

Scholar dropout – how to identify the risk of and how to follow this phenomenon

The Portuguese Higher Education system is divided into two different models – Universities and Polytechnic Institutions – and have both public and private sector¹. Among public HEI all degrees have a fee regulated by national legislation². Moreover, in Portugal there is a system of scholarships to students with financial difficulties³.

According to a survey carried out in April with students from higher education institutions (HEI) in Portugal, 7% considered dropping out in this school year. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are one of the major factors. In one of these HEIs, the values reached 70% of the academic community⁴.

In 2013, a resolution of the Assembly of the Republic recommended that the Portuguese government annually develop a report to mitigate the phenomenon of school dropout. Some government studies have been carried out. A research regarding students doing 3-years bachelors (1st cycle of studies) showed that, in a 4-year span, 17% of women and 25% of men abandoned the university⁵. Recently, a government's study revealed that in the scholar year of 2019/2020 the dropout rate was 9.1% among people studying bachelors and 18.7% in professional technical courses. In the master's degrees and integrated masters 16% and 3.7% quit, respectively⁶. None of the studies neither have mitigated nor have followed this phenomenon.

Nowadays, some Portuguese HEI have data about school dropout rates⁷. For instance, in University of Beira Interior 10.8% of the students quit in 2019/2020. And in Polytechnic of Oporto 15% abandoned in 2019/2020.

HEI in Portugal have the capacity to identify this scourge through anonymous statistical data⁸. In this sense, the collection of data such as non-renewal of enrollment, absence at exams and/or classes, number of students with late payment of tuition fees, at risk of prescription and students with study support grants will allow the stratification and quantification of the risk of dropping out of school.

In Portugal, the student ombuds mission is to look after the rights and duties of students, as well as to identify potential risks that jeopardize their academic path⁹. In this sense, the

¹ In [Regime Jurídico das Instituições de Ensino Superior \(RJIES\) \(dre.pt\)](#)

² In [Lei 2/2020, 2020-03-31 - DRE](#)

³ In [Despacho 9138/2020, 2020-09-25 - DRE](#)

⁴ In [Abandono no Ensino Superior. "A minha maior dificuldade foi não ter dinheiro para comer" \(sapo.pt\)](#)

⁵ In [Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência \(mec.pt\)](#)

⁶ In [Abandono no superior e desemprego de recém-licenciados aumentam em ano de pandemia | Ensino Superior | PÚBLICO \(publico.pt\)](#)

⁷ In [Abandono Escolar @ UBI](#)

⁸ In [Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência \(mec.pt\)](#)

⁹ In [Regime Jurídico das Instituições de Ensino Superior \(RJIES\) \(dre.pt\)](#)

aforementioned quantitative data will alert the university to the potential risk of dropout and provoke reflection on strategies to prevent and avoid this phenomenon.

As an independent and neutral entities, the student ombuds, supported by the Portuguese ombuds network¹⁰, could promote and carry studies based on common indicators which allow the interpretation of the phenomenon in every HEI, as well as facilitate the communication between HEI regarding scholar dropout. These data will also allow the comparison between different HEI from different regions of the country.

Thereby, student ombuds may play two important roles regarding scholar dropout:

- promote studies who make possible to produce recommendations within HEI, as well as to the government;
- dissemination of preventive projects¹¹ which could be applied by HEI.

This would allow to begin mitigating and monitor the phenomenon, as well as to address this matter in a preventive way rather than of reactive way.

Author:

Jorge António Ribeiro Pereira; provedor@ubi.pt; University of Beira Interior; Student Ombudsman; Portugal.

Berta Batista; provedordoestudante@ipp.pt; Polytechnic of Oporto; Student Ombudswoman; Portugal.

¹⁰ In [Rede de Provedores do Estudante — P.PORTO | Ensino Superior Público \(ipp.pt\)](#)

¹¹ In [Projeto do IPCA na área da Inteligência Artificial vai ajudar a prevenir o abandono escolar - IPCA](#)