



Universidade do Minho
Gabinete de Relações Internacionais /
International Relations Office

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY CHARTER 2003-2007

EPS

UNIVERSIDADE DO MINHO (P BRAGA01)

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1 – What is the current situation of your university's international cooperation in the context of current national, international and European development?

Universidade do Minho (UM), founded in 1973 and located in the cities of Braga and Guimarães, is a public university and one of the then named "New Universities" that deeply changed the higher education landscape in Portugal. Whilst UM is a young University, it enjoys a very high reputation for its research and educational performance. A student population of over 16000 together with more than 1100 teaching staff and almost 600 technical and administration staff make UM one of the biggest Portuguese universities.

UM elected internationalisation as one of its priority areas, being an integral part of the institution's strategic plan. UM is undoubtedly amongst the most internationalised higher education institutions in Portugal. Its institutionalisation approach towards internationalisation can be categorised as being well advanced, fairly systematic in its style of introduction, increasingly central in its importance to UM, but with improvements possible in all dimensions.

Having recognised that internationalisation is a key element to obtain and maintain a high quality level of its education and research and to promote the institution in a growing competitive academic world, UM has been making a lot of effort to have a large volume of international work in many categories, which reinforce each other and have institutional coherence. As a reference point, we would like to highlight the following:

i) Consolidation and expansion of its partnerships, developing a wide range of international connections. At European level, it gave priority to the contacts from the former ICPs and encouraged its departments to adopt a strategic approach towards the establishment of new and renewed partnerships. UM has currently over 200 protocols celebrated in the scope of SOCRATES/ERASMUS and many other cooperation agreements have been signed with higher education institutions and organisations in general from all over the world, with emphasis on Portuguese Speaking Countries.

Despite the resource constraints, UM has had a steady development in student mobility e even in staff mobility, but a more aggressive approach is necessary to boost them accordingly.

UM participates in several SOCRATES thematic networks (1 sub-group coordination), IPs (1 coordination) and curricular development projects, which were highly considered by UM as privileged *fora* of discussion and *curricula* innovation, as well as wealthy sources of information and benchmarking within the Bologna Declaration reform process.

UM is aware of the importance of privileged partnership formats - being a member of the **Compostela Group of Universities** Executive Committee and having recently applied to the **SANTANDER Group**. Through its Rector UM actively participates in **EUA** and in **IAUP**. At national level UM is involved in **CRUP** (the Council of Rectors of the Portuguese Universities) and **AURN** (Association of Universities of the Northern Universities). UM is also directly involved in **PRELO** (Portuguese Research European Liaison Office) and in the **LEO-NET** (Leonardo Network for Academic Mobility, through its interface institution TecMinho).

iv) UM recognised the importance of the ECTS and correct implementation of its tools from its very beginning. In 1994/1995, UM participated in the ECTS pilot project in the subject area of History and since 1995/1996 ECTS has



Universidade do Minho
Gabinete de Relações Internacionais

been extended to all study areas represented. At the moment, following the creation of new degree courses UM has been making some effort to offer these new areas and respective units the opportunity to introduce the system in a gradual and systematic way. The ECTS Counsellors visit in 1999 had a very positive impact in our institution and it helped to confirm some best practices and to correct some less accurate procedures. It is important to highlight that, as far as UM is concerned, ECTS is compulsorily used in all student mobility activities, having been extended to the cooperation with the third countries.

v) UM was the Portuguese representative in the first phase of the pilot project on the Diploma Supplement (DS). Despite the lack of official national guidelines and regulations, but recognising the added value of the DS to its students' global competitiveness, UM issued and delivered its first DSs in 2002, being the first University in Portugal to do so. The Rector appointed a special Task Force for this purpose, having paid special attention to the validation and formal recognition of all curricular and extra-curricular academic activities.

