

**A3ES**

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Agência de Avaliação  
e Acreditação  
do Ensino Superior  
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**SIMPLIFIED ASSESSMENT HANDBOOK**

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES IN OPERATION**

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**Version 1.1 (June 2018)**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Portuguese Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) has drafted and approved an [Assessment Handbook](#), which is available in the Agency's website. It is a lengthy document where conceptual questions as well as operational aspects are treated in detail in three chapters:

- Some Questions Regarding Quality Assessment;
- The Portuguese Assessment and Accreditation System;
- Assessment of Study Programmes in Operation.

It was felt the need for a shorter and less complex document containing the main concepts, mechanisms and criteria relative to the assessment and accreditation of study programmes in operation. This simplified version of the Assessment Handbook aims to fulfil that objective by providing a first easier contact with the assessment and accreditation processes.

However, for a better understanding of the characteristics and evolution of the Portuguese higher education system and of the rationale behind the quality assurance systems, their evolution and trends, it is recommended reading the full version of the Assessment Handbook.

## **2. THE PORTUGUESE QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION SYSTEM**

### **2.1. The Agency for the assessment and accreditation of higher education**

The Juridical Regime of Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (Law no. 38/2007 of 16<sup>th</sup> August) in its article 11, no. 2, determines that "external assessment that forms the basis of the accreditation procedures is carried out by the assessment and accreditation agency for higher education. Based on this principle, the Assessment and Accreditation Agency for Higher Education was established by Decree-Law 369/2007 of 5<sup>th</sup> November.

The Agency is a private law foundation, of a legal nature, recognised as a public utility entity, established for an indeterminate period. The Agency shall be independent in carrying out its functions, notwithstanding the guiding principles set by the State through its own bodies.

The mission of A3ES consists in the assurance of the quality of higher education in Portugal by means of the assessment of higher education institutions and their study programmes, and to ensure the integration of Portugal in the European system of quality assurance in higher education.

The first objective of the Agency consists in enhancing the quality of the performance of higher education institutions and their study programmes and in guaranteeing the fulfilment of the basic requirements for their official recognition. The Agency accomplishes its objectives by the assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programmes and the promotion of an internal institutional culture of quality assurance. The objectives of A3ES are accomplished through the following activities:

- Materialising the assessment criteria;
- Defining the consequences of the assessment;
- Developing the quality assessment of the performance of higher education institutions and their study programmes;
- Promoting the accreditation of institutions and their study programmes;
- Providing well-founded information to the public about the performance of higher education institutions;
- Promoting the internationalisation of the assessment process.

Other activities of the Agency are:

- Advising the State on matters related to quality assurance in higher education in Portugal;
- Carrying out studies and providing official opinions requested by the State;
- Participating in the European quality assurance system of higher education;
- Coordinating the activities of assessment and accreditation in Portugal with international assessment institutions and mechanisms.

## 2.2. Organisational structure of the Agency and governing bodies

The organisational structure of the Agency is given in Figure 1. The composition and competences of the governing bodies are presented

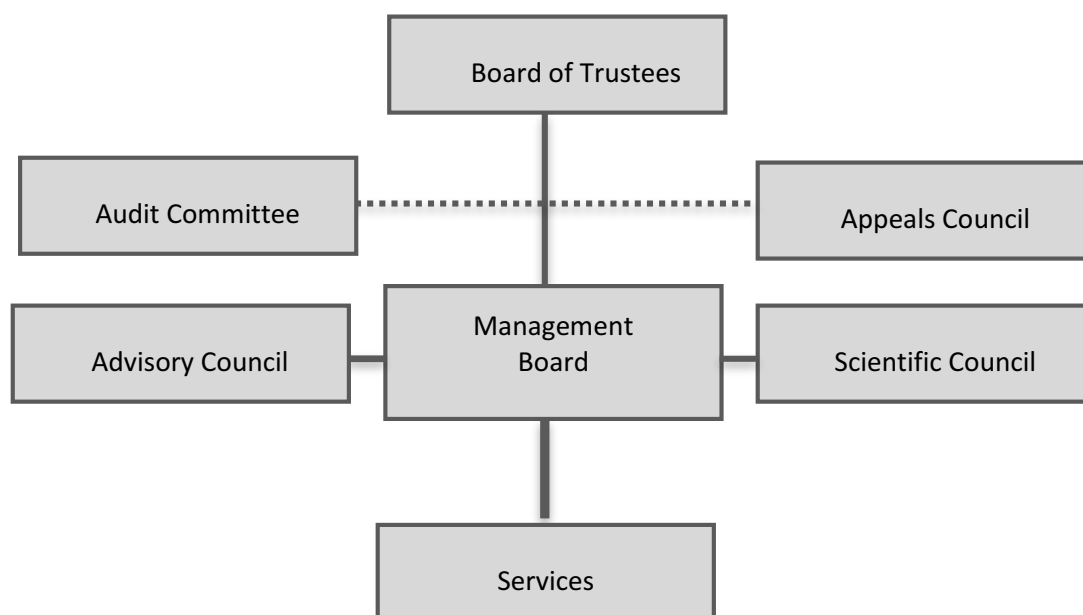


Figure 1 – Organisational Chart of the Agency

### 2.2.1. Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is made up of five members, nominated by the Council of Ministers, following proposal by the Minister responsible for the area of higher education, from among

persons of recognised merit and experience. Their mandate is for five years, which is not renewable, but which in exceptional cases may be extended for a further year. The competences of the Board of Trustees are, among others:

- To nominate members of the Management Board and the Appeals Council;
- To make a general assessment of the performance of the Management Board and to give their opinions and make general recommendations on their management orientation;
- To give their opinion on the current activities plan and the budget of the Agency;
- To give their opinion on the Agency's management and accounts reports.

### **2.2.2. Management Board**

The Management Board is composed of a maximum of seven members nominated by the Board of Trustees, from among persons of recognised academic and professional merit whose experience is relevant to the functions of the Agency. The number of executive members must not exceed four and the number of non-executive members three. Their mandate is for four years, which is renewable.

All acts deemed necessary for the fulfilment of the aims of the Agency are the responsibility of the Management Board, with the exception of those that the Statutes of the Agency attribute to other organs. The Board has wide-ranging powers of representation and management. In order to assure the quality of higher education, it is the responsibility of the Management Board:

- To initiate any assessment and accreditation procedures;
- To take the final decision concerning the above mentioned procedures, whether they were instigated by the agency or by the interested institutions;
- To approve reports resulting from all assessment and accreditation processes;
- To potentially adopt results of assessment or accreditation undertaken by other national or foreign quality assurance organisms;
- To approve norms within the framework of the higher education quality assurance system, subject to the terms of reference contained within the legal assessment regime.

### **2.2.3. Audit Committee**

The Audit Committee is made up of three members nominated by order of the member of government responsible for the area of finance, one of the members necessarily being a certified auditor. The competences of the Audit Committee are the customary competences for this type of organ:

- To control the legality and regularity of the Agency's management actions;
- To control the financial and asset management, through supervision and monitoring of the Agency's accounting tools.

#### **2.2.4. Advisory Council**

The Advisory Council is a body that provides guidance in the area of quality assurance in higher education and support with regard to the decisions of the Management Board. It is the responsibility of the Advisory Council to provide expert opinions on the Agency's annual activity plan and on the main lines of action and strategic orientation. The Advisory Council has a large representation of interests, including organisations representing the higher education institutions, students' unions, professional associations, workers' unions and representatives of interested ministries.

#### **2.2.5. Appeals Council**

The Appeals Council is the body that deals with appeals against the decisions of the Management Board regarding assessment and accreditation. The Appeals Council is composed of five members with relevant professional experience with no permanent tie to Portuguese higher education institutions. The Council must include members with experience of foreign counterpart institutions, nominated by the Board of Trustees.

