

External Review Committee Report, October 2010

The fourth meeting of the External Review Committee (ERC) for the collaborative programme between universities in Portugal and Carnegie Mellon University in the USA – the Carnegie-Mellon | Portugal Program in Information and Communication Technologies – took place over the period from 14th to 16th October 2010.

The Committee commented as follows:

“This visionary initiative is having a very positive impact, advancing yet further the standing and standard of research and postgraduate education in Information and Communication Technology in Portugal. The programme has now been in operation for four years; the progress and achievements are very impressive indeed. During this our fourth evaluation visit we met, as previously, with a wide range of people involved: the Secretary of State for Science, Technology and Higher Education; the President of FCT and the Executive Director for International Partnerships at FCT; the two program directors (from Carnegie Mellon University and the National Director, Portugal); participants in the programme (faculty both from Portuguese universities and from Carnegie Mellon; industrial sponsors and collaborators; a number of students, post-doctoral researchers and alumni) and the Board of the programme. We are again highly appreciative of the way in which all involved engaged with us during our review visit. We especially commend the way in which the Directors, with the support and encouragement of the Board and the government, have responded to the recommendations we have made in our various reports following earlier visits.

“The scale and scope of the programme is substantial - appropriately so. It involves professional Masters courses directed towards the particular needs of the ICT industry in Portugal, dual degree PhD programs and collaborative research projects, which link academics and researchers in Portugal with those at Carnegie Mellon University and with industry in Portugal. The industrial involvement and commitment is especially commendable. The programme has progressed well and we have high confidence that the benefits are becoming deeply embedded in the university system in Portugal. This is undoubtedly greatly assisted by the way in which the academic and industrial research community in ICT in Portugal has become yet further involved in the continued shaping and refinement of the programme. This pattern of strong engagement is a very positive feature that in our view should be maintained in a follow-on phase of the activity, which we consider to be required to ensure that the benefits to Portugal of the investment made to date are fully realised.

“We continue to be impressed by the high calibre of the students recruited to the dual degree programmes and by their commitment and enthusiasm. They clearly recognise the nature and value of the distinctive international experience afforded by the program – with study and research in both Portugal and at Carnegie Mellon University in the USA. In this respect the programme is making an important contribution to the development of potential future leading researchers for the Information and Communications Technology sector in Portugal – in industry, academia and as contributors also to public policy areas. There is no doubt that participating students benefit greatly from undertaking a substantial period of study at Carnegie Mellon, while faculty movements in both directions have played an essential part in helping

ensure real coherence of educational experience as well as equivalence of standard. We had the opportunity earlier during this fourth year to play a part in the evaluation of proposals for collaborative research projects. This gave us close sight at an early stage of emerging research projects. The project proposals were of a very high technical standard and particularly impressive for the high degree of industrial participation. We observed last year the growing number of companies becoming involved with the programme and it is good to see that this has continued. There are also now examples of very direct benefit flowing to the economy of Portugal through technology take-up in industry as well as some new start-up companies being formed. It is clear that, as hoped, the direct and intimate industrial engagement in the collaborative research and with the individual student PhD and MS projects is providing a most valuable channel to enable the ready flow of the fruits of research towards economic and societal impact. We were pleased to see that the new Institute in Madeira relating to Human Computer Interaction (HCI), proposed last year, has now been established. This we consider an imaginative and important development of considerable potential benefit, catalyzed by the Carnegie Mellon Portugal programme.

We congratulate all involved on the excellent way in which the activities in the programme have been progressed. In our view the Carnegie Mellon/Portugal Program is making an important contribution to transformational further development of university research and postgraduate education in Portugal, ensuring that the very highest international standards of excellence are attained. As this exemplary international collaboration enters the fifth year of its initial phase it is greatly to be hoped that the momentum can be maintained by a continuation in the activity.”

Professor Sir John O'Reilly, Cranfield University, UK (Chair)
Professor Luigia Carlucci Aiello, Sapienza University of Roma, Italy
Professor Tariq Durrani, Strathclyde University, UK
Professor Joel Moses, MIT, USA