European Commission

Education and Training Monitor 2015

Portugal

Education and Training

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European Commission

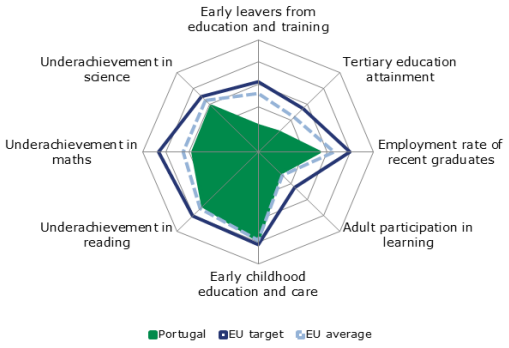
PORTUGAL

1. Key Indicators and Benchmarks

		Portugal		EU average	
		2011	2014	2011	2014
Educational poverty and spending cuts: challenges for the education sector					
Share of 15 year-olds with underachievement in:	Reading ●	:	18.8% [12]	:	17.8% [12]
	Maths ●	:	24.9% [12]	:	22.1% [12]
	Science ●	:	19.0% [12]	:	16.6% [12]
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	7.3%	6.8% [13]	5.1%	5.0% [13]
	Public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure	14.5%	13.5% [13]	10.5%	10.3% [13]
Education attainment levels of young people across Europe					
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Men	28.1%	20.7%	15.2%	12.7%
	Women	17.7%	14.1%	11.5%	9.5%
	Total ●	23.0%	17.4%	13.4%	11.1%
Tertiary education attainment (age 30-34)	Men	21.8%	23.2%	31.0%	33.6%
	Women	31.3%	38.9%	38.7%	42.3%
	Total ●	26.7%	31.3%	34.8%	37.9%
Policy levers for inclusiveness, quality and relevance					
Early childhood education and care (participation from age 4 to starting age of compulsory education) ●		93.8%	93.9% [13]	93.2%	93.9% [13]
Teachers' participation in training	Any topic (total)	:	88.5% [13]	:	84.6% [13]
	Special needs education	:	16.5% [13]	:	32.4% [13]
	Multicultural settings	:	9.6% [13]	:	13.2% [13]
	ICT skills for teaching	:	49.1% [13]	:	51.0% [13]
Foreign language learning	Share of ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages	72.6%	78.4% [12]	63.0%	: [12]
Share of ISCED 3 students in vocational education and training (VET)		42.4%	45.8% [13]	50.4%	48.9% [13]
Employment rate of recent graduates by education attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4	72.8%	65.2%	71.3%	70.8%
	ISCED 5-8	78.5%	73.6%	82.5%	80.5%
	ISCED 3-8 (total) ●	75.8%	69.4%	77.1%	76.1%
Learning mobility	Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)	:	1.7% [13]	:	: [13]
	Inbound graduates mobility (master)	:	5.5% [13]	:	: [13]
Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total) ●	11.5%	9.6%	8.9%	10.7%

Sources: Eurostat (LFS, UOE, GFS); OECD (PISA, TALIS). Notes: ● ET 2020 benchmark; data refer to weighted EU average, covering a different number of Member States depending on the source; b= break in time series, d= definition differs, p= provisional, u= low reliability, [12]= 2012, [13]= 2013. Further information is found in the respective section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

Figure 1. Position in relation to highest (outer ring) and lowest performers (centre)



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2014 and UOE 2013) and OECD (PISA 2012, TALIS 2013). *Note:* all scores are set between a maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the figure).