#### **2.2.6. Scientific Council**

In order to respond to the focus on internationalisation established in the law, it was decided to create the Scientific Council composed of experts with recognised international competence, who at the end of each year will promote discussion on the annual progress and will present a report including critical comments and suggestions to improve procedures.

### **2.3. The operational strategy of the Agency**

The Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) came into being in January 2009. In order to respect legal requirements, it adopted a strategy based on the following essential points:

- a) To computerize the whole process;
- b) To implement a system of prior-accreditation of all proposals for new study programmes to begin in 2010/2011;
- c) To implement a system of preliminary accreditation of all study programmes in operation at the time the Agency started its activities, checking that they complied with the minimum legal requirements – by the end of the academic year 2010/2011;
- d) To develop a five-years first cycle of assessment/accreditation of study programmes, implemented experimentally in October 2010 and running smoothly as from 2011/2012;
- e) To discuss, with institutions, the standards and procedures regarding accreditation;
- f) To foster the implementation of internal quality assurance systems;
- g) To internationalise the Agency.

The Assessment Handbook contains detailed information on the actions undertaken to implement the outlined strategy, namely in relation to the preliminary accreditation process of the study programmes in operation at the time of the start of the Agency's activity. The

present document only presents a simplified vision of the ongoing external quality assurance processes – the prior accreditation of new study programmes, the regular cycle of assessment/accreditation of study programmes in operation and the assessment/certification of internal quality assurance systems.

### **2.3.1. Prior accreditation of new study programmes**

According to the relevant legislation – Decree-Law 74/2006, 24th March, amended by Decree-Law 63/2016, 13<sup>th</sup> September – the prior accreditation of all new study programmes, which institutions propose to run is the responsibility of the Agency. This prior accreditation is only based on analysis, by an external assessment team (EAT), of the reports presented by the institutions. Visits from EAT only occur in exceptional circumstances (e.g. medical study programmes or those associated to the creation of a new institution).

Every year, from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 15<sup>th</sup> October, the Agency's electronic platform will be available for submission of proposals of new study programmes to initiate operation in the following academic year.

### **2.3.2. The regular cycle of accreditation**

As foreseen, the first cycle of regular assessments of all study programmes with preliminary accreditation was undertaken from 2012 and 2016. This was done by area of education and training in order to include all the study programmes belonging to a particular area in one visit to each institution, which made it possible to reduce the costs of the operation and also give the EAT teams a global vision of the situation of each area or department.

It is interesting to note that in the course of this planning, which included a phase of verification by institutions, some of the 3,623 study programmes with preliminary accreditation were discontinued, and at the end of the first regular cycle (June 2018) only 2,488 remained. The conclusion drawn from this is that the institutions have been reorganising their educational provision in order to correct the excesses resulting from the phase of adaptation to the Bologna Process, which in Portugal happened in a very short period of time, obliging the institutions to present proposals which were not very well thought out. Apart from this, the effects of the economic crisis must be taken into account as it has led to a reduction in demand for higher education, namely at post-graduate level. It is also worth noticing that the vast majority of the study programmes cancelled were the decision of the institutions and only a small percentage had a non-accreditation decision by the Agency. This shows that the strategy adopted by the Agency was the correct one – to discuss the results of its analysis of the situation of the study programme with each institution.

### **2.3.3. Internal quality assurance systems (SIGQ)**

As has often been emphasised in its operational plans, the Agency upholds the principle that the ultimate responsibility for the quality of teaching lies, above all, with the institutions themselves, who should therefore create suitable internal structures and procedures to promote and assure quality. It is the responsibility of the Agency to carry out audits with a view to certification of the institutions' internal quality assurance procedures.

Following widespread public discussion, the Agency adopted a set of reference points for internal quality assurance systems, formulated as non-prescriptive proposals, which describe the main characteristics of a properly developed and consolidated system of quality assurance. These reference points essentially aim to provide guidelines to aid institutions in the design and development of the internal quality assurance systems, preferably based on the structures and procedures they already have at their disposal and according to the profile and requirements of each institution.

Based on this, the structure of a model of audits for internal quality assurance systems was developed with a view to their certification.

In 2012 the Agency carried out an experimental exercise using the audit model with the voluntary participation of five higher education institutions. This experimental exercise was completed in January 2013, and the audit process was then made available to all institutions that, in November of each year, express their interest, thus allowing for the organisation of audits in the upcoming year.

#### **2.3.4. Institutional assessment**

In compliance with the provisions of the framework law for quality assurance (Law 38/2007), A3ES launched in 2017 the process of institutional assessment and accreditation, including the state of development of internal quality assurance systems. This process works as a round-up exercise of the just-accomplished process of assessment/accreditation of all study programmes in operation, covering the whole higher education system simultaneously. A total of 113 institutions are involved in the process.

The institutional assessment, which distinguishes between the missions of university and polytechnic institutions, allows, in particular, to verify whether institutions comply with the operating conditions defined in the framework law for higher education institutions (Law 62/2007), and if the assumptions for the recognition of public interest (following the study promoted by the DGES) are maintained.

#### **2.3.5. Student participation in the external assessment of study programmes**

In 2010, the Agency promoted discussion of the Report *Participation of Students in the Assessment of Portuguese Institutions of Higher Education: a contribution for its definition*, which was also analysed by the Advisory Council. As a result of this discussion, in 2010 the Agency decided to experiment including students in the External Assessment Team based on the voluntary participation of institutions. In 2011 the Agency launched a call for recruitment of students for the external assessment teams. From among the candidates, students were chosen who had training in the area of the study programmes being assessed/accredited in 2012 and 2013. These students, after attending a training session, became part of the external assessment teams that began their work in May 2012.

The results of this experimental exercise were assessed through a survey addressed to the leadership of the higher education institutions, EAT coordinators, Project Coordinators and students involved in the exercise. The conclusions of the report on this assessment validate the process, revealing approval from the various groups taking part, and in particular from

the institutions. It was therefore decided that the process of integrating students in the EAT should not only continue but should be progressively broadened to a larger number of assessment visits.

New calls for recruitment of students were opened every year with a view to renewing the group of students and taking into account the new areas to be accredited in the coming years.

## **2.4. Regulations of the Agency and relevant legislation**

The action of the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education is delimited by a set of legal diplomas, including:

- a) Law 38/2007, 16<sup>th</sup> August, which defines the general principles to be adopted in the procedures of quality assurance of higher education.
- b) Decree-Law 369/2007, 5<sup>th</sup> November, which created the A3ES and approved its statutes.
- c) Decree-Law 74/2006, 24<sup>th</sup> March, amended by Decree-Law 63/2016, 13<sup>th</sup> September, which establishes the conditions for accreditation of study programmes.
- d) Law 62/2007, 10<sup>th</sup> September, which establishes the new legal regime of institutions of higher education and contains norms relating to its teaching staff.
- e) Decree-Law 206/2009, 31<sup>st</sup> August, which establishes the conditions for awarding the title of specialist in polytechnic institutions.
- f) Decree-Law 205/2009, 31<sup>st</sup> August, which alters the Statutes governing the Teaching Career in University Higher Education.
- g) Decree-Law 2007/2009, 31<sup>st</sup> August, which alters the Statutes governing the Teaching Career in Polytechnic Higher Education.
- h) Decree-Law 43/2007, 22<sup>nd</sup> February and Decree-Law 220/2009, 8<sup>th</sup> September, which establishes the legal regime for professional qualifications for teaching in non-higher education.

The following regulations and decisions of the Agency's Management Board are also of relevance:

- a) *Regulation no. 392/2013*, which approves the Regime for Assessment and Accreditation Procedures for Higher Education Institutions and their Study Programmes.
- b) *Regulation no. 869/2010*, which approves the regime governing the organisation and functioning of the Appeals Council, and also the regime governing procedures for reviewing decisions relating to assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programmes.
- c) *Resolution no. 53/2012*, which defines the consequences of the non-accreditation of study programmes in operation.



