

DENTAL SCHOOLS – BACK TO THE FUTURE



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The Portuguese case

Universities are globally institutions of the greatest relevance, central to the acquisition of knowledge. The university's learning model faces challenges that are fundamentally constituted by the implementation of evolutionary models that ensure a response to the needs of society that are changing rapidly. The new teaching models consider Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing and machine learning, developments in robotics, 3D fingerprinting, among various existing and emerging technologies.

In Portugal, we have seven faculties of dental medicine. Three public schools: Faculdade de Medicina Dentária da Universidade de Lisboa, Faculdade de Medicina Dentária da Universidade do Porto, Área de Medicina Dentária da Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de Coimbra;

And four private ones: Faculdade de Medicina Dentária da Universidade Católica Portuguesa (special regime of the Concordat), Instituto Universitário de Ciências da Saúde, Instituto Universitário Egas Moniz e Faculdade de Ciências da Saúde da Universidade Fernando Pessoa.

These institutions have been responsible for the academic and clinical training of portuguese dentists.

Portuguese education is recognized as of excellent quality and responsible for the training of highly qualified dentists, with automatic recognition in the countries of the European Economic Area.

Thousands of dentists trained in Portugal are, in fact, practicing in this space, mainly in the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, among others.

In Portugal, like other European countries, Higher Education is a highly competitive sector, which creates enormous strategic wealth for the country, through the training it provides to portuguese citizens, but also to students from European Union countries and other countries who increasingly seek our country to study and develop knowledge acquisition projects in the most diverse areas.

In the area of dentistry, we train students from the most varied origins, in the context of the European Union, following a general trend in which teaching is no longer limited to the national geographical space...

The education industry across Europe faces a variety of challenges.

I will try to briefly list some of them in a summary way, which will require institutions to respond to each of these challenges, through the choice of teaching models.

The growing demand for Continuous Training

The evolving nature of work, characterised by the gig economy and the rapid evolution of skills required in the workplace, requires an ongoing commitment to education and skills development. This trend challenges the traditional model of concentrated education before entering the labour market.

The digitalization of University Campuses

With the influence of technology on their lives, digital natives have different expectations regarding their traditional educational experiences. There is room for universities to provide flexible learning opportunities for new technologies and pedagogical approaches that meet these preferences.

The role of Industry and Companies

The traditional boundaries of the higher education sector are becoming increasingly porous, as non-traditional entities, such as online education platforms and corporate training programs, enter the market. This influx of competition presents both challenges and opportunities for established universities.

International Competition

Universities face intensified competition from fast-growing higher education institutions worldwide. This glo-

balized scenario requires a strategic approach to maintain the reputation and attractiveness of universities to national and international students.

Faced with these challenges, several responses are emerging from portuguese educational institutions in addition to the traditional response of the physical University Campus, face-to-face undergraduate training and face-to-face clinical learning model, such as the development of response in Research and Development, the growing implementation of Digital University Campuses, the adoption of collaborative models with Industry and Companies, the provision of post-graduate offers in areas of doctoral and specialized training, as well as modular training adapted in various areas of professional skills.



The Transition to a Student-Centered Approach

Universities need to shift from a faculty-focused perspective to a student-centered one. This involves understanding the evolving needs and preferences of learners as consumers of education and adapting offerings accordingly.

Recognize the Vital Role of the Education Sector

Policymakers and regulators need to recognise the crucial role that higher education plays in Europe's economic and social development. Public policies should encourage and reward collaboration between universities and industry.

Conclusion

Portuguese universities are in an accelerated process of adapting to increasingly scarce public funding through the adoption of New Funding and Business Models, capable of responding to the demands of a rapidly changing labour market.

To remain viable, universities may need to expand their offerings beyond traditional degree programs and develop new markets and new services.

This implies a commitment to continuous review and adjustment to ensure that the system remains relevant, competitive, and sustainable in the long term. ■