



CASE STUDY

Lisbon, Portugal, July 2012

The case study included a site visit to the Faculdade de Belas-Artes da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal, and meetings with Vice Director, Prof. João Paulo Queiroz, President of the Scientific Board, Prof. Fernando António Baptista Pereira, and the Head of Academic Services, Mr. Nuno Cruz. Established in 1836, the faculty has offered doctoral level education since the early 1990s, with the first graduations taking place in the academic year 1998–9. The original model of doctoral education in the arts was based on individual study with a supervisor, entailing little or no group work as part of the process. In this older model, there tended to be a degree of separation between written and practical components in the doctoral submission. The advent of the Bologna Process in 2000, combined with national university law reforms in 2005–6, prompted a review and renewal of doctoral education, giving rise to a restructured doctoral programme, based, in part, on work by Prof. Isabel Sabino. The first changes made to the doctoral programme, in the early 2000s, saw the creation of vertical pathways for BA, MA and PhD within each subject subdivision of the faculty (painting, sculpture, communication and design, multimedia, etc.), thus creating discrete PhD education in each subject. However, by the late 2000s, even as this new vertical system was in development, the value of cross-disciplinary doctoral-level education was recognised and a system of doctoral seminars was elaborated that provided cohesive third-cycle education across all seven subject areas.

Interestingly, this process was iterative, initially based on a response to Bologna at an institutional level, then shifting into a new strategy, based on national reforms several years later. This last point affirms the experience of elsewhere, which is that, in many discussions of Bologna, what is really at stake is the variant interpretations that have been adopted through national university laws and particular institutional dispensations, which differ in their reading of the detail of the Bologna Process. It seems that much confusion has been generated in international debate on this subject, because of the failure to make a clear distinction between what proceeds from Bologna (such as the Dublin Descriptors accords) and what proceeds from the idiosyncrasies of national reform agendas. In the concrete case of Lisbon, we see that the initial interpretation of Bologna was directed at clarifying an award progression pathway within each subject, followed by the adoption of distinct award levels and pedagogical or organisational strategies for each cycle, not determined by the highly generalised nature of the Dublin Descriptors, but by the particular operationalisation of these proposed in local legislative reforms.

One of the issues of importance in Lisbon, when differentiating between the older 1990s model and the newer 2000s model was the question of time to completion. In the older model, completion typically took between five and eight years, whereas, in the newer model, a commitment was made to achieving completion within three years. In the reform of doctoral education, the question of time to completion, and rates of student attrition, are key concerns. This can be an issue of controversy, with certain educators demanding that the time for art-making be understood as radically open, by contrast with the time for institutional procedures (such as doctoral study and accreditation), which are increasingly subordinated to a calculus of efficiency. It is notable that most institutions negotiate some kind of settlement between

these two positions, and, in the context of the faculty in Lisbon, the decision was taken to opt for a specific completion time on account of the arts-based doctoral award being considered not simply as a space for artistic development but also as a research qualification required for entry into a pedagogical career within the university. In order to achieve completion within the three-year timeframe, a basic structure has been adopted that entails a first year of structured curriculum and seminar work, while, in years two and three, the emphasis is heavily on completion of the research project.

There are currently more than 150 students enrolled in the doctoral programme, across all seven subject areas. While the bulk of the student body is comprised of Portuguese students, very strong networking activity is being led by the faculty, with a major Iberian–South American network creating an important international research milieu for doctoral candidates. The faculty is also developing a unique networking initiative across the Mediterranean, linking art educators from the European and North African hinterlands.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the Lisbon situation is the rapidity with which an innovation beginning in the early 1990s has, within two decades, become the accepted norm. The scale of the doctoral programme is striking, placing Lisbon on a par with some platforms in London in terms of numbers. The interesting question for the next five years will be the pathways that are open to these doctoral graduates. The faculty already has a postdoctoral programme, and the doctoral qualification is required for teaching at the third level; however, it is to be anticipated that, with these numbers, pathways will be much more diverse. It will be interesting to revisit the Lisbon context in the coming years, to see what impact the presence of such a large cohort of doctoral researchers is having on the independent, small-scale and self-organised scene in Lisbon and the wider national context.