2. Main strengths and challenges

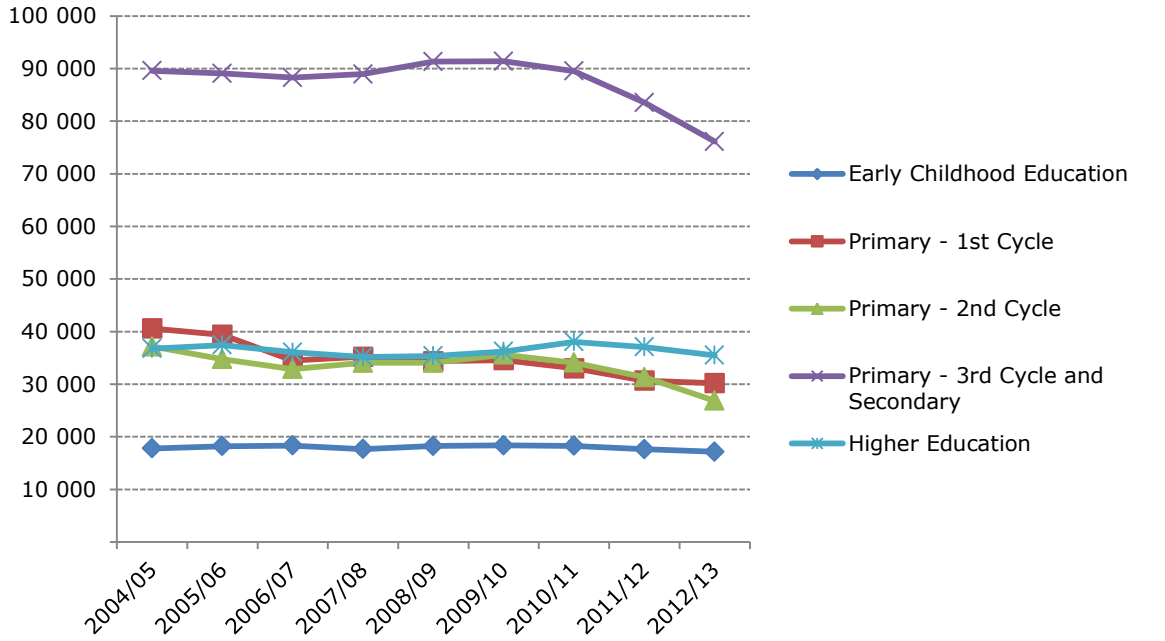
Portugal has significantly reduced its early school leaving rate, and tertiary education attainment has greatly improved. The government has continued to implement major reforms, with the aim of improving the level of basic skills in the population. Signs of economic recovery could, meanwhile, bring new opportunities for the highly skilled. Enrolment in vocational education and training has continued to increase and a first set of new short-cycle higher technical courses (*TeSP*) were launched during the 2014/15 academic year.

The high proportion of students re-sitting years and the extent to which socioeconomic background determines educational achievement demonstrate the extent to which ensuring equity in basic education remains a problem, despite the many new programmes and measures introduced over the last decade. Concerning attractiveness of higher education, and university in particular, enrolment rates have shown some fluctuations over the past three years.

3. Investing in education and training

In 2013, general government expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP was among the highest in the EU at 6.8%, well above the EU average of 5%.[1] The 2015 budget includes a 9.6% reduction in spending on education (not including higher education), relative to the 2014 budget.[2] While spending on pre-school education has remained stable, the budget for primary and secondary education has been reduced by over 11%. The main reason for this is a large fall in teacher numbers (Figure 2), mainly among those dedicated to non-teaching activities. The student teachers ratio, however, remains one of the lowest in Europe.

Figure 2. Number of Teachers per education level



Source: Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciências

The 2015 budget for the science and higher education sector remained largely stable overall. Within this total, however, there was a 5.5% increase in funding for the science sector, which comes under the management of the Science and Technology Foundation. Higher education

[1] Source: Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database.
[2] Source: 2015 Draft National Budget (Orçamento Geral do Estado para 2015)

institutions, meanwhile, saw their budget reduced, with a 4.4% fall in funding for universities, and 2.5% for polytechnic institutes.[3]

Portugal has taken a number of measures to increase the efficiency of its spending on education. These include the introduction of a new funding formula, which allows teaching hours to be optimised, and the rationalisation of the schools network. In 2012/13, only around 90% of the teaching hours financed by public spending in primary and secondary education were actually taught. The implementation of the new funding formula has significantly improved the use of funding for teaching time at school level. During the first year using the new funding formula, almost all schools have used 99% or more of their credited hours, whereas previously, 24% of schools had a 'usage rate' of below 95%.[4]

The introduction of performance criteria in the formula is expected to incentivise schools to improve the quality of lessons and should allow a better allocation of the available resources across education centres. The new web portal *infoescolas*[5] also provides parents and other users with comprehensive information on schools' performance, thus also making the new funding system more transparent. The first set of results was promising, but they will need to be followed by evidence of a real effect on students' performance.

