



FHEQ ■ PORTUGAL

THE Framework
FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION
QUALIFICATIONS
IN PORTUGAL

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1. Introduction

The implementation of the Bologna Process in Portugal has included the establishment of key measures to ensure the qualifications of Portuguese citizens in the European space, to promote equality of opportunity in access to higher education, to improve participation and completion levels in higher education programmes, and to attract new publics in a context of lifelong learning and improved educational welfare benefits. This process included a comprehensive set of major legislative and policy actions.

The first step in the reform was an Act amending the Basic Law of the Education System, passed by Parliament in order to provide the legal basis for implementing the Bologna Process of higher education reform. This was followed by the regulatory Decree-Laws passed by the Cabinet, in particular the Legal Framework of Higher Education Degrees and Diplomas (i.e., Decree-Law no. 74/2006), establishing the general principles for the organisation of degree programmes and their accreditation, and establishing transition rules for the reorganisation of existing degree programmes and the creation of new ones.¹ This has had a significant mobilising effect throughout the higher education system and approximately 98% of all degree programmes taught in Portugal in the 2008/09 academic year were already adapted to the Bologna model (compared to 90% in 2007/08). Full institutional adaptation to Bologna is due for completion in the coming months. The following developments have also taken place:

- New legislation was passed, regulating the creation of post-secondary education programmes (i.e., Technological Specialisation Courses, CETs, by Decree-Law no.88/2006), aiming at increasing the availability of technical and vocational education and widening access to such programmes for new publics. This process has brought a new dynamism to post-secondary education in Portugal, in particular at polytechnic institutes. About 5000 students were enrolled in these programmes in 2007/08 (compared to around 1000 students in 2005), which represents a significant opening up of higher education in Portugal.
- New legislation was passed, providing greater flexibility in admissions and access to higher education, in particular for students aged over 23 and those meeting certain specific educational qualification criteria, thereby widening the recruitment pool and making it possible to reverse the decline in student numbers in higher education observed in recent years. About 12 000 new students were enrolled in higher education through this type of mechanism in 2007/08 (up from around only 900 adults who started higher education in the 2005-06 academic year), representing another significant opening up of higher education in Portugal.
- The implementation of a mechanism to ensure compliance with the Bologna Process, by creating follow-up methods to monitor the transition from an education system based on knowledge transmission to a system based on development of students' skills, in which experimental and project work components, among others, and the acquisition of key skills will play a decisive role.

¹ The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement were introduced by the Decree-Law no. 42/2005

- The implementation of easier and more flexible procedures for access to higher education. This includes the possibility for anyone interested to attend individual curricular units/courses, with a guarantee of certification and accreditation in the case of successful completion, when they enter a programme which includes those curricular units/courses; the opportunity for students on a given higher education programme to attend curricular units/courses not included in their cycle of studies and provided in any higher education establishment, with a guarantee, in the case of successful completion, of certification and inclusion in the diploma supplement; and the opportunity to attend a higher education programme on a part-time basis.

The implementation of the full regulation designed to bring higher education in Portugal in line with the Bologna process was carried out very successfully and at the same time as part of a profound legal reform of the higher education system. This overall reform process was launched in autumn 2005 through an international assessment of the higher education system and its institutions, involving organisations of recognised experience and standing such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) and the European University Association (EUA). At the end of 2006 the OECD presented an overall evaluation of the higher education system, while ENQA presented an evaluation of the system of quality assurance of higher education and accreditation practices. A voluntary programme of institutional assessment conducted by EUA, involving ten different institutions each year, is still in progress.

Following the OECD report of December 2006, the reform of the legal frameworks for the higher education system and the higher education quality assessment system were passed by Parliament and published in the second half of 2007. It brings about significant changes in the internal governance system of higher education institutions (including their management structure), as well as in their relations with society (including internationalisation, research partnerships and business links, as well as external assessment and accountability). The following points should be noted:

- The new Legal Regime of Higher Education Institutions (RJIES) (Law no. 62/2007, of 10th September), establishes the organisational principles of the higher education system, defining the autonomy and accountability of institutions, establishing governing Boards with external participation, allowing for diversity of organisation and of legal status of public institutions (these can become public foundations under private law), allowing for the establishment of consortia, and recognising research centres as part of the university management framework.
- The new legal framework for the assessment of higher education (Law no. 38/2007, of 16th August) and the creation of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Decree-Law no. 369/2007, of 5th November), both designed to ensure the quality of higher education through the assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their cycles of studies, according to best international practices, in which independent external assessment is mandatory.
- The creation of conditions to foster national and international mobility of students and graduates (Decree-Law no. 40/2007, of 20th February), namely: i) the new regulations on

arrangements for changes between cycles of studies, transfers between institutions, and re-entry into higher education. These conditions seek to facilitate the entry of higher education students into Portugal to continue their studies, with rapid and objective recognition of their previous school education and occupational training, and to create simplified arrangements to re-entry into higher education; and ii) the new legal framework for the recognition of foreign degrees, which simplifies the system for recognising foreign degrees in Portugal.

