This paper aims to look at the characteristics of internal quality assurance (IQA) systems of higher education institutions to understand whether these systems tend to reproduce a given model, externally defined and suggested to institutions, or rather to be shaped by institutions’ features and interests. The study is supported in the analysis of the content of self-assessment reports of 12 internal QA systems certified, in Portugal, between 2012 and 2015. An analysis grid was used based on three categories: IQA systems’ historical framework, structural/managerial component and monitoring, assessment and continuous improvement. Institutions tended to follow a “one size fits all” approach, meaning that external (European and national) quality assurance (QA) references were used in an identical way, giving origin to rather similar IQA systems. Institutional characteristics do not seem to have played a relevant role, eventually due to institutions’ will to obtain their systems’ certification and, thus, achieve a light-touch external QA.