

ASEM - Education Process

**PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY ON NEW APPROACHES
TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE ASEM COUNTRIES**

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Portugal

PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY ON NEW APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE ASEM COUNTRIES

- The Portuguese higher education system
- The quality assurance system
- Inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation

The Portuguese higher education system

- School education comprises - basic, secondary and higher education. Secondary education is also compulsory and comprises a 3-years cycle (10th, 11th and 12th years of schooling). Permeability is guaranteed between courses mainly oriented to working life (technological courses) and courses oriented to continuation of studies at higher education level (general courses).
- Higher education is provided at universities and polytechnics (binary system), both public and private.
 - 14 public universities and 21 public polytechnics
 - 31 private universities and 56 private polytechnics

The Portuguese higher education system

Expansion of the higher education system

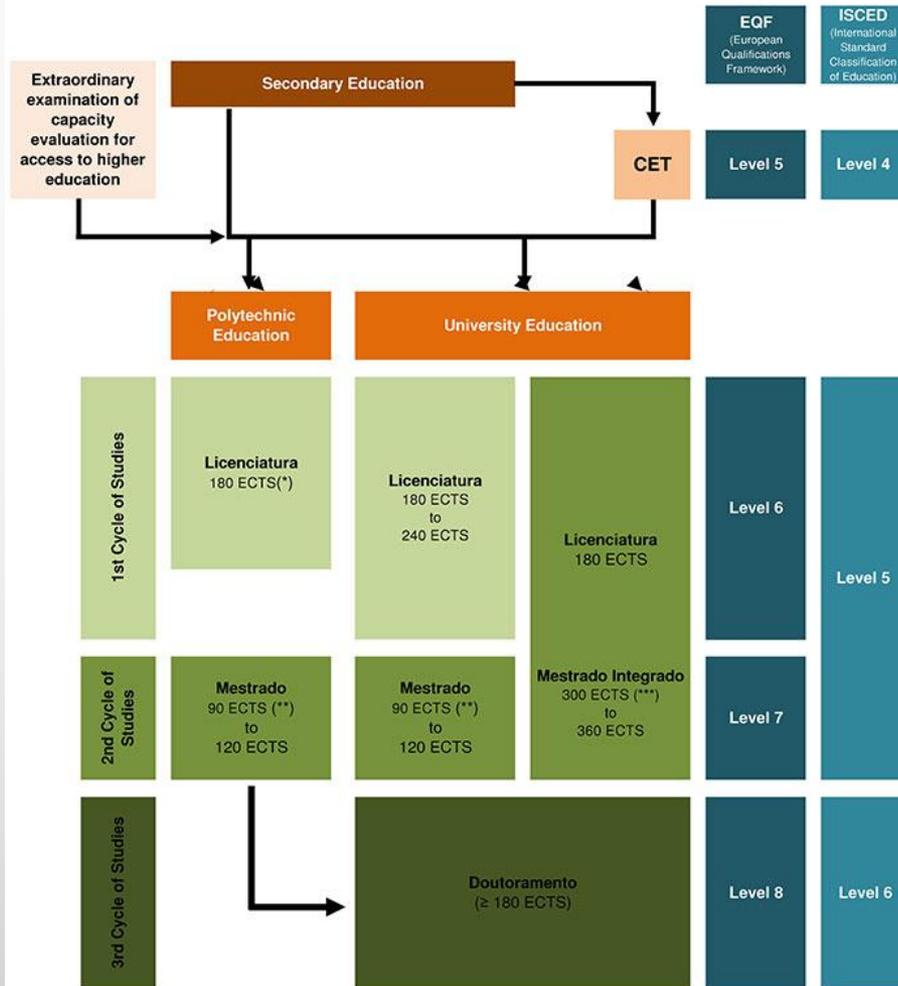
- Gross participation rates (20-24 years-old) have increased steadily from its very low 7% value in 1974, to 37% in 1995, 50% in 2000, 54% in 2005 and 67.3% in 2011
- This was a very fast increase without parallel in other European countries
 - The earlier increase in enrolments was mainly due to the private sector that in 1991 registered a 33.5% increase (22.5% in 1989 and 33.3% in 1990). This very fast expansion of the private sector started to slow down by the mid 1990s and became negative in 1997;
 - The increase in enrolments at public polytechnics was more sustained although it also became slightly negative in 2003.

The Portuguese higher education system

The structure of higher education system

- The university and the polytechnic subsystems are differentiated by their conceptual and formative matrices. There are in total 3384 degree programmes.
 - The degree of **licenciado (licenciatura)** is awarded by **universities** and **polytechnics**. While universities are free to set the length of studies, polytechnics can only offer 3-year programmes unless there is legislation or an established European practice allowing for a longer study programme.
 - The degree of **mestre** is awarded by both the **university** and **polytechnic** institutions, after a cycle of studies with a number of credits corresponding to three to four semesters of studies, although, exceptionally, the duration may be of two semesters. The degree of mestre may also be awarded by universities after an **integrated cycle of studies** of 10 to 12 semesters, in cases where, in order to access the right to practice a regulated profession, such a duration is determined by a EU Directive or results from a consolidated practice in the EU member states.
 - The degree of **doutor** is **awarded only at university** institutions with qualified academic staff, adequate facilities and an accumulated scientific experience demonstrated by relevant scientific and academic production in the corresponding scientific field.