vi) UM benefits from COMETT/Leonardo da Vinci mobility grants since 1992. UM also participates in the Leonardo programme pilot projects with few co-ordinations and several partnerships (one of the co-ordinated projects - 'TTVLC - Trainer training on virtual learning communities', has been selected as a good and outstanding example for pedagogical innovation and collaborative learning in the framework of Leonardo projects), in TEMPUS, Jean Monnet as well as in several contracts under the IV and V R&D Framework Programme, among many others. UM has played a leading role in the ALFA Programme – in the first phase ALFA I (20 contracts with 7 co-ordinations) and in ALFA II one partnership and three full project co-ordinations, being the only Portuguese co-ordinations in the third and fourth selection rounds. UM is involved in several projects within the SOCRATES programme in general.

vii) UM has already organised three editions of the ILPC in Portuguese: 1998, 1999 and 2001, to the great satisfaction of the students, staff involved and Portuguese National Agency.

ix) The importance awarded to internationalisation led the University to place all international issues directly under the responsibility of a Vice-Rector. The internationalisation of UM's teaching and research functions was brought together so as their complementary nature could be exploited and maximized to the utmost. There are two support structures, the International Relations Office (IRO), responsible for supporting and promoting all mobility and academic cooperation initiatives and programmes, and GAP, an office responsible for providing technical support for all research projects. The IRO is a core structure located in both *campi* and adopts a professionalized service attitude towards internationalisation advisory.

A Coordinating Committee of the International Relations Office (CCGRI) was created in 1997 – this a decision-making body, involved in the planning, monitoring and implementation of the SOCRATES institutional contract. The University is extending the duties of this body to an integrated quality control and evaluation steering committee for all cooperation activities.

Each School appointed an international co-ordinator, and there is an ECTS/SOCRATES co-ordinator for each Department. One of the major concerns of UM was to promote a high degree of interaction, on a complementary basis, among all actors involved in the process in order to ensure a proper implementation of activities.

Under the normal constraints of a public higher education institution, UM has been making some effort to co-finance specific actions and projects with its own resources (e.g. student mobility grants). So far, the University has invested largely in and has been mainly worried about creating the most adequate support structures to make its internationalisation feasible and consolidated. It is important to stress though that EU financing is preponderant for the implementation of our plans and for the continuity of our international activities.

2 – Given the strengths and weaknesses of your university's present situation, define your university's aims and priorities for 2003/2004-2006/2007 with a special focus on promoting activities in the SOCRATES programme. Describe briefly how the EPS has been developed and how it will be implemented at your institution.



Universidade do Minho
Gabinete de Relações Internacionais

For the medium-term future, UM is committed to:

- Proceed and enhance its international relations activities (a 5-10% increase in student mobility per annum, consolidation of its teaching staff mobility; attraction of more foreign students; promotion of the internationalisation of administrative staff through short-duration mobility, to increase the number of transnational projects aimed at the internationalisation and innovation of curricula and teaching methods);
- Enlarge the students' undergraduate mobility to postgraduate mobility as well;
- To find alternative sources of financing to increase student mobility and international activities in general;
- Acknowledge and develop a rewarding system for the faculty members actively involved in internationalisation;
- To develop more internationalised programmes. Genuine Joint European and Transatlantic Master/Specialization Courses, overcoming the rigid (national) legal frameworks;
- Improve its participation in international research projects, developing an increasing reputation for the quality of its research activities within the international scientific system;
- Improve its participation in international networks;
- Promote quality within its research centres, namely through its internal and external evaluation;
- To extend the use of the Diploma Supplement to postgraduate courses and raise the students' awareness towards the added value the DS represents;
- To continue adopting a systematic approach towards ECTS, concentrating on skills and learning outcomes (making the most out of the TUNING project conclusions), to formally adopt ECTS together with the national credit system. Based on the expertise acquired, UM intends to apply for the ECTS label in order to validate its best practice procedures regarding this essential tool. The use of ECTS as a credit accumulation system is something new to UM and will deserve special attention along with its LLL priority lines of action;
- UM intends to make the best use of the new Community programmes and initiatives, such as AIBAN and ERASMUS WORLD, in order to create alternative frameworks for its cooperation with third countries and to improve its participation in the already existing Community programmes;
- To build more on the impact of the mobile students on the rest of the student community;
- To raise the academic community awareness on the *internationalisation at home* practices;
- To make international issues, international students, international study periods/teaching assignments abroad everybody's concern. To mobilize all human resources for an effective, efficient and holistic approach towards the university's internationalisation policy;
- To improve the internal and external channels of communication (IRO) and to professionalise the Information Systems of the University;

