



Modernization and internationalization of Iranian HEIs via collaboration in TEL-based curriculum development in engineering and STEM

UNITEL E-COURSE

Module 6 Modernization of Teaching

Unit 6-3 Degree evaluation

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Introduction

This topic is about Degree Evaluation and has the following objectives:

Objective 1: To identify main standards and guidelines of a reference framework for internal quality assurance systems in Higher Education based on the case of Portugal

Objective 2: To characterize the accreditation procedures of Higher Education Study Programs in Portugal

Objective 3: To clarify how students may participate in quality evaluation procedures

-Objective 4: To reflect on quality assurance of teaching staff

1. A reference framework for internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions: the Portuguese study case

Before addressing procedures of Study Programs evaluation, we will start by presenting the Reference framework for internal quality assurance systems in Portuguese higher education institutions. We will stick to the context of Portuguese Higher Education. There are differences of Quality Assurance (QA) systems in the countries of the European Union but against a backdrop of a common European Higher Education Area, that means sharing procedures and Standards, and all having in mind the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

These are the 13 References from the Portuguese Accreditation Agency (A3ES). We will only present the Guidelines of References 2, 3 and 5, the ones that are more important for Study Programs assessment (A3ES, 2016)

1. POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Reference 1 – Policy for quality assurance and pursuit of quality objectives: The institution has consolidated a quality culture supported by a quality policy and by quality objectives, which are formally defined and publicly available.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE NUCLEAR PROCESSES OF THE INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

Reference 2 –Design and approval of programmes: The institution has processes for the design and approval of its educational offer, ensuring that study programmes are designed and structured so that they can achieve the objectives set for them, namely the intended learning outcomes. The qualification achieved in each programme, as well as the corresponding level in the national and European higher education qualifications frameworks, are clearly specified and publicised. With this objective, the institution promoted the definition of procedures to ensure that its study programmes:

- Are designed on the basis of overall objectives aligned with the institutional strategy for its educational provision and explicitly define the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) to be achieved;
- Involve students and other stakeholders in their design;

- Benefit from external expertise and references;
- Are designed to allow a normal student progression;
- Define the expected workload of the students, in ECTS;
- Include well-structured opportunities for professional experience in the corresponding education and training area, where appropriate;
- Are subject to a formal institutional process of final approval.

In designing its courses, the institution also takes into account the purposes of higher education defined by the Council of Europe in Recommendation Rec (2007)6 on public accountability in higher education and research, in particular:

- Contribution to employability;
- Preparation for active citizenship;
- Support for students' personal development;
- The creation of a comprehensive and advanced knowledge base to stimulate research and innovation

Reference 3 – Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment: The institution adopts appropriate procedures to ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that favours an active role of the student in creating the learning process, as well as student assessment processes that are consonant with this approach.

For the achievement of this objective, the institution promotes learning environments able to:

- Respect and attend to the diversity of students and their needs, allowing flexible learning paths;
- Consider and use different teaching and learning methods, in accordance with students' needs and the learning objectives;
- Evaluate and adjust teaching and learning methods regularly;
- Encourages a sense of autonomy in the student, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;
- Promote mutual respect in the student-teacher relationship;

- Provide mechanisms for dealing with students' complaints.

Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, the institution has mechanisms to ensure that student assessment is carried out in accordance with previously defined and publicised criteria, standards and procedures, which are applied in a fair and consistent way, ensuring, in particular, that:

- Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and processes and are supported in developing their own skills in this field;
- The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved and students receive feedback on their performance, associated, where appropriate, with advice on the learning process;
- Whenever possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;
- Assessment regulations take into account mitigating circumstances;
- A formal procedure for students' appeals is in place.

Reference 4 – Student admission, progression, recognition and certification: The institution consistently applies pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle" (e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification).

Reference 5 – On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes: The institution monitors and periodically reviews its programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result are communicated to all those concerned.

The procedures to monitor, assess and review the study programmes include the evaluation of:

- The content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;
- The changing needs of society;
- The students' workload, progression and completion;
- The effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students;

- The student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;
- The learning environment and support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme.