## **2.5. Norms and guidelines for assessment**

All procedures for the assessment/accreditation processes, both of new study programmes and of study programmes which are already in operation, as well as of the process of institutional assessment and of certification of internal quality assurance systems, are run on the Agency's electronic platform. The guidelines for self-assessment and external assessment of study programmes, as well as all pertinent regulations, are available on the Agency's site.

## **3. ASSESSMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES IN OPERATION**

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the procedures for the assessment/accreditation of study programmes in operation, which include a visit by the External Assessment Team. With the appropriate modifications, these procedures are adaptable to prior accreditation of proposed new study programmes, in which the main difference is the absence of this visit, as well as to institutional assessment. Finally, the certification procedures for internal quality assurance systems are described in a separate manual.

### **3.2. INTERNAL ASSESSMENT**

#### **3.2.1. Preparation of the institution for internal assessment**

The internal assessment focuses on the processes deemed critical to ensure both the quality of teaching and methodologies to control/improve it, based on the assumption that institutions assess the quality of their teaching and research. One of the main purposes of the assessment process is to verify the effectiveness of assessment procedures in place in institutions.

The following results should be expected from an internal assessment process:

- They should help to establish and improve quality assurance systems.
- They should place processes for the improvement of teaching/learning on the institutional agenda.
- At an individual and Faculty/School /Department level, they should help to clarify responsibilities for the enhancement of teaching/learning.
- They should support those responsible in their efforts to develop a culture of quality within the institution.
- They should facilitate discussion and cooperation within the academic community in order to find ways to enhance performance.
- They should disseminate transversally information both on best practices and on common problematic areas.
- They should provide objective evidence (visible to the outside world) that attention is being paid to quality assurance.

### 3.2.2. Drafting of self-assessment report

It is recommended that the self-assessment process should:

- Create the opportunity to internally promote deep and fruitful reflection and debate.
- Create a stimulus for the review of processes and mechanisms which ensure and enhance quality.
- Identify areas for improvement.

In order to carry out the self-assessment processes, a Self-Assessment Committee should be appointed, responsible for:

a) Carrying out a SWOT analysis of the study programme, namely:

- Review/reflect on the mission and strategic goals of the institution;
- Analyse its strengths and weaknesses (factors intrinsic to the institution which enable or hinder the achievement of strategic goals);
- Identify opportunities and threats (external factors which can positively or negatively affect main goals).

b) Specify an improvement plan for the study programme which answers the following questions:

- How does the institution react to opportunities and threats?
- What changes are planned in order to achieve the main objectives?
- Do the improvement proposals address the weaknesses?
- Are such proposals supported by the strengths?

c) Draft the self-assessment report, which should include the information specified in the Guidelines for Self-assessment.

### 3.2.3. Participation of students in internal assessment processes

Student participation in the assessment process is relatively well defined in most assessment systems of various European countries, and it takes various forms, both at implementing internal assessment (institutional level) and external assessment (national system level).

The report *Participation of Students in the Assessment of Portuguese Institutions of Higher Education: a contribution for its definition*, already referred to, contains detailed information on this matter, namely in relation to the perspectives on their participation and the participation modes in internal as well as external assessment processes.

Given their autonomy, HEIs must decide on ways to promote student participation in the development of self-assessment and in meetings with the external assessment teams. However, based on experience acquired and taking into account experiences in other countries, A3ES suggests that HEIs take into consideration the recommendations presented in the next two sections.

### **3.2.3.1. Participation in self-assessment processes**

Students should be formally and actively implicated in the internal quality assurance structures and mechanisms, including their effective participation in the pedagogic bodies and in bodies or commissions having responsibility for the strategic coordination of internal quality assurance mechanisms.

In what concerns the process for preparation of the self-assessment report of a study programme it is recommended:

- a) Students of pedagogic councils and student associations:
  - ✓ Must be included in institutional groups responsible for the development of self-assessment, following criteria defined by the HEI;
  - ✓ Should collaborate in drafting the self-assessment report (with a more 'consultative' or 'effective' participation);
  - ✓ Should participate in the discussion and adoption of the self-assessment report at the level of the pedagogic council or the programme committee.
- b) When responding to pedagogical surveys, it is recommended they include:
  - ✓ Definition of institutional strategies to minimize the negative effects of often low response rate from students;
  - ✓ Definition of alternative ways of collecting information: consultation of study programme committees (or similar bodies) by self-assessment groups; joint discussion of the self-assessment report; inclusion of specific topics in the self-assessment guidelines;
  - ✓ Initiatives aimed at discussing, informing and creating awareness among students concerning self-assessment.
- c) To promote student participation the institution should develop:
  - ✓ Institutional strategies for creating awareness of the importance of the assessment;
  - ✓ Eventual symbolic mechanisms of recognition and reward such as a certificate of presence that can be integrated in the diploma supplement;
  - ✓ Initiatives aiming at discussing, informing and sensitising students about the self-assessment.

### **3.2.3.2. Student participation in meetings with the EATs:**

As will be seen further on, the visit of the EAT has the mandatory inclusion of two types of meetings with students, normally after meeting with other institutional bodies, which will allow to compare information:

- a) Meetings with students with no specific function in the institution/study programme management bodies should be prepared to answer questions on the following topics:
  - ✓ Integration in the study programme /higher education institution;
  - ✓ The process of teaching and learning;

- ✓ The functioning of the study programme;
  - ✓ Involvement in pedagogical structures;
  - ✓ Assessment goals and self-assessment report;
  - ✓ More specific questions such as motivation for choosing the study programme, student social support, expectations about future insertion in the labour market.
- b) Students with functions in the management bodies or in students' unions may also comment on:
- ✓ The institution's teaching strategy.
  - ✓ Aspirations, with regard to the purpose of the study programme /HEI assessment;
  - ✓ Policy issues related to the role of assessment and the participation of students in defining strategies for institutional enhancement and quality assurance of the study programmes.

Student selection and their training to meetings with EATs should take into account:

- ✓ Student selection is the sole responsibility of the HEI, which, before the visit, must present the list of people belonging to each of the institutional groups who will be attending each meeting;
- ✓ The number of students tends to vary between a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 12, although sometimes in the case of students with participation in governing bodies, the minimum number is not respected;
- ✓ The criteria regarding representation of students is not always observed in terms of age, gender, academic years attended, present situation in terms of study programme attendance ('regular', working student) or in terms of presence on institutional bodies and in student associations.
- ✓ The students selected should be given an advance warning of at least two weeks prior to their participation in the meeting with the EAT and they should have access to the self-assessment report in order to prepare their participation.

### **3.2.4. Participation of students in external assessment processes**

Following the experimental exercise of student participation in the External Evaluation Panels, organised in 2011/12, the Agency put in place an annual recruitment procedure. After the selection of the applications in the training areas to be evaluated in the respective year, students are invited to take part in a one-day training session and present a paper of about ten pages on one of the topics discussed in the session. The evolution of the number of submitted applications, accepted applications, participation in the sessions, presentation of the paper and acceptance for inclusion in the student-evaluators' pool is presented in Table 1.

In September 2016, no recruitment process was organised for the selection of students to join the EEP in the following year, since, in the year 2016/17, there were no self-evaluation reports of study programmes in operation. A new recruitment competition was undertaken

in 2017/18 to ensure that a student is present at all assessment visits to start in 2018 and onwards.

**Table 1 – Students who participate in accreditation**

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2017/18	Total*
<b>Valid candidates</b>	58	148	409	292	350	163	1 257
<b>Presence in training sessions</b>	39	93	212	162	187	56	693
<b>Essays submitted</b>	25	60	200	127	127	42	539
<b>Accepted into the pool</b>	18	48	174	113	112	43	465
<b>% of visits with a student</b>	8%	12%	67%	67%	65%	100%**	-

\* The ACEF process was not open in 2016/17, so there was no call for students.

\*\* From 2017/18 onwards, all visits include a student.