SOCRATES is a fundamental resource for attaining these objectives and enabling UM to be better prepared to face the challenges imposed by the Bologna process.

In order to implement its EPS, UM will strongly rely on the institutional leadership true and expressed commitment to internationalisation. UM's hierarchy will continue its active involvement, playing the facilitator, promoter and advisor roles. UM views the balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches regarding the promotion, management and implementation of internationalisation as a key feature for the success of its international initiatives.

UM intends to adopt a global implementation strategy, through CCGRI with a stronger involvement of the SOCRATES Departmental Coordinators and School International Liaison. The IRO (together with CCGRI) is an essential structure



Universidade do Minho
Gabinete de Relações Internacionais

responsible for the holistic management of the EPS, namely regarding information, planning, organising, implementation and evaluation systems.

Having under consideration the objectives presented in our first EPS, UM truly believes that the following were reached: the enhancement of its academic mobility and interuniversity cooperation; the promotion of equal opportunities for students and teaching staff; the encouragement of its teaching staff and students to get to know the EU better as well as its different cultures and socio-economic realities; the reinforcement of the Portuguese language and culture at European and international level, especially in the Portuguese Speaking Countries and the promotion of the European dimension in its various teaching/educational, R&D and University-Enterprise cooperation projects.

3 – How will your institution ensure high quality in student and staff mobility and in Erasmus co-operation projects?

UM plans to ensure the high quality of all activities mentioned through a permanent assessment of and continuing reflection on the results of the projects and initiatives, encouragement of a responsive change within the institution; careful selection of partnerships (most suitable ones for each specific purpose); CCGRI; a core IRO with highly skilled and professionalized staff; commitment at all levels - actors directly involved and institution top and intermediate leadership and introduction of measurable quality and performance indicators (bearing in mind a “quality of quantities” approach).

UM will continue to concentrate its efforts to improve and sustain the quality of its mobility activities and flows, where numbers and figures do not matter without being associated to meaningful, reliable, accredited and valid international mobility periods. Within this scope, the following measures are implemented: academic recognition is a condition sine qua non for the student mobility to happen at UM (full use of ECTS tools and implementation of compulsory procedures aiming at facilitating and turning this process into a more transparent and trustworthy mechanism); to improve the access to information on the existent mobility opportunities through better promotional materials and means of communication and dissemination of good practices; to reinforce the mutual knowledge among partner institutions and respective hosting conditions; to provide full support in the organisation of the mobility trying to minimise all possible failure aspects; constant concern with the fulfilment of the students’ expectations about their study abroad through careful preparation, monitoring, guidance and support; and questionnaires/Formal and Informal Assessment and Feedback sessions.

Because UM is conscious about the importance of the administrative systems, communication processes and welfare services for the quality of an international student’s experience, more specifically the following is worth highlighting: thorough pre-arrival information (e.g. international student guide); orientation day; official welcome reception; extra-curricular activities; ERASMUS yearly e-mailing list; Portuguese language course offered (+ CD-ROM); *Padrinho/Madrinha* ERASMUS (similar to buddy system); ESN-Minho and total availability from the IRO for any personal and academic issue.

UM recognises the importance of giving a new impetus to teaching staff mobility through more dissemination sessions, implementation of specific quality indicators, articulated rationale, development of formally assumed priority criteria and visible recognition of an international dimension within its human resource development strategy.

UM foresees an internationalisation which diversity, level and quality constitute one of the formal and informal indicators of its institutional overall assessment.