- The introduction in autumn 2007 of an innovative system of student loans with mutual guarantee underwritten by the State, which complements the system of public grants, thereby improving access to higher education for all students. About 5500 loans had been contracted up to December 2008 through the banking system; this represents an important new achievement for Portugal and Portuguese families, which follows current practices in modern societies at the OECD level.
- The creation of a National Qualifications System (Decree-Law no. 396/2007, of 31st December) and the establishment of the National Qualifications Agency (Decree-Law no. 276-C/2007, of 31st July), which has specific functions to regulate, accredit and control the quality of vocational and professional education, establishing the necessary conditions to foster access to tertiary education.

It should be noted that each of the legal documents described above and part of the legal reform of higher education was implemented after a wide-ranging consultation process with diverse higher education stakeholders, notably the Council of Portuguese University Rectors, the Coordinating Council of Polytechnic Institutes, the Portuguese Association of Private Higher Education, students' associations, and professional associations.

Overall, the success of the reform is demonstrated by a significant increase in the number of students enrolled in higher education. In fact, the decline in new students entering higher education observed in the OECD Review Report of December 2006 was reversed in the academic year 2006-2007 (95 431 in 2006-2007, compared to 84 363 in 2004-2005 and 82 720 in 2005-2006). This trend accelerated in 2007-2008 with an increase of new enrolments in public higher education, with particular impact on polytechnic education.

Total enrolments in higher education of 20-year-olds have increased by 10% over the last three years (2005-2008), reaching about 33% of this age-group (compared to 30% in 2005). In other words, one in three of all 20-year-olds in Portugal are enrolled in higher education. This is similar to the European average, although still lower than for most industrialised countries and regions.

Total enrolments in higher education of adults aged 30-34 years have increased by about 20% over the last three years (2005-2008), reaching about 4.1% of this age-group (compared to 3.5% in 2005).

The total number of graduates per year increased by about 19% over the period 2005-2007, with graduates in science and technology rising in recent years to a figure of 18.1 per thousand

population aged 20-29 years (well above the EU average). At the same time, the number of new PhDs in science and engineering per thousand population aged 25-34 increased to 0.42 in 2007, compared to only about 0.3 in 2001.

These success indicators do not stem solely from the legal reform of higher education; they also reflect the current European movement to modernise higher education, and have been driven by policies designed to extend the recruitment base and the number of students in higher education; to reinforce the upper ranks of the system, by fostering the internationalisation of research universities and their specialisation; and to promote the binary system, with polytechnic education concentrating on professionally-oriented and vocational training, while university education concentrates further on postgraduate education.

The full set of legislation produced in the period 2005-2008 establishes the Portuguese Framework for Higher Education Qualifications which is summarised in this document. The next section describes the main features of this framework, while sections 3 and 4 describe the qualification descriptors and the awarding of qualifications and titles, respectively. The final section summarises the main issues of international mobility of students and graduates.

2. Main features of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Portugal

The main purposes of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications – FHEQ-Portugal – follow similar processes in other European countries², including:

- to provide important points of reference for setting and assessing academic standards to higher education institutions and their external examiners, in such a way as to preserve the autonomy and foster the diversity of higher education and its institutions;
- to assist in the identification of potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning, guaranteeing equity of access and fostering mobility of students and of graduates across higher education and between higher education and the labour market;
- to promote a shared and common understanding of the expectations associated with typical qualifications by facilitating a consistent use of qualification titles across the higher education sector.

The FHEQ-Portugal should enable higher education institutions to foster their own identity and autonomy, as well as to communicate with appropriate transparency to employers, schools, parents, students, professional and regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders the achievements and attributes represented by typical higher education qualification titles.

