

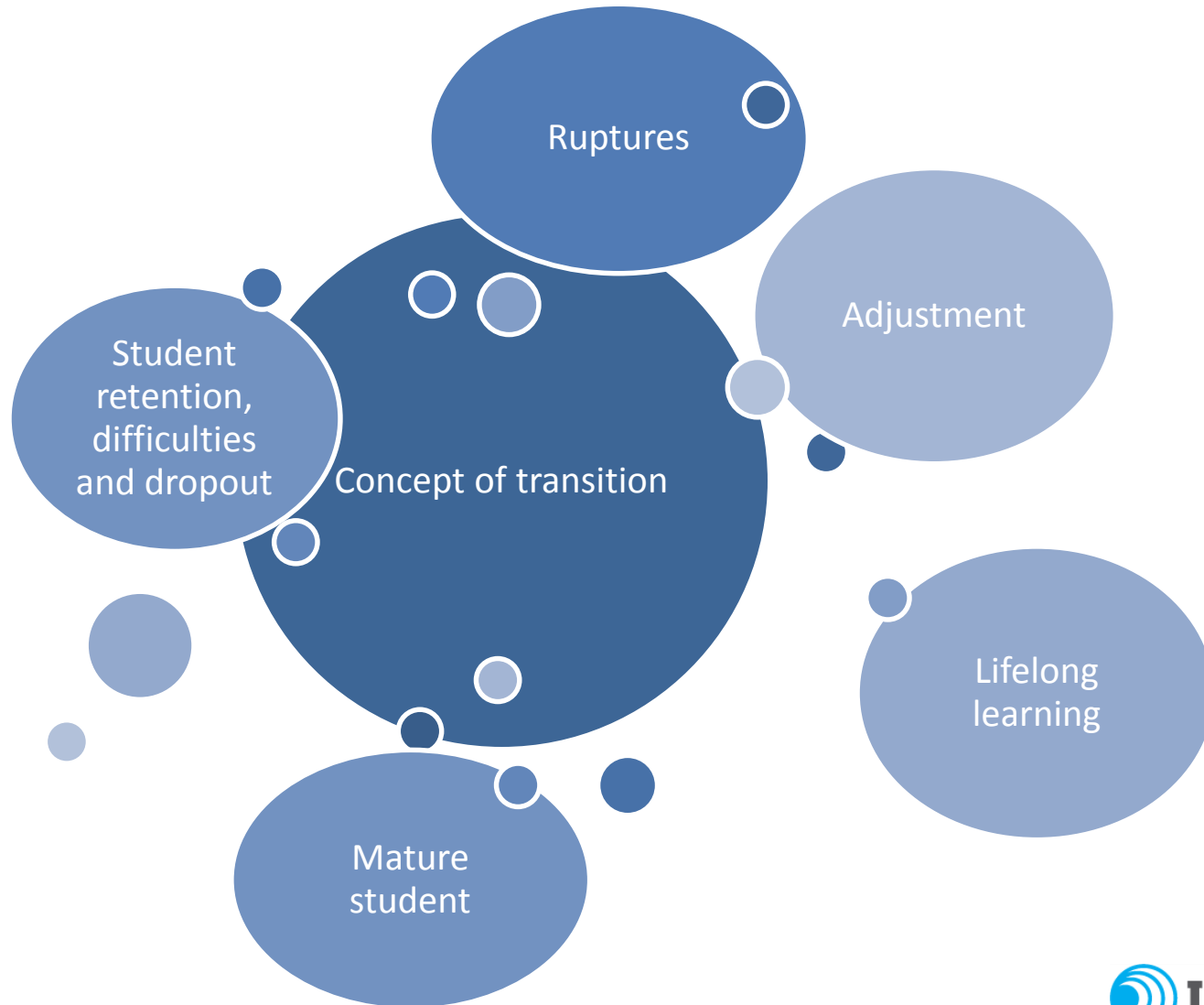
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SUPPORTING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR MATURE STUDENTS – The PORTUGUESE case

