THE FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS IN PORTUGAL

FHEQ-Portugal

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1. Introduction

The National System of Qualifications was implemented in January 2008 by Decree-Law n. º 396/2007, 31 December, and covers the qualifications of all education levels, including higher education.

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Portugal (designated thereafter as FHEQ-Portugal) has been defined in articulation with the Portuguese National Framework of Qualifications, but considers a totally independent system under the framework of legal autonomy given to higher education institutions.

The Ministerial Order n. º 782/2009, 23 July, approved the National Framework of Qualifications, including the formal qualifications of all the national subsystems of education and training and the non-formal qualifications obtained through professional experience. The National Framework of Qualifications is organized into eight levels. The National Agency for Qualification (ANQ) was established in that legal document as a national point of coordination of the European Qualifications Framework, according to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 23 April 2008, concerning the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. The National Agency for Qualification works in coordination with the Directorate-General for Higher Education (DGES) regarding levels 5 to 8 of the National System of Qualifications,

The FHEQ-Portugal is established in Portugal in accordance with the overarching Qualifications framework and in alignment with the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. DGES has the responsibility for developing and maintaining the FHEQ-Portugal in close collaboration with the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES)[1] in a way that fosters the institutional identity and autonomy of higher education institutions This process also involves the Council of Rectors of the Portuguese Universities (CRUP), the Coordinating Council of the Portuguese Polytechnic Institutes (CSISP) and the Portuguese Association of Private Higher Education (APESP), representing Portuguese higher education institutions, with the ultimate goal of promoting a qualifications framework that is both aligned to the European Qualifications Framework developed under the Bologna process and to the need to preserve the institutional autonomy and identity of higher education institutions.

FHEQ-Portugal has been developed according to the ten criteria and procedures defined by the European Commission's Advisory Group.

This document summarizes the FHEQ-Portugal and its alignment with the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education area, focusing, therefore, on levels 5 to 8 of the European Qualifications Framework. Regarding levels 1 to 5, the ANQ's

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[1] The A3ES is a private law foundation, independent institution, established for an indeterminate period of time, with legal status to promote and ensure the quality of higher education.

document should be consulted[2]. This document is organized as follows. This first section describes the process that led to the establishment of the FHEQ- Portugal. It includes the full set of legislation produced in the period 2005-2010, together with the main figures characterising the Portuguese higher education system. The following section describes the main features of FHEQ- Portugal, while sections 3 and 4 describe the qualification descriptors and the awarding of qualifications and titles, respectively. The final section summarises main issues associated with international mobility of students and graduates.

1.1 Making-off FHEQ-Portugal: 2005-2009
Since 2005 particular attention has been given to the implementation of the Bologna Process in Portugal, through the establishment of the principal 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 74/2006, 24 March amended by Decree-Law 107/2008, 25 June), 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. This has had a significant mobilising effect throughout the higher education system and all degree programmes taught in Portugal in the 2009/10 academic year are adapted to the Bologna model (compared to 90% in 2007/08). The following developments have also taken place:

- New legislation was passed, regulating the creation of post-secundary education programmes, Technological Specialisation Courses – CET, aiming at increasing the availability of technical and vocational education and widening access to such programmes for new publics. These courses can be given either by higher education institutions or by other institutions. The FHEQ-Portugal only concerns to the ones taught by higher education institutions. This process has brought a new dynamism to higher education institutions in Portugal, in particular at polytechnic institutes. More than 6,000[3] students were enrolled in these programmes in 2009/10 (compared to around 1,000 students in 2005), which represents a significant opening up of higher education in Portugal.

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[2] Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, I.P., "Referencing of the Portuguese National Framework of Qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning", working document, September 2010.
[3] According to data from Cabinet for Planning, Strategy, Evaluation and International Relations (GPEARI)

- 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. More than 10,000 new students were enrolled in higher education through this type of mechanism in 2009/10 (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[2].

- 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' competences, in which experimental and project work components, among others, and the acquisition of key competences will play a decisive role.

- 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 62/2007, 10 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 38/2007, of 16 August) and the creation of the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (Decree-Law 369/2007, 5 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, 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 (Ministerial Order 401/2007, 5 April); and ii) the new legal framework for the recognition of foreign degrees, which simplifies the system for recognising foreign degrees in Portugal (Decree-Law 341/2007, 12 October).