The reorganisation of the schools network reduced the number of education centres from 7 168 in 2011/12 to 5 857 in 2014/15,[6] by grouping small schools under larger education centres. Whilst this may not have delivered a visible reduction of costs in the first year following the reorganisation, the management of resources is expected to be more efficient going forward.

Portugal has introduced an additional loan system for tertiary education students that will come into operation in the 2015/16 academic year. Students will be able to apply for loans of up to EUR 5 000 per year over a period of five years, with monthly disbursements conditional on academic results.

4. Tackling inequalities

Portugal has significantly reduced its early school leaving rate, from 30.9% in 2009 to 17.4% in 2014. Nonetheless, this remains far above the Europe 2020 national target of 10%. Portugal is one of the few European countries where the early school leaving rate is almost the same among students born in Portugal and those born outside the country. In contrast, there is a significant gender gap, with early school leaving rates of 14.1% for women and 20.7% for men.

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2012) shows performance to have remained stable, around the level of the OECD average. Progress has therefore slowed, following the significant improvement seen between 2000 and 2009. The study also shows there to be considerable variation in performance within age groups, linked to socio-economic background. The proportion of students performing poorly in mathematics has remained relatively stable at 24.9%, above the EU average of 22.1%. The results for reading and science showed a slight deterioration between 2009 and 2012 (OECD 2013).

Enrolment rates in early childhood education and care (ECEC) have increased dramatically over the last decade, for both the 0-3 and 3-5 age groups. The enrolment rate for 0-3 year olds has, however, remained broadly unchanged since 2012, particularly in urban areas, due to the decrease in families' average income. In 2013, the rate of participation in ECEC was 77.8% for children aged 3, increasing to 90.4% and 97.5% for children aged 4 and 5 respectively

[3] Source: 2015 Draft National Budget (Orçamento Geral do Estado para 2015)
[4] Source: Directorate General for Education Statistics (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciências)
[5] http://infoescolas.mec.pt/
[6] Source: Directorate General for Education Statistics (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciências)

(European Commission 2014). Recent changes to legislation allow children who are turning three during the course of the school year to be enrolled in pre-school education.

Portugal has continued to implement the national programme to tackle school failure and early school leaving launched in 2012, with a new monitoring system introduced in 2013/14. This new tool monitors absenteeism and students' performance, meaning that problems are picked up on quickly. A procedure is triggered automatically when risks are detected, thus helping to reduce drop-out rates. The system also makes it easier to compare schools' performance, and to identify risks and direct support appropriately. The government's statistics department is now developing an 'early warning' system for identifying schools where high numbers of students are expected to need to re-sit a year. This new tool should allow preventive measures to be introduced at school level and should improve the allocation of additional resources.

Portugal is also continuing to provide support to tailor-made school-based programmes designed to improve achievement and reduce the numbers of students re-sitting years and dropping out. The third generation of TEIP programmes[7] (programmes targeted at priority regions) are one example of this. The number of TEIP school clusters has increased from 104 in 2012 to 137 in 2014, and the programme now covers 16% of schools. Moreover, the approach developed during the pilot projects for the 'More School Success programme[8] (*Mais Sucesso Escolar*) have now been made available to schools.

The pilot programme offering basic vocational courses (*Cursos vocacionais de ensino basico*) as an alternative path to students at risk of leaving education is now in its third year in lower secondary education, and in its second year at upper secondary level. A total of 27 411 students distributed in 1 266 classes benefited from the programme in the 2014/15 school year. In March 2015, the government announced the continuation of the programme at both levels (lower and upper secondary) for the 2015/16 school year, and called for public and private providers of education to offer these vocational courses. The drop-out rate is currently at 5.5% for the lower secondary level, but it is still too early to carry out a proper assessment as data on students' employment and further education after completion of the courses is not yet available for the upper secondary level.

Portugal must now ensure that the numerous different programmes it has launched to tackle early school leaving are complementary to one another, and are working effectively towards the same aim. There are plans to address the problem of the overlap between measures and to better link specific programmes to specific problems. On the other hand, the socio-economic condition of families continues to play a deciding role in students' performance (OECD 2014a). The increasing poverty experienced by the most disadvantaged groups could thus reduce the effectiveness of the policies introduced to tackle early school leaving.

