Learning, working, networking:
quality teaching initiatives at the Portuguese Catholic University[1]

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Content

The **Portuguese Catholic University** or – as it appears also in translations – the *Catholic University of Portugal* (*Universidade Catolica Portuguesa - UCP*) is a non-state institution founded in 1967. The university is very often referred to simply as „**Católica**". The university, established by a decree of the Vatican, is owned by the Roman Catholic Church. It has the so called "*concordatory status*", that is, it operates under a special agreement between the Vatican and Portugal and under a special law implementing this agreement.

UCP has four major regional centres, in *Beiras*, *Braga*, *Lisbon* (this is the headquarters of the university) and *Porto* and it also runs a „University Institute" in Asia (*Macau*). The four regional centres, led by regional presidents, are highly autonomous. The **Porto Regional Centre**, which is the object of this study[2], started its activity in 1978 (its first program was an Undergraduate Law Course). The Porto regional centre has two campuses. The *Foz Campus* comprises a School of Arts, a School of Economics and Management, a Bioethical and an Education Institute and the extensions of a College of Law and a College of Theology. The *Asprela Campus* includes the School of Biotechnology with and extension in the city of *Caldas da Rainha* in the South of the country. The Porto Regional Centre offers study programs in eighth large disciplinary areas and has around 5000 students (see *1. Table*). The

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[1] This study is based on the information provided by the *Porto Regional Centre of the Catholic University of Portugal* through a background questionnaire in the framework of the OECD IMHE program on "*Quality of teaching in higher education*", and on a three-day visit in Proto at the University at the end of April 2010.

[2] The name UCP in this text always refers to the Porto Regional Centre of UCP.

number of students is quite proportionally distributed between the three- or four-year long undergraduate (bachelor) and the two-year long graduate (masters) programs.

1. Table
Number of students enrolled in Undergraduate and graduate programs at UCP (2009)

	Undergraduate	Graduate
Arts	271	262
Psychology and Educational Studies	154	447
Law	920	215
Biotechnology	436	123
Health Sciences	493	498
Bioethics	0	68
Economics and Management	800	186
Theology	29	202
Total	**3103**	**2001**

Source: UCP (2010a):

In private conversations but also in public documents UCP has often been mentioned as highly "*prestigious*" or as one the "*elite institutions*" of the Portuguese higher education system.[3] According to the Financial Times university league table, in 2007, the degree of the Catholic University in Business was the best in Portugal, and belonged to the top 20 in Europe (UCP, 2010a). Many business leaders and also members of the Portuguese political elite have graduated at UCP.

The wider context

Portugal as a member of the Bologna Process has reformed its higher education system in line with the Bologna principles which have had major impacts on the way teaching and learning in its higher education system is organised. This has affected not only the degree structure but also the goals of teaching, especially through putting the definition of learning outcomes into the centre of curriculum planning and delivery. The 180 ECTS Bachelor plus 120 ECTS Master structure has become the dominant form of organising programs in higher education, and the large majority of institutions and programmes is using ECTS, based on student workload, for both transfer and accumulation purposes (Eurydice, 2009). According to the analysis of one of the best known experts of this area, published in 2008, Portugal is among those countries which are "making rapid progress towards a more comprehensive implementation of learning outcomes" (Adam, 2008). This has created favourable conditions in the country to move towards more learner-centred approaches in teaching in higher education. As Adam has stressed, evoking the communiqué adopted in 2007 by European education ministers in London:

> "The 2007 London Communiqué included the first mention of '*more student-centred, outcome-based learning*'. The significance of this endorsement of 'student-centred learning' as opposed to 'teacher-centred teaching' should not be underestimated. The traditional input-related curriculum has proved to be too focused on the teacher instead of the learner. This change has been associated with a need for improvement in curriculum design, and an acknowledgement that more effective and varied learning styles benefit the learner. This has strengthened the need to express, through the medium of learning

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[3] UCP is given, for instance, as *the* example of elite institutions in the article of Wikipedia on "Education in Portugal" (see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Portugal)

outcomes, the knowledge, understanding, competences and other attributes within qualifications. This pedagogical trend is at the heart of the Bologna agenda that emphasises the need for dramatic reform to modernise Europe's antiquated education systems" (Adam, 2008).

Another important external factor affecting strongly curricular reforms and innovations, which is directly influenced not only by the Bologna Process but also by the European employment strategy and, as part of it, the reform of national qualifications systems, is the growing stress on *employability* and on the development those competences that are the most important for employability. The new Portuguese national qualifications system, introduced in 2007, includes a Framework for Higher Education Qualifications which is used as a basis for accrediting teaching programs in higher education.[4] Improving the employability of gradates is seen as a key goal in the higher education policy of Portugal and it is well understood that this has major implications for curricula, intended learning outcomes and teaching. As the background report prepared by Portugal for the OECD review on its tertiary education has stressed:

> „The international qualification of the Portuguese tertiary education is essential for the development of the country and the employability of its graduates. This challenge involves assuring the transition from an education system based on the transmission of knowledge to a system based on competence building. This is a central and critical issue all over Europe, and particularly in Portugal, where there are high dropout and failure rates and the conservative influence of rhetorical and passive methods of teaching" (MSTHE, 2006)

