

# THE FUTURE OF PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PORTUGUESE AND UNITED STATES UNIVERSITIES

A vision on the theme from the *Conselho Científico das Ciências Exatas e Engenharias da FCT*

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## Quick overview of the full report:

Several important recommendations are made, which we urge the reader to carefully analyze and the following conclusion is reached:

**CMU** – continue the partnership on the same scientific areas and focus on an application area of public interest;

**MIT** – terminate the partnership;

**Texas-Austin** – continue the partnership but focusing only on the original mission of UTEN.

Additionally, it is imperative to significantly reduce the national investment (no less than 50%) in the CMU and Texas-Austin partnerships and to increase these USA universities' investment in both parties' international contracts. **If this does not happen, then the recommended action is to end all three partnerships.**

## Background

Scientific international partnerships play a vital role in the academic and research endeavors of universities worldwide. These collaborations enable universities to enhance their research capabilities, broaden their academic network, and contribute to global knowledge exchange. However, like any collaborative effort, there are both advantages and disadvantages to engaging in scientific international partnerships. This report provides a general analysis of the existing international partnerships of Portuguese and US Universities, as well as examining the pros and cons associated with such collaborations, providing a comprehensive overview of their impact on universities.

A recent exercise evaluated the three current partnerships, with Carnegie Mellon University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Texas at Austin, using a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) matrix. Identified strengths include dual grants, an alumni network, involvement of doctoral students in research projects, and research projects with technology transfer components in some cases. Identified weaknesses include a lower than desired level

of mobility of faculty and students, the absence of an entrepreneurship program in some cases and, more importantly, the unawareness by most Portuguese Universities of the opportunities offered by these partnerships. Identified opportunities include enhanced faculty and student exchanges with the partner university, and potential access to the XXX's Silicon Valley campus and to increased collaboration with startups. The major identified threat was the very large (same as for all national projects) national investment required by the partner institutions.

## **Recommendations**

Our consideration of the partnerships identified a major weakness/threat not referenced in the recent evaluation – the lack of parity of the partnerships. It is our belief that the current agreements do not appropriately value the Portuguese human capital brought to the partnerships. To ensure that the Portuguese human capital is recognized, it is necessary to create competition on the US side of the partnerships. Thus, our major recommendation is that a memorandum of agreement (MoA) be established with a broad swath of Research I universities. Those MoA should address exchange of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty visits, access to core facilities, sharing of intellectual property, and so on.

- **Unawareness of many Portuguese Universities regarding these partnerships**

In order for any partnerships to be successful, it is critical that Portuguese institutions and researchers are aware of the opportunities. We believe that human networks are critical to the proper diffusion of such information and that the Portuguese diaspora at US universities can be critical to the success of potential collaborations. Some activities that could promote the spread of the necessary information include:

1. Internal Communication - start by ensuring effective internal communication within the Portuguese Universities and Polytechnics. This can be done through various means such as email newsletters, intranet portals, and dedicated communication channels. Regularly update faculty, staff, and students about existing international partnerships, their benefits, and how they align with the university's strategic objectives.
2. Workshops and Seminars - organize workshops and seminars to educate faculty members, researchers, and administrators about the value of international partnerships. Highlight successful case studies, emphasize the benefits of collaboration, and provide practical guidance on how to initiate and nurture such partnerships.
3. Collaboration Platforms - create online platforms or databases where universities can share information about their international partnerships. This can include details about the partner institutions, ongoing projects, areas of

collaboration, and success stories. Encourage Universities and Polytechnics to contribute to these platforms to foster a culture of collaboration and knowledge exchange.

4. Partnership Promoters - appoint partnership promoters or liaisons within each institution who will serve as points of contact for international partnership inquiries. These individuals can actively seek out and explore potential partnerships, facilitate communication, and provide guidance to faculty and staff interested in initiating collaborations.
5. Outreach and Engagement - actively participate in national and international conferences, seminars, and events related to higher education and research. Use these platforms to showcase successful partnerships, share experiences, and connect with potential collaborators.
6. Funding Opportunities - promote funding opportunities and grants available for international partnerships. Provide information and assistance to faculty and researchers in preparing and submitting grant proposals for collaborative projects.
7. External Communication - develop external communication strategies to raise awareness about international partnerships. This can include press releases, social media campaigns, and articles in university newsletters or magazines. Highlight the benefits and impact of these partnerships on research, education, and internationalization efforts.
8. Evaluation and Reporting: Regularly evaluate the outcomes and impact of international partnerships and share the results with stakeholders. Demonstrating the positive outcomes and benefits of these collaborations will further encourage participation and engagement.

