

**EUA (European University Association)  
Institutional Evaluation Programme**

**UNIVERSITY OF THE ALGARVE**  
***EUA FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REPORT***

***February 2007***

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
<b>1. Forward.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Recommendations.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Polytechnic and University Sub-Systems.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Governance and Organisation.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Teaching and Learning, Student Care.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Research.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Quality Assurance.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Employability, Society.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Finances, Resources.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Internationalisation.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>13</i>

## **1. Foreword**

This report is the outcome of a follow-up evaluation of the University of the Algarve (UALG) organized by the European University Association (EUA) within the framework of its Institutional Evaluation Programme. The follow-up evaluation was preceded by an Institutional Evaluation in 2002.

The EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme was launched thirteen years ago with the aim of preparing universities to meet the emerging needs for external accountability by an increased capacity for both strategic thinking and internal quality culture. To date more than 150 universities from 36 countries have participated in this program and some have subsequently asked for follow-up visits to monitor progress made. The goal of the 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 European but also international 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 follow-up evaluation of UALG is embedded in a system-wide extensive, independent, voluntary and objective review of Portuguese higher education institutions by the EUA, facilitated by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES). About ten institutions are to be evaluated over the first year, taking into consideration the diversity of the Portuguese Higher Education system. The review will combine “first time” evaluations with “follow-up” evaluation processes (in cases where the “first time” evaluation was performed within the past four years).

The review takes place in the wider context of Government strategic objectives, including:

- To guarantee a system of higher education fully integrated at European level in terms of quality, levels of participation and employability of graduates
- To protect and improve the quality of teaching and learning, in a way that will foster participation in international networks of higher education and the full recognition of Portuguese higher education institutions and degrees
- To promote a diversified system of higher education in a way that will foster quality at the various types of institutions

- To acknowledge the increasing importance of research, development and innovation for the knowledge society
- To develop quality assurance procedures and processes in line with best international practice
- To increase the provision of lifelong education.

The Review Team for the follow-up visit to the University of the Algarve consisted of:

Professor Dirk Bresters, former Rector, University of Amsterdam, Holland (Chair)  
Professor Philippe Rousseau, former Rector, University of Lille, France.  
Professor Don McQuillan, former Chief Executive, Irish Universities Quality Board (Secretary), Ireland

Professors Bresters and McQuillan were members of the review team in 2002.

## **2. Introduction**

The aim of the follow-up process is to identify the impact that the initial evaluation has had on the institution's development, investigate the experiences gained from changes implemented after the initial evaluation, and give further impetus for change. Depending on the specific situation in each institution the follow-up takes account of new changes in the educational environment, and reviews challenges and obstacles that have been faced in the implementation of the recommendations in the original review report, etc. As with the original evaluation the cornerstone of the follow-up review is the university's self-evaluation, which allows the university staff to understand their institution's strengths and weaknesses. In the follow-up review the self-evaluation report focuses on progress made since the first review, possibly indicating barriers to change. However since the overall review process is dynamic rather than static the follow-up review should take into account new developments and reforms, both within the institution and in the wider environment.

A Self-Evaluation Committee (SEC) consisting of two students, five academics and two representatives of the administration staff prepared the follow-up self-evaluation report (SER) of the University of the Algarve. The SEC pointed out that the members were nominated by the new Rector (elected in March 2006) on 15 September 2006 'on a strictly individual basis and were totally independent as far as their judgments were concerned'. The SER was 27 pages long and accompanied by Appendices (47 pages) and the Rector's campaign statement (20 pages). Unfortunately these documents and the schedule for the visit arrived quite late leaving the team with little time for adequate detailed preparation and consultation. That said, the SER was an honest and rather blunt statement of the situation in UALG. Until the appointment of the present Rector it seems that the university essentially ignored the original Evaluation Report of 2002. Although the report was placed on the web and available to all staff we understand that no official discussion of the report took place; there was no follow-up analysis and evaluation of the report's recommendations. The issues described in the university's own original self-

evaluation report of 2002, and analysed in some detail in the EUA evaluation report at that time, remain, for the most part, unresolved. The team met with a variety of key university actors during the follow-up site visit, which took place on 4-5 December 2006. These included the rector, one Pro-Rector and three vice-rectors (for research, academic affairs and Bologna), members of the self-evaluation committee, deans of the faculties (university sub-system) and schools (polytechnic sub-system), five members of the senate, representatives of the pedagogical/scientific councils of the faculties and schools, representatives of central management and administrative staff, heads of the research centres, and one representative of the student council.