Improving the employability of graduates is a particularly highly valued goal in the Portuguese Catholic University. This has been indicated explicitly as the most important rationale behind the "*competency-based approach*" (Oliveira & Guimarães, 2010) followed by one of the three quality teaching initiatives analysed in this report, but it can be easily demonstrated behind the two others, as well. In fact, competence-development for improved employability and using learning outcomes for making competence-development more effective is a major driver of quality teaching initiatives in many countries and many higher education institutions worldwide, including UCP. This is in accordance with the principles of the new Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, mentioned above, which encourages the development of new forms of teaching relying on work based experiences for competence development. As a report of the national ministry on the implementation of the qualification reform in higher education states in connection with vocationally oriented programs:

> "The work-related training component is aimed at applying knowledge and understanding to practical activities of the respective professional profile, and includes the performance of guided activities, using techniques, equipment and materials that are involved in the production of goods or performance of services. Work-related training may embody various modalities of practical training in real job situations, particularly professional work placements. Workrelated training will be carried out in partnership, to ensure integration into the labour market, with companies and other employers, corporate associations or professional associations, or other organisations, which are better suited to the specific nature of the training area, as well as to the characteristics of the labour market" (MSTHE, 2009).

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[4] The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) is „one subsystem of the National Qualifications Framework", „higher education institutions are covered by the National Qualifications System (…) within the specific legal framework of the higher education system" and the national higher education accreditation agency „will use the FHEQ-Portugal as a reference point when auditing or reviewing the establishment and management of academic standards by higher education institutions" (MSTHE, 2009).

A third relevant external or contextual factor to be mentioned here is the *reform of the system of quality assurance* in Portugal. Following an external evaluation of this system by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in 2006 (ENQA, 2006) a major reform was introduced in 2007, which led to a new legal framework for the assessment of higher education including the creation of a new Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency[5] (MSTHE, 2009). Given the relatively strong connection between the renewal of the system of evaluation and accreditation in higher education, on the one hand, and the reform of the national qualifications system and the national quality assurance system, on the other, it is quite probable that the national quality assurance system itself is supporting those quality teaching initiatives, like those of UCP, which aim at improving competence development for employability.

Although no major direct national initiatives to improve quality teaching – such as quality awards, other forms of direct financial support for effective teaching or relevant new priorities stressing excellence in teaching in higher education development programs – could be identified, the new quality and qualifications frameworks, mentioned above, seem to give substantial impetus to institutional level quality initiatives.

Understanding and promoting quality teaching at UCP

From a teaching and learning perspective UCP shows unique and particularly interesting features which make this case worth being observed closely and analysed by those interested in quality and pedagogical innovations. These particular features seem to be linked, first of all, with the *status* and the *location* of the institution.

As for its status: this is a university founded and run by the Catholic Church. This has a very strong impact on the philosophy, the culture and the dominant pedagogical approach of the institution but not so much in terms of manifest presence of religion or religious traits but much more in the strength of *commitment for community action* and in the strength of living and active *communities and networks nurtured by common values and common engagements*. The university operates in the middle of a web of rich social networks that provide innumerable occasions for learning in action outside the organisation of the University.

As for the *location*, Porto as a city seems to have unique cultural features that are particularly favourable for the creation of an environment that offers opportunities for rich learning experiences. Our hosts stressed that this has been an open, liberal minded city, fostering entrepreneurship, autonomy, creativity and innovation and it is also cultivating strong international connections. Culturally the city was said to be "between Latin and English worlds" with strong cultural connections with England.

As a *non-public institution* UCP is entitled, on the basis of the agreement between the Portuguese government and the Vatican to get state subvention, however, a large part of the income of the institution comes from student fees that are – as we were said – approximately five times higher than fees paid elsewhere. The university "lives on the market": its existence and its fate depend on the demands of its clients. It sees itself as being placed in a *competitive environment* where it can survive only if it can offer high quality services. Although it

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[5] The new legal framework for the assessment of higher education was introduced by Law no. 38/2007 (16th August) and the new Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency was created by the Decree-Law no. 369/2007 (5th November) (MSTHE, (2009).

conducts advanced research in a number of areas and it offers also doctoral programs in several disciplinary fields it is not a research university. Its main profile is teaching: what it offers to its clients is mainly high quality training programs with a perspective for its graduates of finding good jobs on the labour market. Employability is one of the main goals explicitly stressed in the strategic documents. The chapter of on *strategic positioning* of the strategic plan of the university establishes, for example, "the best learning and better employability" as the first priority for the 1st and the 2nd cycles.

UCP seems to have a leadership with a clear commitment towards quality teaching. The rector, Professor Joaquim Azevedo, who is a Doctor in Educational Sciences, is a recognised expert of vocational and technical education.[6] In the early nineties he was responsible in the Portuguese Ministry of Education, among others, for the implementation of the reform of secondary professional and vocational education and he has published studies on the question of transition between education and work.[7] One can assume that a university leadership being susceptible towards and valuing the questions related with relationships between education and work has created favourable conditions for initiatives that contribute to the improvement of this relationship.

Under the leadership of professor Azevedo quality teaching has become a strategic priority for UCP. After a more than one year-long intensive work described as a „participative process" and including a thorough self-assessment a Strategic Plan for the period of 2009-2013 was adopted in December 2009. This plan has defined five „strategic axes": the first of them is becoming "*a university of teaching and learning of recognized quality*" and the third one becoming "*a promoter of social innovation*" (UCP, 2010a). One of the objectives under the first „strategic axis" is "*Ensuring high quality teaching; reaching a public image of notoriety in this regard.*" Under this objective a number of specific goals, directly related with quality teaching have been formulated (see box below).

