

## **PARTNERSHIP OF SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL:**

### **THE CASE OF BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN RETAIL MANAGEMENT**

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#### **Abstract**

Since 2007, ESTGA-UA has been offering the Bachelor's Degree in Retail Management, which was previously named Bachelor in Commerce. Year after year, the Bachelor in Commerce had become less attractive, having filled only 33% of the available positions in 2013. Internal and external factors contributed to this negative scenario, especially the name of the course, the weak connection to the business environment and the reduction of the number of candidates for higher education.

Before this scenario, there was a need to take measures that could revitalize the degree and enable its continuity. With this purpose, the main project was to carry out its restructuring contemplating, simultaneously, the study plan, the inclusion of curricular internships in each of the school years, which was very rare, at the time, in courses of the area of Business Sciences in Portugal, the change of the degree's name and also setting up a partnership with a large national company in an active and long-term collaboration.

With that purpose, a partnership was established with the Jerónimo Martins Group (JM), a leader in the retail and distribution sector, with presence in Portugal, Poland and Colombia, and a cooperation protocol signed with a view to restructuring the course.

The partnership established was based on four main lines of action. A first axis involved collaboration in curriculum development of the syllabus and assistance to (in?) the organization of various support actions, namely, study visits, open lectures and seminars. A second axis focused on supporting the operationalization and development of internships during the three years of the course, with the JM group hosting several internships annually and collaborating in the search for new partners. The third one was the implementation of a tutorial program aimed at students, through which each student is assigned a tutor (from JM Group), who keeps up with the student throughout the course, acting as a facilitator and a motivator for business reality. Finally, this cooperation also included the opening of a Call for Teachers' invitation in the Retail Management area, resulting in the development of teaching, research, training and cooperation activities in this scientific field

The importance of the proximity between higher education and the business world is undeniable, the creation and implementation of this partnership has allowed the Retail Management Degree to become a success case. As a result of the restructuring, the number of students from all over the country who compete for the degree has increased, contrary to the downward and geographically more localized cycle, having filled all the vacancies in the first phase, since 2013.

The annual dozens of curricular internships in companies throughout the country and even abroad have proved to be one of the great advantages of the course both for the students and for the companies that seek and welcome them.

Since 2013, several initiatives that have been carried out in partnership with the business community, enriching the training of students and providing them with increased proximity to the business reality and the labor market (open classes, study visits, workshops, contests).

Furthermore, the tutoring program has had a strong adherence and interest of the students and the professionals of the JM that have been volunteering for this program.

Early contact with the business world, either through internships or through regular contact with the tutor, has enabled students to complement the scientific training obtained in the curricular units with a strong practical component. This new approach to teaching applied to Business Sciences has aroused the interest of several companies, allowing the expansion of partnerships (Santander, Novo Banco, C&A, SPAR, Prio, Pecal, Martifer, Lidl, Guialmi, Tupai, Silencor, Indelague, Porcel, Weber, Holmes Place, AIDA, Renault, AEP, Bosch, Revigrés, Teka and many others).

Implementing this pioneer partnership in Portugal allowed the Retail Management Degree to succeed in reversing a negative cycle, in an adverse context, and today it is a success case in the national higher education landscape.

**Keywords:** Higher education; University-business interaction; Partnership; Internships; Management

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