

---

## Promoting good practices for equity and inclusion in portuguese Higher Education: a comprehensive approach at the national and institutional level

*Miguel Jerónimo, Ana Lúcia Duarte, Catarina Frade Mangas, Célia Sousa, Graça Seco, Patrícia Sousa, Tânia Matos dos Santos, Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Portugal*

*Keywords:* Inclusion; Higher Education; Equity; Good practices.

### *General description of the context*

The universal access of all people to higher education (HE), despite their socio-economical background, religion, ethnicity, gender or disability is a goal that has been gaining an increasing importance on a national and international level. In Portugal, the issue of students with special educational needs (SEN) or in need of social support was first addressed at the level of basic and secondary education. With the improvement of the support measures and policies, a growing number of otherwise excluded students has been able to access higher education, which poses a series of new challenges to the Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

Especially since the 80's, the government has been producing regulations and laws in order to provide equal opportunities in access to higher education by students with special needs and disabilities. These general guidelines and regulations are the starting point, but much is expected from the HEIs to ensure a proper reception and specially the success of disadvantaged students in HE.

In the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, a multidisciplinary team tries to assess and provide solutions for every identified case of disadvantage. Social Action Services, Student Support Services, a center of resources for digital inclusion and a research unit focused on inclusion, all reveal the commitment of the institution with the success of all students.

In respect to the availability of resources, the libraries are equipped with the WindowsEyes screen reader, allowing blind students access to all available information, with full control of the content. Through the libraries it is also possible to access the Open Library for Higher Education (BAES), which has a collection of over 3,000 titles in braille, audio and full text.

The Distance Education Unit uses the latest information technologies to provide any student access to all learning resources in IPLeiria.

The school year of 2012/2013 was the thematic year "IPL (+) Inclusive". This project aimed to encourage the implementation of a global policy of inclusion in all areas of action of the Institute and the surrounding community. The initiative is the result of over 10 years of institutional investment in the area

of accessibility and emphasizes the inclusion of diversity as an opportunity for personal and collective enrichment.

A selected number of good practices in the area of equity and inclusion will be presented and discussed next. As a result of the many years of dedication to the theme of inclusion in IPEiria, many others could be addressed, but these five stood out as the most innovative and relevant.

#### *Activities and instruments description*

Good Practice: Educational Programme to Financial Literacy

Objectives: Understand the financial literacy level of the IPEiria students; Improve financial knowledge on IPEiria student community to:

- ensure a more appropriate choice of financial products and services.
- Raise awareness to the importance of saving
- Reduce dropout rates in IPEiria
- Associate financial education to citizenship values and social responsibility

Good Practice: FASE® - Social Student Support Fund

Objectives: Support students from economically disadvantaged groups; Combat early school leaving and promoting success at school; Contribute to the consolidation of the educational path and strengthen academic and professional qualifications of students.

Good Practice: Production of support materials and use of the different support products for blind students

Objectives: Enable blind students to participate in society, particularly in the area of training in basic computer skills; Assess and provide advice about the types of equipment or products and their way of use; Support and train teachers in the use of supportive products and developing affordable materials.

Good Practice: Supporting higher education students with specific learning difficulties: dyslexia, dysorthographia, dysgraphia

Objectives: Psychological assessment of specific learning difficulties; Psychopedagogical intervention with higher education students.

Good Practice: Supporting group for higher education students with specific learning difficulties: dyslexia, dysorthographia, dysgraphia

Objectives: Psychological assessment of specific learning difficulties; Psychological and Psychopedagogical intervention with higher education students.

#### *Results Achieved*

Good Practice: Educational Programme to Financial Literacy

Results: At the end of the seminars, we ask students to fill a satisfaction questionnaire.

The results obtained show that students perceived that: the seminar was useful; after the participation in the seminar, students will change their behavior in relation to money management; the seminar improved their knowledge; what they learned in the seminar has application in their job; the participation on the seminar was important to their professional and personal development; the seminar met the expectations; they would recommend the seminar to other students.

Financial inclusion is an important part of personal wellbeing. Students that are not financially included and have problems with money will not be well integrated in the University in terms of their psychological, social, physical and academic life.

**Good Practice:** FASE® - Social Student Support Fund

**Results:** Annually, and since 2012, the Social Services promote the FASE® assessment through the development of an Analysis Report, on which the final goal is to achieve key indicators to evaluate the program, analyse the most relevant data for the calendar year referred to and compare them with those of previous years. FASE® is also valued by its users (students enrolled) from 2014, through an assessment survey, available online. The results, gathered from the survey are then compiled into a report. FASE® relevance is demonstrated by student responses, when asked to summarize their experience in the program.

The recognition of its importance and the students' identification with the program, has significantly contributed to increase financing available for its operation.

In 2014, faced with an increase in tuition fees, Students' Associations representing all students, voted for the increase of the FASE®'s funding in 1% more at the General Council.

**Good Practice:** Production of support materials and use of the different support products for blind students

**Results:** The project allowed the demystification of the visual disability along the whole academic community, transforming the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria in an open educational institution that respects the difference and equity of their students. The project contributed to the inclusion of blind students, since they have access to all the documents provided by teachers in the proper format according to their capabilities. The project positively influences students, as it allows them to be in possession of all the information according to their capabilities and in addition their full inclusion in all academic and social activity.

**Good Practice:** Supporting higher education students with specific learning difficulties: dyslexia, dysorthographia, dysgraphia

**Results:** There is no formal assessment of the project. However, the testimonies received and reported by the students during the sessions reveal the great impact of the project on their daily lives, especially in their academic achievements. To attain a higher level of success it would be necessary to implement specific laws that regulate strategies and make available support for students with special needs in general and specific learning difficulties in particular. It is also important to im-

prove teachers, staff and students training in special needs area.

Good Practice: Supporting group for higher education students with specific learning difficulties: dyslexia, dysorthographia, dysgraphia

Results: There is no formal assessment of the project. However, the testimonies received and reported by the students during the sessions reveal the great impact of the project on their daily lives, especially in their academic achievements. The psychological and psychopedagogical support intends to help students to create alternative responses to multifaceted problems related to specific learning difficulties, namely in personal and academic nature. By optimising different resources of personal, emotional, behavioural and social sources the self-perception of wellbeing is maximised.

### *References*

Despacho n.º 7569/2012, publicado no Diário da República, 2.ª série, n.º 106, de 31 de maio - Normas para a Atribuição do Fundo de Apoio Social ao Estudante do Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (FASE).

Pires, L., Seco, G., Martins, G. (2015). Apoio a estudantes com necessidades educativas especiais no ensino superior: a experiência de 10 anos do GTAEDS. In Livro de Atas da III Conferência Internacional para a Inclusão - INCLUDiT. Leiria: Instituto Politécnico de Leiria.

Freire, C., Ferreira, L., Mangas, C. & Rodrigues, C. (2015). Atitudes de inclusão no IPLeiria. In C. Mangas, C. Freire & M. Francisco (Orgs.), *Inclusão e Acessibilidade em Ação Diferentes percursos, um rumo*. Leiria: iACT/IPLeiria, Artigo 2. [Online, disponível em <http://iact.ipleiria.pt/>]

Seco, G., Filipe, L., Pereira, P. & Alves, S. (2014). *Necessidades Educativas Especiais: manual de apoio para docentes*. Instituto Politécnico de Leiria