
In Portugal, the agency for assessment and accreditation of higher education has recently included in its remit, beyond programme accreditation, the certification of internal quality assurance systems. This implies lighter touch accreditation and aims to direct institutions towards improvement, in addition to accountability. Twelve institutions have already undertaken the certification, and both self-assessment and external assessment reports are available. Based on the qualitative analysis of the nature of institutional strengths and weaknesses highlighted in these evaluation reports, the paper aims to understand whether the identified strengths and weaknesses are related to procedural and organisational matters or to cultural change (values and beliefs), in turn offering an insight into the quality culture(s) which characterise higher education institutions in Portugal. Findings suggest that the quality culture of the analysed institutions is somewhere between responsive and reactive. Overall, all reports dwell more on the prioritisation of formal and structural procedures, both regarding strengths and weaknesses. External reports point towards more weaknesses related to stakeholders’ participation. Both aspects are more frequent in polytechnics than in universities. These findings suggest that polytechnics are more reactive, whereas universities are more responsive. Therefore, accountability apparently continues to be, for the time being, a more pressing concern than improvement.