Reference 6 – Research and development / targeted research and high level professional development: The institution adopts mechanisms to promote, assess and enhance the scientific, technological, artistic and high level professional development activity appropriate to its institutional mission.

Reference 7 – External relations: The institution adopts mechanisms to promote, assess and enhance collaboration with other institutions and with the community, namely regarding its contribution to regional and national development.

Reference 8 – Internationalisation: The institution adopted mechanisms which allow it to promote, assess and improve its international cooperation activities.

3. **QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

Reference 9 – Human resources: The institution adopted fair and transparent mechanisms to ensure that the recruitment, management and training of its teaching and support staff is undertaken with the guarantee of the necessary qualifications and competence, in order that they may properly perform their functions.

Reference 10 – Material resources and services: The institution adopts mechanisms which enable it to plan, manage and enhance services and material resources with a view to appropriate development of student learning and other scientific and pedagogic activities.

4. **MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION**

Reference 11 – Information management: The institution adopted mechanisms which allow it to guarantee the collection, analysis and use of the results and of other relevant information for the effective management of the study programmes and other activities.

Reference 12 – Public Information: The institution adopted mechanisms which permit the publication of clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date, impartial and readily accessible information about the activities undertaken.



5. PERIODICAL EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Reference 13 – Cyclical external quality assurance: The institution undergoes external quality assurance on a cyclical basis, in line with the ESG.

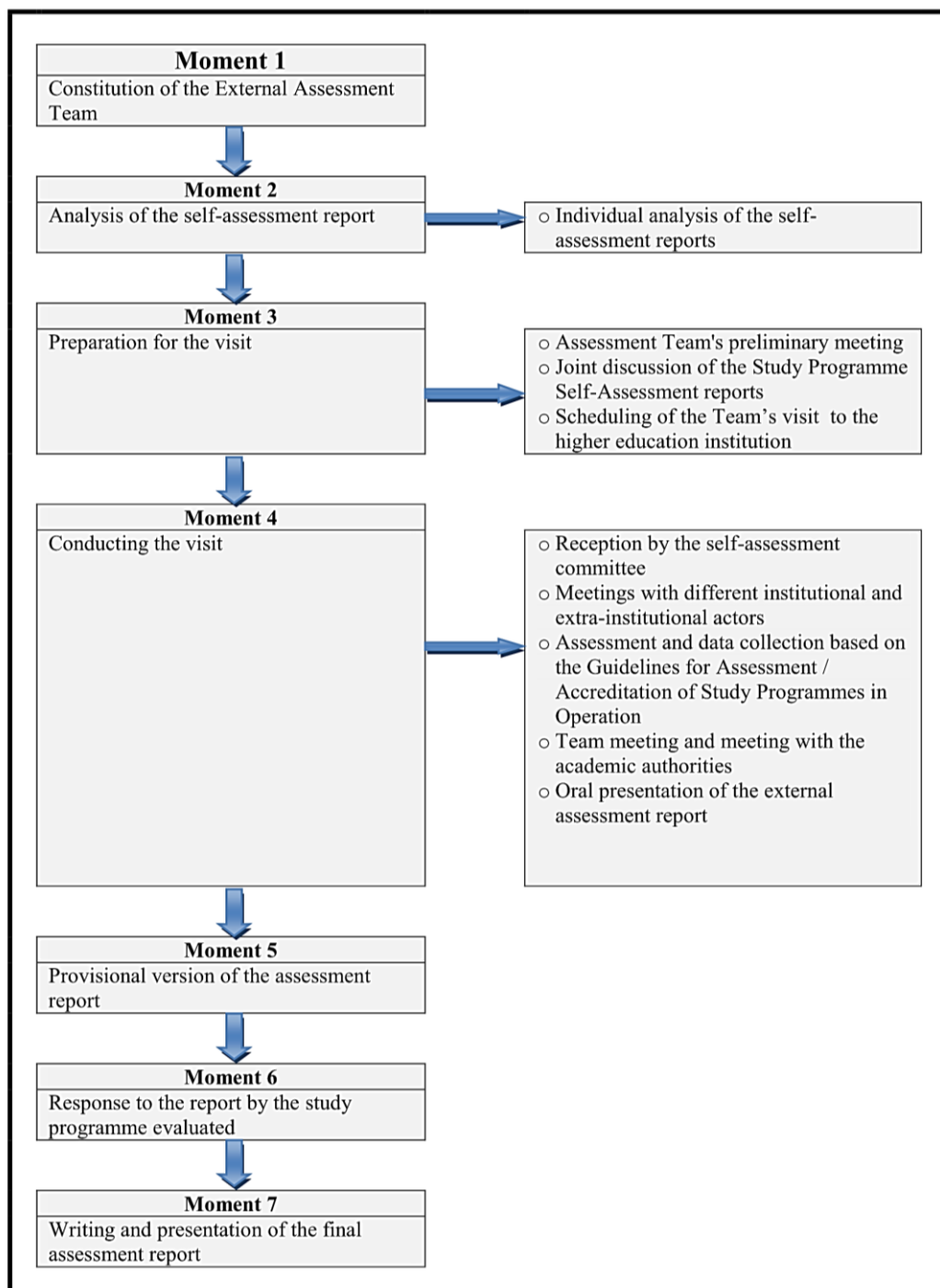
2. Evaluation and accreditation procedures of Higher Education Study Programs in Portugal