- 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. More than 11,000 loans had been contracted up to December 2009 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 396/2007, 31 December) and the establishment of the National Qualifications Agency (Decree-Law 276-C/2007, 31 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.

1.2 Recent Developments: 2009-2010

In the context of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Portugal, recent developments make evident the progress of the accreditation process of tertiary education study programmes and their harmonisation with the Bologna framework, for example:

1) The establishment of the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education, and its activity so far.

2) The publication of the Bologna implementation reports by the higher education institutions on their institutional websites

1.2.1 The establishment of the Portuguese Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education and its activity so far

The A3ES, the Portuguese Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education started its activities in 2009. Its mission is framed by a set of legal documents:

- Decree-Law 74/2006, 24 March, amended by Decree-Law 107/88, 25 June;
- Law 38/2007, 16 August;
- Law 62/2007, 10 September;
- Decree-Law 369/2007, 5 November;
- Decree-Law 205/2009, 31 August;
- Decree-Law 206/2009, 31 August;
- Decree-Law 207/2009, 31 August;
- Decree-Law 43/2007, 22 February and
- Decree-Law 220/2009, 8 September.

In order to fulfil the legal determinations and its mandate[4], the A3ES adopted the following strategy:

a) Have all the accreditation and quality assurance processes ICT based.
b) Implement a preliminary accreditation system for new study programme proposals for the school year of 2010/2011.

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[4] Besides preparing the accreditation system to be used from 2011 onwards (its experimental implementation will be carried out in October 2010 and discuss with higher education institutions the accreditation norms and procedures

c) Implement a preliminary accreditation system so that all existing study cycles at the time of the creation of the A3ES are accredited by the end of the school year 2010/2011.
d) Foster the implementation of internal systems of quality assurance.
e) Internationalisation of A3ES.

Having all the accreditation and quality assurance processes ICT based.

A3ES established that the necessary procedures to formalise the evaluation and accreditation of study programmes are to be performed online, through an ICT platform based at the A3ES website. As such, the proposals for the new programmes, the self-evaluation reports, and the external evaluation reports, among other documents are submitted online (and analysed online). The international experts that perform a periodical evaluation of the Portuguese Agency for Assessment and Accreditation for Higher Education recognised that Portugal was the first country implementing such a system to support the evaluation of the higher education system.

Implement a preliminary accreditation system for new course proposals for the school year of 2010/2011.

Before the A3ES was fully functional, the request for the authorisation of new programmes was decided by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, in accordance with Decree-Law 74/2006, 24 March, following a proposal of the Directorate-General of Higher Education. The A3ES would evaluate the new proposals for programmes due to start in 2010/2011. The proposals for new programmes were submitted between the 1st of October and the 31 December 2009. 330 requests were submitted (45 *licenciaturas* – first cycle; 229 *mestrados* – 2nd cycle; and 56 *doutoramentos* – 3rd cycle). The number of programme submissions is lower than in previous years while there was no major problem with the use of the ICT based platform.

Implement a preliminary accreditation system so that all existing study cycles at the time of the creation of the A3ES are fully accredited by the end of 2010/2011.

Since there were around 5000 study programmes in the Portuguese higher education system, the adoption of a traditional system of accreditation was not pursued because the ability to comply with the legal deadlines for the accreditation of the system was unattainable. Instead, a preliminary system of accreditation was introduced in preparation for the full implementation of a traditional system of accreditation. The preliminary system of accreditation is based on minimal standards of quality (as the traditional accreditation system is), following a triage exercise which allowed to concentrate analytical efforts on programmes where it was not evident that the minimum standards were met. Moreover, higher education institutions were required to reorganise their offer of study programmes. The higher education institutions indicated

the programmes that would be maintained in the future, showing at the same time that there would be enough resources to guarantee the minimum quality standards. Through this method, the first decision over the range of programmes on offer by higher education institutions and their development was taken by the institutions themselves.

After this process was concluded, the results show that the higher education institutions submitted a lower number of programmes for accreditation in relation to the number of programmes registered in the Directorate-General for Higher Education. An analysis of the results shows that about 900 programmes were discontinued (minus 278 first cycle programmes, 487 second cycle programmes, 129 third cycle programmes and plus 8 integrated masters programmes), indicating an effort taken by the higher education institutions in reorganising their educational offer.

