

SWOT Analysis of the Portuguese Higher Education System

Framework

The CS/11 was created in November 1996 within the framework of the Portuguese Quality System (SPQ)¹ and started operating in February 1997, under the auspices of the Portuguese Institute for Quality (IPQ), with the purpose of promoting and stimulating several components that affect Quality in terms of teaching and training products and services, as well as preparing and recommending improvement practices.

The mission of the CS/11 Commission is:

- To analyse the influence vectors of quality in HE and training institutions;
- To promote and stimulate systems and methodologies that allow for planning, managing, evaluating and performing improvement in HE and training institutions.

The Commission consists of 30 members representing different institutions from the education and training sector and is organised into three independent working groups:

- GT1 – Education and Training
- GT2 – Higher Education
- GT3 – Website and Virtual Community

The GT2 comprises representatives of 22 HEI and was created to disseminate information and promote the implementation of good practices in the field of Quality Systems in Higher Education (HE), by:

- spreading information in the academic and scientific communities;
- identifying and sharing good practices, contributions and strategic guidelines regarding HE Quality;
- laying the foundations to carry out internal debates, not only in GT2 meetings, but also in CS/11 plenary sittings;
- sharing good practices with partners and society in general, which includes a CS/11 - GT2 Annual Meeting.

The GT2 working group meets once a month and each session is devoted, not only to develop the group duties assigned at the beginning of the year, but also to share information related to Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in general, and/or to share problems, analyse them and seek solutions, where appropriate. The team members are free to choose any subject for analysis in each session.

¹ Law no. 140/2004 from 8 June. Retrieved from <http://www.ipq.pt/customPage.aspx?modid=916&pagID=1650>

In 2013 the GT2 focused on the drafting of a SWOT Analysis of the Portuguese HE System. The principal aim of this work – planned and conducted by the University of Coimbra – was to create a diagnosis tool that allows for the evaluation of the Portuguese HE system.

SWOT Analysis methodology

The work methodology used in the SWOT Analysis consists of 6 group sessions (from February to September), each one with a different setup. In some sessions the group discussed the internal and external analysis. For the group sessions the GT2 members were divided according to institution type (public or private HEI). This particular division gives GT2 the ability to compare the outputs of both groups and identify the main differences and similarities.

Two discussion sessions were held and streamlined by guest speakers, each of them devoted to a specific chapter of the SWOT analysis. The “Internal Environment Session” was led by António Câmara, Professor at Universidade Nova de Lisboa and founder of Ydreams. The “External Environment Session” was led by Pedro Lourtie, Professor at IST and a participant in the Bologna final statement. In addition, he represented Portugal in the Bologna Follow-up Group between 2005 and 2006, and served as Secretary of State for Higher Education (2001-2002).

These discussion sessions aimed to create room for new ideas and contributions, and to stimulate group reflection. Moreover, the GT2 group members were invited to participate in some sessions with individual reflections and contributions, which were the basis for the next group discussion.

In order to extend the discussion on Threats, Opportunities, Strengths and Weaknesses that characterise HE in Portugal, the SWOT matrix was presented to the Sectoral Committee CS/11 in plenary sittings, for their contribution with new ideas. Finally, given that the students’ opinions are paramount to Portuguese HEI, a survey addressed to student representatives in the various institutions of the governing bodies (Student Unions, General Council, School Board, among others) will be conducted. The purpose of the survey is to have the students' opinion and validation on the SWOT matrix.

Results

As a result of the work developed in the last year, the GT2 identified the external and internal factors that characterise the Higher Education System in Portugal. Based on this analysis, the group developed a set of suggestions for Higher Education. For enrichment of the analysis of GT2, the results presented in the following pages reflect the opinion of students and of several participants (guest speakers and audience) in the GT2 Annual Meeting that occurred on November 13th at IPAM – Porto. This Meeting, the first public event for the presentation of the SWOT Analysis, brought together approximately 200 people working in Higher Education

participated, and three expert panels to discuss the achieved results. The Meeting was very useful as it provided some fine-tuning to the SWOT matrix, and worked as a benchmark for the work carried out so far. The work that is now made available represents the efforts of the 21 Portuguese Higher Education Institutions present at the GT2 event, with the validation and contributions of students, experts and other important stakeholders during a process that took 10 months to conclude. Despite the heterogeneity of all parts involved, we believe that the results are consensual and provide an important overview of Portuguese Higher Education opportunities and challenges.

