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INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ÉVORA (PORTUGAL)

Da integração dos estudantes no ensino superior: o caso da Universidade de Évora (Portugal)

Integración de estudiantes en la educación superior: el caso de la Universidad de Évora (Portugal)

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Abstract: The presence of students with specific educational needs in higher education represents a new challenge for institutions. This study aims to analyze how the inclusion of students is promoted at the University of Évora (Portugal), particularly those who experience learning difficulties. An interpretative, constructivist-based study was conducted on the learning support process, grounded in document analysis and interviews. The findings indicate a growing interest and concern from the institution regarding the inclusion of its students, in a broad sense, starting in the early 1990s. The university has implemented a Regime for Students Receiving Learning Support (RSRLS), which provides for an individual support plan for students who, in any cycle of studies, due to physical, sensory, cognitive, socio-emotional, organizational, or logistical factors, present learning difficulties in their interaction with the environment, limiting their activity and participation on an equal basis with others. There is currently no known evaluation of the impact of the measures implemented under these plans, nor of the perceptions and satisfaction levels of the students covered by the RSRLS and the lecturers of the affected curricular units. Continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of the defined measures, as well as technical support for lecturers, is required. The allocation of staff trained in special education represents an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive and principle-driven inclusion process, one that supports each individual in reaching the full extent of their potential.

Keywords: specific educational needs; higher education; integration.

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Resumo: A presença de pessoas com necessidades educativas específicas no ensino superior é um novo desafio que as instituições enfrentam. Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar o modo como se promove a inclusão de estudantes na Universidade de Évora (Portugal), particularmente os que manifestam dificuldades de aprendizagem. Foi realizado um estudo de natureza interpretativa, de base construtivista, acerca do processo de apoio às aprendizagens, com base em análise documental e entrevistas. Os resultados indicam que crescendo do interesse e da preocupação da instituição com a inclusão dos seus estudantes, em lato sensu, a partir do início da década de 1990. A instituição dispõe de um regime do estudante com apoio às aprendizagens (REAA), prescrevendo um plano individual de apoio que, em qualquer ciclo de estudos, por circunstâncias de natureza física, sensorial, cognitiva, socio emocional, organizacional ou logística apresentem dificuldades de aprendizagem expressas na sua interação com o ambiente e que limitem a sua atividade e participação em igualdade com os demais. Não é conhecida a avaliação do impacto das medidas implementadas no âmbito dos planos nem as percepções e grau de satisfação dos estudantes abrangidos pelo REAA e dos docentes das unidades curriculares afetadas. Torna-se necessária uma monitorização permanente do alcance das medidas definidas e um acompanhamento técnico dos docentes. Constitui uma oportunidade dispor-se de técnicos alocados com formação em educação especial, que contribuam para a construção de um processo de inclusão mais completo e realizador dos seus princípios, conduzindo todos e cada um ao limite das suas potencialidades.

Palavras-chave: necessidades educativas específicas; ensino superior; integração.

Resumen: La presencia de estudiantes con necesidades educativas específicas en la educación superior representa un nuevo desafío para las instituciones. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar cómo se promueve la inclusión de estudiantes en la Universidad de Évora (Portugal), en particular de aquellos que presentan dificultades de aprendizaje. Se llevó a cabo un estudio de naturaleza interpretativa, con base constructivista, centrado en el proceso de apoyo al aprendizaje, a partir de análisis documental y entrevistas. Los resultados indican un creciente interés y preocupación por parte de la institución respecto a la inclusión de su alumnado, en un sentido amplio, desde principios de la década de 1990. La universidad dispone de un Régimen del Estudiante con Apoyo al Aprendizaje (REAA), que prevé un plan individual de apoyo para aquellos estudiantes que, en cualquier ciclo de estudios, debido a circunstancias de naturaleza física, sensorial, cognitiva, socioemocional, organizativa o logística, presenten dificultades de aprendizaje expresadas en su interacción con el entorno, y que limiten su actividad y participación en igualdad de condiciones con los demás. Actualmente no se conoce una evaluación del impacto de las medidas implementadas en el marco de estos planes, ni las percepciones y el grado de satisfacción de los estudiantes beneficiarios del REAA ni del profesorado de las asignaturas implicadas. Se hace necesaria una monitorización permanente del alcance de las medidas definidas, así como un acompañamiento técnico al profesorado. La existencia de profesionales con formación en educación especial representa una oportunidad para construir un proceso de inclusión más completo y coherente con sus principios, que permita a cada estudiante desarrollar al máximo sus potencialidades.