The second result of this exercise was the creation of an updated dataset of programmes for all the Portuguese higher education system which will be used in analyses of the higher education system and to support preliminary accreditation decisions. A third result was the use of the dataset to compare the list of submitted programmes with the one that the Directorate-General of Higher Education has, thus allowing to correct errors and programme denomination discrepancies.

Foster the implementation of internal systems of quality assurance

The A3ES will request an audit that will assess, and certificate, its internal proceedings. The accreditation agency commissioned a study that compared "European processes for the evaluation and certification of internal systems of quality". This study will be jointly analysed with the higher education institutions in order to discuss its implementation, including the basis of the internal systems of quality certification. This is a task that will be performed throughout this year and in 2011.

Internationalization of A3ES

The activities of A3ES and the agency itself are assessed by an international Scientific Council, composed by North-American and European experts, at the end of every civil year. The scientific council analyses the annual progress of the agency, presenting a report with criticisms and recommendations for improvement. The scientific council met for the first time in December 2009 producing a report with a set of recommendations. The A3ES agency become associated member of ENQA in 2009, and is hoping to become full member within 3 years.

In an effort to further the internationalization process, the A3ES participated in the ENQA general assembly, attended the ENQUA "Internal Quality Assurance - Enhancing Quality Culture" seminar, and participated in the ENQA workshop "Quality Assurance and Learning Outcomes", plans to visit other European Accreditation agencies, and participate in the European Assurance Forum "Building bridges –

making sense of QA in European, national and institutional contexts" which will be held in Lyon in November. A3ES is also a member of the IMHE/OECD programme.

1.2.2 The publication of the Bologna implementation reports by higher education institutions on their websites

The implementation of the Bologna Process in Portugal has been associated with an overall reform of the tertiary education system, which included a profound legal reform, the adoption of new governance systems and evaluation regimes, together with the adoption of modern learning paradigms. In this context, it was made compulsory by law that institutions publish annually reports with their most relevant internal reforms, including case studies and the adoption of best practices. These reports are available since 2008 and are published annually in the institutional websites[5].

1.3 Main Figures[6]

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 (96,769 in 2006/2007, compared to 84,586 in 2004/2005 and 83,773 in 2005/2006). This trend accelerated in 2009/2010 with an increase of new enrolments in public higher education, with particular impact on polytechnic education (new students entering higher education reached 126,735 in 2009/2010).

Total enrolments in higher education of 20-year-olds have increased by 18% over the last five years (2005-2009), reaching about 36% of this age group in 2008/2009 (compared to 30% in 2004/2005). In other words, more than 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 most industrialised countries and regions.

Total enrolments in higher education of adults aged 30-34 years have increased by about 20% over the last five years (2005-2009), reaching about 4.1% of this age-group in 2008/2009 (compared to 3.5% in 2005).

The total number of graduates per year increased by about 12% over the period 2005-2009, with graduates in science and technology rising in recent years to a figure of 20.7 per thousand population aged 20-29 years in 2008 (well above the EU-27 average: 13.9). At the same time, the number of new PhDs in science and engineering per

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[5] Examples of these reports can be found here: <u>University higher education sector</u>: University of Minho: http://www.gaqe.uminho.pt/uploads/Rel_Concretizacao_Bolonha.pdf; University of Coimbra: http://www.uc.pt/ge3s/destaques/bolonhauc2010; University of Évora: http://www.uevora.pt/ensinos;
Polytechnic higher education sector: Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco: http://www.ipcb.pt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1002&Itemid=775; Instituto Politécnico de Tomar: http://webmanager.ipt.pt/mgallery/default.asp?obj=1887; Instituto Superior de Engenharia de Lisboa: http://www.isel.pt/pInst/Gabinetes/GabAvalQualidade/docs/RepositorioAval/Rel_Concret_Bolonha_ISEL_2006_2008.pdf
[6] According to data from Cabinet for Planning, Strategy, Evaluation and International Relations

thousand population aged 25-34 increased to 0.45 in 2008, 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.

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 countries[7], 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 enables 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 396/2007, 31 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. 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 Sector Councils for qualifications, *Novas Oportunidades* centres, basic and secondary schools, professional training centres, and companies providing training for their employees[8].

