

**Inaugural Address by the Student Ombudsman, Professor  
José Manuel Palma Redes Ramos, 24 April 2024**

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Mr President of IPT, dear Professor João Coroado,  
Immediate Past Ombudsman, dear Professor Horácio  
Peixeiro,  
Distinguished Representatives of the Student Unions,  
Distinguished Directors of the IPT Schools,  
Dear Colleagues and Staff,  
Dear Students,

First of all, allow me to introduce myself. I started my career as an engineer, a profession I practised for four years (1980–1983) before turning to academia, to which I then devoted myself on a full-time basis for the following forty years (1983–2023), the last thirty-four of which were spent at the School of Technology of Tomar (ESTT). Therefore, it is in my capacity as a professor that I stand before you today. In my capacity as a professor, because my concerns and anxieties focus on teaching and learning in general, with a special interest in higher education and, very particularly, in IPT.

Concerns and anxieties, because we are facing unprecedented challenges - social, economic, and environmental - arising from the acceleration of globalisation and disruptive technological development. While this acceleration offers numerous opportunities for human advancement, it also entails the uncertainty of a future that is difficult to predict. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my greetings to the entire academic community, through its President, my dear Professor João Coroado, for even within a model of Higher Education oriented towards practical action, as reflected in IPT's Mission, we are all aware of the immense effort required to prepare our students for professional activities that have yet to be created, for technologies that have not yet been invented, and to address problems that have not yet been anticipated. Seizing opportunities and finding solutions will be a shared responsibility among all, with the indispensable involvement of our students.

To navigate such uncertainty, students will need to develop curiosity, imagination, resilience, and self-regulation; to engage with new ideas, perspectives, and values; to cope with failure and rejection; and to move forward in the face of adversity. In addition to preparing for good jobs and the prospect of above-average income, students will be motivated by the well-being of their families, friends, and communities and, ultimately, by the sustainability of the planet.



Thus, as higher education continues to evolve, its focus will increasingly be guided by student-centred principles: inclusion and diversity; academic freedom; public responsibility; critical thinking and creativity; integrity and ethics; sustainability and social responsibility; and cooperation rather than competition.

Aware of these concerns and anxieties, I take this opportunity to address all IPT students and, as of today, place myself at your service as your Ombudsman, counting on your collaboration and support in the pursuit of the most appropriate solutions to any matters that may arise. I also extend my greetings to my dear Professor Horácio Peixeiro and applaud his remarkable pioneering effort as the first Student Ombudsman of IPT over nearly thirteen years. I am therefore grateful for all the support he has already provided me and for any further assistance he may still offer. So, far from starting from scratch, I can rely on a valuable legacy, which I hope to do justice to.

According to my understanding of the IPT Statutes, and based on my discussions with the outgoing Ombudsman, Professor Horácio Peixeiro, the Student Ombudsman's role is to review complaints, petitions and other submissions made by students, and to propose concrete solutions to unresolved academic issues. The Student Ombudsman therefore acts as a point of contact for students and as a mediator between the various academic, administrative, scientific and educational bodies. In other words, listening carefully and, as far as possible, seeking solutions, drawing up recommendations and acting as a mediator in conflicts.

Therefore, I do not intend to present any action plan, as I do not consider this to be appropriate. Instead, in my capacity as the new IPT Student Ombudsman, I wish to offer a few statements of interpretation and intent:

- I will uphold respect for the legitimate rights and interests of IPT students by taking independent, impartial and confidential action. This will always be carried out with integrity and in consultation with the relevant academic bodies. My constant aim will be to resolve and mitigate potential or actual conflicts.
- To raise awareness among IPT students of their right to receive high-quality, efficient and dignified public services, and to encourage them to contribute to improvements through personal commitment and critical thinking. Students should see the Ombudsman as more than just a complaints box; they should see them as a trusted partner who is attentive to any threats or obstacles – whether hidden or overt – that may arise during their academic journey.

To this end, the Ombudsman expects students to contribute voluntarily by voicing all their expectations and expressing their criticisms freely and openly.

- To recommend the adjustments, corrections or changes necessary to improve the operational standards and services provided by the IPT, without interfering in the decision-making processes of the various academic, administrative, scientific and educational bodies. The Ombudsman should maintain an ongoing dialogue, conducted in a spirit of loyalty and cordiality, with all academic bodies, acting as the voice of the practical needs expressed by students.
- To work towards the creation and maintenance of an independent website for the IPT Student Ombudsman, with the Ombudsman having full control over and responsibility for the management of its content.
- To work towards drafting the 'Regulations of the IPT Student Ombudsman', which will set out the Ombudsman's duties towards the academic community, the Academia's duty to cooperate with the Ombudsman, and the limits of the Ombudsman's authority to intervene, in addition to the usual rules governing election and tenure. Rather than being a lengthy and restrictive set of regulations, this should enshrine the Ombudsman's informal and private remit.

Trusting that time will guide the course of my actions in line with the intentions I have expressed, I would not want to bring this address to a close without an ambitious note or, at least, a motivating point of reference.

Academic failure and dropping out directly affect higher education students, the higher education system and, consequently, society. In an economy driven by knowledge and innovation, higher-level academic qualifications are becoming increasingly important. We must therefore consider the most likely reasons why students drop out at IPT, such as potential difficulties in the academic integration process, as well as a possible strategy to combat this. Believing that prevention is better than cure, I consider that, rather than focusing on tackling the consequences of dropout, it is more important to recognise that prevention is the first step towards reducing dropout rates in the future and increasing students' success and well-being. If we are able to take this first step, those that follow will be giant leaps.