Palabras clave: necesidades educativas específicas; educación superior; integración.

1 INTRODUCTION

Inclusion in higher education is a fundamental concept aimed at ensuring access, participation, and academic success for all students, regardless of their individual characteristics, backgrounds, or specific conditions. It is not merely about integrating or adapting persons with disabilities to the existing status quo. Rather, it involves going beyond physical presence, striving to create educational environments and practices that foster equal opportunities for everyone. The objectives of higher education – as well as its assessment methods and curricula – require reconfiguration in the face of this new challenge (Ferrari; Sekkel, 2007). Such a transformation demands a rethinking of teaching and learning models in higher education, and a critical engagement with issues such as curriculum flexibility, the potential need for support by inclusive education professionals, and the implementation of alternative assessment methods (e.g., special examinations). These measures have gradually emerged in the context of inclusive education in Portugal, particularly within basic and secondary education, following the April 25th, 1974 Revolution.

The entry of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into higher education does not occur in an explicit or systematic manner. Not all secondary school students who previously benefited from the Legal Framework for Inclusive Education (LFIE), established by Decree-Law No. 54/2018 of July 6, in its current wording (Portugal, 2018), go on to request support from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), either due to lack of information or by personal choice. Within the pedagogical dynamics of the classroom, lecturers do not always perceive the presence of SEN among their students, even when working with small groups. It is often the students without SEN who first identify the challenges faced by their peers. In some cases, a fear of “contamination” through interaction may emerge – a kind of “osmotic contagion” that reflects a biased interpretation of disability (Amaral, 1995).

Inclusive education presupposes collective participation in classroom and institutional decision-making, as well as the necessary flexibility in the use of institutional, human, and material resources. Lecturers should be aware that they can count on the support of inclusive education professionals and colleagues when planning teaching and learning processes, as well as on the collaboration of students to address specific issues that may arise. Therefore, it is essential that lecturers be actively involved in defining the support measures for student learning and inclusion, so that they can express their questions, limitations, and needs. This collaborative approach helps prevent lecturers from becoming isolated and adopting defensive attitudes as a means of protecting themselves from perceived – whether real or imagined – threats.

Inclusion in higher education encompasses multiple dimensions, including physical and digital accessibility, inclusive pedagogical practices, specific accommodations and supports, awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives, psychosocial support, and inclusive institutional policies. These dimensions, when not

adequately addressed, can become barriers that hinder access to and continued participation in higher education for students with SEN, negatively affecting their quality of life and academic performance. Moreover, these students often face prejudice and stereotypes from peers and faculty members, which may create a hostile and discouraging academic environment (Lima; Carmo, 2023).

The perspectives and lived experiences of persons with disabilities can meaningfully contribute to fostering inclusion in higher education in several ways. Firstly, they can help identify the barriers and challenges faced by students with disabilities, thereby informing the development of more inclusive policies and practices. Additionally, their voices can raise awareness within the academic community about the importance of accessibility and inclusion, promoting a more inclusive and respectful institutional culture. Finally, they can contribute to creative and innovative solutions to the challenges encountered – such as the use of assistive technologies (Santos; Rocha, 2023) and the adaptation of pedagogical practices (Lima; Carmo, 2023).