The Audit Panels for auditing internal quality assurance systems have always integrated a student.

### **3.3. EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT**

#### **3.3.1. Introduction**

Using as reference the legal framework for the assessment and accreditation of higher education, the focus of **quality assessment and accreditation of Higher Education** is the performance of higher education institutions, measuring the degree of fulfilment of their mission through performance indicators related to their respective operations and consequent results.

Therefore, the main goals of quality assessment are:

- ✓ To enhance the quality of higher education institutions.
- ✓ To provide society with well documented information regarding the performance of higher education institutions.
- ✓ To develop an institutional culture of quality assurance.
- ✓ To ensure the compliance with the requirements for official recognition of higher education institutions and their study programmes.

The pursuit of the main goals of quality assessment and accreditation can be obtained through different and complementary processes – internal quality assurance, self-assessment, external assessment, accreditation, institutional audit – which are characterised in the Assessment Handbook. In order to clarify the context of the External Assessment, this simplified version of the Handbook seeks to achieve the following purposes:

- ✓ Support and facilitate the work of the External Assessment Teams.
- ✓ Provide guidelines for the External Assessment Team, clarifying how these must be prepared and what should be their behaviour during the external assessment visits.

- ✓ Contribute to the homogeneity of the assessment process, in order to build and enhance criteria and parameters of a global or specific nature, inherent to various fields of scientific knowledge.

### **3.3.2. The External Assessment Team**

The External Assessment Team (EAT) is composed of a set of experts selected by the Agency based on experience and expertise held in the area of the external assessment. Each team will evaluate a study programme or a set of study programmes, in the same field of knowledge, and is supported by an employee of the Agency, who acts as Project Coordinator.

#### **3.3.2.1. Composition of Team**

Members of the EAT are selected and appointed by the Agency. This is a fully transparent and objective procedure, based on the relevance of the curriculum and suitability of the profile of those appointed to perform the functions required. The independence of the selected experts in relation to the study programmes assessed should be ensured.

The External Assessment Team consists of three to five members, one of whom must be appointed President, with at least a student and one of members recruited internationally from among recognised experts in the relevant academic/scientific/professional field.

#### **3.3.2.2. Code of Ethics**

In performing their functions and activities, members of the EATs must respect a set of rules relating to conflicts of interest, confidentiality and personal conduct. The standards of conduct for employees of the Agency constitute the Code of Ethics, included in the Quality Manual, as well as the Norms for the Appointment and Conduct of EATs, presented as Appendix 1.

#### **3.3.2.3. Functions of the External Assessment Team**

The following functions are common to all members of the EAT:

- ✓ Read and analyse the rules contained in this Assessment Handbook, the Guidelines for Assessment /Accreditation of Study Programmes in Operation, and the self-assessment reports produced by the HEI.
- ✓ Discuss the dates for the visit to the HEI/study programmes and participate in the drafting of its planning, if a visit is foreseen.
- ✓ Conduct the assessment of the study programmes, following the Guidelines for Assessment/Accreditation of Study Programmes in Operation and other relevant norms.
- ✓ In accordance with guidance from the President, conduct meetings with academic authorities, the self-assessment committee, and institutional and extra-institutional members.
- ✓ Provide a general view of the study programmes being assessed, from an academic, scientific and professional point of view.

- ✓ Carry out assessments of all areas related to the study programmes assessed, which are part of the Guidelines for Assessment/ Accreditation of Study Programmes in Operation.
- ✓ Discuss the results of the external assessment, making recommendations and suggestions for improvements to be incorporated in the drafting of the Final External Assessment Report.
- ✓ Assist in the preparation and approval of the External Assessment Reports, both the oral and written versions, both preliminary and final versions.

Specific tasks of the President of the External Assessment Team include:

- ✓ Representing and leading the External Assessment Team, coordinating its activities and taking responsibility for external assessment.
- ✓ Defining the EAT's plan of activities and distributing tasks among its members.
- ✓ Defining dates and agenda of the visit with the HEI responsible for the study programmes with the help of the Project Coordinator.
- ✓ Conducting meetings with academic authorities, institutional actors (teachers, students, non-teaching staff) and extra-institutional partners (graduates of study programmes evaluated, employers, community representatives, etc.).
- ✓ Conducting internal discussions and debates of the External Assessment Team, in particular on the results of the assessment.
- ✓ Coordinating the final meeting with academic authorities and orally presenting to them the interim external assessment reports.
- ✓ Coordinating the revision of the draft version of External Assessment Reports, as well as drafting their final versions.
- ✓ Validating (Final) External Assessment Reports with the responsibility of it being sent to the Agency.

All visits by the External Assessment Teams are accompanied by an Agency official who works as a Project Coordinator. This Coordinator is a highly trained professional in the assessment methodologies and full member of the EAT whose specific responsibilities are:

- ✓ To assist the President in coordinating activities of the External Assessment Team.
- ✓ To define, under the guidance of the President, dates and agenda of the visit with the HEI responsible for the study programme.
- ✓ To provide logistical, methodological, technical and advisory support to members of the External Assessment Team.
- ✓ To report to the Agency any incidents or unforeseen events occurring during the external assessment processes as well as drafting critical reports, with a view to future improvement.

#### ***3.3.2.4. Preparation of the Team and stages of their activity***

Once selected, members of the EAT attend a training programme specifically designed and developed by the Agency. Besides attending this training programme, members of the External Assessment Team must individually prepare for the performance of their functions by analysing and studying documents such as this Assessment Handbook, as well as the

Guidelines for Assessment/Accreditation of Study Programmes in Operation and in particular the Self-Assessment Reports relevant to the study programme being assessed.

**Table 2 – Work Organization for the External Assessment Team**

Adapted from ANECA, 2007.