Steps are also being taken to address the low level of basic skills among Portuguese students. The Ministry of Education has introduced a number of learning objectives for maths and Portuguese (*metas curriculares*). It has increased the teaching hours allocated to both these two subjects and provided teachers' training accordingly. The new learning objectives were the subject of a public consultation, and provoked a heated ideological debate. Some regret that emphasis is now being put on traditional teaching and assessment of basic knowledge and skills, instead of on promoting multidisciplinary approaches such as teaching and learning through projects. Others, meanwhile, welcome these new objectives, which they see as being more demanding and promoting a culture of excellence.

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7 The present TEIP (Educational Territories of Priority Intervention) were launched in 1996, inspired by the French ZEPs (Priority Intervention Zones). Schools with a high percentage of students from vulnerable socio-economic background are entitled to benefit from additional funding and support through "improvement contracts".

8 The Programme 'More School Success" proposes alternative and innovative classroom teaching strategies designed to enhance learning through motivation and challenging experiences. 'More School Success' is an 'umbrella' created in 2009 to provide institutional support to three models developed at local level: *TurmaMais*, *Fenix* and *Hibridas*.

In 2014, the government appointed a working group to set guidelines for childcare centres and nurseries, in order to improve education for the 0-3 age group. The conclusions have not yet been published, however, and public debate on this issue is therefore lacking.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education launched a new accreditation process for the resource centres for inclusion (*centros de recursos para a inclusão*), which extended the network to include 90 centres. In 2014, the Ministry commissioned an evaluation of the centres, which confirmed that they are having a positive effect in terms of promoting the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream education.

Box 1. Promoting schools autonomy

In view of the highly centralised nature of Portugal's education system, promoting schools' autonomy is a major part of the strategy for improving students' performance and reducing drop-out rates.

The number of autonomy contracts rose from 22 in 2012 to 212 in 2014, with 26% of all school clusters now covered. State schools that have signed autonomy contracts and private schools both benefit from greater autonomy in several areas: the design of the curriculum, the distribution of teaching hours, choice as to which subjects to teach in which school years, management of up to 25% of the workload of each subject, with the exception of Portuguese and mathematics, and the opportunity to propose new subjects and school activities.

The aim of giving schools greater autonomy is to give them a certain amount of freedom to develop new educational programmes, with the aim of improving students' performance, while also making them accountable for the results of the proposed programmes through annual monitoring. The Ministry of Education has developed two indicators to measure the effectiveness of the schools given greater autonomy: 1) the education efficiency indicator, which measures the annual improvement in students' educational achievement; and 2) the drop-out risk indicator, which calculates the number of students classified, at the end of the year, as potential school leavers. These indicators are critical for applying the funding formula and provide the right incentives by allocating additional credit hours to the implementation of new programmes. It is still, however, too soon to evaluate the effect of schools' increased autonomy on students' performance. Nonetheless, the results of earlier pilot programmes, such as the TEIP schools, *Fenix* and *Turma+*, are promising.

In 2015, the government launched the second phase of the programme, which involves further decentralisation and aims to extend schools' autonomy and link them with local authorities. This programme is part of the wider *APROXIMAR* policy, which also covers health and social security. The Ministry of Education issued a new law in March 2015, which increased schools' autonomy in relation to teaching methods and resource management. A pilot programme involving 15 municipalities (*conselhos*) has been launched to test the decentralisation process. Mechanisms have been put in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme.

Given how recently this second phase of the programme was launched, it is not yet possible to assess what the changes will actually mean for schools and local authorities, or what the effect will be on students' performance. Nonetheless, it can be noted that giving schools greater autonomy makes it more important than ever to promote strong school leadership and strengthen middle management capacities. Teachers will also need to receive appropriate training to allow them to develop the skills needed to successfully implement new initiatives.

5. Modernising school education

Recruitment of fewer new teachers over the period 2011-13 has led to a significant fall in total teacher numbers, and contributed to the ageing of the teaching profession. According to the 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), the proportion of teachers using information and communication technologies (ICT) for student projects or class work is 34.4%, and the proportion of teachers participating in ICT training 49.1%, both around the EU average. The overall proportion of teachers taking part in some form of professional development during the previous 12 months is 88.5%, slightly above the EU average of 85%.

