

Portuguese Higher Education and the New System of Evaluation and Accreditation

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ABSTRACT

The creation of quality assurance system internationally accepted is one of the aims of the recent approval of the legal regime of the assessment of Tertiary education. With this regime the government aims to create quality assessment parameters, that include taught education, the qualification of teaching staff, the strategy adopted to assure the quality of education, the scientific, technological and artistic activity, in conformance with the mission of the institution and the international co-operation. The approval of these measures aims to achieve an improvement in the quality of institutions of tertiary education. Provide correct information on the performance of the institutions, to the society as well as the development of an internal institutional culture of quality guarantee.

This assessment is compulsory and is done within the Framework of the guaranteed European quality in the tertiary education. The assessment agents are self-assessment, which is done by each education establishment and the external assessment is the basis for the accreditation processes, which is carried out by the assessment and accreditation agency for the guarantee of quality in tertiary education.

The Agency for the Assessment and Accreditation of Tertiary Education was legally instituted in November 2007. The accreditation of tertiary education institutions, and its cycles of study, are compulsory and can be done on the initiative of the Agency or requested by the tertiary education institutions, which show an interest.

In this paper the aim is to show and explain the recent challenges facing the tertiary education establishments, focusing especially the implementation stage of these governmental measures.

Keywords: *Accreditation, assessment, tertiary education*

1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the national system of assessment and accreditation of tertiary education, according to Santos (2007), was dealt with in Great depth in 2004, as regards to concept and definition of guiding principles as well as on an operational level, in a study compiled with the close co-operation with the Ministry of Science and Tertiary Education.

The subject was once again discussed with the implementation of the “Accreditation Agency” by Law Decree No. 74/2006, gaining special prominence with the publication of the ENQA Report “Quality Assurance of Tertiary Education in Portugal”, which recommended its implementations.

This study, besides revising the literature on quality, assessment and accreditation, gives special focus to the new paradigm of the quality assurance of tertiary education in Portugal, legally approved in 2007.

The assessment and accreditation process of the tertiary education institutions has various expectations; which can only be met with its implementation.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE

Presently the need to assess the various activities of the Tertiary Education Institutions (HEI) is not an issue. The assessment programmes are widely accepted; the issue is how to do such an assessment.

There is no single assessment model that can be applied in any one country. It is essential to take into account the social, cultural and political reality, as well as the aspects that favor or make difficult its implementation.

An important aspect to consider is the influence that the results of the assessment may have in the funding of the HEI. According to Bricall (2000:361), the combination of the institutional autonomy with the social responsibility and the role it has in the assessment of quality, constitutes the

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most adequate background to balance and harmonize that interface.

Since the quantitative growth of the HEI is not predictable, the great challenge they face is the quality assurance provided by the services. Thus the public

Administrations and Tertiary Education Institutions in co-operation with other economic and social sectors should concentrate efforts to promote awareness of a culture of quality amongst the university community, as an element of balance between autonomy and social responsibility.

Bricall (2000:363) argues that the concept of quality can be understood in different ways. In the case of a university some characteristics of the teachers, students, financial resources, facilities, fees, the history or simply the reputation or public recognition is considered as quality.

Quality can mean conformity with established standards, or fitness for purpose. The quality maybe associated with the efficiency and costs supported by the institution.

Quality is defined as the capability to meet the needs of the users, target users or clients; this is the totally accepted definition in the industry and in services, but accepted with some resistance in the university context.

Therefore, a new concept of quality emerges, related to the capability of transformation and change of HEI, which gives emphasis to the need for change management in reply to the demand by the society, the improvement and re-engineering of procedures, adaptation to the new information and communication Technologies, the adaptation of human resources and new methods of institutional organization. The fundamental aim of the implemented systems should aim to improve the quality incorporating the regulatory or accreditation norms.

The emergence of new concepts of quality does not exclude the validity of previous concepts. Therefore the concept of quality is a multi-dimensional and complex concept.

In HEI, the quality systems should meet certain functions, such as:

- a. Prepare the mechanisms for the accreditation of the institutions and programmes;
- b. Improve teaching, research and administration;
- c. Be an instrument of accountability to the government and to society;
- d. Provide public and transparent information to the students and labour market;
- e. Operate as a mechanism of differentiation in the financing of the HEI by the state.

The methods used may vary. Therefore, can opt for a model of self-assessment, where the responsibility for the initiative and the execution falls on the HEI, an external control model to be done by the government or a mixed model, in use in some countries, based in the creation of independent agencies created by the government. The tendency is the combination of a first internal self assessment with external assessment.