The teaching quality related goals
of the first strategic axis in the Strategic Plan of UCP
(„Objective B")

> Monitor and improve quality levels through the coordination mechanisms for peer review and diagnosis of student satisfaction (questionnaires and other means that may be relevant),

> Ensure the acquisition by all students specific skills and general skills, among which we highlight a solid inscribed in humanist and Christian tradition, these skills can sustain performance profiles ethically grounded, critical, creative, enterprising and committed to community development.

> Ensure high levels of pedagogical innovation, particularly through the start-up projects with significant impact in most of the teachers and students of this level of education;

> Strengthening tutoring based on personalization, the demand and success of student learning,

> Provide all students in all courses and all courses by the beginning of the academic year 2010/11, devices support online through the new tool of e-learning, "Campus On-line" with clear effects on levels of student satisfaction (to be revised in the annual survey),

> Develop and implement a Skills Development Plan teaching of teachers (e.g. linking objectives, strategies and pedagogical evaluation, coordination of teaching in attendance and technological contexts).

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[6] See the Curriculum Vitae of professor Joaquim Azevedo here: http://www.cnedu.pt/files/conselheiros/Joaquim-Azevedo.pdf

[7] See, for example, Azevedo (2003)

The strategic axis "*promoting social innovation*" deserves special attention as it demonstrates perfectly the commitment of the university towards innovation both in its own internal organisation and in its broader social environment. Under this axis the Strategic Plan envisages the "*strengthening the quality of services from the perspective of their customers*" and „*the creation of products and/or innovative services (...) with high added value for existing or potential customers*". As we shall see in the next section UCP is innovative not only in renewing its own teaching programs through introducing new, learner-centred and competence-development oriented teaching methods but also in enhancing development in its environment through fostering innovations in its partner organisations, both in the public and the market sector. Defining social innovation as a strategic axis has created particularly favourable conditions for those organisational and technological innovations that may lead to improved teaching quality. The strategic axis on social innovation of UCP directs our attention to an important point of synergy between innovation and quality strategies, sometimes neglected in the quality discourse.

One of the actions pursued on the basis of the new Strategic Plan, with a high relevance from a quality teaching perspective, has been the reinforcing of the internal quality system of the university (*Sistema de Garantia Interna de Qualidade – SIGIQ*) and that of the central service unit responsible for operating this system. According to a related internal document (UCP, 2010b) a number of initiatives are being considered as part of SIGIQ that may have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Such initiatives are:

- launching an internal consultation with the academic community on the „educational questionnaires" used in UCP in order to make them more relevant for the improvement of quality in the area of curriculum planning, teaching and assessment
- capacity building among the academic staff through a range of various programs such as
  - conferences with national and international experts who would share their know-how
  - workshops on practical applications and case studies
  - the creation of communities of practice for the development of teaching materials and for experimentation in the organisation of education
  - discussions with students on teaching and studying practices
  - the initiation of thematic discussions on themes like orientation of students, tutoring and mentoring, curriculum development and pedagogical coordination or the use of the Blackboard system
- using external evaluation and consultancy for promoting quality teaching (participation in the IMHE "Quality teaching" program is conceived as such an activity)
- using internal evaluation and also institutional research into pedagogical models and conceptions of teaching and learning, as well as, thinking about teaching quality
- The development of a policy on recognising and rewarding innovative and effective teaching by teams and individual teachers

A further characteristic of UCP is related to its commitment towards the value of employability. As already stressed, improving the employability of students is one of the main goals of UCP's strategy, and this is directly linked with the quality of teaching and learning. UCP is one those universities which see an opportunity and not a challenge or threat in the

implementation of the Bologna Process, and which seem to understand deeply the driving principles of this process. This seems to be one of those universities where the implementation of the Bologna principles has reached the deepest layers of teaching: it has transformed, in several units, curricula, the way curricula teaching and learning is organised, including teaching and assessment methods and pedagogical thinking. In its competition with other universities it seems to gain a significant comparative advantage form implementing thoroughly the Bologna reform, including the reorganisation of curricula and teaching according to the learning outcomes approach. "*We have to do something what is different from what the others are doing*" – said one of the middle level leaders we interviewed – and he continued: "*our speciality is analysing the skills needed by companies*".

UCP is an interesting case of universities considered as "elite institutions" and, at the same time, making competitive advantage from valuing the goal of employability and that of developing labour market relevant competences. This orientation is taken seriously in this university: it is well reflected in the way it plans and delivers its teaching programs, and in the way it transforms the work of its teachers. Sending out students has become a value. "*We let students go out without losing time*" – said the same the middle level leader, stressing the need to reconcile two things that are often difficult to reconcile: letting students gain real life experiences outside the closed world of the school and, at the same time, keeping full control of the quality of learning, including the effective use of time.

The serious implementation of the Bologna principles and the transformation of the teaching-learning process have changed, as mentioned, the work of teachers. What we saw in UCPUCP is perfectly illustrating the statement of the last Bologna "Trends Report": "*The shift to student-centred learning entails a more creative approach to teaching and therefore even more hours spent on developing new ways of teaching. Institutions must find ways to motivate academic staff to spend the time required to design, evaluate and re-design their modules, if necessary, and to assume different roles to those of ex-cathedra teachers.*" (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). The leaders of one of the quality teaching initiatives stressed that "*Each teacher has to have critical, reflective attitude towards teaching/course*". The integration of project work into the study programs, the dramatic increase of interaction with external agencies who became partners in teaching and, particularly, the growing need for individual coaching, tutoring and personalised teaching have already fundamentally transformed the work of many teachers at UCP. For many teachers this transformation made teaching professionally more challenging, more rewarding and more motivating, although some of them might still be unhappy with the changes (we heard some complaints about the increased workload and the lack of time for individual research and for academic carrier building). The redistribution of teaching loads as well as the emergence of new functions and the relative decrease of the weight of some traditional functions might have also lead to conflicts among the academic staff.