It should be noted that the Legal Framework for the National Qualifications System in Portugal, implemented in 2007, which lays down the structures for regulating its operation (Decree-Law no. 396/2007, of 31st December), also created the National Qualifications Framework, defining the structure of qualification levels. The National Qualifications Framework aims to integrate the national qualification subsystems and to improve access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

The FHEQ-Portugal is thus one subsystem of the National Qualifications Framework, following and based on a specific legal framework, as provided by the set of legislative acts described above. In fact, the Legal Framework for the National Qualifications System integrates the National Agency for Qualifications (for all qualifications excluding higher education), the National Council for Professional Training, and the Sectoral Councils for Qualifications, *Novas Oportunidades* centres, basic and secondary schools, professional training centres, and companies providing training for their employees.

Higher education institutions are covered by the National Qualifications System, but within the specific legal framework of the higher education system. It was a clear objective of the legislator to consider the higher education system within an autonomous qualifications framework, bearing in mind the particular nature, diversity and autonomy of higher education institutions.

² See as an example the report on the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It is in this context that FHEQ-Portugal was implemented through the new legal framework introduced in Portugal from 2005 to 2007, based upon a thorough reform of the higher education system, mainly through the following measures:

- amendment of the Basic Law on the Educational System (Law no. 49/2005, of 30th August);
- the new Legal Framework for Degrees and Diplomas (Decree-Law no. 74/2006, of 24th March, as amended by Decree-Law no. 107/2008, of 25th June);
- the new Legal Framework for Technological Specialisation Courses (CETs) (Decree-Law no. 88/2006, of 23rd May);
- the new Legal Framework for Higher Education Institutions (Law no. 62/2007, of 10th September);
- the new Legal Framework for the Mobility of Students and Graduates (Decree-Law no.40/2007, of 20 February).

It should also be noted that a new Legal Framework for the Evaluation of Higher Education has been introduced (Law no. 38/2007, of 16th August), and a new Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency ('A3ES') is being implemented (Decree-Law no. 369/2007, of 5th November), which will come into full operation in July 2009.

The Agency 'A3ES' will use the FHEQ-Portugal as a reference point when auditing or reviewing the establishment and management of academic standards by higher education institutions. Following similar practices in Europe³, auditors and reviewers will look at how institutions align the academic standards of their degrees with the levels referred to in the FHEQ-Portugal. They will also ascertain whether institutions have means of ensuring that degrees and qualifications are of an academic standard consistent with the standards referred to in the FHEQ-Portugal.

Table 1 identifies the different levels of higher education qualifications in Portugal. Each level is illustrated by, and each degree determined by reference to, a qualification descriptor (see next section). The qualification descriptors of the FHEQ-Portugal reflect the distinct levels of intellectual achievements associated with the typical qualifications awarded by higher education institutions in Portugal in accordance with their degree-awarding powers.

Typically, programmes leading to higher education qualifications, particularly those taken over a number of years, include learning that is progressively more challenging. For the award of a higher education qualification at a particular level, the outcomes of this learning must, in overall terms, reflect the qualification descriptor for that level.

Within the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), the term 'cycle' is used to describe the three sequential levels identified by the Bologna Process (first cycle, which can include short cycle qualifications, second cycle and third cycle) within which all European higher education qualifications are located. In broad terms, the first cycle corresponds to undergraduate degrees (i.e., *Licenciatura* degrees⁴), and the second cycle and third cycles to postgraduate degrees (i.e., master's degrees and doctoral degrees, respectively).

³ See as an example the report on the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

⁴ The *Licenciatura* degree is the first academic degree, conferred after completion of a first cycle programme, lasting 6 to 8 curricular semesters.

[Table 1] Typical higher education qualifications of the FHEQ-Portugal and the corresponding level of EQF and cycle of the FQ-EHEA

Higher education qualifications of the FHEQ-Portugal	Corresponding FQ-EHEA cycle	Corresponding EQF levels
Doctoral degrees	Third cycle qualifications	8
Doctoral course diplomas	–	–
Master’s degrees	Second cycle qualifications	7
Master’s course diplomas	–	–
Bachelor → <i>Licenciatura</i> degrees	First cycle qualifications	6
Higher education short cycle diplomas	Short cycle qualifications (within the first cycle)	5
Technological specialisation diplomas	Short cycle qualifications (linked to the first cycle)	5

Similarly to several National Frameworks of Qualifications in Europe, including Portugal, the FQ-EHEA has generic qualification descriptors for each cycle, called the **‘Dublin descriptors’**. These illustrate the typical abilities and achievements associated with qualifications that signify the completion of each cycle.