The team was greatly encouraged by the frank and open discussions over the two days. There was a healthy readiness to face up to the problems facing the university and generally to support the new rector's vision for the change and restructuring proposed in his programme 'Horizonte 2010'. This programme includes many of the recommendations contained in the EUA Evaluation Report of 2002 and involves important changes in the statutes. It will be presented for ratification to the University Assembly in the Spring of 2007 and will require a two thirds majority to succeed. In spite of the obvious will for renewal manifested in our meetings we were not in a position to gauge the overall level of support within the university for the changes proposed by the rector, or indeed for any programme that might involve changing the old ways. Given that next to nothing was done to implement the measures we proposed four years ago, or even to discuss them, it is to be feared there is a strong element of conservatism, or perhaps inertia, present in the university that may make it difficult to achieve the required two thirds majority in an assembly of 160 members.

This written report is a full exposition of the team's conclusions. We hope that it will be considered as a contribution to the crucial debates that will take place in the university over the coming months. The recommendations here are very close to those we made four years ago but informed and encouraged by the discussions we had with the rectorate, staff and administrators.

### **3. Recommendations**

***Polytechnic and University Sub-Systems*** By general admission the two sub-systems of the university have failed to coalesce into a coherent unit. Established separately in 1979 and merged in 1988 they have failed to overcome internal historic differences. In addition the government has failed over the years to provide a policy on how the university should proceed. In 2002 the evaluation report suggested that this lack of official policy might be a blessing in disguise and urged the university to exploit the synergies inherent in the merger to create a successful institution that is unique in Portugal. This has not happened. There has been no co-operation in the area of teaching and no co-operation in preparing for implementation of the Bologna Process, to cite only two examples.

It is clear from the SER and from our meetings with staff that the university understands the need to address and resolve these issues. The Rector's plan suggests a way forward. We urge the university to forge a consensus by engaging, at all levels, in the crucial

debates that will take place between now and decision time in the Spring. The team is convinced that immediate, positive and visible movement toward full co-operation between the two sub-systems is essential to the future of the university. Retaining the status quo is not an option. The university will not achieve the goals set out in the Bologna process, will not be in a position to compete for scarce national resources and diminishing numbers of students, will not develop its international potential and a harmonious balance between teaching and research, if things remain as they are.

**Governance and Organisation** The evaluation report in 2002 made several comments in this area and we repeat them here:

- The university is overly organised, with too many committees
- Look again at the statutes pertaining to the number of elected representatives in the top management bodies, especially the Senate and the University Assembly
- Perfect the internal communication capacity of the university to ensure that all will have an input into the decision-making process
- The statute creating two separate sub-senates will make the evolution to one corporate identity difficult, and brings us back to the question as to how the university sees its future.

The need for consensus in such an extensive consultative process may lead to delayed decisions and compromises that are ultimately inimical to the best interests of the university. The modern university finds itself in a rapidly changing environment and facing challenges that are by now well known: increased competition for scarce resources, massification of education, economic globalisation with the resulting demands from government and society for more and better trained graduates especially in the sciences and technology, the need to establish improved research capabilities for assisting/underpinning national competitiveness. The team feels that the university must accelerate its decision-making procedures in order to better face the challenges posed by a globalised society and economy. The university understands this reality and notes in the SER that UALG is facing the classic problem of balancing scarce resources with multiple objectives without, however, having the right decision-making structure available to promote and facilitate this.

The historic development of the university and polytechnic sub-systems has created a situation where great power and independence are devolved to the faculties and schools, with a corresponding diminution of power at the centre. In our previous report we urged 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. This has not yet happened and the team wishes the new rector well in his efforts to eliminate this barrier to focused academic performance, effective governance, and necessary change.

**Strategic Planning** Up to now strategic planning has been weak in the university. However the future looks brighter. The new rector has set out an ambitious programme for the coming years and the team wishes him and his team well in this important enterprise. The programme seeks:

- Harmonious and fruitful relationships between the university and polytechnic sub-systems
- Harmonious balance between teaching and research
- To promote international relationships.