In sum, the characteristics of UCP mentioned above contributed to the emergence of an organisational environment that seems to be favourable for pedagogical innovations leading to more effective and better quality teaching and learning. This will be illustrated in the following by a presentation of three specific quality initiatives.

Quality teaching initiatives at UCP

Improving employability and improving learning are strongly interlinked with each other in the philosophy of UCPUCP. Apparently the aim to improve the employability of students is

the most important driver of initiatives to improve learning and this creates a particular pattern of learning improvement. We observed an interesting, sophisticated and original model of organising teaching and learning that manifested itself clearly in all the three quality initiatives examined. The three initiatives are run independently from each other in three different faculties (see box below).

Quality initiatives presented by the Portuguese Catholic University [8]

Portfolio of Individual Competences - PIC
(Faculty of Business and Economics)

  This is a complex curriculum innovation of the Faculty of Business and Economics which aims at improving the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning of its degree programs. The innovation consists of including intensive competence development into the curriculum though collective project-work, internship in workplaces and individualised coaching.

Community Service
(Faculty of Education and Psychology)

  In this project students do voluntary work in various community service centres in Porto, tutored by the staff of the Faculty of Education and Psychology. The aim of this program is to enhance the personal and social development of students, to promote the values of empathy, solidarity, cooperation, gratitude, responsibility and commitment, to allow students to have a first experience with the reality of professional life and also to contribute to meeting the needs of various community institutions.

"A nurse in school: a project for more health"
(Institute of Health Sciences)

   In this project students of the 4th year of the Nursing Undergraduates Program of the Institute of Health Sciences, tutored by teachers, are placed to basic and secondary schools of one of the District (Oport) of Porto. They work as nurses in these school providing various health related services to pupils and, sometimes, to teachers. This program is part of the formal curriculum of students in the Nursing Degree Program.

Although these are three separate initiatives they share at least two key principles: the focus on *competence-development through combining learning and work* and the *direct involvement of actors outside the university into the learning process*. In all the three cases the faculties have created a dense *web of connections* through intensive working relationships with external organisations. The networks created seem to assume the following four closely interrelated functions:

- They provide a wide space for various voluntary community actions that have not only a strong impact on the values and attitudes of students (including their attitudes towards working sometimes in hard conditions) but they also create trust for them in their future employers. This reduces transaction costs for employers and increases the chances of the students to get a job offer.
- They provide a diversified space for learning in practice or learning by doing which helps developing those competences that are highly valued by employers but that cannot be developed in traditional university settings. This gives sufficient guarantee to the employers (who may also have a role in the evaluation of the work or the

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[8] Source: UCP (2010) and UCP's website

assessment of the competences of the students) that the students are well prepared for the job they might offer to them.

- They often create new forms of work, without any substantial investment or financial risk-taking by the employers who, experiencing the beneficial work of students, may come to the conclusion that a new job should be created. This may lead to job creation led by the supply side (supply creating demand).
- The intensive cooperation between the faculties and the partner organisation through the students commuting between the two places has created channels of communication that enhance knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer in two directions. Teachers told us that they were learning from their partners (often through the reporting of students) about the reality of professional work and the representatives of partner institutions told us that they could rely on the specialist knowledge of universities to solve real work related problems.

Although at a different level and weight the three quality teaching initiatives all showed the presence of these four functions. In the case of the *Faculty of Business and Economics* the stress has been on the second function (students were doing project work in companies which made it possible for them to acquire valuable practical competences) but the three other functions were also important. The employers we met made it clear that students of UCP became more attractive for them than students coming from other universities because they already knew them and they could develop trust in them. The activity of the students in the companies could make employers discover new opportunities (for example experiencing how students through their project work contribute to the improvement of their business activities) which could make them consider the opening of new jobs. Employers reported on several forms of using the knowledge created by the university and transmitted to their company though students received in internship. Some of them said students, with their professors in the background, were working on real problems in the company and this way they could be used for tasks that have been done earlier by contracted external consultants. Here teachers reported, like in the two other cases, about enriching the content of their subject with the knowledge imported from companies through students.

In the case of the initiative run by the *Faculty of Education and Psychology* the stress was on the first and the second function: students were doing voluntary community service in municipal or private institutions of social care working with the disabled, the elderly or other social groups in need of social assistance which not only helped them to acquire competences related with specific psychological interventions but also had a major educational impact on their thinking and behaviour. At the same time, although not explicitly stated in this case, this could also create a new need for the type of specialist work they were doing even if no such a need was originally perceived. In the partner institution visited the voluntary activity of the students of psychology has already become an integrated part of the work of the institution and probably stopping it would already cause difficulties. Teachers in this faculty reported on the intensive contacts with the partner institutions being a valuable source of new knowledge for them as this allowed them to discover new problem areas that could be integrated into their own professional knowledge. A professor teaching various intervention techniques said this way she could enrich the curriculum of its subject with new elements which made the content of her course more relevant and, therefore, improved its quality.