In many other European countries, as in Portugal, some higher education qualifications are available to students who have undertaken a programme of study within the FQ-EHEA first cycle, but which do not represent the full extent of achievement for this cycle. These qualifications are referred to as higher education short cycle diplomas (within or linked to the first cycle) and may prepare students for employment (also providing preparation for the subsequent completion of the first cycle).

At a post-secondary level, higher education institutions can also provide qualifications associated with Technological Specialisation Courses (CETs), leading to a technological specialisation diploma. By their nature and objectives, these qualifications are short cycle programmes, with the main goal of preparing students for employment, but also providing preparation for, and access to, the first cycle.

Table 1 also indicates the relationship between the levels of the FHEQ-Portugal, the levels of European Qualifications Framework for Life-long Learning (EQF), and the cycles of the FQ-EHEA.

When positioning higher education qualifications within the FHEQ-Portugal, higher education institutions should ensure that the achievements represented by qualifications are appropriate and represented consistently. Higher education institutions are responsible for demonstrating that each of their qualifications is allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ-Portugal.

3. Qualification descriptors

Within the FHEQ-Portugal, descriptors exemplify the nature and characteristics of the main qualifications at each level. They provide clear points of reference at each level and describe outcomes that cover the great majority of existing qualifications. The FHEQ-Portugal has a flexible nature and can accommodate new qualifications as the need for them arises.

Qualification descriptors are a statement of outcomes, achievement of which is assessed and which a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. Qualification descriptors should also provide a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed.

Each descriptor sets out the outcomes for typical qualifications at each of the four levels of the FHEQ-Portugal. The qualification descriptors provide points of reference that will help institutions determine at which level of the FHEQ-Portugal any qualifications resulting from such programmes should be placed. Each level is deliberately broad to provide flexibility and space for the development of new qualifications.

Qualification descriptors also reflect the binary nature of higher education in Portugal, with university education oriented towards the provision of solid academic training, combining the capabilities and competencies of both teaching and research units, while polytechnic education concentrates particularly on professionally driven vocational and advanced technical training. The organisation of the binary system reflects the needs of the increasingly diversified demand for higher education that meets the requirements of those who have completed secondary education and those who are seeking vocational and professional courses and lifelong learning.

It should also be noted that the legal framework of higher education in Portugal established the organisation of cycles of studies in higher education based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

The Agency 'A3ES' will keep under review the need for any additional qualification descriptors, or amendment to them, in the light of the development of other points of reference, such as benchmark statements or European developments, for example arising from the Bologna Process.

3.1. Descriptor for a qualification: Technological Specialisation Diplomas

Under the national legal framework that regulates Technological Specialisation Courses (CETs), approved by Decree-Law no. 88/2006 of 23 May, CETs are post-secondary training courses that do not have the status of higher education and lead to the award of level 4 professional qualifications in the Portuguese system. Level 4 professional qualifications are obtained by linking a general or professional secondary training course with a post-secondary technical training course, and are characterised by:

- a. providing high-level technical training;
- b. communicating high-level knowledge and capabilities;
- c. generally not requiring mastery of the underlying scientific principles of the different areas involved;
- d. communicating capabilities and knowledge that allow holders to undertake responsibilities in planning and/or management autonomously or independently.

The Technological Specialisation Diploma grants access to a professional aptitude certificate issued under the auspices of the National System for Professional Certification pursuant to the conditions established by Implementing Decree no. 68/94 of 26th November.

The programme of a CET includes general and scientific training components, technological training components and work-related training components.

The general and scientific training component is aimed at developing attitudes and behaviours that are appropriate to professionals with high level skills and adaptability to the labour and corporate markets, as well as at improving their knowledge of scientific fields on which the technologies intrinsic to the training areas are based, whenever necessary.

The technological training component includes technological elements aimed at understanding practical activities and solving problems within the scope of professional practice.

The work-related training component is aimed at applying knowledge and understanding to practical activities of the respective professional profile, and includes the performance of guided activities, using techniques, equipment and materials that are involved in the production of goods or performance of services. Work-related training may embody various modalities of practical training in real job situations, particularly professional work placements. Work-related training will be carried out in partnership, to ensure integration into the labour market, with companies and other employers, corporate associations or professional associations, or other organisations, which are better suited to the specific nature of the training area, as well as to the characteristics of the labour market.

The Technological Specialisation Diploma will be awarded upon completion of a training plan consisting of between 60 and 90 ECTS credits.