MULTIPLIER CONFERENCE Sofia, 8/10/2013

Project ‘Lost in Transition Europe’ (LiTE)
Lifelong Learning Programme, Sub-Programme Erasmus

Research



Portuguese national curriculum

Portuguese education system is divided into six sequential levels

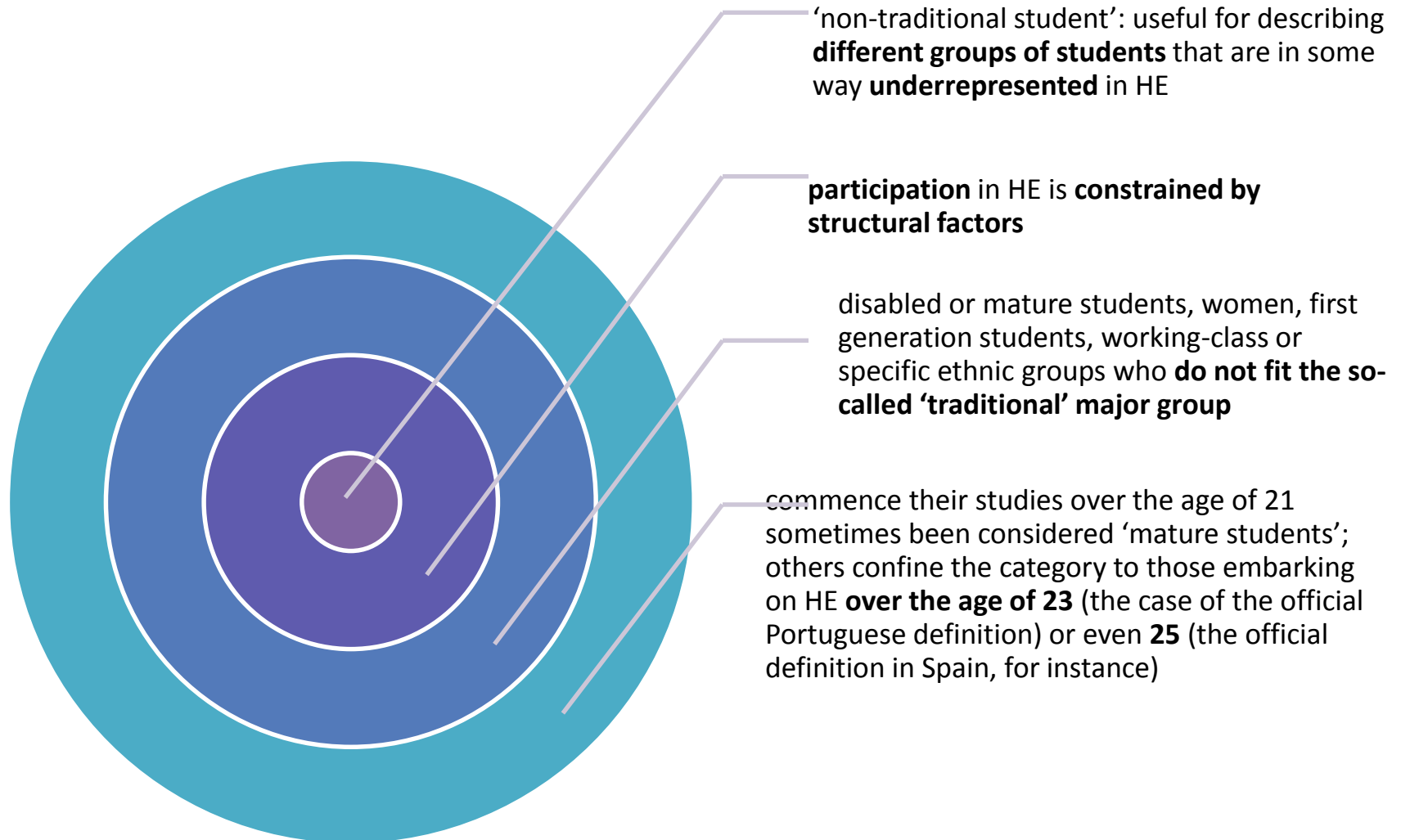
In all levels schools can be public, private or cooperative