In the *Faculty of Health Sciences* all the four functions could be observed in a very clear form. In this case students and teachers both reported on, sometimes spectacular, developments in the behaviour, attitudes and competences of students as a consequence of

their being involved in demanding real life tasks that required high level commitment and responsibility and also specialist knowledge (they delivered, for example, sexual education to adolescents in a normal classroom environment, working like real teachers or they were working in school bullying prevention programs and they were training teachers and other staff to do life saving first aid intervention). Students in this case, in the seventh semester of their studies, were exposed to quite harsh real life situations (they had to take care, for example, of pregnant adolescents and they gave support to children living in extreme social deprivation and poverty). As one of them said: "We became adults while during our practical work in schools" which is something we, the observers who saw these students working in schools, can confirm.

In this case we heard the explicit formulation of the goal of voluntary service possibly leading to the creation of new jobs through the recognition of the need for a service that has not existed before. It was in the framework of the initiative "*Nurses in schools*" that a new permanent service was created and institutionalised in the schools participating in the program, with relatively well equipped offices, with regular health prevention and health promotion programs and with a health consultancy and fist aid service opened for both children and staff. We were told that this being institutionalised might convince local authorities on the need to create and maintain such services (according to explicit state policies) and this could lead to the emergence of a new labour demand for highly qualified nurses that the university can later satisfy with its training program.

The two-direction transfer of knowledge was also perhaps the most apparent in this case. Not only teachers reported here about acquiring new knowledge through their students but we could see the reification of this knowledge in databases ready to be processed into statistical analyses and in intelligent and well structured reports by students describing the specific health-related problems they faced in schools, presenting the interventions they delivered and analysing their impact. We had the opportunity to look into some of these reports – called "reflections" – which were extremely rich in information and insights. Through this the teachers, who had to read carefully and also systematically assess these reports, could gain an excellent insight into the health related problems of schools and their surrounding communities and they could develop their professional knowledge further. This has had a clear impact on the quality of their teaching, especially for the relevance and the pertinence of the content of their teaching programs. The students we met (we could see several case presentations made by them and also engage into dialogue with them) seemed to be highly motivated and also highly demanding as far as the quality of their teaching programs is concerned.

Learning and teaching in this environment occurs in what one of our interlocutors called the "*learning space*". This is an extended space for learning which includes not only the university itself but also its environment: the wide range of various *companies* (smaller and larger enterprises) and *public service institutions* (schools, hospitals and associations providing service to the handicapped, socially disadvantaged and the elderly) operating in the city of Porto or in its surroundings where student are doing voluntary service, are received for internship or do field-research for their compulsory project work." Looking at all these external activities and the various partners involved one sees *a university organisation with permeable boundaries*. The staff of the partner institutions are involved in the learning process: professors are sharing their teaching tasks with them, they are often directly involved in various teaching tasks as mentors, moderators, and supervisors of projects or sometimes even as guest lecturers. In this extended learning space there are no clear boundaries between

the internal world of the university and the external world of work and real life. There is a permanent and intensive communication between these two worlds: people and knowledge are continuously flowing between them. The responsibility for the quality of learning is unavoidably shared between the internal and the external agencies and, on the basis of what we saw, we can say this does not damage but improves the quality of learning.

Naturally, the formal responsibility for quality remains with the university and with its teachers. In this open and complex learning environment they can assume this responsibility only through ingenious and innovative solutions, through the invention of new forms or organising teaching and learning. In fact, all the three initiative we studied can be described as *sophisticated techniques to assure quality in an open learning environment* where there are many elements that are not easy to keep under control.

Improving employability through developing competences

The initiative called PIC is perhaps the best known of the three initiatives within and outside of the university. We found two different unfolding for the abbreviation PIC: one is "*Portfolio of Individual Competences*" the other is "*Pensar, Communicar, Agir*" that is "*Think, communicate and act.*". According to the website of the program[9] the *thinking* component aims at identifying and valorising skills, the *communicating* component aims at articulating experiences with the requirements of the job market and the *acting* component aims at strengthening the quality of training and finding the way in the world of work.

This initiative has two strongly interrelated aims: on the one hand it helps students to achieve academic success (through enhancing the teaching and learning process), on the other, it helps them to achieve career goals connecting learning with the requirements of the world of work. As an article presenting the program has formulated it (making reference to opportunity and the stimulus provided by Bologna reform): "*The main strategy was the competency-based approach of curricula development, and the creation of three new subjects dealing specifically with transferable skills: critical thinking, communication and teamwork, and systemic thinking*" (Oliveira & Guimarães, 2010).

This is a coherent framework that aims at developing some key competences that seem to be the most appreciated by employers: thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork and communication skills and application of knowledge in real life situations. These competences are developed through the following three well defined and distinct learning projects accomplished in the fist, the second and the third years of the management and economics bachelor degree program (Oliveira & Guimarães, 2010)

- *Project I* (first year): it aims at developing individual thinking and problem solving skills through and individual mini research/learning project leading to the building of an individual learning portfolio and to a presentation of the outcome of the activity
- *Project II* (second year): it aims at developing communication and teamwork skills through group work in small (generally five members) teams typically in real life situations and through a common presentation of the results of the work
- *Final Project* (third year): it aims at applying knowledge in real life situations (in internship at workplaces) through, for example conducting an organisational diagnosis

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[9] See here: http://feg.porto.ucp.pt/PIC/Default.aspx. For a detailed presentation of the program see also Oliveira & Guimarães, 2010

of a company and creating a business plan (in the case of business students) or through the resolution of case studies (economics students).