The general and scientific training component and the technological component will have between 840 and 1020 contact hours, the former accounting for 15% and the latter for 85% of the number of hours.

In relation to the technological training component, the number of hours spent in practical, laboratory, workshop and/or project activities will account for at least 75% of the course's contact hours.

The work-related training component will be not less than 360 hours and not more than 720 hours.

The sum of the contact hours and work-related training hours attributed to the combined three training components in accordance with the above numbers will not be less than 1200 or more than 1560.

For trainees who have passed all the subjects of the 10th and 11th grades of a secondary or legally equivalent course and have been enrolled in the 12th grade but have not completed it, and for holders of level 3 professional qualifications:

- a) Between 15 and 30 credits will be added to the number of ECTS credits stipulated above;
- b) The number of hours necessary for the awarding of these credits will be added to the number of hours also stipulated above.

The officially authorised body in the training institution will decide the number of complementary credits that a student must obtain and the number of hours necessary to obtain them based upon analysis of their curricula.

Trainees who complete the CET are also entitled to be recognised as having a secondary level of education.

3.2. Descriptor for a higher education qualification: *Licenciatura* degrees

Under the national system of higher education degrees and diplomas, approved by Decree-Law no. 74/2006, of 24th March, as amended by Decree-Law no. 107/2008, of 25th June, the *Licenciatura* degree is awarded to students who have demonstrated that they:

- a. possess knowledge and capacity of understanding in a training area at such a level that:
 - i) they can develop and expand on the knowledge acquired in secondary education;
 - ii) they can work with advanced learning materials and relate to them;
 - iii) they have state-of-the-art knowledge in some aspects of this area;
- b. know how to apply acquired knowledge and understanding in order to clearly demonstrate a professional approach to the work carried out in their vocational area;
- c. have the capacity to solve problems within the field of their studies, based upon their own arguments;
- d. have the capacity to collate, select, and interpret relevant information, particularly in their training area, which will enable them to support the solutions they present and the opinions they put forward, including analysis of relevant social, technical and ethical aspects;
- e. possess competences that enable them to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions, to both experts and non-experts;
- f. possess learning competences that will enable them to benefit from lifelong learning with a high degree of autonomy.

In polytechnic education, the cycle of studies leading to the *Licenciatura* degree has 180 credits and normally takes six curricular semesters of students' work. In specific cases, where access to professional practice depends on a longer training path, the *Licenciatura* course can include up to 240 credits, lasting normally for up to seven or eight curricular semesters,

following express national or European legal regulations or established practice in reference higher education institutions within the European Higher Education Area. Higher education institutions may award diplomas for the conclusion of at least 120 credits, as part of a *Licenciatura* degree (higher education short cycle diploma, as indicated in Table 1).

In polytechnic education, the cycle of studies leading to the *Licenciatura* degree must place particular value upon training initiatives aimed at the practice of professional activity, ensuring that it includes a component for applying acquired knowledge to activities within the respective professional profile.

In university education, the cycle of studies leading to the *Licenciatura* degree has between 180 and 240 credits and normally lasts between six and eight curricular semesters of student work.

When establishing the number of credits for this cycle of studies for different training areas, university institutions must adopt values that are similar to those used by institutions of university education in Europe within the same areas, in order to ensure that Portuguese students have conditions of mobility and training and professional integration that are similar, in terms of length and content, to those in other European States.

3.3. Descriptor for a higher education qualification: Master's degrees

Under the national system of higher education degrees and diplomas, approved by Decree-Law no. 74/2006, of 24th March, as amended by Decree-Law no. 107/2008, of 25th June, a master's degree is awarded to those who demonstrate that they:

- a. possess such knowledge and capacity of understanding that:
 - i) based on the knowledge obtained in the first cycle, they are able to develop and expand that knowledge;
 - ii) are able to develop and apply that knowledge to original situations, often in the context of research;
- b. know how to apply their knowledge and understanding and problem-solving capacities to new and unfamiliar situations in multidisciplinary situations, although related to their area of studies;
- c. possess the ability to integrate knowledge, deal with complex matters, develop solutions and put forward opinions on situations of limited or incomplete information, including reflecting on the implications and ethical and social responsibilities that result from those solutions and opinions and that influence them;
- d. are capable of communicating their conclusions and the knowledge and reasoning that underlie them clearly and unambiguously, to both experts and non-experts;
- e. possess learning competences that will enable them to benefit from self-oriented or autonomous lifelong learning.