It is desirable that the quality system combines the simultaneous use of internal self assessment and external assessment, including making the report in public. The external assessment should be done by autonomous entities, independent from the State or HEI Administration.

3. ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCES

3.1 International

The assessment of the institutions of tertiary Education is a common practice in European countries and has a long tradition in Anglo-Saxon countries.

In the United States, it was the actual university institutions that started many years ago to research the efficiency of their own functioning, revision of programmes and strategic planning. Accreditation by regional specialized agencies was done; these were very often private, based on the revision of the organizational structure and in visits by external groups of assessors.

According Bricall (2000:367), over two thirds of the States have a system of quality assessment for tertiary education institutions in their territory. An important aspect in the process of assessment is the results assessment of the learning process by the students, which is for these a significant added value.

In Australia, the assessment model is distinct. There is a state agency - HERDS ("Higher Education Research and Development Society"), which follows recommendations from CYTEC ("Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission"), organization responsible for tertiary education, which prepares the assessment methodology to be done by the university, every three years. The assessment system in the United States, started at the beginning of the 90's, with the creation of the Academic Audit Unit by the British Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), integrating in 1992 the 'Tertiary Education Quality Council (HEQC). The assessment system self regulated in the United Kingdom is based on the use of success indicators.

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In Denmark created in 1992 a centre for quality assurance and assessment of tertiary education, under the Ministry of Education. It assesses the education programmes and defines the priority areas for action. A report is made as a result of the assessment which includes the required recommendations. The assessment is requested by the education councils and the Minister of Education implements the education programmes. The assessment is done periodically.

In France, the “Comité National D’Évaluation”, created in 1984, is an independent autonomous organization. It assesses the teaching and research aspects of universities, but does not have the competence to assess people, approve curricula or allocate state grants. The universities are not expected to prepare a report prior to their visit, they must provide the necessary data for the assessment, and public report is then made. This committee is made up of members nominated from the academic community and by individualities of other state organizations.

In Holland, the system of quality management started in the 80’s, with the publication of a document entitled “Tertiary Education: autonomy and quality”, issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. According to this document, all the tertiary education institutions should be responsible for the quality assurance of its educational programmes and internal assessment, which should be made public. The assessment is done in cycles of six years and combines self assessment with external assessment, and the final report must be made public. Public Administration should take on a “remote Control” of tertiary education system. In 1987 a system to assess the quality of the programmes was implemented, to ensure the implementation of the quality recommendations.

In Spain, towards the end of 80’s, universities council began a line of work to design and implement an assessment programme with the aim to provide quality standards for the university system, especially in the case of human and material resources. Unable to meet the objectives proposed, from 1990 the council decided to follow the assessment standards based on models from other countries, resulting in “The experimental programme of Quality Assessment of the Universities”, which was developed in 1992 and 1994, and the immediate participation in the “Pilot Project of the European Union”. This process was continued in “National Plan of Quality Assessment”, approved by the government in 1995.

Bricall (2000:369) refers that there has been initiatives by the institutions, such as the Technological University of Delft who considers important the assessment of their quality, seen as meeting their institutional objectives,

such as the quality of teaching and research, efficiency of university management, the quality of human resources and the organization of their decision systems.

The University of Twent, together with other ten European Universities, grouped in the “European Consortium of Innovative Universities”, started a pilot programme of international accreditation. They favour a system of auditing and international accreditation between similar universities and for innovative programmes. This model permits network member universities to act as external agencies of accreditation and mutual reinforcement of the assessment procedures and quality management.

These experiences re-inforce the idea of the increasing need for international accreditation. This is a key element for the future, especially in the case of some universities or courses, both in their country and in an international projection. The quality system in the HES should facilitate the transparency.

3.2 In Portugal

The need for tertiary education system assessment was formerly accepted in 1986, and in that same year Parliament passed the first legislation in that field, and included in the constitutional revision of 1997.

Public debate on the matter was started by Council of Deans of Portuguese Universities (CDPU). The universities promoted a process of self assessment, through this pilot Project, later included in Law No. 38/94, of 21 November – Law of Assessment Tertiary Education, which was created by the Portuguese University Foundation (PUF). The Constitution of 1996 permitted the expansion of this assessment to all subsystems. A “Group of assistance to the Process of self assessment of tertiary education Institutions”, with the aim to propose regulations and general principles that assure the assessment system, the constitution of the representative entities and the cohesive and creditable functioning of the system. They had the duty to prepare the guidelines for self-assessment of a first strategic document and a Project law that result in Decree-Law No. 205/98, of 11 July, creating the “Conselho Nacional de Avaliação do Ensino Superior (CNAVES) (National Council for the Assessment of Tertiary Education)

The assessment process is applicable to all public institutions of tertiary education, universities and polytechnics, public, members, private, associations and military. Its aim is to promote the improvement of the quality of activities pursued, provide information to the academic community and to society in general. It also aims to assure a deeper understanding and a more transparent

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dialogue amongst the tertiary education institutions, as well as contributing to the organization of the network.