INTERNAL FACTORS			
OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
1	Internationalization	1	Demographic trends
2	Lifelong Learning	2	Uncertainty of future competence profiles needed
3	Europe 2020 agenda	3	Undefined roles of Public and Private Higher Education
4	Policies to increase qualification levels	4	Social devaluation of Higher Education degrees
5	African Portuguese-speaking markets	5	Absence of human resource policies
6	Globalization and multiculturalism	6	Increase in unregulated competition between Higher Education Institutions
7	Valuing by society of new developed skills - attitudes, behaviours and values	7	Importance given to international rankings
8	Growing role of citizens' movements	8	Absence of integration between education cycles (elementary, secondary and higher)
9	New scientific and interdisciplinary areas of knowledge	9	Absence of political strategy for the country Higher Education
10	Higher Education Network / Offer in Portugal	10	Widespread financial crisis
11	Increase in competitiveness between Higher Education Institutions (HEI)	11	Public funding model
12	Higher Education role in development	12	Uncertainty in the definition of criteria by the regulatory authorities
13	Technological Development	13	Education/market divergence
14	New ways of learning	14	Downward trend in public funding
15	Existence of an independent regulatory entity of Higher Education	15	Lack of cooperation between HEI
16	Alumni networks	In the context of HEI only	
17	Transfer of knowledge from the HEI to companies	16	Strong lobby of public HEI towards the political power and the European Commission
EXTERNAL FACTORS			
STRENGTHS		WEAKNESSES	
1	Recognition and reputation of Portuguese graduates (critical mass of world-class talent)	1	Shortage of remediation mechanisms to counterbalance the lack of skills from non-HEI
2	Maturity of Institutions	2	Low mobility of teachers and students between national institutions
3	Bologna reform consolidated	3	Duplication of offer from a large number of institutions
4	Higher Education quality recognised at national and international levels	4	Shortage of foreign language courses
5	Good research reputation	5	Aging of teaching staff
6	Broad range of degrees provided	6	Dependence on non-competitive national funding
7	Increasing participation in national and international research networks	7	Inadequate information systems in non-traditional areas
8	Student Support Services	8	Relative position in international rankings (in research area)
9	Variety of training profiles	9	Stiffness of the teaching staff
10	Tangible and intangible heritage	10	Rigidity of the <i>curricula</i>
11	Governance models	11	Institutional communication quality
12	Academic supply for the requalification of degrees	12	Isolation from each HEI from their peers
13	Strong cooperation with companies and institutional partners	13	Small investment in the connection with foreign institutions
14	Qualification of students to be proactive developing a profession	14	Insufficient number of full-time researchers
15	Quality of the human and technological capital	15	Weak interdisciplinary research
16	Diversity of scientific research	16	Insufficient commitment with e-learning (lack of a quality benchmark)
17	Provision of external services to the community	17	Education does not foster creativity and entrepreneurship
18	Credibility of management in Portuguese HEI to pursue the public interest	18	Ecosystem not compatible with the one existing in major world centres
19	HEI considered as the driving force of the country's development	19	Native language poorly promoted
20	Strong identification of the students with their institutions	20	Hard accountability system (too much focus on performance indicators)
21	Strong guidance to provide service to students	In the context of private HEI only	
22	Increasingly practice-oriented and better adequacy to the profile needed by markets	21	Lack of research culture
In the context of private HEI only		22	Knowledge transfer (there is room for improvements, namely in terms of applied research)
23	Cultural proximity from the institutions with students (student-teacher relation and others)	23	Imbalance of scientific areas of training offer (more "paper and pencil" degrees)
24	Management flexibility and organizational efficiency	24	Lack of teaching career (no legislation)

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
OPPORTUNITIES	<p>Create a Citizen Observatory Network for sharing and disseminating best practices in the social responsibility area</p> <p>Increase Lifelong Learning through non-degree courses, using partnerships</p> <p>Consolidate the existing interinstitutional relationships and networks in order to promote partnerships to join efforts, knowledge and experience</p> <p>Establish ECTS criteria for extracurricular activities (eg: volunteering)</p> <p>Promote research partnership programmes that allow for hiring younger researchers, taking advantage of their high qualifications and encouraging retention in the Portuguese Higher Education System</p> <p>Promote knowledge (technical and pedagogical) exchange projects among the teaching-staff (eg: classroom peer observation; class co-preparation)</p> <p>Develop the collaborative work between Higher Education Institutions, in order to contribute to self-regulation of the network, by identifying strengths, opportunities and existing alliances related to research and cooperation projects, formative offers, curricular plans, and hiring processes</p> <p>Promote consortia with national and international companies, in applied research of new fields of development (eg: natural gas exploration)</p> <p>Promote collaboration between HEIs and with the Ministry of Education and Science in order to redefine long, medium and short-term goals and objectives for HE</p>	<p>Open / Consolidate curricular spaces for the development of crosscutting skills, including interpersonal and intercultural skills, entrepreneurship, work team and language learning</p> <p>Create attractive programmes for patronage (fundraising)</p> <p>Create / Develop collaboration programs between students and HEI that enhances the development of activities in research projects and other activities</p> <p>Promote workshops with the participation of the HEIs to discuss policies in order to find a balance between the knowledge of Portuguese language, the adoption of English as an instruction language and the development of foreign language skills</p> <p>Increase international mobility programmes for teaching and non-teaching staff and students</p> <p>Create quality standard models for distance courses (A3ES - Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education)</p> <p>Enhance the value of alumni networks for HEIs</p>
	<p>Create and develop business incubators</p> <p>Create a service portfolio and training offer targeting to the business community</p> <p>Develop studies and involve partners in the curricula construction concerning the market needs (employability) and support the constitution of some study programs curricula adapted to them</p> <p>Betting on postgraduate training to retrain and develop professional skills</p> <p>Diversify and increase the services provided to the community</p> <p>HEI marketing for global marketplace – building a national strategy</p> <p>Harness the potential of emerging markets through research and the Portuguese language</p>	<p>Promote meetings / workshops between HEIs for best practice sharing (CS/11 – GT2, A3ES, CRUP, CCISP, APESP)</p> <p>Create a common platform for e-learning (sharing of human capital and technology)</p> <p>Increase the number of courses taught in English</p> <p>Standardize the affiliation of scientific production (eg: publications) to value research in Higher Education</p> <p>Promote skills acquisition / update specific entry requirements (eg: assessment of specific competencies of each course at the entry in the HE, summer courses, year zero, creation of working groups between institutions that link the HEIs and high schools to promote initiatives)</p> <p>Ensure transparency, fairness and rigor criteria por public funding model</p> <p>Foster institutional coordination of the training offer by region (eg: creation of regional forums for HEIs top management discussion) in order to create integrated strategies</p> <p>Combine human resource strategies with a culture of excellence in research</p> <p>Reflect / Redefine HEI interfaces with society</p> <p>Enhance the stakeholders participation in the definition of the training offer and in the prioritization of in development research projects</p>
WEAKNESSES		