A systematic review on the conditions offered to students with disabilities in Brazil concluded that, although there are public policies aimed at ensuring access to higher education for these students, there remain significant gaps between policy guidelines and actual practices, which may hinder their retention and successful completion of studies (Dussilek; Jaqueline, 2017). The analysis of the data highlighted the urgent need for the effective implementation and enforcement of legislation that ensures accessibility, in order to guarantee that the right to education is truly exercised. Moreover, the study emphasises the importance of raising awareness among faculty members and the wider academic community regarding inclusion and accessibility, as well as the need to adapt curricula and provide academic and technological support to students with disabilities.

A study conducted at the Universiteti i Prishtinës, in Kosovo, recommends strong collaborative efforts between policy frameworks, institutional management, and teaching and learning variables – alongside the cultivation of positive values and attitudes – in order to guarantee the successful inclusion of students with SEN and to move towards a more inclusive higher education environment (Zabeli; Kaçaniku; Koliqi, 2021).

Inclusion requires the engagement and awareness of faculty members, staff, assistants, and students in the creation of a welcoming and respectful academic environment. It is also essential to train faculty members so that they are adequately prepared to deal with student diversity and individual learning needs. In this regard, psychosocial support recognises the importance of emotional and psychological well-being, offering services such as counselling, career guidance, and psycho-pedagogical support to promote students' holistic development and academic success. Furthermore, HEIs must establish inclusive institutional policies that span from admission to graduation. These may include the creation of dedicated support offices, the revision of admission policies, and the implementation of inclusive practices aimed at removing barriers to full student participation.

In Portugal, the Constitution of the Republic (Decree of April 10, 1976, as currently amended) guarantees equal opportunities and the democratisation of the education system, particularly in terms of access to HEIs. According to Article 76, No. 1, "Citizens with physical or mental disabilities fully enjoy the rights and are subject to the duties enshrined in the Constitution, except for those which, due to their condition, they are unable to exercise or fulfil" (Portugal, 1976). In this respect, the No. 2 of the same article states that the State is responsible for developing a national policy for the prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and integration of citizens with disabilities, as well as for supporting their families. The State must also foster public awareness of society's duty to respect and show solidarity with these individuals and assume responsibility for the effective realisation of their rights, without prejudice to the rights and duties of parents or legal guardians (Portugal, 1976).

In 2014, the Working Group for the Support of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education (GTAEDS) was established. This group brings together public HEIs that offer support services for students with disabilities, with the aim of improving the quality of service provision and fostering inter-institutional collaboration to facilitate the exchange of experiences, joint initiatives, and resource optimisation (GTAEDS, 2025). Within the Erasmus+ programme, a network of entities and universities developed the European Network of Inclusive Universities (EUNI4ALL-NETWORK, 2024), which seeks to promote visibility and advancement of universities committed to inclusion.

There is, however, a notable disparity among European Union Member States regarding the implementation of universal strategies to facilitate access to higher education for persons with disabilities. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Portugal, 2024) has described the European scenario as concerning, noting that, in several Member States, many children and adults with disabilities still lack access to inclusive and quality education. A situational diagnosis of persons with disabilities in Europe reveals that the proportion of individuals with disabilities attaining higher education in the EU-28 remains significantly lower than that of individuals without disabilities (15.5% vs. 25.0%).

One of the eight priority action areas of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 is education and training (Comissão Europeia, 2010). Its objective is to promote inclusive education for students with disabilities and to increase both enrolment and successful completion rates among this population. Nevertheless, students with disabilities remain significantly underrepresented in mobility programmes, which are increasingly essential for professional competitiveness in today's European labour market. In light of this context, the present study aims to analyse how the inclusion of students is promoted at the University of Évora, a Portuguese HEI, with particular attention to those who exhibit learning difficulties.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study, grounded in an interpretative paradigm with a constructivist foundation (Aires, 2015), adopted an exploratory case study design (Yin, 2010) in order to explain, explore, and describe current phenomena within a specific and concrete context (Stake, 2012). The purpose of the case study was to uncover underlying aspects of the phenomenon, to emphasise the surrounding context, and to interpret it through both consonant and dissonant perspectives regarding the aspects involved (Rios, 2021, p. 15).