Diagram of the Portuguese Higher Education System according to Bologna



(*) Except when in order to exercise a certain professional activity requiring education and training rating between 210 and 240 ECTS.

(**) In exceptional circumstances, and subject to the fulfillment of every requirement relating to the definition of the objectives of the degree and the conditions for acquiring the latter, a cycle of studies leading to a *Mestre* degree in a specialized field may amount 60 credits resulting from a stable and consolidated practice in that specific field at international level.

(***) A *Mestre* degree may also be granted following an integrated cycle of studies of which the duration, for the purposes of obtaining access to a professional activity, a) is established by European Union regulations; and b) results from a regular and consolidated practice within the European Union; in such cases, a *Licenciado* degree is granted to students having obtained 180 ECTS (3 years, 6 semesters).

The quality assurance system

- **An historical perspective**

- Tension between autonomy and accountability of HEIs
 - The **University Autonomy Act** (Law 108/88 of 24 September) awarded public universities a considerable degree of autonomy, including **full pedagogic autonomy**, meaning in practice that public universities had almost complete freedom to start, suspend or cancel study programmes.
 - The **Polytechnic Autonomy Act** (Law 54/90 of 5 September) awarded autonomy to public polytechnic institutes, although to a **lower degree when compared to public universities**.
 - Although **private institutions** have very extensive autonomy in what concerns financial matters and staff, **their pedagogic autonomy was limited and they needed a priori permission of the Ministry before being able to start, suspend or cancel study programmes, as it is the case with public polytechnics**.
- The autonomy laws commanded the Ministry with the task of ensuring the assessment of the pedagogic, scientific and cultural quality of higher education.

The quality assurance system

- **An historical perspective**

- Initial quality assurance activities

- The **Portuguese Council of Rectors (CRUP)** organised a pilot experiment in 1993 following the Dutch methodology. When the Ministry produced a draft of the Law on the Assessment of Higher Education, the CRUP was able to make a counterproposal based on this pilot experiment. The **Foundation of Portuguese Universities**, similar to the Dutch VSNU, became responsible for the assessment of public universities after being recognised by the Ministry. The first assessment cycle was completed in 1999 and included only the public universities and the Catholic University.
- In **1998 it was created an overall coordination council (CNAVES)**. New agencies were recognised in 1998 for the public polytechnics (ADISPOR) and in 1999 for the private sector (APESP).

The quality assurance system

- **An historical perspective**

- External reports were in general carefully drafted and could **not offered a basis for ministerial decisions leading to the cancellation of study programmes**
- Parliament passed Law 1/2003, clarifying the consequences of the results of assessments and **introducing academic accreditation**, which was included in the remit of the agencies already responsible for quality assessment.
- In 2005, **a new government commissioned from ENQA a review of the Portuguese quality assurance system**. The terms of reference committed ENQA to advise CNAVES and the Ministry on academic and management structures for implementing adequate quality assurance and accreditation practices and to provide a final report including recommendations for improvement and for complying with the ESG.

The quality assurance system

- **An historical perspective**

- ENQA concluded that the major strengths of the former quality system were
 - establishment of a self-evaluation culture,
 - its methodological model, which is in principle appropriate and in many respects in compliance with ESG and practice,
 - and its comprehensiveness as it includes all HEIs.
- And that the major weaknesses of the former quality system were
 - limited independence (like the former Dutch system, there was strong intervention of the HEIs),
 - the lack of sufficient operational efficiency and consistency (limited staff numbers,
 - no efficient training of the reviewers,
 - inconsistencies in reporting, etc.),
 - low internationalisation,
 - serious lack of consequences

The quality assurance system

- The report of the ENQA panel was used for drafting the legislation framework regulating the new quality assurance system and its compliance with the ESG
- In 2007 the Parliament passed a Quality Assessment Act (Law 38/2007) defining the new quality framework, and the government passed Decree-Law 369/2007 defining the statutes of the Assessment and Accreditation Agency (A3ES)

The quality assurance system

- **The Assessment and Accreditation Agency** was established as a private foundation, independent both from the government and from higher education institutions. Financially independent from the public budget
- A3ES organization
 - The **Board of Trustees** is composed of five members appointed by the Cabinet in consultation with the bodies representing the higher education institutions
 - The **Management Board** is responsible for performing all the necessary actions for fulfilling the Agency's objectives that the statutes do not commit to other bodies. It makes the decisions on assessment and accreditation
 - The **Audit Committee** is responsible for checking the legality, regularity and proper management of the Agency's finances and equity
 - The **Appeals Council** is the body for appeals against the decisions of the Management Board on assessment and accreditation
 - The **Advisory Council** is a body that advises on matters of higher education quality assurance and provides support for the decisions of the Management Board
 - The **Scientific Council** is a non-statutory body integrating six foreign experts with recognised international competency in the area of higher education quality assurance