Preschool education

Compulsory education (that includes Educação Básica/Basic education, divided into 3 cycles; and Secondary education)

Higher education

Mature student



National/institutional policies and practices

universities have a certain degree of **autonomy** but they are not autonomous in the selection of the students

national competition (lead by the general direction of higher education) for students arriving from secondary education who present between **one and six different choices of degrees and universities**

several **specific competitions** for recruiting new students: students who want to change of degree, to change of university, to come back to university, who already have a degree, who come from former Portuguese colonies, who are children of diplomacy staff, etc

*All follow the national rules even if in some cases there is some autonomy in the decision and in the procedures.
Disabled students have also specific regimes.*

specific competition for mature students

prepared according to **national rules** but the **criteria of selection are local/institutional**

more than 23 years (“Maiores de 23”) and who **did not finish secondary education** (12 years of education in Portugal) but want to enroll in a university degree

to pass an **exam**, to submit their **curriculum** for evaluation and to make an **interview** with a jury

at the **University of Algarve** the exam has two parts: one of Portuguese language and culture - 20% of the final mark – and another of the specific discipline of the degree the student wants to enroll – 80% of the final mark)

National measures or strategies to support transitions



Local level: almost all the institutions have **specific strategies** to support the transition

a) **visibility of the higher education institution (HEI)** and its life: marketing to attract new students (open day, visits to schools with professors and students; a catalogue of conferences presented by university professors that can be demanded by each school according to their curricular plans; summer courses for secondary students , etc.)

b) help in the **preparation to exams** to enter: specific courses/disciplines (“Ano zero”, “Maiores de 23”; ECTS accreditation, etc.)

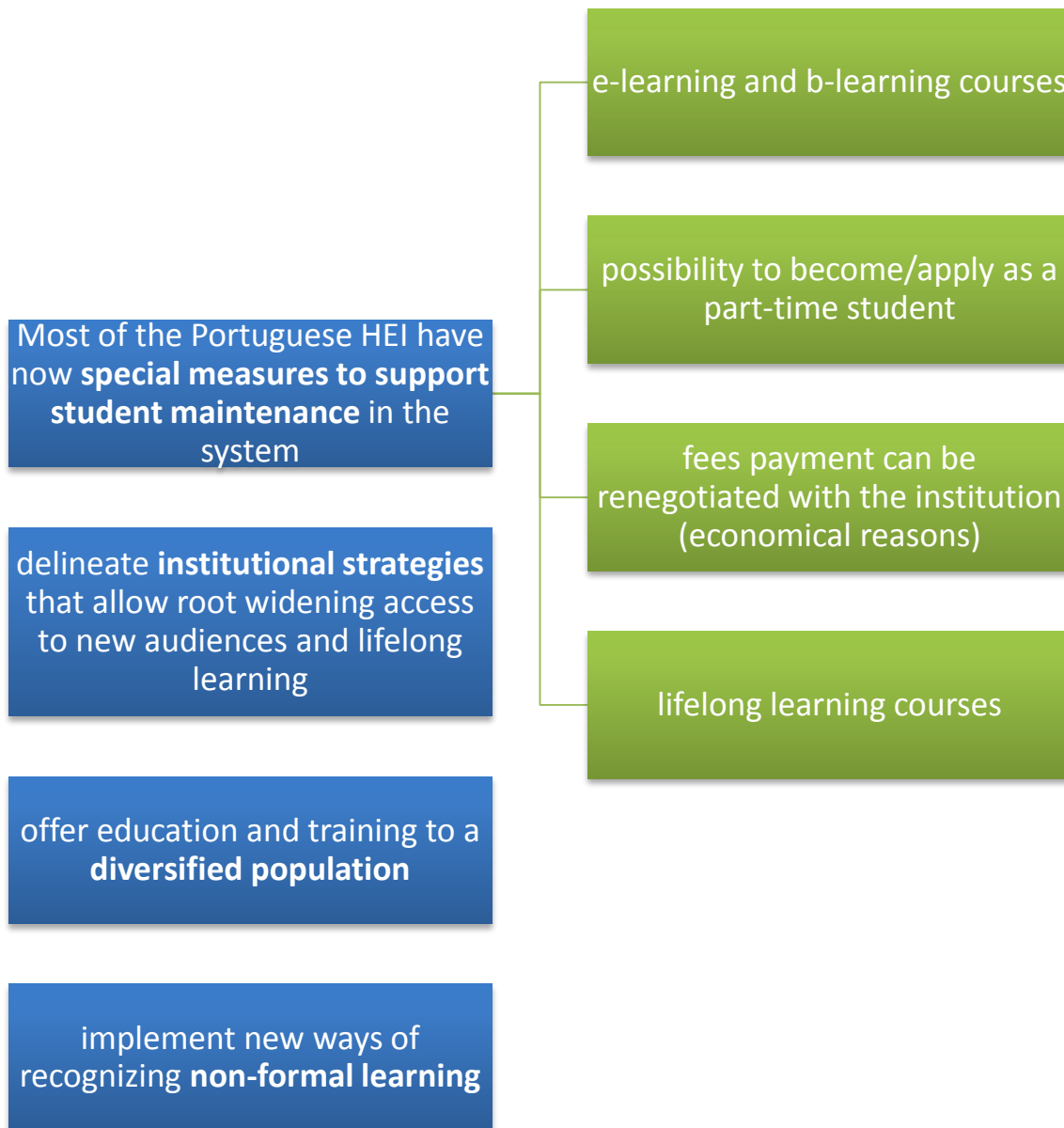
c) **internal organization** to support students once they are enrolled: courses on studying strategies and autonomous work; tutors; course director; reception days/activities; specific sessions on evaluation system, ECTS, the university campus library, use of on-line resources, etc ;