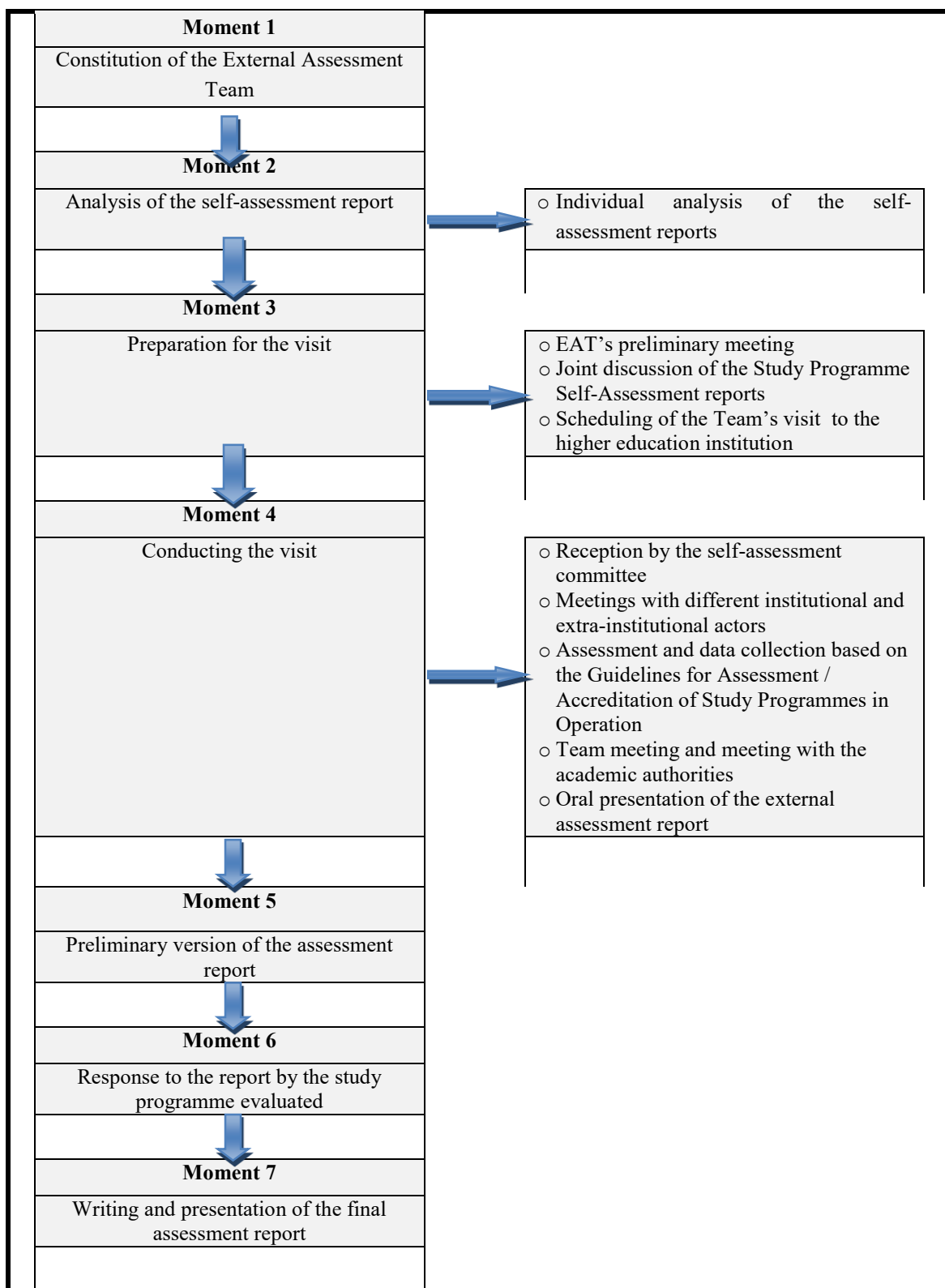




Table 2 shows the various stages of the activity of an External Assessment Team, from its set up until the final act of delivery of the final report to the Management Board of the Agency. In cases where a visit to the HEI is not necessary, moment 3 consists of a joint discussion of the self-assessment reports.

### **3.3.3. Criteria and guidelines for accreditation**

In the case of study programmes in operation, the attitude of the CAEs should be more flexible, due to the fact that there are generally students attending these study programmes: in those cases, where the legal criteria are not completely fulfilled, the CAE is asked to determine whether the study programme cannot be recovered and should be closed, or whether it may be salvaged providing a set of recommendations are implemented within a fixed period of time.

To ensure consistency regarding recommendations, the Agency has systematically awarded conditional accreditation for one year whenever recommendations include correcting the composition of teaching staff, and for three years when the measures refer to improvement of scientific research. However, the level of exigency should rise from 1<sup>st</sup> cycle to Doctoral degrees. For example, if there is no proof of high quality scientific research duly confirmed with publications, there is no justification for accrediting a doctoral programme, even if it is already in operation.

The criteria for accreditation are defined in the relevant legislation, which can be found throughout a number of legal decrees (see § 2.4) and they are also indicated in the assessment guidelines. In particular, it is imperative to characterise the teaching staff of the institutions and their research practice. With regard to this, the Agency has drawn up a detailed document – *Qualification criteria for teaching staff* (see Appendix 2 for a summary).

### **3.3.4. The visit**

#### **3.3.4.1. Preparation for Visit**

After the constitution of the External Assessment Team, the Agency must notify the HEI of its composition. Through its academic leadership the HEI may comment on the composition of the EAT prior to the visit and eventually oppose the inclusion of some of its members, based on the existence of any incompatibility. In the latter case, the Agency must examine the reasons underlying this opposition and, if warranted, should replace the member(s) of the Team who have been justifiably opposed.

Once the composition of the Team is definitive, the Agency will inform its members and the Team will start its activity, with the Self-Assessment Reports being sent to each of its members. They will proceed, individually, to read and analyse the reports, as well as to the overall assessment of the self-assessment procedure. From this analysis, in accordance with the Guidelines for Assessment/Accreditation of Study Programmes in Operation, each of the Team's members must decide on:

- ✓ The sufficiency of the information contained in the self-assessment reports.
- ✓ The need to clarify some aspects of self-assessment reports.

- ✓ The need to obtain additional information during the visit.
- ✓ The main guidelines of the meetings with different actors (institutional and extra-institutional) to take place during the visit.

Each of the members of the Team should send to the President, at least one week before the visit, his main impressions and conclusions derived from the individual analysis of the Self-Assessment Report in order to allow the President to make a synthesis and to start organising the activity plan for the visit.

Immediately prior to the visit, a preparatory meeting of the Team will be held, in order to discuss the main impressions and conclusions drawn from the individual analysis of the Self-Assessment Reports. Specific goals of this meeting are also:

- ✓ To identify if further information is needed to clarify, support or supplement the evidence present in the self-assessment reports.
- ✓ To identify, albeit preliminarily, the main strengths and weaknesses of the study programme being assessed.
- ✓ To make an overall appreciation of the work of the self-assessment committee.
- ✓ To define the major activities to be undertaken during the visit, organise them (see proposed schedule below) and assign them to different members of the Team, namely based on the nature of their duties and responsibilities.

#### **3.3.4.2. Organisation of the visit**

The visit to the institution is organised as exemplified in the Table 3 in next page. Beyond the meetings suggested in the Table, the EAT should visit the facilities and other operational structures of the study programme (buildings, laboratories and libraries, class rooms, etc.) and enquire if they match the location legally authorised for its operation.

#### **3.3.4.3. Meeting of External Assessment Team**

Before the end of the visit, the Team meets to discuss their conclusions regarding the results of assessment and to organise items for inclusion in the external assessment report to be presented orally. During this meeting, the Team should come to an agreement regarding the main conclusions, based on their assessment, to be included in the external assessment report to be presented orally.

All conclusions and activities of the Team must obligatorily be based on the following:

- ✓ **On analysis of information and available data.** Findings by the Team must be based on information made available regarding study programmes undergoing assessment (i.e. Self-Assessment reports), or which they collected through meetings with different groups of interlocutors.
- ✓ **On personal observation.** This is one of the main duties of the Team and should be based on the Guidelines for Assessment/Accreditation of Study Programmes and aims to gather additional information, which would otherwise be inaccessible.
- ✓ **On additional document analysis** (whenever necessary), the aim of which is to obtain supplementary data in order to facilitate the forming of opinions on the

various aspects of the assessment. The Team should obtain this additional documentation whenever this is deemed necessary, with a view to complementing the existing information.

<b>Table 3 – Meetings with different interlocutors</b>	
<b>Interlocutors at the meeting</b>	<b>Contents of the meeting</b>
Top leader of institution or designated representative	Presentation. Discussion of self-assessment process and the institution's strategy.
Team responsible for self-assessment	Discussion of self-assessment process and results thereof.
Team responsible for the management of the study programmes being assessed and of the relevant department.	Views on strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, identified in self-assessment report. Analysis and discussion of proposals for improvement.
Teachers	Analysis of study programmes, aims and objectives of the study programmes, student evaluation methods, of pedagogical work of teachers and research projects with relevance to teaching.
Students	Discussion of students' views on their integration in study programmes/IES (1st year), the teaching/learning process, the functioning of study programmes and their involvement in the pedagogical organs; discussion of the aims of evaluation and collection of their opinions of self-assessment reports.
Non-teaching staff	Discussion on their contribution to the functioning of study programmes; co-ordination with teaching activities; the existing and necessary resources for smooth running of teaching activities.
Graduates	Discussion of views of graduates on their entry into the labour market; the match between competences acquired during the study programme and the demands of the market; the requirements of the labour market in the scientific area of their study programmes.
Employers, representatives of the local community, partners, etc.	Discussion of views on match between competences of graduates and the requirements of the labour market; the contribution of the study programme to the development of the local area/community and solution to its problems; articulation between study programme and potential employers.

Adapted from ANECA, 2007; CNAVES, 2000; EUA, 2008.

