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José Eduardo Franco
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Cátedra CIPSH de Estudos Globais
Universidade Aberta - Palácio Ceia
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Re: Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia - Evaluation Research Unit 2023/2024

Dear José Eduardo Franco,

Thank you for your prior invitation to join the External Advisory Board of your Center for Global Studies and for requesting comment on the international assessment process with the Portuguese State Foundation for Science and Technology. Before I share my opinion, I would like to point out aspects of my qualifications that allow me to have an experienced opinion on your review and subsequent appeal. First, I am a serial founder of Centers for Entrepreneurship in the UK and the USA. Some centers have been practical and focused on activities designed to enhance student education. In contrast, others have been research centers, most notably at the University of Sheffield, where I jointly founded the Center for Regional Economic and Enterprise Development. I have also been a Department of Management Chair (Director) and an Associate Dean of a Business School. These roles have required me to undertake program reviews (including for AACSB) worldwide, including in the UK, USA, Hungary, and Botswana. I thus feel qualified to express an opinion regarding your review and appeal. I would also like to confirm that I read the documents you provided in some detail, the original application, the evaluation, and your appeal letter.

The Establishment of a New Center

Having established multiple centers at universities in several countries, I can confirm that gaining momentum and building something substantial takes significant time. At a minimum, I would not expect to see much in the way of results within the first three years of launching a new center, and I would only expect to see significant outcomes as a new center reaches its ten-year milestone. Examining your evaluation application, I noted that you have achieved an incredible amount quickly. Not unexpectedly, this has not yet translated into quality academic outputs. This is hardly surprising. For example, I recently published an elite paper (in the British Journal of Management), which took seven years from conception to final publication. The amount of work your center is engaged in will eventually produce quality outcomes, but it will take time. I do not believe the evaluation committee fully understood or respected the entrepreneurial process of establishing a new academic activity as substantial as that created by Centro de Estudos Globais da Universidade Aberta. For example, recruiting aligned faculty, selecting PhD students, and beginning research projects takes time. It also takes time to conduct research and produce quality research publications. The evaluation committee appears to have evaluated you as if you were an established entity having existed for several decades. I, therefore, share the sense of injustice that your appeal articulates. You have achieved a great deal in a short amount of time, and it would be a shame for



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your momentum to be stopped by an evaluation undertaken very early in the center's life, where the committee did not understand the startup process or the timeframe involved in creating something new.

Inaccuracies, inconsistencies, errors, and contradictions

As your appeal highlights, I also find many inaccuracies and mistakes in the committee's evaluation report. These vary, including misinterpreting the information provided in your report, generalizations without evidence cited, straightforward grammatical errors, writing mistakes, and contradictions between statements within the report itself. Having been involved with multiple such evaluations, this indicates several things to me. First, it shows that the report was likely rushed. Many statements in your appeal seem to confirm this. Many judgments come across as ambiguous, where the committee may not have thoroughly read your evaluation report, or where the work to understand contributions has not occurred. Secondly, it also illustrates that the committee formed an opinion about the center before the evaluation meeting and visit. Though not uncommon, such a prejudgment is considered poor evaluation practice. Written documents do not always reflect a center's work well, which is why assessment processes require meetings and visits. These issues within the evaluation documentation should give pause for thought by the decision-making authority before any funding is withdrawn or withheld.

Multidisciplinarity and complexity

I could not see the evaluation panel's disciplinary composition from the information provided. Despite this, I found it somewhat suspicious that the committee recommended your center refocus on a specific discipline within your mission. I agree with your appeal. Global Studies requires multidisciplinarity, and it is messy and complex to do well. Often, it is difficult to get different disciplines to communicate and build dialogues, bridges, and projects that cross over between disciplines. It is also unlikely to be achieved quickly. The panel did not fully appreciate the nature of a multidisciplinary center, especially one just getting started. I suspect their recommendation occurs for two reasons. First, they have a particular desire to refocus on one discipline in which they may have a vested interest. Secondly, because they have been discipline-bound, they do not understand multidisciplinary research and centers designed to enable it.

I was sorry to hear about your challenges with this assessment process, and I wish you luck with your appeal.

Sincerely,

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