At the moment 'Horizonte 2010' sets out a list of desirable goals to be achieved, an important first step in formulating a strategic plan. In the rector's vision the university sees itself as an international institution of high quality: it 'does not restrict its sphere of intervention to the Algarve region, as might have been expected. As a university, it is limited only by its capacity to interact with other entities. It collaborates with businesses, leading European universities, higher education institutions in Portuguese speaking countries, European institutions, and to a lesser degree, multinational organizations'.

The next and very difficult task is to work out details as to how the university will achieve its stated objectives. This is a complex and difficult task involving as it does repeated top-down and bottom-up debate within the university. Inevitably there will be competing agendas, and tension between the various elements of the university. No university finds it easy to arrive at the type of institution-wide consensus that is required if such a process is to have an effective and fruitful outcome.

Good organisation and agreed procedures are essential. The objectives should be prioritised, and each objective should be stated in a clear and unambiguous way. An action plan for the successful achievement of each objective should be established, responsibility for completion assigned, and allocation of required resources agreed. Each objective should have a time frame for completion and precise indicators of success should be set down beforehand.

It is important to emphasise that planning is a continuous process. Thus the plan itself and the facts on which it is based must be updated on an ongoing basis. This requires solid data to support conclusions and to position the university to meet new developments. The team urges UALG to establish a central unit for the collection of data on all its activities. Such a database will serve the university well.

***Teaching and Learning, Student Care*** The university was established with an emphasis on teaching rather than research. In the meantime important research centres have been developed, and now the rector seeks a harmonious balance between these central academic activities. In 2002 the evaluation report contained several recommendations aimed at improving the teaching and learning performance of UALG that were based on frank discussions with teachers and students, and on evidence provided by the original self-evaluation report. These included student counseling, a staff development programme, systematic evaluation by students of teachers and courses with agreed follow-up procedures. These recommendations still stand.

We referred also to the high failure rate among students, but understand that this has been, at least partially, due to (i) the somewhat chaotic national regulations for passage from secondary to third level; (ii) the perceived weak preparation of students in

secondary school, especially in mathematics and Portuguese; (iii) the lack of formal requirements for entry to exacting scientific courses. Nevertheless there is a need for improved teaching and learning techniques, for transparency in matters of course content, for tracking of students at risk of failing, for dialogue between teachers and students. There must also be an awareness of the need to move from a teaching to a learning mode in line with modern academic developments.

The university sees implementation of the Bologna reforms as a vital support in improving the teaching and learning performance. Although introduction of the reforms only became mandatory in March 2006, UALG has already forged ahead with rapid implementation of the two-cycle degree structure. The team congratulates the university on this development and urges it to proceed with the introduction of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, integral elements in facilitating movement of students across borders.

Modularisation of courses is a development that, used to full advantage, can have a profound effect in many areas of university life. We urge the university to proceed with the full implementation of this course structure. Modularisation will influence many of the developments planned by the university. At postgraduate level it will simplify the structuring and organisation of interdisciplinary studies for both the students and the university, and indeed may point the way to new combinations of subjects for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work. At undergraduate level it opens up the possibility of a more effective use of resources by identifying or indeed creating courses that could be regarded as basic or core courses for all or many students in different faculties.

The process of examining closely the desired outcomes of programmes and courses, followed by a breakdown into coherent modules, is a fruitful exercise in itself and by its nature contributes to a review of curricula. Modularisation will also contribute to transparency in the University's dealings with students and the public at large. We suggest that the student information package should include a statement of the learning outcomes of each module, the associated ECTS credits, and prerequisite modules clearly indicated. The package 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 guidelines on written and project work, principles on marking and feedback to students.

The development of the action plans in the Bologna Process will be facilitated by a modularised course structure. Visiting students from abroad will be enabled to easily construct an appropriate study programme, and the implementation of ECTS will be simplified.

**Research** In 2002 the mission of UALG included an emphasis on research, and now the SER lists 30 research centres in the university, funded by contracts with MCETS, the EU and some other sources. The SER notes that the number of published research papers per doctor in UALG places the university second among universities in Portugal. On the



other hand this number is small by international standards and the quality of research is not consistent across the university.