#### **3.3.4.4. Final Meeting with the academic authority**

This meeting should be held with the Academic Leader and, in the case of private institutions, with the presence of the administrative body of the Founding Entity.

In this meeting there should be discussion with the leaders of the institution of the main conclusions of assessment and the main items that make up the external assessment report to be presented orally. The aim of this meeting is to eliminate potential misunderstandings.

#### **3.3.4.5. Presentation of Oral Report**

After this final meeting the oral presentation of the report should be made to the academic authorities and persons invited by them to be present. The responsibility for this presentation lies with the President of the EAT. As the final decision on accreditation lies with the Management Board of the Agency, the EAT should not reveal the nature of its recommendation to the Board, and should only discuss the results of its analysis in terms of shortcomings, positive aspects, proposals for improvement, etc.

#### **3.3.4.6. Norms for the visit and decision on assessment**

During the visit the EAT members must always bear in mind that they are dealing with colleagues and for this reason ***should never cite the example of their own institution***; they should avoid inappropriate behaviour including commiseration or authoritarianism; they should avoid both excessive familiarity and imparting the idea that they are in a superior position. The assessors are at the meetings rather to listen and ask questions than to talk. They should avoid lecturing on the way in which they see the study programme or how it should be taught, but they should attempt to verify and complete the information in the self-assessment report through appropriate questions. Meetings with students must not be used to test their knowledge. If the Team wishes to assess the level of the study programme, they may ask students about reading lists used or ask for samples of tests and Masters or Doctoral theses.

The Team must carefully follow the guidelines and respect the visit plan, being careful to separate isolated criticisms coming from members of the institutions assessed from problems of a more general nature – separating the wheat from the chaff is fundamental; it is normal in many institutions for someone to appear with a personal problem (promotion, timetable, etc.) as though it were a general problem of the institution. It is advisable to ask the same set of questions to people at different levels of the institution, drawing conclusions from the consistency of the replies. For example, asking the Director, teachers, and the students whether the students' opinions were heard in the definition of ECTS. Or questions concerning the criteria for selection and promotion of teachers. Or the selection criteria for new students. Or how student progress is monitored. How (or whether) the level of knowledge of the students is assessed on entrance to the institution and whether this implies compensatory measures. How they are sure that the classification level is suitable. How high student failure and drop-out rates can be explained. How is analysed the employability of the graduates from the study programme.

The Team should analyse the appropriateness of the definition of the mission of the institution, assess external and internal limitations and confirm the SWOT analysis. Other questions have to do with the existence, or not, of a strategic plan and the way it was produced (with or without the participation of students, teachers and other staff).

The Team must verify if an internal quality assurance system exists, its characteristics, and the level of efficiency of this system. They must confirm whether there is a member of staff in the institution responsible for quality. They must determine the nature of the attitude (participative or not) of the students, teachers and other members of staff. They must find out how study plans are periodically renewed and brought up to date. They must determine how the proposal for creation of new study programmes is processed.

#### **3.3.4.7. Support provided by the Agency during the visit**

The visit will be organised by the Agency, namely by the Project Coordinator under the guidance of the President of the External Assessment Team. The expenses incurred by the members of the Team, including any expense incurred for travelling, food and accommodation are naturally the responsibility of the Agency.

**Emergency Situations.** It is to the responsibility of the Project Coordinator, under the guidance of the President of the External Assessment Team, to resolve any unforeseen or urgent situations. For this purpose, the Agency's services can be contacted.

**Agency website:** publications and other useful resources for the External Assessment Team and the HEI are available on the Agency's website: [www.a3es.pt](http://www.a3es.pt)

### **3.3.5. The external assessment reports**

#### **3.3.5.1. Preliminary external assessment report**

Using the notes taken at the meeting of the EAT, and also the relevant electronic form (Guidelines for External Assessment/Accreditation of Study Programmes), the Team prepares the preliminary version of the Reports online. These reports should be formally approved by all the members of the Team and subsequently sent to the Agency by the President of the EAT.

The aim of the assessment in progress should be borne in mind during the different phases of the drafting of the External Assessment Reports: accreditation, according to the law, of the study programmes being assessed and consequent enhancement of the conditions of its functioning and its quality. The writing of the Reports should respect the following rules:

- ✓ Accordance with the version presented orally to those responsible for the HEI.
- ✓ Confidentiality must be respected:
  - there should be no reference to people, institutions and/or study programmes except those being directly assessed;
  - legal requirements regarding protection of personal data must be respected, and anonymity of those taking part in the assessment process must be assured.
- ✓ A clear unequivocal evidence-based conclusion must be presented on the quality of the study programme.
- ✓ Final recommendations should:
  - be based on, and in accordance with, the data and evidence collected during the process and should refer clearly and objectively to those aspects assessed;

- avoid any comparison with any other study programmes/HEI;
  - be clear and coherent.
- ✓ The reports should include a comment on the proposals for improvement formulated by the HEI responsible for the study programme, offering alternative or complementary proposals when such is possible and justifiable. Alternative proposals should:
- be based on clear and objective data and, where possible, indicate ways of overcoming the problems detected, making it possible for measures for improvement to be implemented;
  - be in accordance with the parameters of assessment;
  - be oriented towards the overcoming of shortcomings and the reinforcement of positive aspects identified;
  - take into consideration the specific context of the HEI/study programmes being assessed.

#### ***3.3.5.2. Final external assessment report***

Each preliminary report is then sent to the HE Institution for their appreciation and possible statement/pronouncement within the established deadline. In view of the statement made by the institution, the Team may review each of the preliminary reports, if it so determines, and it is then their responsibility to approve the final version and send its submission in the Agency's electronic platform.

#### ***3.3.5.3. Need for attention to detail and consistency***

The reports must be drafted with great care. Throughout the text the rules of cordiality among colleague must be observed and an aggressive tone must be avoided. The language of the reports must be clear and precise, and it must not be forgotten that it is a dialogue between colleagues and thus an authoritarian tone or one of commiseration should be avoided. Conclusions should be presented in a serene, objective, but strong manner with sufficient clarity to help the institutions assessed to change and improve.

In the writing of the reports it is necessary to ensure their consistency and internal coherence and to justify statements made, particularly those that are negative. For example, praise should not initially be poured on to the study programme, only to propose non-accreditation at the end of the report. Or, for example, at the beginning of the report it should not be said that the teaching staff fulfil or partially fulfil legal requirements, only to say in the conclusions that they do not do so. Or when scientific research is considered insufficient this should be justified by the amount of scientific output indicated in the CV of the teaching staff, etc., etc.

In the last section of the report a general appraisal of the study programme is required, synthesising the assessments made throughout the report, summarising the strengths and weaknesses of the study programme, and the main recommendations made. This synthesis, in addition to supporting the decision on the accreditation proposed to the Management Board, targets in particular the external stakeholders (potential applicants, families,

employers, society in general), so an easily understandable language must be used in its drafting, thus avoiding an excessively technical language.

Finally, the teams should always be sufficiently, (but not over-) demanding and ensure the equity of their decisions when assessing study programmes from various institutions.

#### ***3.3.5.4. Cessation of responsibility of External Assessment Team and appraisal of the assessment work***

The intervention and responsibility of the EAT terminates both in relation to the Higher Education Institution/study programmes assessed and with relation to the Agency, with the presentation to the Agency of the Final External Assessment Report. It is the responsibility of the Management Board of the Agency to proffer the final decision on accreditation of the HEI/study programmes in question, and in accordance with the law, this decision may, or may not, follow the recommendations in the report.

At a later date, each member of the Team is informed about the conclusion of the process and about any actions undertaken by the Agency regarding the results of assessment/accreditation. Any questions or doubts, which may appear in this context, as well as any requests from the media, should be referred to the Agency.

After cessation of responsibility, the members of the External Assessment Team are requested to make a critical appreciation of the work undertaken, through a questionnaire, which they will receive from the Agency.