A master's degree is granted in a specialist field and whenever necessary specialist fields may be divided into specialised areas.

The cycle of studies leading to a master's degree includes between 90 and 120 credits and normally lasts between three and four curricular semesters of student work. Exceptionally and without prejudice to satisfying all of the requirements related to the aims of the degree and the conditions for obtaining it, the cycle of studies leading to a master's degree in a specialist subject may include only 60 credits and normally last for two curricular semesters of work, following stable and internationally established practice in that specialist field.

In university education, the cycle of studies leading to a master's degree must ensure that the student acquires an academic specialisation based upon research, innovation or expansion of professional competences.

In polytechnic education, the cycle of studies leading to a master's degree must ensure predominantly that the student acquires a professional specialisation.

The cycle of studies leading to a master's degree consists of:

- a) A specialised course, consisting of an organised series of curricular units, known as a master's course (which can lead to a master's course diploma, as indicated in Table 1), which accounts for a minimum of 50 per cent of the total number of credits for the cycle of study;
- b) A dissertation or an original project, carried out specifically to this end, or a professional work placement which is to be concluded with a final report in accordance with the objectives specified under the terms established by the respective regulating standards and which accounts for a minimum of 35 per cent of the total number of credits for the cycle of study.

Obtaining a master's degree, or the credits that correspond to the Master course (referred to in Table 1 as a Master's course diploma), may also enable students to have access to professions that are subject to special recognition requirements under the legal and institutional terms set for that purpose.

In university education, a master's degree may also be awarded after an integrated cycle of studies, conferring 300 to 360 credits and normally lasting between 10 and 12 curricular semesters of work; in such cases access to the practice of a particular professional activity is dependent upon that length of time:

- a) established by legal EU standards;
- b) resulting from stable practice established within the European Union.

Access to and entry into this cycle of studies is governed by the same norms applicable to access and entry into the cycle of studies leading to a *Licenciatura* degree.

In this cycle of studies, the *Licenciatura* degree will be granted to those who have successfully completed 180 credits, which corresponds to the first six curricular semesters of work. In this case, the *Licenciatura* degree must adopt a title that cannot be confused with that of the master's degree.

3.4. Descriptor for a higher education qualification: Doctoral degrees

Under the national system of higher education degrees and diplomas, approved by Decree-Law no. 74/2006, of 24th March, as amended by Decree-Law no. 107/2008, of 25th June, a doctoral degree is awarded to those who have demonstrated:

- a. the capacity for systematic understanding in a scientific field;
- b. competences, skills, and research methods associated with a scientific field;
- c. the ability to conceive, plan, adapt and perform significant research complying with the demands imposed by standards of academic quality and integrity;
- d. the production of a significant body of original research which has contributed to challenging the boundaries of knowledge, part of which merited national or international dissemination in referenced publications;
- e. the ability to critically analyse, evaluate and synthesise new and complex ideas;
- f. the ability to communicate with their peers, the rest of the academic community and society in general in their expert field;
- g. the ability to promote technological, social or cultural progress in academic or professional terms in a knowledge-based society.

The doctoral degree is awarded only by universities and university institutes, in a field of knowledge or in one of its specialist subjects.

The cycle of studies that leads to the doctoral degree consists of:

- a) an original thesis specially written for that purpose which is appropriate to the nature of the field of knowledge or specialist subject;
- b) the possible undertaking of curricular units aimed at research training known as a doctorate course (which can lead to a doctoral course diploma, as indicated in Table 1) whenever stipulated in the degree's regulations.

3.5. Qualification descriptors and other points of reference for academic standards

Qualification descriptors are generic statements of the intended outcomes of study. Many academic programmes aim to develop general and specific skills. These are not explicitly addressed in the qualification descriptors as many skills, and the extent to which they need to be developed, are discipline or profession specific. Specific statements about the intended outcomes of an individual higher education qualification may be provided by institutions when submitting their application for the establishment of the respective cycle of studies.

The establishment of new cycles of studies is approved if it complies with the national legal framework, and after an application has been submitted to the official national body, including:

- a. a report approved by the Academic Council of the higher education institution⁵:

⁵ Defined in the Legal Framework for Degrees and Diplomas (Decree-Law no. 74/2006, of 24th March, as amended by Decree-Law 107/2008, of 25th June), as "órgão científico legal e estatutariamente competente".