We are presenting the case of Portugal. Although there are some differences in procedures in other European countries there are also several similarities, in particular in the institutional audit processes. The most common trend is "(...) the progressive compliance with the ESG, with considerable impact on the design of procedures, and which is leading to some convergence of criteria, standards and practices in quality assurance processes, which is reflected in audit processes." (Santos, 2011, p. 84). For more information about a comparative analysis of 10 European cases see Santos (2011, pp. 84-94).

The program studies assessment and accreditation is performed by A3ES (the Portuguese Agency for the Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education) which has the following mission statement: " The mission of A3ES is to assure the quality of higher education in Portugal through assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programmes, and also to perform functions inherent to Portugal's inclusion in the European Quality Assurance System for Higher Education. (---) The primary aim of the Agency is to assure enhanced performance of higher education institutions and their study programmes, and assure the fulfilment of basic requirements for their official recognition. The aims of the Agency are pursued through assessment and accreditation of institutions of higher education and their study programmes, thus promoting an internal culture of quality assurance within institutions." (A3ES, 2013, p.28). Its main functions are:

- To define and assure the quality standards of the system;
- To assess and accredit study programmes and higher education institutions;
- To make public the results of assessment and accreditation;
- To promote the internationalisation of the Portuguese higher education system.

The following picture enlightens the process of the program studies assessment and accreditation from the perspective of the external assessment team.



Source: (A3ES, 2013, p.50).



These are the Topics of the Guidelines to write the Internal/Self Assessment Report (A3ES, 2018):

I. EVOLUTION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME SINCE THE PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT

1. Accreditation decision in the previous assessment process.
2. Synthesis of improvement measures of the study programme since previous assessment, namely in response to conditions determined by the Management Board and to recommendations of the external assessment team.
3. Changes to the curricular structure and/or study plan.
4. Changes to facilities, partnerships and support structures to the teaching and learning processes.

II. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

1. General characterisation of the study programme.
2. Curricular structure. Student-centred learning and teaching.
3. Teaching staff.
4. Non-academic staff.
5. Students.
6. Results.
7. Internal organisation and quality assurance mechanisms.
8. SWOT analysis of the study programme and improvement proposals.
9. Proposal for curricular restructuring (optional).

The report has also Annex I – Teaching staff curricular file and Annex II – Curricular Unit File.

3. Student participation in quality assessment

Student participation in the programme studies assessment is well defined in most assessment systems of various European countries, and it takes various forms, both at the internal implementation of the assessment process and the external implementation of the assessment process.

Here are some of the ways students can participate in the **internal** implementation of the assessment process (A3ES, 2013, p. 43):

- As one of the groups responsible for the development of self-assessment;
- Collaborating in the drafting of the self-assessment reports;
- Responding to pedagogical surveys;
- Participating in institutional initiatives designed to collect information (seminars, discussion sessions, etc...);
- Being consulted during meetings with panels/external assessment teams.