PIC is a major, well elaborated and well documented pedagogical innovation, designed originally by the Department for organisational behaviour and human resource management of the *Faculty of Business and Economics* but later adopted and applied across the entire faculty. It reflects the open and extended "learning space" conception evoked earlier as it consist of three major pillars: giving a new role to employers, teachers and students in the learning process.

Employers in PIC not only receive students for project work and for internship but also take part directly in the assessment of students during the so called "public skills demonstrations". They are continuously consulted on their skills needs, and some of them accept to take part also in teaching through delivering occasional lectures or fulfilling the role of mentors in project work. Teachers in this program have a double role: on the one hand they continue to teach their subject, and, on the other, they play the role of project leaders, which requires particularly intensive interactions with students. As project leaders they have to behave as tutors responding to the various needs of the student group working in the project led by them. Their role as subject teachers has also changed: they have to redesign systematically their teaching programs in the light of the skills needs of the futures employers of their graduates.

Individual coaching for supporting each student in setting individual goals and strategies to achieve them is a key element of this program. As the website of the program formulates it: „*Coaching helps answer the questions 'Where am I?' and 'Where am I going?'*". This initiative, similarly to the two others, could not work without making active individual mentoring and coaching a fundamental function of teaching. This function is assumed by the so called "PIC team" whose work is connected, at the same time, to three different problem areas and to three different key partners (as illustrated in *2. Table*). A company or work related problem to be negotiated with a teacher might be, for example, informing the teacher on the specific learning opportunities provided by a specific workplace (which is logical as the PIC team members know better the workplaces than the teachers). A student welfare related issue to be negotiated with the employers might be, for example, informing the employer about the specific private life related difficulties of a student (which is again logical as the PIC team members know much better the individual students than the employer who receives them occasionally in his/her work organisation).

2. Table
Problem areas and working partners of the "PIC team"

	Employers	Teachers	Students
Company and work related issues			
Teaching and learning related issues			
Student welfare related issues			

As the types of activities performed and the competences needed by the members of the "PIC team" (guidance, counselling, coaching, supporting, negotiation, mediating etc.) are not classical teacher competences the persons assuming these functions should have training typically in psychology and other related disciplines. The horizontal perspective of the PIC team makes its members well informed on the whole of the teaching and learning process and

their cross-cutting mediation contributes to the transformation of teaching and learning into a teamwork performed by the whole of the academic community involved in the program and creates a strong program transparency. Program level integration becomes stronger and the use of learner centred approaches becomes almost inevitable. All this seems to contribute significantly to the quality of teaching at the *Faculty of Business and Economics*.

In the case of this initiative – and this is the case in the two others, as well – quality is strongly linked with employability. Teaching is seen as of good quality if it is successful in developing the skills needed by employers. It is not surprising that the assessment of competences is one of the most important components of the PIC program, as it is reflected in its name: *Portfolio of Individual Competences*. The program starts with an individualised assessment of skills (based on self-assessment) and continues with an individual identification of the skills need to be developed further and ends with skills-demonstration. It is assumed that by the end of the study program students build their individual skills portfolio which is a „collection of supporting evidence of skills developed during the whole process". Employers, as mentioned earlier, are directly involved in the assessment of the skills of students at the end of the study program. This happens during the skills' demonstration sessions with "juries consisting of members of local business organisations "(Oliveira & Guimarães, 2010).

The PIC program has radically transformed the organisation of work at the *Faculty of Business and Economics* of UCP. It is worth mentioning that this process started well before the implementation of the Bologna Process, on the initiative of some innovative teachers, particularly from the department responsible for teaching and research in the areas of human resource management and organisational behaviour. The radical reform was preceded by a long preparation period as stressed by the leaders of this innovation in one of their articles presenting the program: "Preliminary discussions took a long time, and there was also time spent on resolving conflict among the academic staff. It takes time to gain the co-operation of all the members of staff, given the scope of change involved in the curricular innovation process" (Oliveira & Guimarães, 2010). Time was also needed to build up, through contacting companies, business leaders and alumni in appropriate positions the network of partners who could offer work-based learning opportunities. Although the Bologna reform gave a strong "tailwind" to this innovation and it has accelerated it, it has remained basically and *incremental process* and – according to its leaders – this was the only way to bring it to a success.

Building networks and using voluntary service for improving learning

The second quality initiative analysed in more detail in this report is run by the Faculty of Education and Psychology of UCP, which is the youngest faculty of the university (headed by the present rector). The Faculty says it is committed to "find concrete answer to the problems of the Portuguese society",[10] to link university education and research with this commitment and enrich learning with practical experiences in real life. The internal culture of the Faculty encourages reflexion about how to improve teaching and learning as it is reflected, for example, in the presentation of its undergraduate program of psychology. The public website of the study program "*Licenciature Psicologia*" contains a separate section on "training and assessment methodologies", stressing, among others, that "students are encouraged to perform various projects and practical assignments (individually and in groups) in order to develop

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[10] See the website of the Faculty here:
http://www.porto.ucp.pt/site/custom/template/ucptplfac.asp?sspageID=1675&lang=1

skills in collecting and analyzing data in the context of the issues discussed in the workshops". Also "self-evaluation is encouraged, particularly with regards to the completion and presentation of work by promoting the ability of critical reflection and identification of areas for personal and academic improvement."[11]

