

Quality Assurance in Portuguese Higher Education

Accreditation in Engineering Courses

**CISPEE 2013 – 1st International Conference of the
Portuguese Society for Engineering Education**

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A3ES

- **Quality assurance in Portuguese higher education**
 - The national Agency A3ES
 - QA processes in progress
 - Perceptions on impact
 - Degree programmes on Engineering Education

- **Trends on QA**
 - Adoption of audit models / simplification of QA processes
 - The Institutional Audit model of A3ES

- **Future issues and challenges**

The Portuguese QA System

➤ **New system set up in 2007 (Law 38/2007)**

- **One single Agency for the whole system**
 - **A3ES** – Agency for the Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education
- **All degree programmes to be regularly accredited (presently every six years)**
- **New programmes subject to prior accreditation**
- **All degree programmes in operation to be accredited until the end of 2010/2011**

⇒ **Main process: Programme accreditation**

The Agency A3ES

➤ Present QA activities

- **Prior accreditation of new degree programmes**
➔ *ex-ante* accreditation – initiated in 2009/10
- **Assessment and accreditation of all degree programmes in operation**
➔ launched in 2010; evaluation procedures started in 2011
- **Cross-sector studies on the HE system**
- **Institutional Audit**
➔ experimental exercise run in 2012; now fully operational

Ex-ante Accreditation

- **Prior accreditation of new study programmes:**
 - **A new call every year (01.September – 15.October)**

- **Results from calls 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12**
 - **1.049 proposals (average 350 / year)**
 - 500 accredited**
 - 144 accredited with conditions**
 - 405 not accredited (39%)**

The Process of “Preliminary Accreditation”

➤ Results from the preliminary analysis (end of 2011)

- **5 256 programmes in operation in January 2010**
- **4 379 submitted to be accredited by the A3ES**
- **3 613 programmes with “preliminary accreditation”**
 - To be submitted to a proper assessment/accreditation process in the accreditation round 2012-2016
- **421 programmes submitted to assessment/accreditation**
 - 47 accredited
 - 257 accredited with conditions (mostly for one year)
 - 113 not accredited
- **345 additional drop-outs by institutions**

Portfolio rationalisation through self-regulation

DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN FEBRUARY 2010	
Programmes in operation (officially recognised)	5.262
Submitted to preliminary accreditation	4.379
Cancelled by HEIs	883

DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN FEBRUARY 2013		
Programmes in operation that were accredited	3.691	70,1%
Programmes with preliminar accreditation	3.384	
Accredited after on-site visit	307	
Programmes that were cancelled	1.571	↓ 29,9%
Cancelled by HEIs	1.457	27,7%
With a negative decision on accreditation by A3ES	114	2,2%

New programmes accredited by A3ES	664	↑12,6%
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Degree programmes on Engineering Education

	1st cycle	2nd cycle	3rd cycle	Total
Kept in operation 2010	296	314	119	729
Preliminary Accreditation	263	302	109	674
For Assessment	33	12	10	55
Accredited	3	0	1	4
Conditional accreditation	29	10	7	46
Not accredited	1	2	2	5
New programmes	32	91	17	140
Drop-outs	19	36	1	56
In operation Feb.2013	308	367	133	808

New degree programmes on Engineering Education (2010-2012)

	1st cycle	2nd cycle	3rd cycle	Total
Polytechnic education				
Proposals	38	59		97
Accredited	16	28		44
Conditional accreditation	9	15		24
Not accredited	13	16		29
University education				
Proposals	10	67	23	100
Accredited	4	40	14	58
Conditional accreditation	3	8	3	14
Not accredited	3	19	6	28
Total				
Proposals	48	126	23	197
Accredited	20	68	14	102
Conditional accreditation	12	23	3	38
Not accredited	16	35	6	57

Perceptions on Impact

- **Portfolio rationalisation through self-regulation**
- **Enhancement in processes and resources**
 - **Self-evaluation reports show improved consistency and better indicators (e.g. human resources)**
 - **Follow-up reports (conditional accreditation) show interesting progresses**
- **Dynamics on the development of internal quality assurance systems**

European Trends on QA

➤ **Concerns with programme accreditation**

- **Little added-value in repeating a round of programme accreditation**
- **HEIs become more responsible and transparent**
- **Tendency towards less intrusive external QA mechanisms**
 - More in line with the autonomy and self-responsibility of HEIs
 - Stimulate the development of **internal QA systems**
 - More appropriate to stimulate the emphasis on quality enhancement

The Institutional Audit Model of A3ES

➤ Why an Audit process in Portugal?

- To support HEIs in the development of their internal QA systems (discussion, definition and dissemination of standards)
- To stimulate HEIs in assuming the main responsibility for the quality of their educational provision
- To contribute (under previously specified quality standards) **to simplify programme accreditation processes in the next accreditation round.**

The Institutional Audit Model of A3ES

➤ Voluntary exercise

- **Well documented – available documentation includes an Audit Manual and Guidelines for self-assessment and for the audit report**
http://www.a3es.pt/sites/default/files/Manual%20Auditoria_EN_0.pdf
- **Experimental exercise in 2012 (involved 5 HEI)**
- **New call in February 2013**
- **Annual calls every November**
- **Normal validity period of certification is 6 years**
- **Expectation: most institutions will apply for the audit**

What after the 2012-2016 accreditation round?

- **Lighter touch ⇒ “Risk-management” approach**
- **Conditions for a lighter-touch approach**
 - **Internal QA system certified by the Agency**
 - **Good performance in the assessment/accreditation round**
 - **Good performance indicators on qualification of academic staff and on R&D**

⇒ Programme accreditation by sampling

Thank you for your attention!

Further details at:

www.a3es.pt