The assessment process has two phases: self assessment and external assessment, culminating with global assessment of the institution. The target assessment can be done by external or foreign entity, in co-ordination with

CNAVES, as the leading national organization. The aim is to guarantee total harmony, cohesion and credibility of the whole assessment process and supporting tertiary education adhering to standards of excellence which should correspond to the global functioning of system.

CNAVES must judge the global coherence of the assessment system, from indicators used in the various modalities of teaching, Should produce reports and recommendations to standardize and improve the tertiary education system.

As a result of a process of reforms started by the government, CNAVES was made extinct by the Decree-Law No. 369/2007 of 5 November, which created the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Tertiary Education. The National system of quality assurance of tertiary education internationally recognized, begins with the approval of Law No. 38/2007, of 16 August.

4. THE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION

4.1 Assessment Versus Accreditation

Presently the difficulty to distinguish between assessment and accreditation, tends to disappear and is not an issue.

Assessment and accreditation have complementary objectives. Assessment aims to constantly monitor and improve the quality, representing an important function of great interest to the community, such as the promotion of the quality of education, research and cultural action developed by the institutions to achieve the results with the available resources. On the other hand accreditation aims to assure that minimum requirements are met leading to the official recognition of the course or institution assessed.

Therefore assessment and accreditation processes cannot be separated. The assessment process informs society publically, about the quality of an institution or course. Accreditation provides society information if a course meets the minimum quality requirements to be recognized.

4.2 The Assessment And Accreditation System

There is no exclusive model of assessment and accreditation with a general application in all cases and countries. One of the aspects to consider is the indicators of success. These could be of three kinds:

- Indicators internal success – the rate of students who completed the degree is considered, the funds obtained for research or the rate of success of tertiary degrees, and time taken to complete these.
- Indicators of external success – where the rate of employability of graduates, the publications and papers that professors discuss at congresses or patents registered, inventions or consultancy provided.
- Indicators of operational income – where number of student per class, number of available computers for students, or working hours of teaching staff.

The assessment should be seen on two perspectives: from outside the university system, where it should be assured that the society and in particular the students know and understand the quality and supply of the academic programmes. Within the institution, the assessment is an instrument to look at the strong and weak points and to promote the strategy to follow to reach the highest level of quality.

The previous aspects, although important, do not end the assessment process. It also helps the institutions are able to get more financing from governments and other financing sources.

Substitute the traditional process of homologation and authorization by another of accreditation. This means to progressively transform the early intervention mechanisms by auditing instruments which assesses the management quality. The increasing role played by the mobility of students and professionals, shows the importance of the programme quality and the accreditation procedures that guarantee the adequate continuity of the studies or the practice of a profession.

4.3 The role of the ENQA

The European Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education was created in the year 2000 to promote the European co-operation in the domain of quality assurance. In November 2004, the General Assembly transformed the Network into the Association for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ENQA). This idea for the creation of a European association began in the Pilot Project of Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (1994-95), which

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showed the value of sharing experiences and development in the scope of the quality assurance. Subsequently, this was reinforced by the Recommendation of the Council (98/561/CE, of 24 September 1998) on the European co-operation the quality assurance of tertiary education and by the Declaration of Bologna 1999. The European

Commission, by conceding grants, has financed the activities of the ENQA since the beginning.