To this end, multiple sources of information were used: text analysis, interviews, and enunciation analysis (Carmo; Ferreira, 2008; Colás, 1998; D'Unrug, 1974). The documentary material was subjected to textual analysis techniques. For the document analysis, the following institutional documents from the University of Évora were used as primary sources: University Statutes, Academic Regulations (AR), Regulations of the Academic Services (Universidade de Évora, 2023), Pedagogical Council Regulations, and the 2019–2022 Activity Report of the School of Social Sciences. In addition, the content of the university's official website (www.uÉvora.pt) was also analysed.

An unstructured interview format was chosen, as it allows for a more flexible and dynamic data collection process and is particularly recommended for exploratory studies (Sousa, 2005). The interview focused on the following dimensions: RSRLS – scope of application, verification and access to the special regime, implementation of the special regime, individual support plan, and special attendance and assessment regime.

Two interviews were conducted: one with the coordinator of the Student Support Office (GAE) on November 20, 2023, and another with the president of the Pedagogical Council of the School of Social Sciences (CPECS) on December 5, 2023. The ideas, strategies, and reflections shared by the interviewees were recorded in detailed, precise, and extensive field notes.

3 RESULTS

The first integration measures at the University of Évora – a public higher education institution of the Portuguese Republic, established on December 14, 1979 – were implemented on June 1, 1994, with the aim of supporting recent graduates in their search for their first job. This led to the creation of the Internships and Career Services Unit (NESP) (Universidade de Évora, 1994). From 1995 onward, there was a significant increase in the number and diversity of students entering the higher education system, making the provision of support for students with disabilities an urgent and current matter. The NESP was discontinued, and on December 30, 1996, the Student Support Unit (NAE) was created under the direct supervision of the Rector's Office. Its main areas of intervention were: *a*) internships and career services; *b*) support for students with disabilities; *c*) support for working students (Universidade de Évora,

1996). In 2007, the NAE maintained its reporting structure and saw its areas of intervention expanded (Universidade de Évora, 2007).

In 2009, the NAE was dissolved, giving way to the Student Support Office (GAE) (Universidade de Évora, 2009). Four years later, in light of its ongoing work, the office's responsibilities were clarified: *a)* Support for the integration of new students; *b)* Support for the integration and follow-up of students with special educational needs; *c)* Management of the Part-Time Student Employment Programme; *d)* Management of claims under the Student Insurance Scheme; *e)* Management of the Student Volunteer Bank; *f)* Support for students' professional integration (Universidade de Évora, 2012). On July 1, 2015, the GAE was placed under the direct supervision of the Director of the Academic Services (SAC), a department which itself reported directly to the Rector. Its mission was to "assist students during their time at the university, supporting their inclusion and accompanying them throughout their academic journey" (Universidade de Évora, 2015), and its remit was expanded accordingly.

Following the new SAC regulations (Universidade de Évora, 2023), the GAE was formally dissolved in December 2023, and replaced by the Division for Student Integration and Support (DIAE). This division is now responsible for coordinating the functions previously assigned to the Higher Education Access Office, which it now includes, as well as for planning and implementing projects and initiatives aimed at promoting student access, enrolment, integration, academic follow-up, and persistence. The ultimate goal of DIAE is to promote equity by recognising the diversity of each student, ensuring that appropriate conditions are in place for them to make the most of the opportunities provided by higher education. This contributes directly to academic success and the improvement of students' personal and social well-being.

With regard to specialised support, HEIs in Portugal enjoy statutory, pedagogical, and scientific autonomy, among other forms. Under Article 140, No 3 of the Legal Framework for HEIs (Portugal, 2007), each institution's competent governing bodies are authorised to approve internal regulations in accordance with their statutes. In the case of the University of Évora, its current AR (Portugal, 2022) adopt the concept of "learning support", drawing upon the LFIE. The five articles of Subsection IX are fully dedicated to the "Student with Learning Support" status (RSRLS).

