

## **GLOBAL REPORT ON THE EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH UNITS ON COMMUNICATION SCIENCES**

### **Final Report of the Research Centres Evaluation Panel October 2003**

The panel met in October 2003 in order to evaluate ten submissions for the Research Centres programme. Three site visits were undertaken and one of the original ten applications was withdrawn. Professor Hamelink was unable to attend for the site visits but was fully involved in the assessment of applications and in preparation of the final evaluation.

The panel wish to record their appreciation for the practical and detailed help provided by FCT staff during their evaluation meeting in Lisbon. They also enjoyed the opportunity to visit the research centres, and wish to record their appreciation for the hospitality they received, and the very extensive efforts made to display and demonstrate the work of the Centres. These differ in many ways from those in many other countries, and these differences to some extent are reflected in the panel's criteria and procedures. Since the aim of having international evaluators is to ensure the comparability and credibility of Portuguese research in the international arena, these differences are important, and the role of the panel in imposing internationally accepted and understood standards of evaluation is vital to the success of the procedure.

We have a number of recommendations for consideration in the light of our experience this year, as follows.

1. The field of communication sciences remains very broad. This is true in all countries and is a feature of the field. However, the diversity of the work undertaken and proposed by the Centres caused major difficulties for comparative evaluation. The work we saw included media research, journalism, musicology, art and design, social policy, performance arts, pedagogy, history of natural sciences, organisation science, marketing, and so on. While the boundaries of this field are necessarily flexible, and encompass a diversity of activities across the humanities and social sciences, at present we feel this diversity is not sufficiently disciplined within the panel structure and the expectations signalled to researchers by the FCT.
2. In most countries applications for core funding of Research Centres would require a detailed statement of the programme of work to be undertaken by the Centre. This would include extended statements of budgets, intellectual foundations, research designs and methodologies, expected outcomes, timetables and so on. Little of this was provided in most

applications, and we wonder if sufficient is required in the guidance provided by the FCT to applicants.

3. Criteria for evaluation should be more explicit and detailed, and weighted where necessary. For example the expectation that applicants should have a record of publication in international peer refereed journals, if taken inflexibly, would rule out most applicants immediately.
4. Research is normally understood to mean original investigation producing new knowledge or understanding. It is distinct from performance, scholarship, product development, and archival work, though it may include or overlap with any of these. It is not clear to us that applicants have a firm understanding of what research entails, or the methodologies and designs that research would normally require.
5. The information provided for evaluation, in addition to the above, should include, for panel consideration, an annual report by existing centres, and full details of research strategy and programmes as outlined above.
6. We were surprised to discover how much potential overlap and duplication existed among the centres. This can, of course, be productive. There is no reason that several centres should not be undertaking parallel or even identical research - replication is a vital component of scientific progress. However our strong sense was of mutual ignorance and therefore of unnecessary waste in both resources and effort. The FCT could perhaps perform a valuable role here in enabling cooperation and communication among research centres.
7. As in the submission of research projects, both last time and this, we were surprised by the number of applications for the creation of archives and databases. This is valuable work, but often more a preliminary to or precursor for research, rather than a central feature of original investigation.
8. Despite the concerns expressed above, we were struck by the enormous energy, enthusiasm, commitment, and talent displayed in the research centres we visited, or were visited by. We would like to express very real appreciation for the efforts made by all centres to give the panel a clear and detailed picture of their work. The application of some of the disciplines suggested in this report to the widespread potential displayed in the evaluation speaks of great vitality and potential for the future of communication sciences in Portugal.

Peter Golding  
Evaluation Panel Chair  
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