'Horizonte 2010' defines research as the absolute priority for the coming years, and the plan has identified six priority areas for research development. The team agrees with this approach. Providing funding will be a challenge, especially internal funding since the government budget does not include research money. The rector has made a start by setting up a university fund to support research, the Fundo Ceratonia, with donations from local business. This is a very important development since it will provide seed money for new projects and help young researchers get a start. However it is also important to provide support to researchers applying for external funding, and in 2002 we recommended that the university establish a central office for this purpose. This office could disseminate information on research funds available through the EU and elsewhere, prepare a common procedure for research proposals, train administrative staff in proposal requirements, and create a research database. We repeat this recommendation here, and again in the section on Internationalisation.

The SER notes that heavy teaching duties leave little time for research. Given the reasonable student:staff ratio, and the decline in the number of students in the university sub-system, it seems that this may be due, at least in part, to over-teaching and to the large number of entirely separated study programmes with resulting duplication of courses. We note also that many faculties and schools have their own departments of mathematics, physics, etc. We recommend that these mini-departments should be merged into university-wide departments that will, where appropriate, provide common courses for all faculties and schools across the institution. Not only will this reduce teaching hours but will provide synergies for research developments. The team congratulates the university on experimenting with new ways to organize teaching hours so as to free up time for research. The introduction of six-week intensive teaching blocks, with six on and six off, will be effective in some 'hands-on' disciplines. However students of mathematics, for example, cannot be forced in this way. The staff we spoke to understood this well.

Intimately linked to the development of a first class research university is the development of a first class PhD programme. So far as we could ascertain in our discussions with representatives of the research centres, a systematic PhD programme does not exist in the university. The present process of producing PhDs is quite haphazard and chaotic, with no organized system in place to guarantee the sustainability of the research effort. This issue is important for the future of research in UALG, and indeed in the country as a whole, and will require innovative approaches at both local and national level. Interesting work has been done recently by the EUA, as well as in various countries, on how best to organize PhD studies and this work should be consulted.

Another issue that is hindering the development and sustainability of research in UALG is the way teachers are appointed. As we understand the situation teachers are appointed on the basis of teaching ability, with little or no reference to a candidate's research achievement or potential. This is a most unusual approach to appointments at university

level, and so far as the team is aware is not replicated in any modern university with aspirations to international research status. We urge the university to give urgent consideration to changing this appointment system to one which gives due weight to both teaching and research. This will go some way toward the 'harmonious balance between teaching and research' desired by the rector.

**Quality Assurance** The quality of higher education has emerged as a key element in the establishment of the European Higher Education Area and as a driver of national progress and competitiveness. Thus quality assurance is one of the main action items of the Bologna Process. In the Berlin and Bergen Communiqués the European Ministers of Higher Education stressed that the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.

The EUA proposes a coherent QA policy for Europe based on the belief that institutional autonomy creates and requires responsibility, and that universities are responsible for developing internal quality cultures. With the active contribution of students universities must monitor and evaluate, in a systematic fashion, all their activities, including study programmes, research productivity, innovativeness, competitiveness, management, funding systems and services.

For the EUA, as for the Ministers of Education, the key elements in a QA process are:

- self-assessment by the unit being evaluated
- review and site visit by peers including external peers
- publication of the peer review report
- effective follow-up on recommendations for improvement
- minimal bureaucracy
- quality improvement
- involvement of students and other stakeholders.

We refer to two publications:

'EUA's Quality Assurance Policy in the Context of the Bergen Communiqué',  
'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area' (ENQA Report).

Given that Portugal is a signatory to the Berlin and Bergen Communiqués, and that UALG is a member of the EUA, we suggest that the university establish an internal Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement system based on the above principles, and that the task of organising and operating the system be assigned to the Information, Quality and Evaluation Office. It is important to remember that this is not rocket science, and that other universities, twice the size of UALG, have achieved great and rapid success in this endeavour, based on an office consisting of one energetic senior academic and one secretarial assistant.

**Employability, Society** The university is aware of the economic, social and educational factors affecting the Algarve: the dominance of tourism in economic activity, seasonality,

low level of qualifications, temporary work and early school-leaving. The SER suggests several initiatives that UALG should develop in co-operation with its graduates and the community. The team supports these initiatives and wishes the university success in implementing them. They include:

- Tracking graduates and soliciting feed-back on teaching and education at UALG
- Maintaining systematic, formalised contact with companies and public administration to support the design of training programmes for innovation and knowledge
- Developing entrepreneurial skills in students, co-operation with local companies on projects, providing incubation space for companies on the campus, knowledge transfer, etc
- Lifelong learning

***Finances, Resources*** According to the SER expenditure on Research and Development in Portugal is about 0.7% of GDP (data from 2001), while in the European Union and the USA the percentages are 1.9% and 2.6% respectively. Also the structure of expenditure is unbalanced, with 39% coming from the private sector in Portugal and 64% from the private sector in the EU (OECD data). It is worth noting that new EU member countries like the Czech Republic and Slovakia attracted greater private investment in 2002 than Portugal. Thus, the SER notes, the period until 2009/2010 will clearly be one of adjustment and not of expansion.