The proportion of teachers assigning different work to students based on their individual needs is above the EU average, at 52.7% compared to 46% (OECD 2014b).

The Ministry of Education has brought in a number of reforms designed to improve the quality of teaching staff. The entry requirements for teacher training courses have been increased, the academic part of the teacher training course is being revised, and a new entry exam for teachers with less than five years teaching experience (*Prova de Avaliação de Capacidades e Conhecimentos*) has been introduced, provoking a widespread debate. Portugal has also reformed its system for employing temporary teachers, following the infringement procedure opened by the European Commission in 2014. The annual renewal of fixed term contracts cannot now exceed five years.

The Ministry of Education has begun implementing the new system of continuous professional development for teachers, which had been approved in February 2014.[9] The new scheme introduces training criteria, meaning that only relevant courses, i.e. those that update specific technical skills or improve teaching skills, will be recognised when considering staff for promotion. It also includes plans for creating internal pools of trainers for each education cluster, thus increasing in-house training capacities. This part of the system has not, however, yet been put into practice. There are now 91 training centres across the country, which are responsible for providing the training required by schools and by teachers working in the public, private and cooperative education networks. Their ability to provide good quality, relevant courses will be crucial to ensuring that this new system has the positive effect expected.

Portugal is trying to improve the use of ICT in its education system but budgetary constraints have severely limited its scope for action in recent years. The Technological Plan for Education introduced in 2007 has not been updated and internet coverage does not meet schools' current needs. Teachers complain that the courses proposed by the official training centres are expensive and not recognised when a teacher is being considered for promotion. The new project Future classroom labs (*labóratorios de aprendizagem*), launched in cooperation with the European Schoolnet, aims to publicise European projects and to create a network for teachers involved in innovative projects.[10]

The Ministry of Education has introduced English into the primary school curriculum, as a way of improving the quality and labour market relevance of the skills which students have on leaving education. As of the 2015/16 school year, primary school children will learn English for seven consecutive years. Teachers will receive training to improve their language skills, in order to ensure that the change to the curriculum does have the intended effect.

