

APPENDIX Ia

**REPORT BY THE EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
OF THE
*ESCOLA DE CIÊNCIAS DA SAÚDE***

REPORT BY THE EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (EAC)

July, 17 – 18, 2009

The following members were present at the site visit:

Alistair Warren (University of Sheffield)
Arsélio Pato de Carvalho (Universidade de Coimbra)
David McFadyen (University of Edinburgh, formerly World Health Organization)
Fernando Lopes da Silva (University of Amsterdam)
Joseph S. Gonnella (Thomas Jefferson University)
Walter Friedrich Osswald (Universidade do Porto)

Were not present but sent a message:

Eduardo Marçal Grilo (Fundação Calouste Gulbekian)

1. Introduction

The EAC visited the School of Health Sciences of the University of Minho on July 17 – 18, 2009. This meeting was the last one of the EAC, because the new by-law governing the Universities in Portugal led to changes in the constitution of Advisory Councils. Most EAC members have been involved with the School from the very beginning. It is with great satisfaction that the EAC acknowledges that having reached this milestone the School is successfully entering a most fruitful consolidated phase of its existence. As on previous occasions the EAC compliments the Faculty regarding the quality of the information received, notably the Bi-Annual Report of the School of Health Sciences and the Assessment of the Academic Year 2007-8 – A Snapshot.

2. Finances and other general questions

As in previous years the EAC has to emphasize its concern with the precarious financial condition of the School since the Ministry of Science and Higher Education has not yet fulfilled its promise of transferring the allocated funds to the School. Also the funds previously agreed upon by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) are lagging behind schedule. The lack of funds for the Animal House continues to be a matter of great concern; the solution to this question should receive the highest priority.

3. The undergraduate curriculum

The presentation of the current Curriculum demonstrated that the School is continuing to make thoughtful adaptations of the latter, guided by the feedback received from the students and the assessment of the Faculty. The criticisms made by the EAC concerning “Pharmacology” appear to have been addressed, although the graduates noted that the training in “Therapeutics” is still below the desired level.

A considerable challenge is that the School was forced to increase the number of students enrolled in the first year. This increase in student numbers presents a major problem to the Faculty. The Annual Report and the discussions at the site-visit have

convinced the EAC that the Faculty is reacting adequately to this challenge. A special problem is that the School is forced to allocate students for clinical training at Hospitals and Health Centers that are at considerable distance from Braga, for instance at Viana do Castelo. Consequently the Faculty is faced with logistic problems that have to be solved in an acceptable way for the students. During discussions with the students, they appeared to be willing to work with the Faculty to help solve this problem; this very positive attitude should be cherished by the Faculty.

A positive development in this regard is that the new Braga Hospital (Public/Private partnership) is being built very near to the campus (it should be ready in 2011), and that there are already protocols established between the University, the Faculty and the Hospital administration in order to integrate clinical teaching in the Hospital, forming a "Clinical Academic Center". The EAC advises the Faculty to monitor these developments very closely and to make further progress in building-up a comprehensive system of double appointments with clinicians involved in teaching, avoiding the creation of "Turbo-professors". The EAC applauds the efforts of the Faculty to motivate clinicians to carry out research leading to a PhD degree, which appears already to have yielded successful results.

The EAC recognizes that the "centrifugal model" that the School has developed, where 9 Hospitals and Health Centers participate, is the most appropriate taking the local conditions into consideration. There is no uniform method of clinical teaching although the "case-based learning" model is mainly used. The strategy of combining teaching in a clinical environment outside the School building, with Cognitive learning localized centrally within the School is highly appropriate. Nonetheless the EAC understood, from the discussions with students, that this combination may be too demanding for the students in practice, due to the many visits required and the time needed to travel from peripheral Hospitals to the School. The Faculty should consider these criticisms and make adequate plans to solve these practical problems.

The EAC calls again attention for the considerable workload of the staff and advises that it is important to recruit more young staff members who should be given responsible positions with respect to the Curriculum.

4. The transition at the graduation stage

Although the requirements of the examination to obtain a position in the Portuguese Health System appear to be inconsistent with the basic philosophy of Minho's Medical Course the graduates performed very well in this test at the National level. The EAC recommends that the Faculty and student's organization continue to exercise their influence in the sense of modernizing this outmoded system of evaluating the capacities of young doctors at the threshold of their professional careers.

The students and graduates were offered the possibility of taking the American "Fundamental Board" examination on a voluntary basis. An appreciable number of students of the 3rd and higher cohorts accepted this challenge. The results obtained were clearly above average, which reinforces the conclusion that the School is preparing students according to high international standards. The fact that so many students accepted to sit the test is also a positive indication of their strong motivation to go beyond the traditional boundaries of the Faculty examinations.

5. Research at the ICVS and Postgraduate teaching

The EAC did not evaluate the research carried out at the ICVS since this is the task of the ICVS External Advisory committee, although it was noted that there are clear and strong links between research and teaching at the School. For the future the EAC

recommends that a new External Advisory Committee should advise regarding both aspects “research & teaching” since these are closely interrelated. The EAC was again impressed by the quality of the research being carried out at the Institute, as indicated by the increasing number of publications and their impact factor, in spite of the disappointment of the Faculty faced with the classification “Very Good” at the last FCT evaluation round of the research Unit.

As previously, the EAC considers that the post-graduate program is an important asset of the School that merits continuing support. The achievements of this program in the last couple of years are remarkable.

6. MD/PhD programme

The possibility of carrying out research during the basic curriculum is another important asset of the School. This is reflected in the fact that several of the graduates with whom EAC talked, intend to carry out research combined with their post-graduate clinical training. A few follow the MD/PhD programme at Thomas Jefferson and Columbia Universities, what is an excellent asset for the School.

7. Medical Education Unit (MEU)

The EAC was very impressed by the activities of the Medical Education Unit and by the way the Unit’s Head presented the statistical analysis of the student’s performances with great rigor and detail. This analysis identified signals in first year students indicative of possible failure later during the course. This information should be used to help advise the students about their learning. This appears to be particularly relevant for the students belonging to “special contingents”, that enter the Faculty outside the normal route.

8. Public Relations and fund raising

The EAC stresses that the School is, by now, well recognized in Portugal. At the previous visit the EAC suggested that the School should set up a special Committee with the aims of promoting public relations and fund raising. Although this was not yet done in a formal way, the EAC was pleased to hear that the School has obtained an important donation and is pursuing further activities in this area. Nonetheless the EAC continues to advise setting up such a Committee to give more body and visibility to these activities within the University and the Portuguese scientific community in general.

9. Role of the EAC and its renewal

A consequence of the new law governing Portuguese Universities is that the EAC in the present form should end.

The EAC recommended that the School should consider the formation of a new Advisory Council that preferably would be dedicated to consideration of both the Medical Curriculum and the Research Institute.

10. Concluding remarks

Since the last visit a new phase in the life of the Medical School started with the appointment of Professor Cecília Leão as the new Dean of the School, and Professors Nuno de Sousa and Jorge Pedrosa as vice-Deans. The EAC is happy to acknowledge that this new governing team has been very successful in guiding the School during this new phase of its existence and shows great potential for the continuing success of the Medical School. The EAC acknowledges also the very fruitful and intense interaction

between the Faculty and the Research Institute (ICVS), and is confident that the ICVS has excellent capabilities to provide a high level scientific environment for students and post-graduates. Therefore the EAC supports wholeheartedly its plan to apply for being accredited as "Laboratorio Asociado" by FCT, what would help stabilizing the basic financing of the whole Institution.