- i) describing and providing the basis for the objectives of the cycle of studies, its organisation and the suitability of the human and material resources for both the academic and pedagogical demands and for the quality of teaching;
- ii) explaining the conformity of the cycle of studies with the national training network and respective area and clarifying the reasons for creating it, in the case of public higher education institutions;
- b. the curricular structure, study programmes and credits, following the technical norms established for this purpose;
- c. the basis for the number of credits that, calculated according to the students' estimated workload, are attributed to each curricular unit, including surveys carried out with that end in mind in which the opinions of teachers and students are stated;
- d. the conformity of the total number of credits and the consequent length of the cycle of studies with the corresponding qualification descriptors;
- e. a demonstration that the organisation of the cycle of studies and teaching methodologies match the corresponding qualification descriptors;
- f. a comparative analysis between the organisation of the cycle of studies and the organisation of other reference European programmes with similar objectives.

3.6. Assessment

Assessment is essential to the operation of a qualifications framework based on learning outcomes.

The Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency ('A3ES') is responsible for the assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their cycles of studies, with accreditation being fully dependent upon the results of the assessment procedure. The Agency 'A3ES' is also responsible for Portugal joining the European system of quality assurance in higher education.

Within this context, the Legal Framework for Higher Education Evaluation (Law no. 38/2007, dated 16th August), and the system of quality assessment adopted in it, are characterised by the universal, compulsory and periodic nature of the assessment, by the need for higher education institutions to adopt internal quality policies, by the multifaceted nature of the corresponding procedures, and by the assessment criteria being subject to standards set during the development of the Bologna process.

Quality assessment takes the form of (i) self-assessment and (ii) external assessment. Self-assessment is carried out by each higher education institution and external assessment is carried out by the Agency 'A3ES', the latter forming the basis of the accreditation procedures. The quality assessment system necessarily includes the contribution of external bodies relevant to the process, specifically professional associations as well as other scientific, cultural and economic entities. The quality assessment system ensures student participation by including students in self-assessment procedures, specifically through the compulsory involvement of educational councils and students' associations, their participation in anonymous educational surveys of the teaching staff and courses which form a compulsory part of the self-assessment

process, interviews given during external assessment procedures, and the appointment of students' association representatives to the Agency 'A3ES' governance structure.

The goal of creating a system of quality assurance suitable for international recognition was divided into four areas identified as:

- (i) expanding the assessment of institutions' performance;
- (ii) objectifying the assessment criteria by assigning qualitative grades, level by level, and allowing for comparison, and clarifying the consequences of the assessment, in terms of how the courses are run and financed by the higher education institutions;
- (iii) internationalising the assessment procedure, particularly at the level of institutional assessment;
- (iv) requiring that higher education institutions implement their own systems of quality assurance, subject to certification.

The conditions and regulations for progress from one higher education cycle of studies to another are regulated by specific legal instruments, namely the Legal Framework for Degrees and Diplomas (Decree-Law no. 74/2006, of 24th March, as amended by Decree-Law no. 107/2008, of 25th June).

4. Awarding qualifications and titles

Higher education institutions ensure that the outcomes required for each of their qualifications are specified clearly and that the achievement of those outcomes is demonstrated before a qualification is awarded.

Public understanding of the achievements represented by higher education qualifications requires a transparent use of qualification titles. The title of any qualification must accurately reflect the level of achievements, represent appropriately the nature and field(s) of study undertaken and not be misleading.

The Technological Specialisation Diploma will be awarded upon completion of all training components of a Technological Specialisation Course (CET). The Technological Specialisation Diploma grants access to a professional aptitude certificate issued under the auspices of the National System for Professional Certification pursuant to the conditions established by Implementing Decree no. 68/94, of 26th November. Higher education institutions that have a valid registration for a CET are authorised to grant the respective Technological Specialisation Diploma.

The degree of *Licenciatura* is awarded to those who, through the completion of all curricular units that make up the cycles of studies of the *Licenciatura* programme, have obtained the established number of credits. The title of *Licenciado* is granted by means of a diploma written and issued by the legal authorised body of the higher education institute.

A Master's degree is awarded to those who, through the completion of all curricular units that make up the cycle of studies of the master's programme and through the successful public defense of their dissertation, their project work or their professional work placement report, have obtained the required number of credits. The title of Master is granted by means of a diploma written and issued by the legally authorised body of the higher education institution.

The Doctoral degree is awarded to those who have successfully defended their thesis in public. The title of Doctor is awarded by means of a diploma written and issued by the legally authorised body at the university or university institute.