special activities to support **foreign and mobility students** (reception week, Portuguese language courses, etc.) and psychological support for all students provided at an institutional level, not only for clinical needs but also for vocational or organisational reasons

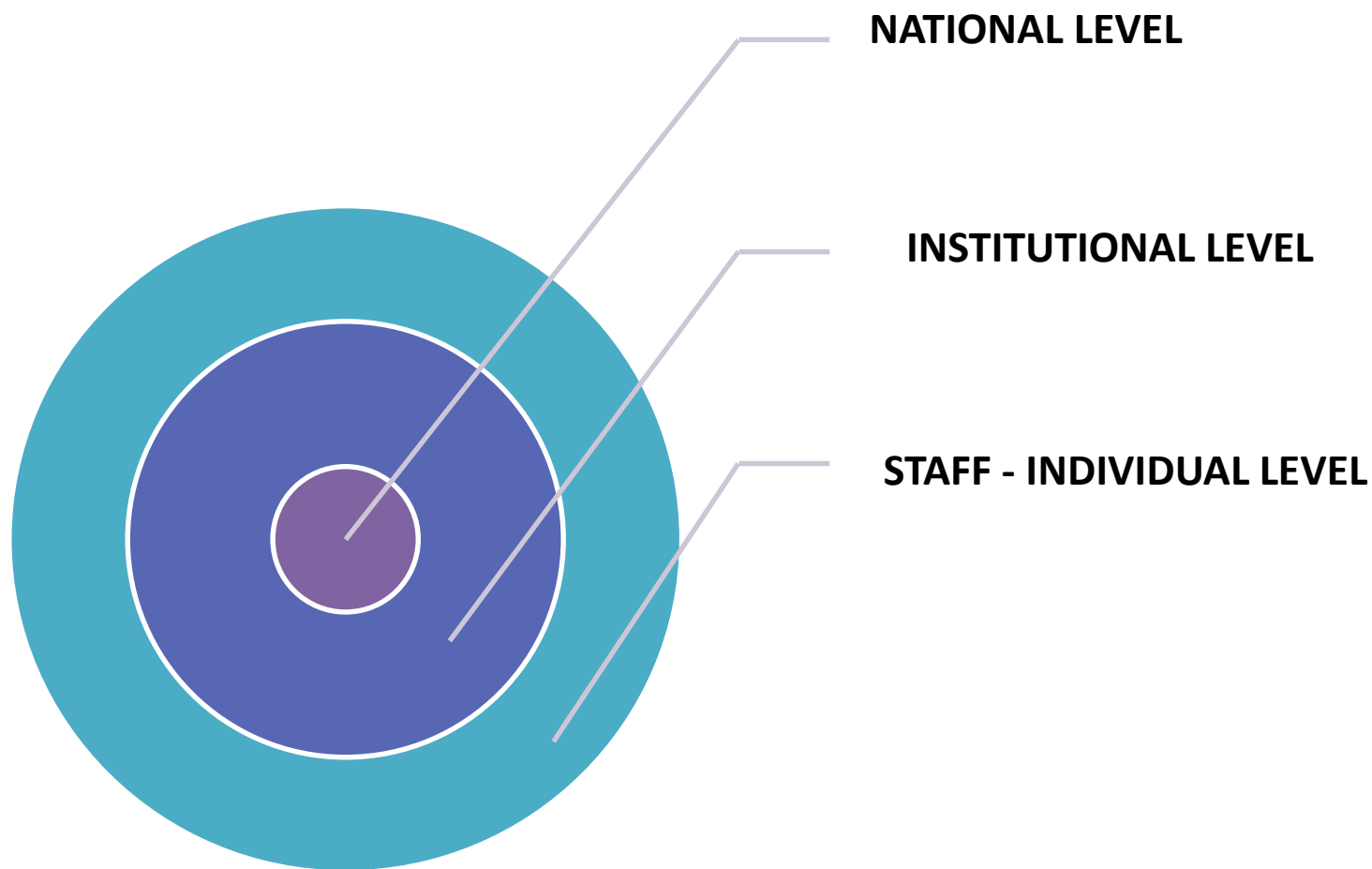
Table 1 – Emplacements, exams and students enrolled through “Maiores de 23” access into Higher Education, by subsystem, in 2012/13

Subsystem	Emplacement			Exams					Entries			
	General entrance	> 23	%	Entries	Performed all the exams	%	Aproved	%	Oct 2012	Prevision of other entries	Total entries (prevision)	%
Public	53 000	3 831	7%	11 646	6 983	60%	5 924	85%	3 513	422	3 935	66%
Universities	30 433	1 986	7%	5 315	3 009	57%	2 306	77%	1 466	405	1 871	81%
Polytechnics	22 567	1 845	8%	6 331	3 974	63%	3 618	91%	2 047	17	2 064	57%
Private	28 887	3 289	11%	3 504	3 177	91%	3 027	95%	2 408	229	2 637	87%
Universities	19 044	2 147	11%	2 319	2 099	91%	1 973	94%	1 589	114	1 703	86%
Polytechnics	9 843	1 142	12%	1 185	1 078	91%	1 054	98%	819	115	934	89%
TOTAL	81 887	7 120	9%	15 150	20 320	134%	8 951	44%	5 921	651	6 572	73%

Source: DGEEC/MEC (2013)



Development of the framework of support strategies and model of implementation



Mature students in Higher Education – increasing participation

Framework for institutional and national strategies

National level:

1. Awareness-raising initiatives
2. Support for mature/disabled/disadvantaged students/underrepresented groups of students
3. Monitoring mature student **transition** and **enrolment**

Guidelines on implementation

- 1.1. Researching and disseminating quality practices
- 1.2. Experimenting alternative selection procedures and systems
- 2.1. Experimenting alternative selection and enrolment procedures and systems
- 2.2. Making available dedicated information and support packs
- 3.1. Implementing research oriented projects/tasks to critically supervise strategies
- 3.2. National monitoring and reporting