As stated in the 'website' the ENQA (September 2008), the members of this Association are the following:

Full Members Agencies	
Austria	Ireland
AAC - Austrian Accreditation Council, Vienna	HEA - Higher Education Authority, Dublin 4
AQA - Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance, Vienna	HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council, Dublin 2
FHR - Fachhochschulrat, Vienna	NQAI - National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, Dublin 1
Belgium	Italy
VLHORA - Council of Flemish Institutions of Higher Education, Brussels	CNVSU - Comitato Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario, Rome
VLIR - Flemish Interuniversity Council, Brussels	Latvia
Cyprus	HEQEC - Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre, Riga
CEEA - Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation, Nicosia	The Netherlands
The Czech Republic	NQA - Netherlands Quality Agency, Utrecht
Accreditation Commission Czech Republic, Prague 1	NVAO - Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, The Hague
Denmark	QANU - Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities, Utrecht
EVA - Danish Evaluation Institute, Copenhagen	Norway
Estonia	NOKUT - Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, Oslo
Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Center, Tallinn	The Slovak Republic
Finland	Accreditation Commission of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava
FINHEEC - Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, Helsinki	Spain
France	AGAE - Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Research of Andalusia, Córdoba
AERES - Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education, Paris	ANECA - National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain, Madrid
CTI - Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur, Neuilly sur Seine	AQU - Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System, Barcelona
Germany	Sweden
ACQUIN - Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute, Bayreuth	NAHE - National Agency for Higher Education, Stockholm
ASIIN - Accreditation Agency Specialised in Accrediting Degree Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, the Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Duesseldorf	Switzerland
EVALAG - Stiftung Evaluationsagentur Baden-Wuerttemberg, Mannheim	OAQ - Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities, Bern
FIBAA - Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation, Bonn	UK
GAC - German Accreditation Council, Bonn	QAA - Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Gloucester
ZEVA - Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hannover, Hannover	European agencies and organisations
Hungary	EUA - European University Association
HAC - Hungarian Accreditation Committee, Budapest	

In September 2008 there were ten institutions candidates to 'full members' of ENQA. However before

officially becoming members, they have to be two years candidates to members.

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The ENQA aims to strengthen community co-operation in terms of quality. It aims to do so through its General Meeting, where the quality agencies of similar national institutions from various European countries are represented, although their activity Spectrum is much wider. After the Bologna agreement, the role of the ENQA has been growing. The fact that quality assurance is one of the pillars of the construction of the European space of Tertiary Education turned the organization into an important part of the process and, as such one of the most active organizations. To reinforce this role, the ENQA organizes various workshops, prepares reports during these, takes part in groups related to the Bologna process and proposes amplifying their activities in respect of quality assurance to e-learning activities.

The ENQA depends on the support of the European Commission to financing their activities. Amongst these is the completion of various projects related with quality, as well as the start of others. It has completed the external assessment of members of the Network, as well as a study about the convergence of quality in Europe. Parallel to the execution of the projects, there is the preparation of documents on quality, which proved to be fundamental in the development of the Bologna Process.

In Portugal, the ENQA led the process of assessment of tertiary education, at the request of the government that ended in a report. According to Azevedo (2006:44) in the report, the leader of the ENQA Project referred the following: "Institutional accreditation should be considered in order to steer and regulate the number and quality of Tertiary Education Institutions". So that it becomes viable, it is necessary that a significant change in the system of tertiary education in general and the institutions in particular. Some changes have already been started.

5. ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION IN PORTUGAL: A NEW PARADIGM

5.1 What was done: methodology and the relevant aspects

The Report prepared in 2005 by ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education) in the scope of the implementation of the Bologna Process, entitled 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Tertiary Education Area' refers to the general principles of quality assurance of tertiary education in Europe. In November 2006, at the request of the government and in sequence to this document, a Report on Quality Assurance in tertiary education in Portugal was prepared by the referred European association. The practices

of the National Council of Assessment of Tertiary Education were assessed and recommendations about the organization, method processes of a new system of accreditation, called 'Quality Assurance of Tertiary Education in Portugal' were made to the government. The principle recommendations of the report look at the following aspects:

- Creating of a strong and independent national agency.
- Publishing the assessment results;
- Producing summary reports every two to three years;
- Professionalism and of the work of the assessment and accreditation agency;
- An agency with highly qualified 'staff';
- Resorting to international experts;
- Including the students in the quality assessment project;
- Involving the 'stakeholders';
- Availability to co-operate in network Works, in the European and international scope;
- Internal procedures of responsibilities according to European standards;
- Pre-accreditation and accreditation based in relevance criteria and of national interest;
- Financing of a new agency of quality assessment;
- 'Focus' on specific assessment criteria;
- The process for the definition of accreditation criteria;
- Definition of accreditation criteria;
- Accreditation and follow up Levels;
- Accreditation consequences;
- Duration of the accreditation cycle;
- Possibility of appeal of the accreditation decisions.

In December 2006, the Report of assessment system of tertiary education, prepared by the OCDE (Organization for the Co-operation and Economic Development), at the requested of the government, entitled 'Reviews of National Policies for Education: Tertiary Education in Portugal' was made public.

