THE PORTUGUESE CASE: NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT REFORMS AND THE EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

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Abstract

The 1988 University Autonomy Act, and the Polytechnics Statute and Autonomy Law of 1990, conferred a considerable degree of autonomy on Portuguese public higher education institutions (HEIs) and designed a governance system based on collegiality. A quality assessment system was legally established in 1994 and closely followed the initial Dutch quality system. Among academics it was seen to be compatible with academic values, due to its focus on improvement, its ownership by a body linked to HEIs and its bottom-up implementation. More recently, a new reform publicly presented as the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) in the Portuguese higher education system has changed the legal framework. A new accreditation system is run by the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education - A3ES, created as a private law foundation. The legislation commands the Agency to ensure that Portugal complies with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), and is registered in EQAR. In this chapter, we analyse the new Portuguese legal framework to understand how much it has contributed to implement a quality system in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), namely its Part 1. We will try to uncover both barriers to ESG implementation and examples of good practice for achieving quality in higher education.