Mature students in Higher Education – increasing participation

Framework for institutional and national strategies

Institutional level:

1. Institutional climate
(flexible to accommodate multiple learner identities and learning styles)
 - Support staff in pro-mature student attitudes
 - Minimize institutional barriers
2. Early support for mature/disabled/disadvantaged areas students/underrepresented groups of students integration and transition and create a sense of belonging/ avoid social isolation/marginalization
 - Focus on aspirations (clarity) and expectations
 - Maintain and develop consciousness of studying, independence and responsibility of students, sense of integrity

Guidelines on implementation

- 1.1. To enhance different teaching styles and evaluation/assessment procedures
 - Staff training, including self-efficacy training
 - 1.3. Developing an image & ethos which is welcoming of mature students
 - 1.4. Friendly hours of work offices, tutorials for students in convenient form and time
 - 1.5. Creating a 1-stop-shop system for working students
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- 2.1. Including these students in publicity materials and events, and establishing pre-entry peer mentoring schemes
 - 2.2. Organizing courses to encourage experimentation with APEL systems
 - 2.3. Promoting Academic advice
 - 2.4. Supporting these students in meeting commonly faced challenges

Framework of support strategies – HE staff level

1. **Staff involvement** in social and academic integration to enhance students' awareness of institutional norms and rules

2. Management of **students' expectations of workload and the university experience** to enhance students' awareness of course structures, study methods and learning outcomes

3. Creation of an approachable **orientation** towards mature/disabled/disadvantaged areas students/underrepresented groups of students through targeted tutorial support

4. **Accreditation** of professional experience

5. Development of students skills (e.g. autonomy, social skills, study skills)

Standards and guidelines for staff implementation

1.1. Organizing **preparation courses** before accessing the HEI

1.2. Promoting **informative sessions** about the institution and the course

2.1. Organizing informative sessions about the **students identity, transitions, self-regulated learning, autonomy, adjustment into HE, expectations and HE demands**

2.2. Promoting the **active participation of the Students Union** on receiving new students

2.3. Accessing **mentoring services**

3.1. Adapting **tutorial materials**

3.2. Maintaining regular contacts, including long-distance contacts (**online platforms, e-learning**)

3.3. Promoting regular contact and tutorials with **tutor/course director** (central role in Portugal)

4.1. Carrying system of **valuing professional skills as a part of non-formal learning**

5.1. Promoting peer learning communities and problem-based learning strategies

5.2. Carrying model of autonomous work group and individual work in studying

5.3. Creating contexts for self-regulated learning

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

Projeto Educação pelos Pares (Peer Counselling/Support project) – Social Welfare Services of University of Coimbra: improvement of students' social skills, and promote the development of stress management strategies (prevention, reduction and coping) through peer counseling; tutors receive support from Social Welfare Services (e.g. training courses on counseling basic skills and strategies aimed at tutors are promoted, as well as workshops on study methods, stress management strategies, and development of personal, social and academic skills).