In terms of quality excellence in tertiary education and in science and technology, the report refers that the "Portuguese system of tertiary education should aim to achieve higher levels of excellence, particularly in the polytechnic and private sectors".

According to this report all the institutions should have levels of quality in terms of leadership, curricular

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development, pedagogical performance and financial viability.

Regarding the accreditation of new programmes, these should be rigorously assessed by external independent authorities as proposed by the ENQA. The external assessments should be done regularly on all the study programmes and to all institutions.

The OCDE report emphasizes the need to strengthen the exposure of the universities to increasingly competitive environments and rendering accounts, namely in terms of scientific and pedagogical performance. On the other hand the I & D units should be strengthened so has to create more and better specialization in certain scientific fields. The aim is to guarantee in this way the necessary critical masses on the emerging scientific and pedagogical knowledge.

It is the Decree-Law (DL) No. 74/2006, of 24 March, which approves the legal regime of degrees and diplomas, based on the general principles of accreditation of the institutions of tertiary education and the study cycles.

5.2 The Legal Regulations For Assessment Of Tertiary Education

The DL No. 38/2007, of 16 August, establishes the legal regulations for assessing tertiary education. According to this law, quality assessment is compulsory and is part of the European system of quality assurance for tertiary education. This applies to tertiary education establishments their organic units and on the study cycles. Quality assurance covers self-assessment and external assessment. The assessment will be done by the institutions themselves and the Assessment and Accreditation Agency for Tertiary Education. It looks at education offered, qualifications of the teaching staff, the international co-operation, and the scientific and technological activity, amongst others as referred in the law.

The assessment system includes the students, external entities, such as councils and other public Professional associations. The results of the assessment are made public.

The DL No. 369/2007, of 5 November, creates the Assessment and Accreditation Agency for Tertiary Education, who will be responsible for quality assurance of this education, namely assessment and accreditation, as well as the inclusion of Portugal in the European system of tertiary education quality assurance.

The Agency is a foundation for private law, with clear rules of independence, representation and technical scientific competencies, and is responsible for the

assessment and accreditation of the tertiary education institutions and courses.

Creating it was a very important step for the implementation of a national system of quality assurance of tertiary education, which is independent, internationally accepted and covering all its institutions.

The Agency will be led by an administration board made up of persons with recognized expertise in the field of quality assurance in tertiary education and science. This board decides, totally independently, on issues regarding assessment and quality of courses or education establishment. The consultation council has to represent the interests of the assessed entities, and is made up of members named by the tertiary education institutions, the students, the Professional associations and other social stakeholders.

According the "MCTES" Ministry of Science and Technology and Tertiary Education (www.mctes.pt), the regulations for quality assurance of tertiary education:

- Introduces a real system of external assessment, independent of the education institutions, where assessed and assessors come together;
- Makes accreditation of the institutions and cycles of study a compulsory condition for its existence and its recognition depends on a previous favorable assessment;
- Recognizes the fundamental role of the councils and other public Professional associations that become part of the accreditation process, ending its old fashioned intervention, in subsequence, in the professional recognition process of tertiary courses made in certain cases, necessary due to the lack of a system such as this.

5.3 Expectations Of The New Model

The need to assure that the tertiary education contributes in an adequate manner to the promotion of knowledge in Portugal, led to the start of a legislative process with the aim to guarantee the quality of tertiary education, which has the most varied expectations.

The adequate management of delicate matters such as these, demands starting from clear concepts and explanatory principles about the system of assessment, that are in agreement and harmonious with the objectives and aims of tertiary education.

As a result we wait for the starting of the Assessment and Accreditation of Tertiary Education Agency, as well as its functioning regulations.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The quality assurance process of the institutions of tertiary education was the duty of the CNAVES who, from indicators used in the various types of education, produced prospective reports and recommendations of changes and improvement of tertiary education.

As a result of the recommendations made in the Report of ENQA of 2006, the assessment process until then in force was equaled. The Government abolished CNAVES and made legislation for the creation of a new assessment and accreditation process for tertiary education. The present legal regime for quality assurance of tertiary education in Portugal, accepts many of the ideas recommended by the said Association.

It is of the greatest importance the constitution of a structure such as the Assessment and Accreditation Agency for Tertiary Education, to achieve a tertiary education of quality and excellence that can compete with the best European education institutions. An education with these characteristics contributes for the economic development and progress of Portugal.

Defining clear criteria with the aim to promote merit and progress of scientific knowledge. Promote the competition of the tertiary education institutions, by permitting them to compete with other European institutions.

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