The quality assurance system

- **The Assessment and Accreditation Agency**
 - **Project coordinators** manage the evaluation, assist in site visits and accreditation procedures and support the meetings of the expert committees. They accompany expert teams on site visits but do not write the teams' evaluation reports. They do edit them, however, and check for evidence and consistency and may ask the team for clarifications.
 - **Office of Research and Analysis**, which allows the Agency's research staff to shift between more analytical and more hands-on work in the processes of assessment and accreditation. This unit is instrumental in strengthening the Agency's knowledge capital in the future. This applies only to the Agency's staff hired as researchers, who also participate in visits to institutions as Project Coordinators.

The quality assurance system

- **The Assessment and Accreditation Agency**
 - To develop the quality assessment of the performance of higher education institutions and their study programmes;
 - To determine the assessment criteria, in order to translate their results into qualitative appreciations, as well as to define the consequences of assessment for the operation of study programmes and institutions;
 - To promote the accreditation of study programmes and institutions, aiming to ensure the fulfilment of the legal requirements for their recognition;
 - To provide society with information on the quality of the performance of higher education institutions;
 - To promote the internationalisation of the assessment process.

The quality assurance system

- **The Assessment and Accreditation Agency...**
 - is responsible for the assessment and accreditation of all higher education institutions and their study programmes, taking into account the contribution of internal quality assurance systems
 - had the task of 'cleaning' the system before starting its regular operations, in view of removing those identified as of the poorest quality
 - formally stated its assumption of the basic principle that the main responsibility for the quality of education lies with each higher education institution
 - offered to help institutions to implement their internal quality systems and to promote voluntary audits aimed at certifying institutional procedures for assuring the quality of their programmes
 - promoted debates on internal systems of quality assurance, performance indicators to be used in the assessment and accreditation processes for study programmes, and modes of student participation

The quality assurance system

- **The preliminary accreditation system**

- each HEIs was asked to assume responsibility for adjusting its offer of study programmes to its available resources and to its development strategy, allowing for the discontinuation of study programmes which were no longer viable or were already being discontinued
- The study programmes with performance indicators above a given threshold were exempt from a full assessment/accreditation process, being considered as pre-accredited until the regular operation of the accreditation system started in the academic year 2011/2012
- Where institutions wished to maintain study programmes but were unable to produce sufficient evidence that these complied with minimum quality standards, the study programmes went through a formal assessment/accreditation process by external assessment teams that included foreign experts

The quality assurance system

- **The Assessment and Accreditation Agency...**
 - is now running the **first regular accreditation cycle** that consists of the accreditation of all study programmes that received preliminary accreditation. This first cycle will be completed in 2016.
 - is **member of a number of international organisations**, such as ENQA (Affiliated member), ECA, CHEA International Quality Group and IMHE (OECD), being member of its Management Board.
 - is a member of EQAR

The quality assurance system

- **Assessment of study programmes in operation**
 - **Self-assessment, external assessment** and a **final decision** on accreditation, conditional accreditation (1 year to 3 year) and non-accreditation,
 - **External assessment** involves a External Assessment Team made of academics, international experts, students and the project coordinator (from the QA agency).
 - The final decision on **accreditation** is the responsibility of the Management Board. In reaching this decision, the Management Board will take into account the final report of the External Assessment Team, and if there are relevant professional Orders/Associations, their opinion will be considered.
 - **Institutional audit** is the external assessment process which aims at verifying that the system of internal quality assurance of the institution complies with the objectives set out, and whether it is effective and fit for purpose. The audit evaluates the procedures used by the institution to manage and improve the quality of its teaching and other activities.

The quality assurance system

- **Assessment of study programmes in operation**
 - Comprehensive database building on the use of an **electronic platform for all the quality assessment and accreditation procedures**, including reporting, additional information, messages to institutions and stakeholders, institutional responses, accreditation decisions, assessment processes
 - **Results** of assessment are **public** and HE institutions must make self-assessment reports and external assessment reports public.

Inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation

- **Participation in international projects**
 - IBAR – research project financed by the European Commission on the analysis of barriers to the implementation of the ESG.
 - JOQAR – a project run by ECA on “Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of Degrees Awarded”.
 - ECA’s WG4 working group on Learning Outcomes in Quality Assurance and Accreditation.
 - Three working groups led by ENQA: Quality Assurance and Excellence in Higher Education; Impact of External Quality Assurance Processes; Stakeholder Involvement in Quality Assurance Practices.
 - Member of the Advisory Board of the QUEST Project for Quality for Students.

Inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation

- **Participation in a number of international projects**
 - Offers technical support to Angola's quality assurance agency
 - Collaborates on the assessment of joint degree programmes offered in Macau and Mozambique and other former Portuguese colonies
 - Advises other new agencies (e.g. Macau, Guinea, Angola, Mozambique)

Thank you!

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