Here are some of the ways students can participate in the **external** implementation of the assessment process (A3ES, 2013, p. 43):

- Participating in the definition and planning of the assessment process: by being represented in decision-making bodies of assessment agencies and in meetings held between agencies and student associations;
- Acting as external assessors (team members);
- Participating in the drafting of the external assessment report;
- Participating in follow-up actions.

4. Assurance of Teaching Staff Quality

Here we will only address the situation in Portugal, although some considerations may extend to many other countries of Europe and the world. There are European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and of legislation passed by several European countries, including Portugal, that address the quality of teaching and learning. But the extent to which HE institutions are complying with them is variable. A study by Cardoso et al. (2015) tried to "find out if HEIs are adopting measures on the quality of teaching and teaching staff in compliance with the ESG standard on teaching quality. The aim was to understand whether Portuguese HEIs promote teaching quality by setting up mechanisms for academics' recruitment, appointment, support, appraisal and professional development, which ensure that they have the necessary 'quality', e.g. skills, competences, experience and motivation, to teach students." (p. 3) Through analysis of institutional policy documents and national legal texts on teachers and teaching quality and semi-structured interviews they researched policies and practices of 4 HE Portuguese Institutions regarding the following topics: institutional policies on teaching staff; the support given by HEIs for the quality of teaching performance, as regards pedagogic training and infrastructure; the academic staff appraisal and its effects on teaching quality; and the promotion of teaching quality through academic staff motivation.

In what refers to **institutional policies on teaching staff**, regarding staff recruitment and appointment procedures, HEIs establish as main criteria the scientific performance, the pedagogic performance and 'other relevant activities' (Cardoso et al., 2015, p.8). The pedagogic competence is mainly assessed through previous pedagogical experience. There are no pedagogical prerequisites for teaching in Higher Education, as there are scientific ones (a Degree in the field of study). That does not happen in other education levels, where teachers must have pedagogical certified training so they can teach. So, quality assurance depends very much on professional development.

Regarding **institutional support for the quality of teaching performance**, the findings report that the support is generally incipient or absent (Cardoso et al., 2015, p.8). Regarding the support to quality of teaching performance through pedagogic training, there is a "relative

absence of systematic policies to improve teaching skills through training. " (Cardoso et al., 2015, p.10). situation that is similar in multiple European institutions.

In what refers to the **support of the quality of teaching performance through infrastructure**, the shortcomings identified are mainly due to HEI's economical constraints.

Regarding the **appraisal of teaching quality**, " as in other European countries (...) Portuguese HEIs have established their own systems for the appraisal of academics ' performance in response to the national legal framework." (p.11). They include several dimensions (teaching, research, other) and include student surveys. Nevertheless, as in other countries "it seems that, notwithstanding research and teaching are generally regarded as complementary aspects of academics ' activity, teaching tends to assume a lower importance in academic staff appraisal." (Cardoso et al., 2015, p.12)

Some Reasons to explain the situation are the fact that ESG do not have not a prescriptive character; "a large variety of actors is involved in the ESG implementation — from the European bodies concerned with their definition and the national governments to the different national HEIs and their actors dilute and to disperse the authority over such implementation." (Cardoso et al., 2015, p.3) and ESG 's intent is to act mainly as a background, a reference framework for QA increment; they do not put forward concrete means which allow fulfilling this increment. Nevertheless, the development of HEIs ' internal quality assurance systems induced by the Portuguese Agency for the Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education has been gradually improving this situation. But there is still work to do about it.



5. Conclusion

We presented the Reference framework for internal quality assurance systems in Portuguese Higher Education and the Assessment procedures of Higher Education Study Programs in Portugal, e.g. the Guidelines to the Internal/Self-assessment report of the Study Programs. We have also reviewed some recommendations for student participation in the Quality Assurance process. And, finally, we examined the findings from a study about the assurance of teaching quality in Portuguese HEIs that proved that things are still not perfect but moving in the right direction.

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