By implementing these recommended actions, Portuguese universities can enhance their awareness and understanding of international partnerships, foster a culture of collaboration, and actively seek out and engage in meaningful collaborations that contribute to their research and educational goals.

- **Unequal Resources Distribution between the national and the foreign partners**

Addressing the issue of unequal resource distribution between Portuguese and USA partner universities requires careful consideration and proactive steps. Here are some strategies to help mitigate this imbalance:

1. Partnerships in restricted research themes – consider setting up restricted research partnerships focusing on specific research themes, enabling in-depth exploration and analysis within those areas. It is crucial for research partnerships to carefully consider the trade-offs and assess whether the benefits of a restricted approach outweigh the potential drawbacks (e.g. limited scope, lack of flexibility, missed opportunities, reduced diversity) in

achieving their research objectives. Therefore, the presence of a Portuguese 'Ambassador' in the partner universities will be mandatory for such research partnerships to function well.

2. Grant and Funding Opportunities - actively seek out grant and funding opportunities specifically designed for international collaborations. Encourage both Portuguese and USA partner universities to explore and apply for these grants together. This can help secure additional resources to support joint research projects, faculty exchanges, and student mobility programs.
3. Resource Sharing - foster a culture of resource sharing between partner universities. Identify areas of complementary expertise and resources where both institutions can benefit. Encourage the exchange of equipment, facilities, and research infrastructure, allowing both sides to leverage each other's strengths and enhance overall capabilities.
4. Collaborative Research Grants - establish joint collaborative research grants specifically designed to address the resource imbalance. These grants can be structured to provide additional funding to the Portuguese partner university, allowing them to overcome resource constraints and actively contribute to the collaborative research projects on an equal footing.
5. Knowledge and Expertise Exchange - emphasize the exchange of knowledge and expertise as a valuable resource. Encourage faculty and researchers from Portuguese universities to actively contribute their unique perspectives and expertise to the collaboration, fostering a sense of equality and mutual learning. This can help balance the resource distribution by emphasizing intellectual contributions.
6. Negotiate Equitable Partnerships - during the partnership negotiation phase, ensure that resource distribution is discussed and agreed upon. Advocate for equitable sharing of resources, acknowledging the different capacities and limitations of each partner. Establish clear expectations and mechanisms for resource allocation, ensuring that both parties contribute and benefit from the collaboration.
7. Seek Government Support - engage with relevant government entities and funding agencies to advocate for increased support and resources for international partnerships. Highlight the importance of equal resource distribution and the benefits of collaborative research and education. Seek policy changes or funding opportunities that address resource disparities and encourage more equitable partnerships.
8. Alumni and Industry Engagement - leverage the support of alumni and industry partners to bridge the resource gap. Engage alumni networks and industry stakeholders to provide financial and in kind support to collaborative projects, scholarships, and research initiatives. This can help supplement the

resources available to Portuguese universities and promote a more balanced partnership.

It is important to approach the issue of unequal resource distribution with open communication, mutual understanding, and a commitment to fairness and equal participation. By implementing these strategies, Portuguese universities can work towards mitigating the resource imbalance and fostering more equitable and sustainable international partnerships.

## **Conclusion**

The strengths and opportunities outweigh the weaknesses and threats, indicating the partnerships' potential for growth and success. However, it is essential to fully address the identified weaknesses by implementing measures to enhance mobility, such as funding opportunities for travel and exchange programs, by establishing an entrepreneurship program to foster innovation and entrepreneurial skills, and by promoting the involvement of all Portuguese universities in these programs.

In conclusion, considering all the documents/interviews produced by the existing programs linked to the partnerships between Portuguese and United States universities and the overall analysis, **the following is recommended:**

**CMU** – continue the partnership on the same scientific areas, and focus on an application area of public interest (eg public administration);

**MIT** – terminate the partnership;

**Texas-Austin** – continue the partnership but focusing **only** on the original mission of UTEN.

Finally, last but not least, and generally speaking, it is imperative to significantly reduce the national investment (no less than 50%) in the CMU and Texas-Austin partnerships and to increase these USA universities' investment in both parties' international contracts. **If this does not happen, then the recommended action is to end all three partnerships.**