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[7] See as an example the report on the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
[8] The document by Agência Nacional para a Qualificação, I.P., "Referencing of the Portuguese National Framework of Qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning", working document, September 2010, refers to the Portuguese national qualification framework for these types of formal and informal education.

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.

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 49/2005, 30 August);

- the new Legal Framework for Degrees and Diplomas (Decree-Law 74/2006, 24 March, as amended by Decree-Law 107/2008, 25 June);

- the new Legal Framework for Technological Specialisation Courses (CETs) (Decree-Law 88/2006, 23 May);

- the new Legal Framework for Higher Education Institutions (Law 62/2007, 10 September);

- the new Legal Framework for the Mobility of Students and Graduates (Decree-Law 341/2007, 12 October).

It should also be noted that a new Legal Framework for the Evaluation of Higher Education has been introduced (Law 38/2007, 16 August), and a new Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency ('A3ES') is implemented (Decree-Law 369/2007, 5 November), and fully operational since 2009.

The Agency 'A3ES' uses the FHEQ-Portugal as a reference when auditing or reviewing the establishment and management of academic standards by higher education institutions. Following similar practices in Europe[9], auditors and reviewers assess how institutions align the academic standards of their degrees with the levels referred to in the FHEQ-Portugal. They 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,

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

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* degrees[10]), and the second cycle and third cycles to postgraduate degrees (i.e., masters degrees and doctoral degrees, respectively).

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

FHEQ-Portugal Higher education qualifications	Corresponding FQ-EHEA cycle	Corresponding EQF levels
Doctoral degrees	Third cycle qualifications	8
Doctoral course diplomas	-	-
Masters degrees	Second cycle qualifications	7
Integrated Masters degrees		
Masters course diplomas	-	-
Licenciatura degrees	First cycle qualifications	6
Technological Specialisation courses	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, is set forth in the legislation that some higher education qualifications are available to students who have undertaken a programme of study within the FQ-EHEA 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.

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[10] The *Licenciatura* degree is the first academic degree, conferred after completion of a first cycle programme, lasting 3 or 4 years.

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 consistently represented. 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

Descriptors exemplify the nature and characteristics of the main qualification at each level, and comparison demonstrates the nature and characteristics of change between qualifications at different levels. They provide clear points of reference at each level and describe outcomes that cover the great majority of existing qualifications. However, the FHEQ-Portugal has the flexibility to accommodate diversity and innovation, and to 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. This is of particular relevance to higher education institutions in designing, approving and reviewing academic programmes. They will need to be satisfied that, for any programme, the curriculum and assessments provide all students with the opportunity to achieve, and to demonstrate achievement of, the intended outcomes. Qualification descriptors should also provide a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed. It will be of assistance to higher education institutions during discussions with employers, and others with an interest in the general capabilities of holders of the qualification.

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 competences 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' keeps 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 (CET), approved by Decree-Law 88/2006, 23 May, CET are post secondary training courses. These 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 68/94, 26 November.

A CET programme 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, corresponding to a training

period between 840 and 1020 contact hours, the general and scientific training component accounting for 15% and the technological component 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 programme'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.

3.2. Descriptor for a qualification: *Licenciatura* degrees

Under the national system of higher education degrees and diplomas, approved by Decree-Law 74/2006, 24 March**,** as amended by Decree-Law 107/2008, 25 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 skills 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* degree 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 qualification: Masters degrees

Under the national system of higher education degrees and diplomas, approved by Decree-Law 74/2006, 24 March, as amended by Decree-Law 107/2008, 25 June, a masters 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 masters 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 masters 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 masters 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 masters 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 masters degree must ensure predominantly that the student acquires a professional specialisation.

The cycle of studies leading to a masters degree consists of:
a) A specialised course, consisting of an organised series of curricular units, known as a masters course (which can lead to a masters 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 masters degree, or the credits that correspond to the masters course (referred to in Table 1 as a Masters 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 masters 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; this is allowed in such cases where 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 EU.

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 masters degree.

3.4. Descriptor for a qualification: Doctoral degrees

Under the national system of higher education degrees and diplomas, approved by Decree-Law 74/2006, 24 March, as amended by Decree-Law 107/2008, 25 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.