In this light the initiative of the rector in setting up Fundo Ceratonia is extremely important and every effort should be made to support and develop the fund. The expansion of the research effort toward attracting more EU funding is also crucial and we shall return to this point in the section on Internationalisation. It is important to realise however that many advances can be made with little or no extra funding. We have already noted how reforms in the organisation of timetables, courses and departments can free up time for research. But this process can also release teaching staff who are not active in research to undertake other important initiatives. We refer for example to the Information, Quality and Evaluation Office. We were told that this office has received no extra resources since it was established, and indeed that the staff was reduced from four to three. This office should be in a position to perform crucial service in the organisation of a Quality Assurance process and in establishing a database for the university. Other universities, faced with the need to set up these and other services, have turned to energetic academics, with outstanding results. UALG could do the same, and we urge the university to proceed with this initiative as quickly as possible.

***Internationalisation*** This is one of the key elements in the rector's plan for the university, and in his election campaign statement he notes desirable goals for improving UALG's international standing:

- UALG staff to spend study and research time abroad in top universities
- foreign scholars to spend time in UALG
- collaborative Masters and PhD projects with various institutions
- promoting publication of research articles in peer-reviewed international journals

- circulation of UALG students at all levels, including internships in business organisations outside Portugal.

These ideas should be included in the strategic plan, with details on how and when they are to be achieved, as we noted in a previous section.

Development of an international profile for research is critical to the financial future of the university. The SER notes that the strategic plan ‘cannot be limited to the financial options offered by the institutional budgets or even by national organisations that fund research. Put in another way, if the institution does not internationalise sufficiently it will lose a substantial part of the resources which are mobilised within the great multinational conglomerates’. The research in UALG must therefore be of a quality sufficient to attract foreign financial support.

Several steps can be taken to support and drive research activity and applications for foreign grants:

- Use commonly accepted international research and development performance indicators
- Establish a Research Support Office. This office could create a research data base and support staff in compiling first class research proposals
- Provide adequate seed and reward money to support promising research initiatives and outstanding achievements
- Join with other university research initiatives for larger EU grants.

The introduction of a systematic PhD programme, as we recommended earlier, is necessary to support this drive. In the context of international competition for research funding we suggest that the university should seek to strengthen international acceptance of its PhD graduates. The following measures might assist in achieving this goal:

- Joint PhD programmes supported by the EU
- Use of external referees
- Publication of results, especially of PhD research achievements, in international refereed journals,
- Systematically stimulated and rewarded attendance at international conferences.

Finally the team recommends that a central Office of International Affairs be established to work with all relevant entities of the university in developing international activities. We suggest a number of steps to give international relations the place they must occupy in the European and world context:

- include in the university strategic plan an international university policy for the next five years with all university components (faculties, schools, departments, research centres) based on the work already done, on effective contacts, on scientific priorities, on geographic areas, etc.
- confirm the central role played by this Office in implementing the university international policy in cooperation with all university components

- develop a systematic policy of information to the university community (on European programs, networks, scholarships, ECTS, 7th Framework, Bologna process, Erasmus mundus, etc)
- define targets to be reached concerning the increase of the mobility of students and teachers and also administrative staff; create more motivation utilising the experience of former Erasmus and Leonardo students; make sure that all PhD students spend a study period abroad; develop a sabbatical programme for teachers with foreign universities and systematic exchanges
- collect centrally all data at all levels on international actions in order to follow their evolution. Use this monitoring (this log-book) to have a clear view of UALG's presence in Europe and in the world.

**Conclusion** The university is poised to move into a period of important change and evolution. There is a new and enthusiastic rectorate formulating a framework for a strategic plan that can play a crucial role in moving UALG onto another level of achievement and international recognition. Locally the university can be the driver to transform the economic landscape of the Algarve. As we said in 2002 we trust that our joint efforts will together provide a sound springboard for the university as it moves into the next phase of its development.