6. Modernising higher education

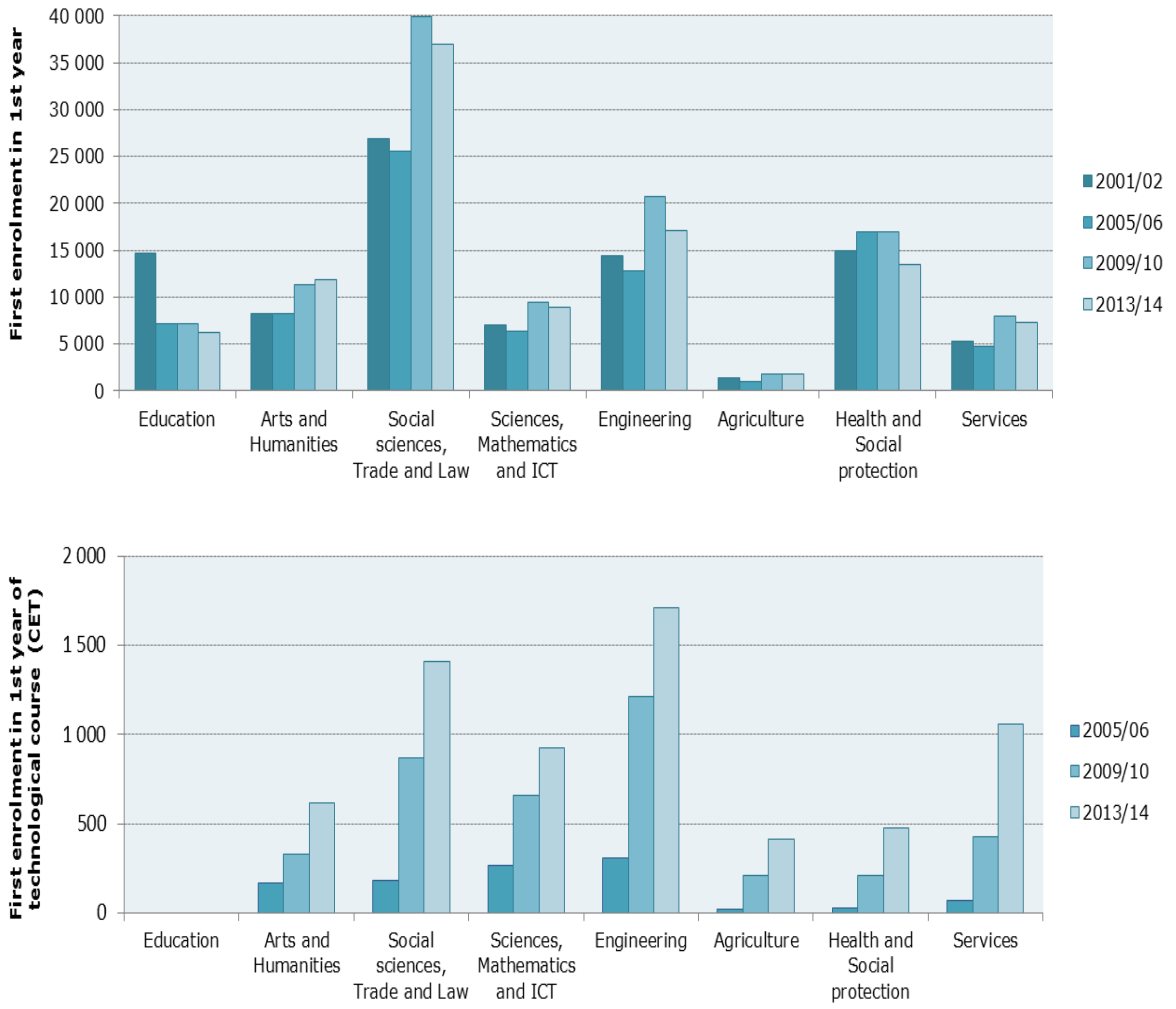
Portugal's tertiary education attainment rate for 30-34 year-olds has increased dramatically over the past ten years, but, at 31.3% in 2014, it remains significantly below the EU average (37.9%) and its Europe 2020 national target of 40%. The 2015 Bologna implementation report (European Commission 2015) shows, however, that completion rates in higher education have fallen by 19 percentage points since 2008 (the biggest decrease in Europe). Women have a significantly better completion rate than men, with 73% successfully completing their studies compared to 59% of men (European Commission 2015).

The relatively low employment rate of recent tertiary graduates[11] (73.6%, compared to the EU average of 80.5%) could make higher education less attractive to young people in Portugal. They seem less inclined to believe in the value of academic studies, as shown by the results of the fourth Education Barometer (EPIS 2013). Enrolment rates in higher education have shown

9 Decree n. 22/2014.
10 Labóratorios de aprendizagem: http://www.cfaebn.pt/documentos/doc_visitas_CF_Braganca.pdf.
11 People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

fluctuations over the past three years, despite the increase in students completing upper secondary education. This downturn trend is more visible for first degrees (Figure 3), while the number of students starting master's courses and PhDs has increased, with enrolments for master's courses tripling between 2007 and 2014, and for PhD courses doubling over the same period.[12]

Figure 3. First enrolment in first academic year (university and technological courses)



Source: Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciências

At the beginning of the 2014/15 academic year, 50 820 places were offered (on first degrees and integrated master's degrees) by a range of public institutions including 13 universities, 15 polytechnic institutes and five independent colleges. The major universities located in or around Lisbon and Porto were able to fill over 90% of their places while smaller universities located further from the major urban areas attracted lower numbers of students, such as was the case for Azores University (where 69.8% of places were filled) and Algarve University (71.9%). Among polytechnic universities, the gap in enrolment rates between the different institutions is even wider. Only a small number are able to fill 70% or more of their places – those that do include Porto (87.8%), Coimbra (71.9%) and Lisbon (77.4%) – and some do not even reach the 50% level – Beja (42.7%), Bragança (34.8%) and Tomar (29.4%) being amongst these.

[12] Source: Directorate General for Education Statistics (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciências)

In response to this, the government has launched several specific programmes and measures designed to increase the number of places available in higher education, while rationalising the higher education network (MEC 2014). The new web portal *inforcursos*[13] provides better transparency and useful information to guide students' choices.

