardo Da Vinci agreements with Universities in 6 countries. In the current year 52 students from the University of the Algarve went abroad and 55 foreign students came in. Students we spoke to noted that the financial aid available was not sufficient to enable them to take advantage of these agreements. Others said they had trouble getting recognition for the credits they had earned abroad, that this seemed to depend on the attitude of individual teachers. The Team recommends that the University publish clear guidelines to staff and students regarding credits earned abroad.

We note that the teaching reforms we recommend in Section 4.1 are very pertinent here, especially for foreign students coming to the University of the Algarve. The resulting transparency will simplify entry into the University for them, making it easier to make choices.

Relevant here is the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which is bound to play an increasingly important role as student mobility is emphasised in the context of the European Higher Education Area. It is crucial that the University have a firm institution-wide policy with respect to credits earned abroad by its students. Some of the students we spoke to complained that acceptance of these credits can sometimes depend on the good will of individual teachers.

The third strategic approach refers to "the internationalism of study programme'', very limited due mainly to the language barriers.

Given the aim of national consolidation this is a good record of international activity and the Team urges the University to continue and attempt to expand it. As we noted earlier the international research collaborations, as well as being scientifically important in themselves, have the potential to increase the income of the University and should be encouraged.

The Team was disappointed that the University seems to have done little as yet toward achieving its aim of "contributing to international understanding, especially in connection with countries whose official language is Portuguese''. Elsewhere in this report we note the possibility of bringing students from Brazil to the University for a semester or a year.

But this is a modest step in comparison to what could be achieved. We urge the University to turn its attention to this potentially fruitful initiative, not only with respect to South America but also Asia and Africa as well.

4.3 Services, Infrastructure

Over the course of the two visits we spent some time visiting the new Central Library and the Computer Services centre. The Team was impressed by the beautiful new library building and its facilities, and with the excellent computer services as described to us by the Director. The University can be justly proud of these services, although obviously much work and investment are still needed. In addition to the new library there are three libraries on the Penha campus, one in the School of Nursing, and one in Portimão. There is free access to computer rooms, which are sponsored by the Student's Union with additional support from the Rectorate.

In the area of IT the University has an IT Strategy document pertaining to Teaching and Learning which is comprehensive and ambitious (SER, Part II, Section 3). The document highlights two activities that the University has been developing:

- Setting up the Integrated Academic Information System (IAIS)

- Promoting and Strengthening the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Some of the objectives in the IAIS have been achieved but the rest are aspirational. All of the objectives for the ICTs are aspirational.

This strategy document is an excellent one with objectives that are of paramount importance for the future of the University. The Team recommends that it be integrated into the overarching mission and Strategic Plan for the University recommended in Section 3.3, with a timetable for completion, an indication of the funding required and how the objectives will be achieved.

4.4 External Relations

We have noted elsewhere the modest but developing contacts that the University has with universities in Europe and elsewhere through student exchanges and joint research projects. We again suggest that the University continue to expand these relationships.

During the Main Visit the Team met with representatives of employers and regional industries. The discussions were wide-ranging and very informative. In all of these meetings we were struck by the obvious impact that the University has in the area and how widespread and important its contacts are. Graduates of the University are employed in a wide variety of capacities and at the highest level, as well as being leaders in their own enterprises. This should help the University in its intention to establish sound relationships with the flourishing business world in the area, a step which will help

in finding jobs for the students and attracting capital for financing and research. A step further in this direction would be to set up joint research and development activities with industry, and to establish joint research centres. We urge the University to persevere with its efforts in this important direction.   With reference to finding work for graduates of the University we recall our earlier recommendation that the University establish a Careers and Appointments Office, an initiative which would also help to strengthen the relationship with the business world.

We repeat here the importance of life-long learning as a stimulus for new ideas and crucial revitalisation and refreshment. We would like to see the University provide part-time courses for graduates, with the structures and resources necessary to do this effectively. The provision of continuing education opportunities is not only a worthwhile step in itself, but would further embed the University in the industrial life of the area and increase the possibilities of future fruitful alliances. It would also of course provide an additional source of income to the University. We note that the implementation of the proposed new IT infrastructure would hugely expand the possibilities in the area of continuing education, presenting virtual learning opportunities not only in the Algarve but in the rest of Portugal.

5.0 Envoi

We wish to thank the University once again for its generous hospitality and for the excellent arrangements provided for the Review Team. It was a pleasure to be in the Algarve to discuss with students and staff the future directions of a young and ambitious University. At this time of profound and far-reaching change in higher education the University is to be congratulated for its frank and open examination of its ability to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. In all our meetings we were struck by the strong determination to make the new structures work and to see the University achieve its full potential as an institution of high international standing. We hope that the University finds our comments and suggestions helpful, and we wish the University well for the next stage of its development.