The curriculum of the undergraduate program of psychology includes the possibility for students to take part in *voluntary community services* in various areas, such as school support orphanages, drug prevention programs, civil associations of parents of children with serious illness, homes for handicapped children, prevention of AIDS, immigrant centres, supporting the homeless, centres of young mothers and other similar organisations or programs. The activity can be developed throughout the academic year and more intensively during the holidays.[12] The aim of the voluntary community services is to promote the personal and social development of students, to develop their commitment to the values of empathy, solidarity, cooperation, gratitude and responsibility and particularly to allow them a first contact with the reality of professional life. The community service work allows students to face real life situations and to apply their knowledge and practice their competences in these situations. This activity appears in the official presentation of the curriculum of the degree program, although, as it is not compulsory, not every student participates in it, and its accomplishment does not bring formal credits to those who make it.

Even if it is not formally integrated into the study program, like in the case of PIC and also in the "*nurse in school*" initiative to be presented below, the curriculum is significantly enriched by it and teachers make use of the practical experiences their students acquire during their external work. Students are encouraged to use this experience to improve their chances on the labour market. According to the regulations of the program the participation in the voluntary community service appears in the diploma as „*additional information* in the *Diploma Supplement* in accordance with the guidelines of the Bologna Declaration" (UCP, 2007).

The organisations who receive the students for the service voluntary service[13] sign a "*protocol of collaboration*" with the Faculty of Education and Psychology which specifies the responsibilities and tasks of the three partners, that is, the receiving institution, the university and the student. One of the obligations the hosting organisation have to accept is the nomination of a person who is "responsible for monitoring and supervising" the student and "maintaining regular contacts" with the tutor teachers. The hosting institution has to accept an obligation to fully "integrate the student into the dynamics of the institution" and also being assessed by the students through a questionnaire (UCP, 2007).

The intensive communication between the university and the receiving institutions and the high level of mutual trust between them assures that the places of practice do not use students simply as free labour but they offer them a rich learning environment that allows the development of valuable competences (such as capacity to work in collaborative teams, empathy, conflict resolution or ethical consciousness or social responsibility). The learning experiences of students during their voluntary service are assessed continuously by the tutors,

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[11] See here: http://www.porto.ucp.pt/ieducacao/licenciaturas/
[12] See the website of the program „*Serviço Comunitário*":
http://www.porto.ucp.pt/site/custom/template/ucptplfac.asp?SSPAGEID=2905&lang=1&artigoID=2046
[13] According to the information on the website of UCP the university has a signed agreement for this program with 33 partner institutions and an agreement is being prepared with 7 further partners (see here: http://www.porto.ucp.pt//site/resources/documents/IEducacao/Documentos/servicocomunitario/Acordo%20Cola boracao%20Lista%20Instituicoes%20que%20assinaram.pdf)

as well as the peer-group, and there is also an obligation to "write a report with a brief description of the activities performed and a critical reflection on the experience of volunteering", which is also assessed. (UCP, 2007)

From the perspective of quality teaching and learning within the university a key component of the voluntary community service program should be stressed here: this is the system of *individual tutoring and training sessions* which aim at preparing students for the field work and providing them continuous support (see *1. Figure*).This is done by a team of four teachers of psychology, who are members of the staff of the Faculty of Education and Psychology. They organise the training sessions where students perform, among others, personality development exercises and they also discuss with each other the difficult cases the meet or share their achievements during the practical work. The four tutors assume also the monitoring of the work of students at the workplace where the voluntary service is done: they frequently visit these workplaces and they keep contact with the persons who supervise the work of students there. They are assisted by a secretary, who assumes the related, quite significant, administrative tasks.

1. Figure
Training sessions for community service at the Faculty of Education and Psychology[14]

Individual tutoring is a particularly important element of this program: even more than in the "*nurse in school*" initiative below. The special importance of individual tutoring is related here with the fact that the receiving institutions are extremely diverse and the work or learning situations in which the students find themselves are extremely different. The high level of diversity is good for learning but it makes it almost impossible to standardise teaching. Individual tutoring is a kind of personalised teaching: it allows students and teachers to discuss particular cases, to solve specific difficulties, to answer unexpected problems. It is important to stress that the teachers who are members of the *Community Service Team* take responsibilities that go beyond the usual responsibilities of academic staff and they show extraordinary commitment and motivation. This attitude is strongly supported by the university as a whole which, as a Catholic institution, stresses in general its commitment towards the values of solidarity and social engagement.

The work-based learning that occurs during the voluntary service period enhances the acquisition of tacit knowledge needed in effective professional work. This practice not only

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[14] Source: the website of the program „*Serviço Comunitário*" (see
http://www.porto.ucp.pt/site/custom/template/ucptplfac.asp?SSPAGEID=2905&lang=1&artigoID=2046)

makes preparation for professional life more effective but improves also the employability of students and increases their chances to find a job after graduation. Those employers who have received students for the voluntary practical work seemed to be highly satisfied with them. As one of them said to us regarding UCP students: they are "well instructed, versatile, humble, they are willing to devote time and energy, they are capable to work autonomously, and they are willing to make initiatives".