5. Promoting national and international mobility of students and graduates

The reform of the higher education system in Portugal has included the implementation of a series of measures which seek to ensure the effective and less bureaucratised national and international mobility of students and graduates, aimed at attracting and encouraging the settlement in Portugal of qualified human resources, both Portuguese and foreign. Mobility of students and graduates depends on the recognition of their prior learning and qualifications, which is required when they move between qualifications or cycles in order to access more advanced programmes.

First, new regulations were introduced for mobility of students between national higher education institutions, from the same or different subsystems, as well as between national and foreign higher education institutions, based on application of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). These regulations are based on the principle of mutual recognition of the value of training undertaken and competences acquired. This purpose was specifically set out in the Legal Framework for Degrees and Diplomas (Article 45 of Decree-Law no. 74/2006, of 24th March) which establishes that higher education institutions will take into account the level of credits and the academic area in which they were obtained and will:

- credit within their cycles of studies training undertaken within the scope of other higher education cycles in national or foreign higher education institutions;
- credit within their cycles of studies training undertaken within the scope of Technological Specialisation Courses (CETs) under the terms fixed by the respective statute;
- recognise, through the award of credits, professional experience and post-secondary training.

Second, new regulations were implemented for re-entering higher education, changing programmes and transferring between higher education institutions (Ministerial Order no. 401/2007, of 5th April), by means of which all obstacles are removed to re-entry for those who have interrupted their higher education studies, and the procedures for transfer or change of course are altered, integrating students coming from both national and foreign institutions into a single system, extending limits to admission and simplifying procedures.

Third, a new regime was implemented for the recognition of foreign academic degrees of the same level and nature (and with the same objectives) as *Licenciatura*, master's and doctoral degrees awarded by Portuguese higher education institutions, entitling holders to all the rights associated with these academic degrees (Decree-Law no.40/2007, of 20th February).

This new regime is based on the extension to *Licenciatura* and master's degrees of the system established for doctoral degrees in 1997 (Decree-Law no. 216/97, of 18th August). It is based on the principle of reciprocal trust that should be adopted by the international academic

community, replacing, in all cases where applicable, the process of equivalence based on the academic re-assessment of work carried out with the aim of obtaining a foreign degree.

The simplified mechanism for the recognition of foreign degrees is entrusted to a committee, presided over by the Director-General of Higher Education, and including one representative from each of the bodies representing higher education institutions (the Council of Portuguese University Rectors, the Coordinating Council of Polytechnic Institutes and the Portuguese Association of Private Higher Education), and a fifth member, co-opted by the others.

For the purposes of the simplified recognition process, a number of foreign degrees are recognised after consultation with the above-mentioned committee, and this group is then constantly updated and extended. The recognition process includes (i) academic degrees awarded by foreign higher education institutions of a state signatory to the Bologna Process, following a first, second or third cycle organised in accordance with the Bologna Process and accredited by an accreditation body recognised within the scope of that process, and (ii) all academic degrees awarded by foreign higher education institutions which, through a decision from the above-mentioned committee, are classified as such. The recognition mechanism also includes a simplified mechanism for recognising the final classification.

This has removed a serious obstacle to the free circulation of diploma holders who wish to study in Portugal after obtaining their academic degree abroad, and are now welcomed without the bureaucratic impediments and delays that hitherto existed.

Fourth, with the aim of ensuring greater flexibility in accessing and attending higher education, new norms were introduced (Decree-Law no. 107/2008, of 25th June), in order (i) to enable any interested citizen to enrol in individual curricular units, with a guarantee of both certification and accreditation in the case of successful completion and when they enrol in a cycle of studies that includes it; and (ii) to enable students enrolled in a higher education cycle of studies to enrol in curricular units which are not part of their cycle of studies and in any higher education institution, with a guarantee of certification in the case of successful completion, and inclusion in the diploma supplement.

Finally, similarly to the practices in other countries, particularly in the USA, and to promote diversity of academic and educational backgrounds for candidates applying for higher education programmes in Medicine, a new regime for access to *Licenciatura* degrees in this area was created (Decree-Law no. 40/2007, of 20th February) specifically designed for undergraduates with a diploma in a related scientific field (such as biology, physics, or chemistry), thus broadening the areas of training which will permit people to be admitted into a course of Medicine, although guaranteeing an appropriate level of knowledge in the core subjects which are an enrolment condition.

Edition

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