The RSRLS applies to students enrolled in any cycle of studies who, due to physical, sensory, cognitive, socio-emotional, organisational, or logistical factors, experience learning difficulties in their interaction with the environment, which limit their ability to participate and engage on an equal basis with others. Under this scheme, students are entitled to a set of educational measures tailored to their specific needs, provided these do not compromise the intended learning outcomes defined for each degree programme and each curricular unit (CU) syllabus.

The support measures are defined individually for each student, with their active involvement, and are formalised in an Individual Support Plan (PIA). This plan includes provisions concerning attendance, assessment, pedagogical follow-up, instrumental support, and other relevant measures, based on the student's needs. Below, we outline

how the RSRLS is verified and granted at the University of Évora, referring to procedures still associated with the now-defunct GAE.

At the time of enrolment, students who wish to benefit from the RSRLS indicate this intention via the University of Évora's Integrated Information System (SIUE). Alternatively, they may submit the request later via the Document Management System (GESDOC). They are then required to upload or submit one or more medical and/or technical reports specifying the type of difficulties and their impact on academic performance. These documents may also be submitted directly to the GAE. The RSRLS request must be submitted within the deadlines established in the academic procedures calendar, and cannot be made after the end of the second semester's teaching period.

If a student experiences learning difficulties but does not possess any medical or technical documentation, they may request that the GAE or another specialised professional from the University carry out an assessment to identify these challenges. Where deemed necessary, the GAE may request additional documentation to verify or specify the difficulties mentioned, thereby completing the student's individual case file.

Following the RSRLS request and document review, the GAE contacts the student via email to schedule a validation interview with a psychologist, who then issues a technical report outlining the student's difficulties and a proposed set of support measures. Under Portuguese civil law, any student aged 18 or older must sign a consent form authorising the insertion of relevant information into the SIUE system and its dissemination to the CU teachers.

Once the technical report has been issued, the GAE convenes a multidisciplinary team meeting, composed of the stakeholders essential for approving the RSRLS and implementing the PIA. In the first instance, the team includes: *a)* the course director or a representative from the course committee designated by them; *b)* a psychologist from the GAE; *c)* the president of the pedagogical council, or a representative from the most representative academic unit of the course; *d)* specialised technicians from internal or external entities; *e)* a lecturer specialised in inclusive education; *f)* the student's assigned tutor. Depending on the specific case, a second-level approach may involve additional members, such as: *a)* the academic manager of the course; *b)* a representative from the Student Welfare Services; *c)* a representative from the Student Union or the student committee of the relevant degree programme.

Since the course director or their delegate is part of the team, meetings are organised on a course-by-course and student-by-student basis, though more than one case may be addressed during the same meeting if the students are enrolled in the same programme. Meetings are convened by the GAE, and the psychologist presents the student's case and the proposed support measures, based on the available medical and/or technical documentation. General measures apply across all CUs. Each member of the team must sign a confidentiality agreement specific to the case discussed.

The CPECS generally supports the GAE's proposals, particularly as its president does not hold qualifications in psychology. Nevertheless, the council ensures that the proposed measures do not generate inequality in assessment methods for other students, maintaining fairness and academic integrity.

The multidisciplinary team is responsible for proposing, approving, monitoring, and overseeing the implementation of learning support measures and advising academic staff on inclusive teaching practices. The proposed measures are subject to a vote among team members, although no formal minutes of the meeting are taken. Subsequently, the GAE registers the special attendance status and corresponding PIA in the SIIUE, submitting them to the Pedagogical Council for approval. Once approved by the president of the council, the following individuals gain access to the agreed measures through their SIIUE profiles: the course director, the teachers of the relevant CUs, and the student benefiting from the RSRLS. There is no formalised process of direct communication between the GAE and the lecturers, although faculty members may choose to contact the GAE on their own initiative.