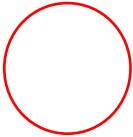The cycle of studies that leads to the doctoral degree consists of:

a) an original thesis specially written for that purpose which is appropriate to the nature of the field of knowledge or specialist subject;

b) a number 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. Table 2 indicates the alignment of the descriptors of the Portuguese National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, based on the descriptors[11] described in

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[11] These descriptors refer to the Shared Dublin descriptors: see Report for the Joint Quality Initiative Informal Group, "Shared Dublin descriptors for Short Cycle, First Cycle, Second Cycle and Third Cycle Awards", 18th of October 2004.

the previous sub-sections, with the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.
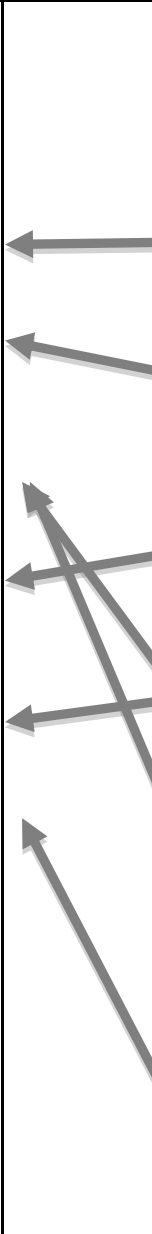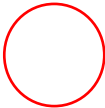
The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area		The Portuguese National Qualifications for Higher Education
Short cycle qualification – within or linked to the first cycle		Short cycle qualifications (Technological Specialisation courses)[12]
Qualifications that signify completion of the short cycle - within or linked to the first cycle are awarded to students who: • have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle; • can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts; • have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems; • can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients; • have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.		Technological Specialisation Diplomas are awarded to students who have demonstrated: ***Knowledge and Understanding*** High-level technical training, knowledge and capabilities, although generally not requiring mastery of the underlying scientific principles of the different areas involved. Improvement of their knowledge of scientific fields on which the technologies intrinsic to the training areas are based. ***Skills*** Being capable of understanding practical activities and solving problems within the scope of professional practice. Attitudes and behaviours that are appropriate to professionals with high-level skills and adaptability to the labour and corporate market. ***Attitudes*** Competence for applying knowledge and understanding to practical activities of their professional profile, including performance of guided activities, using techniques, equipment and materials involved in the production of goods or performance of services. Competence to undertake responsibilities in planning and/or management autonomously or independently. Being capable of undertaking further studies with some autonomy.

Table 2a) – Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Portugal – Short cycle qualifications
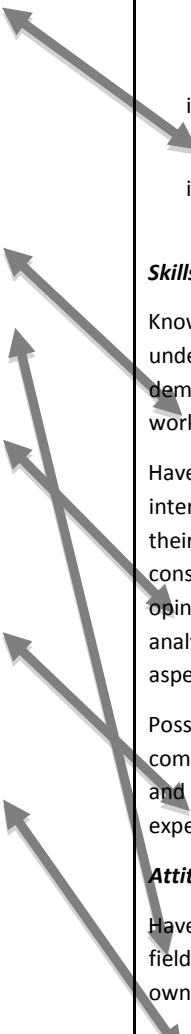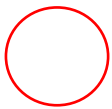
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[12] Decree-Law 88/2006, 23 May

The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area		The Portuguese National Qualifications for Higher Education
First cycle qualification		**First cycle - Licenciado[13]**
Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who: • have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study; • can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study; • have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues; • can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences; • have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.		The Licenciado degree is awarded to students who have demonstrated: ***Knowledge and Understanding*** Possess knowledge and a capacity of understanding in a training area to such a level that: i) Based on the knowledge acquired in secondary education they may develop and expand upon it; ii) They can work with advanced learning materials and relate to them; iii) They have state-of-the-art knowledge in some aspects of that area. ***Skills*** Know how to apply acquired knowledge and understanding capacity in order to clearly demonstrate a professional approach to the work carried out in their vocational area; Have the capacity to collate, select, and interpret relevant information, particularly in their training area, which will enable them to consolidate the solutions they present and the opinions they put forward, including the analysis of relevant social, scientific and ethical aspects; Possess skills that enable them to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions, both to experts and non-experts. ***Attitudes*** Have the capacity to solve problems within the field of their training area, based upon their own arguments; Possess learning competences that will enable them to benefit from lifelong learning with a high degree of autonomy.