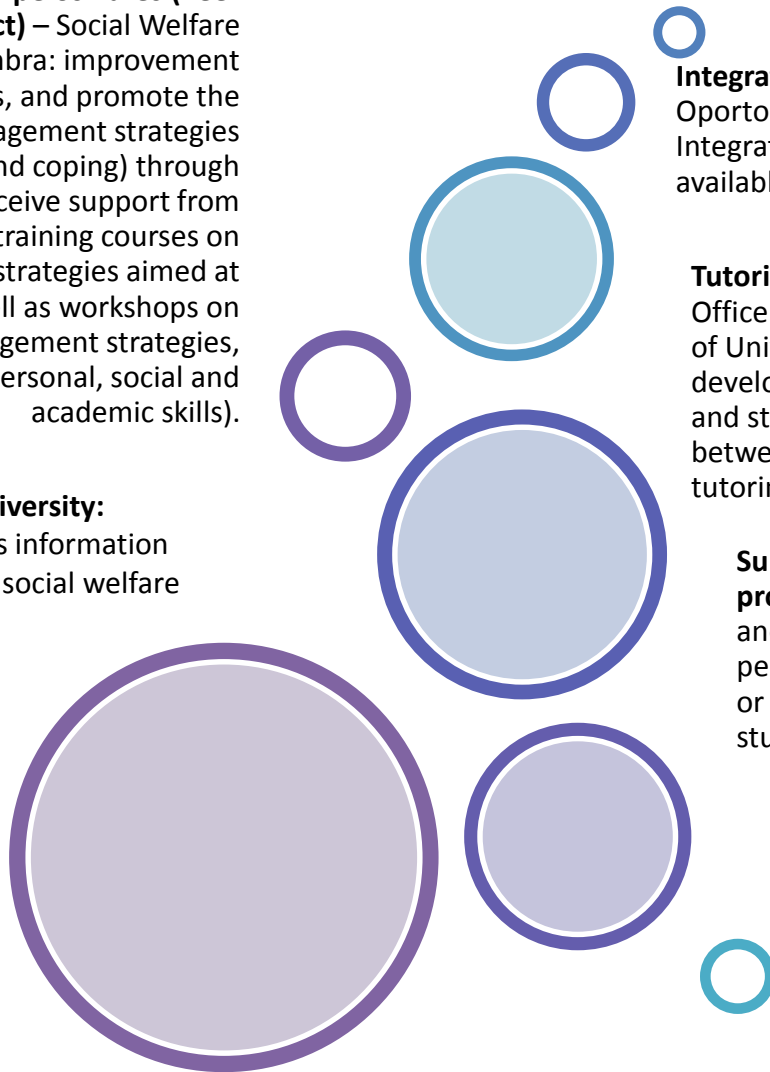
Flash Estudante – Oporto University: Online database that provides information about university services and social welfare benefits aimed at students.

Integration kit – Social Welfare Services of Oporto University: Guide for Academic Integration, maps and city guides and is available on the Website of the University.

Tutoring (Tutorias de Acompanhamento) – Office for the Promotion of Academic Success of University of Évora: transition to university, development of study skills, time management, and stress management; students can choose between two types of tutoring: (1) Teacher tutoring, and (2) Peer tutoring.

Support of academic (mentoring) and professional integration – Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Oporto University: peer mentoring to new students (a mentor (2nd or 3rd year student) is assigned to each 1st year student enrolled in the program)

Peer mentoring - foster the integration of students in academic life. A mentor (2nd or 3rd year student) is assigned to each 1st year student enrolled in the program.



BOLOGNA PROCESS

significant changes in the higher education system in Portugal

Relevance and impact

variety of non-graduate different paths that can give access to HE

changes printed to HE made access to university studies easier, bringing more non-traditional students

Technological Specialization Courses (TSC)

mature students are the most important group, in the sense they have been excluded from HE in the past

the whole system of HE gained a new flexibility in its structures and procedures

Recognise and validate prior learning

“Ano zero”: “transitional year”

academic continuums between past training and professional experience and the new learning identities

Conclusions

recent national changes can contribute, not only to a further **democratization of knowledge and learning** in HEI, as it is possible that some of these changes **affect positively transition in its version of menace and risk**

access is easier in Portugal nowadays, especially for mature students

attention to the underlying nature of an institution's teaching and learning environment, the manner in which this environment influences student non-completion and student perceptions and expectations (Laing and Robinson, 2003)

number of factors than can influence student's transition to HE – and some of these factors do depend of HEI policy, management, academic bodies, evaluation rules, pedagogy, etc

Conclusions

national measures and strategies in HE are important and we could argue that some of them can have an eventual positive impact over transition

attention to the underlying **nature of an institution's teaching and learning environment**, the manner in which this environment influences student non-completion and student perceptions and expectations (Laing and Robinson, 2003)

solutions in order to make student's transition easier: **changing academic rules and procedures** towards a bigger **flexibility**