Working and learning: the "nurse in school" initiative

The initiative called "*A nurse in school*" (Enfermeiro na Escola) is part of the undergraduate nursing program of the Institute of Health Sciences. It is different from the previous initiative in that in this case the work-based component is formally included into the curriculum of the study program. In the last year of their four-year-long undergraduate program nursing students have to perform clinical practice in schools which are in partnership with the university. This is a 560 hours course which includes 350 hours of practical work in the school, during which students perform activities like assessing the health status of pupils, providing first aid in case of accidents, teaching pupils about nutrition, sexual behaviour, emotional disorders or hygiene and taking part in various forms of health promotion. Beyond the 560 hours school work they spend 100 hours on individual work (e.g. reporting on their experiences) and they spend a further 110 hours with their teachers who offer them 5 hours tutoring per week at the university and 2 hours in the school where they work.

The tutorial orientation is a particularly important element of this program. During this activity students share their experiences with their teachers, discuss their problem-cases with them, assess together the outcomes of their work-based learning and elaborate together learning strategies. Teachers use a standard repertoire of tools in the tutorial activity which consists of the following elements:
- the nursing appointment database (students have to record here every intervention they do)
- the international classification of nursing practice (this is a standard terminology used by the students when recording their interventions)
- health promotion sessions (these are practical tasks related with health education)
- reflections (these are reports written by students about their learning experiences, sent regularly to their teachers through the "BlackBoard" e-learning platform, assessed by the teachers and also commented by them, with their comments sent back to the students)[15]
- individual portfolio (containing all the reified outcomes of the school practice)
- the group report (this may take the form of a common presentation)[16]
- the BlackBoard e-learning platform (this enhances communication between students and teachers, as well as students and students, and it also allows individualised assignments and assessments)
- the Document approval (this is the final assessment done with a standard evaluation grid which allows a multidimensional evaluation of the whole of the clinical practice of the individual student)

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[15] We had the opportunity to get the translation of such a reflection chosen at random and we found its content of high quality, reflecting real and substantial learning.
[16] We saw several such presentations and we were impressed by them.

Learning in the "nurse in school" initiative, as stressed earlier, happens in a challenging and high risk real life environment. In this environment not only students are continuously exposed to difficult and unexpected situations but their teachers, as well. Teachers have to learn to live in and to control this challenging open learning environment which puts them into a role that is different from what most of them are used to in the well protected closed classrooms. One can observe an interesting mixture of openness and standardisation in this environment: openness, accompanied with uncertainties, is unavoidable but pedagogical control can be assured by the conscious and systematic use of the standard repertoire presented above.

A particularity interesting feature of the initiative is that the various items of the repertoire of the applied pedagogical tools also function as a complex *knowledge management system*. They assume not only direct learning enhancement or educative functions but they also contribute to the enrichment of the body of knowledge relevant for the school nursing practice. The reports written by students about their work experiences, for example, often contain information that are new for the teachers and this way students can enrich the knowledge of their teachers.[17] The portfolios and the horizontal communication through BlackBoard support mutual learning: students, supported by their tutors, learn also from each other while sharing their experiences. As students are permanently uploading data into the nursing appointment database using the standard international classification system this creates opportunities for various kinds of statistical analyses and it enhances research activities. Learning in this case is more than individual acquisition of information, knowledge or competences: it is also a collective building of common knowledge.

Some conclusions

On the basis of the analysis of the three quality-teaching initiatives of UCP a number of general conclusions can be drawn.

- A commitment towards employability and towards developing those skills that are the most relevant in the world of work have created favourable conditions for the creation of effective forms of learning and skill-development at UCP
- Cultivating strong and intensive cooperation between the university and workplaces, and combining interesting work and learning have lead to significant innovations in teaching and improved learning.
- As opening learning towards work and community activities made teaching significantly more complex and organising learning became logistically more complicated, UCP needed particularly committed and motivated teachers to operate this open learning system.
- UCP has improved the quality of teaching through creating networks based on trust and willingness and turning these networks into an extended learning space providing a challenging, motivating, and inspiring learning environment. The high level of trust, engagement and collaborative spirit made it possible to keep this extended learning place under effective pedagogical control.
- The establishment of close cooperation with a very high number of partner organisations in its social environment and, through this, the creation of an extended open learning space became possible by the fact that UCPUCP is clearly committed to contribute to regional and urban development and to social problem-solving.

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[17] This was confirmed by the teachers we interviewed

- Placing learning into a complex, open environment increased the need for highly personalised teaching and for individual tutoring. This has significantly increased the workload of teachers who had to become partners in a radical transformation of their teaching practices.
- Innovation plays a key role in improving the quality of teaching and learning at UCPUCP. Quality is improved through innovation and through the commitment of the academic staff to innovate for improvement rather than through bureaucratic regulation or through standardising process.
- The recognition by the leadership of UCP that improving the quality of teaching and maintaining it at a high level is a major competitive advantage for the university. The capability of this leadership to turn this into an institutional strategy through extended participatory process has created particularly favourable conditions for the spread of innovative teaching solutions, based on combining work and learning, throughout the whole institution.
- UCP is one of those higher education institutions which have been capable to understand the significant potential in the Bologna Process to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to generate innovations that may lead to quality improvement.
- Some of the units of UCP seem to be particularly well positioned to become drivers of innovations leading to the improvement of teaching and learning. Faculties or departments of education and psychology play this role in many universities (Hénard, 2010), which is the case of UCP, as well. Beyond education and psychology health and management studies – especially human resource management and organisational behaviour – seem to show here a strong potential in innovating teaching and learning for making them more practice oriented and more relevant for needs of the world of work.
- The example of UCP shows that it is possible to reconcile expectations towards an "elite" institution with commitment to improve employability and to combine learning with work.

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