The new short-cycle higher technical courses (*TeSP*) are the government's flagship initiative, designed to promote the link between higher education and the business sector and to attract students and businesses to higher education. Those programmes have a strong technical and vocational component and include on-the-job training. The majority are run by polytechnic institutions. A total of 92 courses were approved and offered in the 2014/15 academic year, set to rise to 180 in 2015/16. The enrolment rate for 2014/15 was 82% and, despite some initial difficulties with the introduction of the programmes, they now appear to be running smoothly. It is, however, still too early to assess their quality and the employability of their graduates.

The programme *Mais Superior* provided 991 scholarships in the 2014/15 academic year. These are designed to encourage students to enrol in higher education institutions where demand for places is lower, mainly those located in the more rural regions. At the same time, the programme requires these institutions to adapt courses they offer to the needs of the local economy. Again, it is the employability of future graduates that will be the true measure of the effectiveness of the programme, rather than enrolment rates.

The government is supporting the creation of regional clusters, as a way of rationalising the range of courses offered, making better use of the resources available and encouraging the exchange of best practices. The two major projects currently under way are the merger of two major state-funded universities in Lisbon, and the creation of the consortium *UniNord*, a grouping of three universities in the north of the country.

The international students' statute was amended to give universities greater freedom in setting entry requirements. The objective is to allow universities to make their requirements more flexible, and thus to attract higher numbers of non-EU students. The government has continued to run the *Retomar* programme, designed to encourage students who dropped out of higher education to re-enrol, but tight budget constraints have limited its effectiveness.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education, with the support of the OECD and the European Commission, launched an initiative to develop a national skills strategy. A number of Ministries have been involved, and a dialogue has been opened between the government and relevant social and economic parties on how to improve the quality and labour market relevance of education. The diagnostic report presented in April 2015 emphasises the importance of balancing the need to improve performance and the need to ensure greater equity. It also expresses the view that re-sitting years has become too common a practice. The report recommends that more emphasis be put on social skills, and that methods for evaluating and assessing students be improved. According to the report, the difference in the level of resources allocated to schools with disadvantaged students and to those with students from more privileged backgrounds is above the OECD average. It also states that access to higher education needs to be improved and that regional and local authorities should be more involved in decision-making (OECD 2015).

7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning

Upper secondary students' participation in vocational education and training (VET) is slightly below the EU average, at 45.8% compared to 48.9% in 2013. Participation of adults in lifelong learning in Portugal has been decreasing from 10.5% in 2012 to 9.6 in 2014%, compared to an

[13] http://infocursos.mec.pt/.

EU average of 10.7% in 2014. Portugal's employment rate of upper secondary education graduates[14] increased from 64.1% in 2013 to 65.2% in 2014. This reverted the falling trend experienced since 2008, when employment rate had reached its peak at 82.1%.

As part of its strategy to address early school leaving, Portugal has increased the number and diversity of vocational courses offered within secondary education. The new courses include, for example, a basic vocational course that students can take from the age of 13. This gives students at risk of re-sitting years another alternative and is complemented by targeted guidance services.

Steps are being taken to improve the quality and labour market relevance of VET. In particular, training materials have been improved and the proportion of training at the work place has increased significantly on the basis of new partnerships with the industry. The effect of these changes will be monitored using a set of indicators, and external evaluations will also be carried out. Vocational programmes with a significant work-based dimension are now being offered to young people over 16, who are interested in a more practical education. These programmes lead to recognised professional qualifications and monitoring of their quality by higher education institutions ensures their accreditation and provides their graduates with access to further studies. The extensive range of programmes and target groups should, however, be simplified.

The enrolment rate in VET rose in 2014. The Centres for Qualification and Vocational Education provide additional guidance to young people and adults in VET, including on routes to validation of non-formal and informal learning. They also build links with employers, schools and certified VET institutions, in order to help adapt the courses offered to the regional economy. The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training is also developing a new tool (*Sistema de Antecipação de Necessidades de Qualificações*)[15] designed to predict the qualification and skills needs of the country's economy, in order to be able to better adapt the VET being offered to the labour market.

Lastly, the new short-cycle higher technical courses (*TeSP*) are intended to develop close relations between business schools and regional businesses. One business school, the Instituto Empresarial da Bairrada, has now opened programmes for these courses, and five others are waiting for authorisation.

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