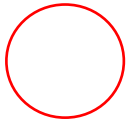**Table 2b) - Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Portugal – First cycle qualifications**

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[13] Decree-Law 74/2006, 24 March

The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area		The Portuguese National Qualifications for Higher Education
Second cycle qualification		**Second cycle – Mestrado/Mestrado integrado[14]**
Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who: • have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context; • can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study; • have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments; • can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; • have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.		A Masters degree is awarded to those who demonstrate that they: ***Knowledge and Understanding*** Possess such knowledge and capacity of understanding that: i) Based on the knowledge obtained in the first cycle, they manage to develop and expand that knowledge; ii) Manage to develop and apply that knowledge to original situations often in the context of research. ***Skills*** Know how to apply their knowledge and understanding and problem solving capacities to new and unfamiliar situations in wide multi-disciplinary situations, although related to their area of studies; Are capable of communicating their conclusions and the knowledge and reasoning that underlie them, both to experts and non-experts clearly and unambiguously. ***Attitudes*** Possess the capacity to integrate knowledge, deal with complex matters, develop solutions or put forward opinions on situations of limited or incomplete information, including reflecting upon the implications and ethical and social responsibilities that result from both those solutions and opinions or indeed that condition them; Possess learning competences that will enable them to benefit from self-oriented or autonomous lifelong learning.

Table 2c) – Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Portugal – Second cycle qualifications

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[14] Decree-Law 74/2006 24 March

The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area		The Portuguese National Qualifications for Higher Education
Third cycle qualification		**Doctoral degrees[15]**
Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who: • have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field; • have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; • have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication; • are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas; • can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise; • can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.		The Doctorate degree is awarded to those who have demonstrated: ***Knowledge and Understanding*** The capacity of systematic understanding in a scientific field; Having carried out a significant body of original research, which has contributed to challenging the boundaries of knowledge, part of which merited national or international dissemination in renowned publications. ***Skills*** Being capable of critically analysing, evaluating and synthesizing new and complex ideas; Being capable of communicating with their peers, the rest of the academic community and society in general in their expert field; Competences, skills, and investigation methods associated with a scientific field. ***Attitudes*** Competences, skills, and investigation methods associated with a scientific field; The capacity to conceive, project, adapt and perform significant research respecting the demands imposed by patterns of academic quality and integrity; The capacity to promote technological, social or cultural progress in academic or professional terms in a knowledge-based society.

Table 2d) – Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Portugal – Third cycle qualifications

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

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[15] Decree-Law 74/2006 24 March

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 (Decree-Law 74/2006, 24 March, modified by Decree-Law 107/2008 25 June and Law 62/2007, 10 September) depends on its previous accreditation by the Agency A3ES (Law 38/2007, 16 August and Decree-Law 369/2007, 5 November). The accreditation procedures are well described, in Portuguese and in English, in the website of the Agency, http://www.a3es.pt/.

3.6. Assessment

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

The Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education ('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 38/2007, 16 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 74/2006, 24 March, as amended by Decree-Law 107/2008, 25 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 Programme (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, 26 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, after completing all of the curricular units that make up the cycle 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 Masters degree is awarded to those who, after successfully completing all of the curricular units making up in the cycle of studies of the masters programme, have obtained the required number of credits, as well as having successfully defended their dissertation, their project work or their professional work placement report in public. 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 74/2006, 24 March amended by Decree-Law 107/2008, 25 June) 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 whether obtained within the organisational framework resulting from the bologna process or obtained previously;

- credit within their cycles of studies training undertaken within the scope of Technological Specialisation Programmes (CETs) under the terms fixed by the respective statute;

- recognise, through the award of credits, professional experience and other training not covered by the previous paragraphs.

Second, new regulations were implemented for re-entering higher education, changing programmes and transferring between higher education institutions (Ministerial Order 401/2007, 5 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 programme 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*, masters and doctoral degrees awarded by Portuguese higher education institutions, entitling

holders to all the rights associated with these academic degrees (Decree-Law 314/2007, 12 October).

This new regime is based on the extension to *Licenciatura* and masters degrees of the system established for doctoral degrees in 1997 (Decree-Law 216/97, 18 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 remaining, for the others, the regime of Decree-Law 283/83, 21 June.

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 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 107/2008, 25 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 40/2007, 20 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 programme of Medicine, although guaranteeing an appropriate level of knowledge in the core subjects which are an enrolment condition.