The PIA outlines the student's difficulties and includes a set of measures appropriate to their needs and strengths. Its main purpose is to promote equity and equal access to the curriculum, ensuring fair participation and progression throughout the student's academic journey. The PIA may include: *a)* curricular accommodations, *b)* specific curricular areas, *c)* special health needs, *d)* Individual Educational Plans (PEI), *e)* support from the Centre for Inclusive Resources, *f)* tutorial support. According to the GAE coordinator, the PEI involves adaptations to the assessment of learning. The president of the CPECS adds that the PEI is tailored to each course unit, requiring the lecturer to adapt assessment methods accordingly.

According to the President of the CPECS, all students benefiting from the RSRLS should be assigned a tutor – a faculty member responsible for observing their challenges and offering prompt, effective, and targeted assistance.

The support measures defined in each student's PIA can be reviewed at any point during the academic journey, either at the student's request or upon recommendation by the course committee or the former GAE, based on the effectiveness of the measures implemented. At the end of each semester, the GAE assesses how the measures outlined in the PIA were operationalised and their impact, identifying facilitators and barriers to academic progress and learning development. This process includes a review of the student's academic performance, direct contact with the student, and engagement with individuals or entities involved in the implementation of the support measures. However, course teachers are not consulted in this evaluation process.

The RSRLS must be requested annually. If a student wishes to renew their application in subsequent years, the same PIA remains valid as long as the initial support team determines that no significant changes have occurred. If substantial changes are identified, the student must submit updated medical and/or technical

documentation describing the nature and implications of the learning difficulties. A new set of learning support measures is then defined and included in an updated PIA.

The period between the REAA request, the first meeting of the multidisciplinary team, the drafting of the PIA, its submission to the Pedagogical Council, and final approval varies significantly, ranging from two to five months. The President of the CPECS suggests that delays in the preparation of PIAs are largely due to an insufficient number of technical staff within the GAE to handle all incoming RSRLS requests, clarifying that from the Council's side, approvals never exceed five working days.

There have been instances where course teachers have challenged the measures proposed by the multidisciplinary team, arguing that certain accommodations do not promote inclusion. The CPECS President presented two examples.

In one case, a student diagnosed with selective mutism and anxiety disorder (ICD-10 F94.0; DSM-5 195) applied for the RSRLS. During the interview at the GAE, the student remained nonverbal and was accompanied by their mother. The multidisciplinary team approved a support measure allowing the student to complete an individual assignment instead of a group project, which had been originally planned for all students. A teacher from a bachelor's degree in Management CU of expressed disagreement, arguing that group work is essential in the management field, where collaborative and interpersonal skills are critical in the professional environment. The lecturer asserted that this accommodation did not promote the development of key competencies and proposed that support measures should not be defined without direct input from the instructors of the relevant course units.

Furthermore, the teacher noted that most instructors are not trained in special education and should be supported in developing appropriate pedagogical strategies for students under the RSRLS. The GAE clarified that meetings with instructors to monitor PIA or PEIs are only arranged when the complexity of the case justifies it, or if the teaching staff explicitly request guidance.

Two additional contested cases involved: the elimination of an oral presentation, replaced by a written submission; and the removal of peer assessment in favour of evaluation solely by the teacher. In both cases, instructors argued that these measures were counterproductive to inclusion, potentially creating further professional disadvantages for the students in the long term.

The CPECS President noted additional cases, particularly among psychology students with psychological disorders, raising concerns about the future professional suitability of these individuals for practising as psychologists.

The CPECS does not monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of learning support measures. According to the President, the multidisciplinary team does not monitor the implementation of these measures nor advise instructors on inclusive pedagogical strategies. Instead, the GAE appears to assume this responsibility, although, according to its coordinator, this is carried out informally, primarily through student interviews and based on academic performance in individual course units. Some students are also

supported by psychological counselling services, either within or outside the University of Évora, and such support may lead to adjustments in their support measures.