### **3.4. ACCREDITATION**

#### **3.4.1. Decision of the Management Board**

The final decision on accreditation is the responsibility of the Management Board. In reaching this decision, the Management Board will take into account the final report of the EAT, and if there are relevant professional Orders/Associations, their opinion will be considered.

The Management Board may, however, reach decisions not in accordance with those of the EAT. It is the responsibility of the Management Board to ensure the equity and balance of final decisions, and their divergence of opinion may be favourable for the institution (they may be less demanding than the Team) or unfavourable for the institution (they may be more demanding than the Team) with regard to the recommendation of the EAT.

#### **3.4.2. The Appeals Council**

The Appeals Council is a body through which appeals may be lodged against the decisions of the Management Board. Interested parties have the right to a review of the decisions of the Management Board regarding assessment and accreditation of HE institutions and their study programmes and also of the omission of the due decisions relevant to the same subject, through an appeal made to the Appeals Council, as follows.

Appeals against the final decision of the Management Board, or omissions by them, may be lodged on the subject of processes relating to assessment and accreditation of Higher

Education Institutions and their study programmes. No appeal will be heard against any other act or omission than those mentioned above, namely preparatory, interlocutory or executive acts performed by the Management Board or by any other body or agent of the Higher Education Assessment and Accreditation Agency, nor against omissions of acts by them. Appeals may be based on the illegal or unacceptable nature of the Board's decision or on the illegality of its omission.

Only the HE institution which applied for the assessment procedure resulting in the contested decision or omission, and which considers itself penalised, may lodge an appeal. Any HE institution which has either explicitly or tacitly unreservedly accepted the decision of the Board can no longer legally appeal.

The lodging of the appeal does not result in suspension of the contested decision, nor does it, even provisionally, rectify the omission of a due decision, and while the appeal is pending, except in cases of evident, substantiated urgency, no acts may be performed which are likely to conflict with the decision which may be proffered in the appeal or affect its validity.

In the appeal decision, the Appeals Council may confirm or revoke, partially or completely, the decision of the Management Board. When it considers that during the assessment or accreditation procedure in which the contested decision or omission took place undue acts or formalities occurred, or when there was omission of due acts or formalities, the Appeals Council may, totally or partially, annul the procedure and establish that it must be repeated or that complementary measures must be taken, as legally foreseen in the regime governing the process of assessment and accreditation of HE institutions and their study programmes. In this case new preliminary and final reports are written.

### **3.4.3. Publication of the results**

In accordance with article 16 of Law 38/2007, 16<sup>th</sup> August, results of assessment are public. Thus, when the external assessment reports are written, it should be borne in mind that these results must be widely published, namely on the Agency's website and on those of the HEI/study programmes assessed. Any contestation (statement) from the Institution concerning the reports on external assessment must also be made public, together with the final version of the reports.

Apart from this, the pertinent legislation (n. 2 of article no. 16, Law 38/2007, 16<sup>th</sup> August) determines that HE institutions must make self-assessment reports and external assessment reports public.



#### **4.1. Appendix 1 – Norms for the appointment and conduct of the External Assessment Teams**

##### **4.1.1. Selection and appointment of Teams**

The assessment is performed by an External Assessment Team (EAT) composed of independent experts.

As a rule, the EAT is composed of three to five members, depending on the complexity of the assessment tasks involved, and includes the obligatory participation of at least one expert recruited internationally from among recognized experts in the relevant academic/scientific/ professional area. The EAT also includes a student.

The President and other members of the EAT are selected and appointed by the Management Board of the Agency for a period of one year. The selection is made based on the following requirements:

- Appropriateness of the nominees' curriculum vitae and profile to the functions to be performed;
- Independence of the evaluators in relation to the institution or study programme being assessed;
- Gender balance and balance in the geographical origin of the nominees taking into consideration the national higher education network, without prejudice of the other listed requirements.

The appointment of EAT members for a particular training area is done as follows:

- The Management Board appoints the Chairperson of the EAT.
- Upon consultation with the EAT President, the Management Board appoints the remaining members of the EAT, in a sufficient number to ensure the assessment of all study programmes or institutions involved, as well as possible specificities of study programmes of an interdisciplinary nature.
- The appointment of the EAT responsible for each assessment procedure is made through an individual or general decision of the Management Board.

##### **4.1.2. No-conflict-of-interests and norms of conduct**

The appointment and operation of the External Team must comply with the following principles of non-conflict-of-interest, fairness, impartiality, confidentiality and personal conduct:

- To integrate an EAT, the evaluator must not have had any paid or contractual relationship with the institution of higher education in the two years prior to its assessment.
- The EAT members should keep adequate detachment towards the higher education institution, in order to safeguard the independence, neutrality and impartiality of the participation of students in external teams in cases where institutions accept this participation. The results of the exercise have validated the experience, allowing for a more generalised future participation of students.
- In conducting an assessment process, evaluators must treat the higher education institution and its collaborators as responsible partners, thus promoting their openness and commitment, without looking to impose models of other programmes/institutions, which may undermine the diversity of improvement actions adopted by institutions.

- In particular, it is strictly forbidden for evaluators to use examples from their own programme or institution as a model to be followed by the assessed entities.
- Any higher education institution being assessed may raise an incident of non-fulfilment of incompatibilities and obligations listed in the preceding paragraphs.
- EAT members should always seek the Agency's advice on any particular situation that may constitute a conflict of interest.
- EAT members must safeguard the confidentiality of information relating to the assessment process, including the non-public documents.

In pursuit of their activity, the conduct of the members of the External Assessment Team should comply with the following principles:

- Accuracy, efficiency and effectiveness, using the most appropriate and adjusted procedures to the processes of decision making;
- Independence, impartiality, fairness, integrity and objectivity;
- Follow the rules of good faith, considering the fundamental values of fairness in light of the situations under consideration;
- Clarity of purpose and action and an attitude of openness and transparency;
- Concern with ensuring and improving the quality of higher education and safeguarding public interest.

#### **4.1.3. Preparation of the External Assessment Teams**

Once selected, EAT members attend a training program specifically designed and promoted by the Agency. In addition to attending the training programme, EAT members should prepare individually for the performance of their duties, through the previous analysis and study of documents, including the legal standards for assessment/accreditation, the Assessment Handbook and the adequate Assessment/Accreditation Guidelines, and especially the self-assessment reports submitted by the institution of higher education.

#### **4.1.4. Consultation of the higher education institution on the composition of the External Assessment Team**

After appointing the EAT, the Agency shall inform the institution of higher education of its composition.

The academic leadership of the institution may decide to question the composition of the EAT prior to the visit and declare its opposition to the inclusion of any of its members, in case of demonstrable conflict of interest. In the latter case, the Agency will examine the reasons that support the claim and, if substantiated, will replace the member or members of the EAT on whom a grounded conflict of interest incident had been raised.

## **4.2. Appendix 2 – Synthesis of reference criteria on the qualification of the teaching staff for the accreditation of study programmes**

### **4.2.1. Minimum reference criteria on the qualification of the teaching staff for the accreditation of study programmes**

The document *Qualification Criteria for Teaching Staff* for the accreditation of study programmes, available in the website of the Agency, presents a systematisation of the minimum criteria for the qualification of the teaching staff that must be fulfilled for the accreditation of study programmes. These criteria, which are dispersed through several legal documents, deal in detail with both the criteria for the composition of the teaching staff and those relative to research requirements.

This Appendix presents a synthesis of those criteria allowing for easier information.

#### **4.2.1.1 University education**

For the purposes of accreditation of study programmes, the teaching staff of a university education institution must meet the following minimum requirements:

- ✓ Have a total teaching staff to ensure the teaching of the study programme who is “próprio” (own), academically qualified and specialised in the fundamental education and training area or areas of the study programme<sup>1</sup>.
- ✓ Have the human and material resources indispensable for guaranteeing the level and quality of the acquired training.
- ✓ A full-time coordinator of the study programme holding a PhD in the fundamental area of the study programme.