Regarding the RSRLS, the main role of the Pedagogical Council pertains to the review and approval of PIAs under the special attendance regime. However, this review process has not always been fully integrated into the SIIUE platform. Upon the appointment of the current President, each PIA was assessed during multidisciplinary team meetings, after which the information was forwarded to instructors via email—a practice that often resulted in systematic errors and information loss throughout the process.

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the President of the CPECS took part in the multidisciplinary team meetings held during the second semester, in which 13 PIA proposals were reviewed. In those meetings, the President proposed to the GAE the implementation of the current model – that is, that the entire process be registered in the SIIUE, with restricted access in order to protect students' personal data. This new procedure was adopted at the beginning of the following academic year. Between 2019 and 2022, the CPECS was involved in a total of 101 PIA processes: *a)* 27 in 2019–2020; *b)* 25 in 2020–2021; *c)* 18 in 2021–2022; *d)* 31 in 2022–2023.

According to item *b)*, No. 3 of Article 5 of the Basic Law on Higher Education Funding in Portugal (Portugal, 2003), the right to enrolment and registration in a study programme is considered forfeited if the applicable criteria are not met, and the student is prevented from reapplying to the same or any other programme for two subsequent semesters. According to the AR of the University of Évora, the maximum number of registrations allowed is: 6 for bachelor's degrees with 180 ECTS credits² (Portugal, 2005); 8 for those with 240 ECTS credits; 5 for master's degrees with 120 ECTS credits. Students under the RSRLS benefit from a special prescription rule (0.5 per enrolment) and are not required to enrol in a minimum number of CUs.

With regard to student status, the AR of the University of Évora provides for full-time and part-time enrolment, as well as a special attendance regime for "students with learning support needs" (item *h)*, Article 33 of the AR), provided that they are enrolled in a programme lasting at least one semester and meet all applicable legal and regulatory requirements for recognition. Recognition of the right to this special attendance regime is subject to an annual request, supported by appropriate documentation as defined in the AR, and submitted through SIIUE either at the time of registration or within the deadlines defined in the Academic Procedures Calendar. Such a request cannot be made after the end of the teaching period of the second semester.

Students under the RSRLS are granted priority in the selection of class groups and may complete experimental coursework over two consecutive academic years,

² In Portugal, within HEIs, the allocation of credits in CUs is based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). One ECTS credit reflects the workload required from a student to achieve the learning outcomes of a given course unit, measured in terms of acquired skills and competencies. At the University of Évora, one ECTS credit corresponds to 26 hours of total student work, including class time, independent study, assessments, and other academic activities.

provided they submit a request to the scientific-pedagogical coordinator of the course unit and the course conditions allow it. Additionally, such students are entitled, where legally permissible, to: register for the special examination period in all CUs; have their specific difficulties considered when prioritising internship placements. For outgoing mobility, students must submit a specific form at the time of application to indicate their SEN and any associated additional costs, in order to be eligible for the support available. Loan periods for library materials are extended for students covered by this scheme, although the exact duration of the extension is not clearly defined.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The findings provide a general overview of the policies and practices adopted by the University of Évora with regard to the integration and support of students. The University aims to promote equity and to recognise the individual differences of each student, ensuring that appropriate conditions are in place for them to benefit from the opportunities of higher education, thereby contributing to academic success and the enhancement of personal and social well-being.

To achieve these goals, the University of Évora has implemented, within its AR, a RSRLS for students with SEN. This scheme establishes procedures for assessing student difficulties and implementing support measures. The University of Évora is thus committed to providing an inclusive and supportive academic environment throughout the students' educational journey, through a range of initiatives aimed at promoting both academic achievement and personal and social well-being. Nevertheless, the study highlights the need for further improvements in this process – particularly in the monitoring of learning support measures and in the provision of support for teaching staff involved in the implementation of inclusive practices.

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Data Availability

The data underlying the research text are available within the article.

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