For the accreditation of a first cycle (*licenciatura*) it is considered that the teaching staff is:

- ✓ “Own” teaching staff, when the total FTE teaching staff is composed by a minimum of 60% of full-time staff.
- ✓ Academically qualified, when the total teaching staff is composed by at least 50% of FTE teachers holding a PhD.
- ✓ Specialised, when:
  - At least 50% of the total teaching staff is composed of FTE specialists of recognised experience and professional competence in the fundamental training area(s) of the study programme or of staff holding a PhD specialised in those area(s).
  - At least 20% of the total teaching staff is composed of FTE staff holding a PhD specialised in those area(s).

For the accreditation of a second cycle (*master*) it is considered that the teaching staff is:

- “Own” teaching staff<sup>2</sup>, when the total FTE teaching staff is composed by a minimum of 75% of full-time staff<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The fundamental education and training areas of the study programme are those that under the classification of the education and training areas (Ordinance no. 256/2005 of 16th March) represent at least 25% of all credits (article no. 3, item h of Decree-Law no. 74/2006 as altered by Decree-Law no. 63/2016 of 13th September).

- *Academically qualified*, when the total FTE teaching staff is composed by at least 60% of FTE teachers holding a PhD.
- *Specialised*, when:
  - At least 50% of the total FTE teaching staff is composed of specialists of recognised experience and professional competence in the fundamental training area(s) of the study programme or of staff holding a PhD specialised in those area(s).
  - At least 40% of the total FTE teaching staff is composed of staff holding a PhD specialised in those area(s).

For the accreditation of a third cycle (*PhD*) it is considered that the teaching staff is:

- *“Own” teaching staff*, when the total teaching staff is composed by a minimum of 75% of full-time staff.
- *Academically qualified*, when the total teaching staff is composed only of teachers holding a PhD. However, in special circumstances the staff may integrate teachers not holding a PhD but having an academic, scientific or professional curriculum recognised in the accreditation process as having the capacity to lecture in the study programme.
- *Specialised*, when at least 75% of the total teaching staff is composed of FTE teachers holding a PhD in the relevant specialised area.

Those criteria are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4 – Minimum percentages (composition) for the teaching staff (university education)**

Teaching staff	1st cycle	2nd cycle/ Integrated Masters	3rd Cycle
Full-time staff – “own teaching staff”	60%	75%	75%
Full-time PhDs	50%	60%	100%
PhDs/Specialists in the fundamental areas of the study programme	50%	50%	-
PhDs specialised in the fundamental areas of the study programme	30%	40%	75%

Note: All percentages calculated relative to the total number of teachers and all values in FTE

<sup>2</sup> Own teaching staff is composed of those academics, who independently from the nature of their contracts are teaching in full-time in the study programme under consideration (article no. 3, item k, Decree-Law no. 74/2006 as altered by Decree-Law no. 63/2016 of 13th September).

<sup>3</sup> Full-time regime is the working regime of those academics who make of their teaching and research activities an exclusive or predominant activity and who cannot be considered as such in more than one higher education institution (article no. 3 of Decree-Law no. 74/2006 as altered by Decree-Law no. 63/2016 of 13th September).

#### **4.2.1.2. Polytechnic Education**

For the purposes of accreditation of study programmes, the teaching staff of a polytechnic institution must meet the following minimum requirements:

- ✓ Have a total teaching staff to ensure the teaching of the study programme who is “próprio” (own), academically qualified and specialised in the fundamental training area or areas of the study programme.
- ✓ Have the human and material resources indispensable for guaranteeing the level and quality of the acquired training.
- ✓ A full-time coordinator of the study programme holding a PhD or being a specialist of recognised experience and professional competence in the fundamental area of the study programme.

For the accreditation of a first cycle (*licenciatura*) it is considered that the teaching staff is:

- “Own” teaching staff, when the total FTE teaching staff is composed by a minimum of 60% of full-time staff.
- *Academically qualified*, when the total FTE teaching staff is composed by at least 15% of FTE teachers holding a PhD.
- *Specialised*, when at least 50% of the total FTE teaching staff is composed of specialists of recognised experience and professional competence in the fundamental training area(s) of the study programme or of staff holding a PhD specialised in those area(s).

For the accreditation of a second cycle (*master*) it is considered that the teaching staff is:

- “Own” teaching staff, when the total FTE teaching staff is composed by a minimum of 75% of full-time staff.
- *Academically qualified*, when the total FTE teaching staff is composed by at least 40% of FTE teachers holding a PhD.
- *Specialised*, when:
  - At least 50% of the total FTE teaching staff is composed of specialists of recognised experience and professional competence in the fundamental training area(s) of the study programme or of staff holding a PhD specialised in those area(s).
  - At least 20% of the total FTE teaching staff is composed of FTE staff holding a PhD specialised in that area(s).

Those criteria are summarised in Table 5 in the next page.

#### **4.2.1.3 Area of specialisation and adequacy in number**

The minimum limits of PhD holders or specialists referred to in the aforementioned criteria should be met by teaching staff specialised in the several scientific areas that integrate the curriculum of the study programme, in a reasonable proportion to their relative weight expressed in number of credit units. In case there is more than one fundamental area in a *licenciatura* or master programme, the teaching staff should have an allocation adequate to the relative weights of those areas.

**Table 5 – Minimum percentages (composition) for the teaching staff (polytechnic education)**

Teaching staff	1st Cycle	2nd Cycle
Full-time staff – “own teaching staff”	60%	75%
Full-time PhD	15%	40%
PhDs/Specialists in the fundamental areas of the study programme	50%	50%
PhDs specialised in the fundamental areas of the study programme	-	20%

Note: All percentages calculated relative to the total number of teachers and all values in FTE

Most importantly, for purposes of verifying that the teaching staff is adequate to “ensure the level and quality of teaching”, as specified in the law, all the programme’s course units should be taught by teachers suitably qualified in the respective area of knowledge and their teaching loads should be acceptable.

#### **4.2.2. Criteria related to the practice of research**

From the legal framework requirements related to research the following criteria may be derived:

- For the accreditation of a 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle (PhD) it is necessary to demonstrate that the institution’s teaching staff plays an active, relevant and internationally recognised role in the research developed in the scientific area of the study programme. Indeed only in such case it will be possible to ensure that those awarded the degree will demonstrate “capacity to conceive, project, adapt and perform significant research respecting the demands imposed by patterns of academic quality and integrity” as well as “having carried out a significant body of research which has contributed to challenging the boundaries of knowledge, part of which merited national or international dissemination in peer reviewed publications” (article 28, Decree-Law 74/2006).
- For the accreditation of a university 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle (master) it is necessary that the teaching staff develops recognised research activities in the scientific areas integrating the programme. Indeed, without supervisors with solid research experience it is not possible to create the necessary conditions for adequately supervising masters’ thesis. A high scientific level is necessary for a master degree, as it is essentially this characteristic that distinguishes a master from a post-graduation programme.
- For the accreditation of a polytechnic 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle (master) it is necessary that the teaching staff develops targeted research activities or high level professional development activities in the scientific areas integrating the programme. Indeed, only under those conditions it will be possible to ensure that students have the knowledge and the understanding capacity at a level such that allows them to “manage to develop and apply that knowledge to original situations often in a context of research”.

- At the level of a 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, there are no specific requirements associated to research and/or experimental development. Under these circumstances, are valid the general principles associated to the nature of higher education as defined in the Juridical Regime of Higher Education Institutions. These principles are namely the articulation between education and training with research (or oriented research) and experimental development, which cannot be separated from the integration of a significant part of the teaching staff in research, oriented research or experimental development activities.

For the acknowledgement of research activities duly recognised in the education and training areas, those activities may be developed in the institution itself or through its participation or collaboration, or of its teaching staff, in recognised research institutions.