REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN PORTUGUESE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

(Adapted to the ESG 2015)

The reference points presented below, which are formulated in terms of statements which characterise a sound and well developed internal quality assurance system, consonant with the European Standards and Guidelines (2015) and the applicable legal requirements, are intended to provide a set of general guidelines that can support the higher education institutions in designing and implementing their quality systems and also to be used as a reference basis for applying the criteria for their certification.

The definition of the reference points is systematized around the following vectors:

- Policy for quality assurance;
- Nuclear processes of the institutional mission – teaching and learning, research and development (university education) or targeted research and high level professional development (polytechnic education), and inter-institutional and community collaboration – including internationalization;
- Management of human resources and of material resources and support services;
- Management and publication of information;
- Periodic external review.

In accordance with the ESG 2015, in this document the term "study programme" refers to a higher education programme in a broad sense, regardless of whether it awards an academic degree or not. Likewise, the quality assurance policy should take into account the institution's core activities that are subcontracted or developed by third parties.

1. Policy for quality assurance

Reference 1 – *Policy for quality assurance and pursuit of quality objectives:* *The institution has consolidated a quality culture supported by a quality policy and by quality objectives, which are formally defined and publically available.*

For this purpose, the institution prepared, formally approved and made public documentation that expresses the institutional policy and objectives for quality, including, namely:

- The institutional strategy for quality enhancement, translated into the pursuit of certain quality objectives, as an integral part of the overall strategic management of the institution and a contribution to accountability;
- The organization of the quality assurance system, pointing out the responsibilities of the different bodies and services in this field;
- The forms of involvement and responsibilities of students and other (internal and external) stakeholders in quality assurance processes;
- Ways of ensuring academic integrity and surveillance against academic fraud and against all forms of intolerance or discrimination against students or teaching and non-teaching staff;
- The way of implementing, monitoring and reviewing the quality policy and its translation into an effective internal quality assurance system.

2. Quality assurance in the nuclear processes of the institutional mission

Reference 2 –*Design and approval of programmes*: *The institution has processes for the design and approval of its educational offer, ensuring that study programmes are designed and structured so that they can achieve the objectives set for them, namely the intended learning outcomes. The qualification achieved in each programme, as well as the corresponding level in the national and European higher education qualifications frameworks, are clearly specified and publicised.*

With this objective, the institution promoted the definition of procedures to ensure that its study programmes:

- Are designed on the basis of overall objectives aligned with the institutional strategy for its educational provision and explicitly define the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) to be achieved;
- Involve students and other stakeholders in their design;
- Benefit from external expertise and references;
- Are designed to allow a normal student progression;
- Define the expected workload of the students, in ECTS;
- Include well-structured opportunities for professional experience in the corresponding education and training area, where appropriate;
- Are subject to a formal institutional process of final approval.

In designing its courses, the institution also takes into account the purposes of higher education defined by the Council of Europe in Recommendation *Rec (2007)6* on public accountability in higher education and research, in particular:

- Contribution to employability;
- Preparation for active citizenship;
- Support for students' personal development;
- The creation of a comprehensive and advanced knowledge base to stimulate research and innovation

Reference 3 – Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment*: The institution adopts appropriate procedures to ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that favours an active role of the student in creating the learning process, as well as student assessment processes that are consonant with this approach.*

For the achievement of this objective, the institution promotes learning environments able to:

- Respect and attend to the diversity of students and their needs, allowing flexible learning paths;
- Consider and use different teaching and learning methods, in accordance with students' needs and the learning objectives;
- Evaluate and adjust teaching and learning methods regularly;
- Encourages a sense of autonomy in the student, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;
- Promote mutual respect in the student-teacher relationship;
- Provide mechanisms for dealing with students' complaints.

Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, the institution has mechanisms to ensure that student assessment is carried out in accordance with previously defined and publicised criteria, standards and procedures, which are applied in a fair and consistent way, ensuring, in particular, that:

- Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and processes and are supported in developing their own skills in this field;
- The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved and students receive feedback on their performance, associated, where appropriate, with advice on the learning process;
- Whenever possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;
- Assessment regulations take into account mitigating circumstances;
- A formal procedure for students' appeals is in place.

Reference 4 – *Student admission, progression, recognition and certification:* *The institution consistently applies pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "cycle life" (e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification).*

In the scope of this standard, the institution takes into account, in particular, the following elements:

- Access policies and admission procedures and criteria which are implemented in a consistent and transparent manner, including the provision of induction processes to the institution and to the study programme;
- The conditions and support for students to progress normally in their academic careers;
- The establishment of processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression;
- The adoption of fair procedures for the recognition of qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including informal and non-formal learning, in line with the principles of the 1997 Lisbon Convention on Equivalence of Periods of Higher Education Studies;
- The adoption of sufficiently clear certification procedures regarding the learning outcomes achieved and the context, level, contents and status of completed studies, in particular by issuing the Diploma Supplement.

Reference 5 – *On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes:* *The institution monitors and periodically reviews its programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result are communicated to all those concerned.*

The procedures to monitor, assess and review the study programmes include the evaluation of:

- The content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;
- The changing needs of society;
- The students' workload, progression and completion;
- The effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students;
- The student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;
- The learning environment and support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme.

Reference 6 – *Research and development / targeted research and high level professional development*: *The institution adopts mechanisms to promote, assess and enhance the scientific, technological, artistic and high level professional development activity appropriate to its institutional mission.*

The research and development policies of the institution include, namely:

- Mechanisms for institutionalisation and management of research (Procedures and criteria for the creation, extinction and management of research units and interface units, generation of funding, incentives to scientific production, ...);
- Mechanisms for articulation between teaching and research, namely on student contact with research and innovation activities from the first years;
- Mechanisms for economic valorisation of knowledge;
- Procedures for the monitoring, assessment and enhancement of human and material resources allocated to research and development, of scientific, technological and artistic production, of the results of the valorisation of knowledge and of the results of articulation between teaching and research.

Reference 7 – *External relations*: *The institution adopts mechanisms to promote, assess and enhance collaboration with other institutions and with the community, namely regarding its contribution to regional and national development.*

In the ambit of its external relations policy, the institution has in place procedures to promote, monitor, assess and enhance interface and external action activities, namely with regard to:

- Inter-institutional collaboration;
- Services to the community;
- Cultural, sporting and artistic external action;
- Integration in national projects and partnerships;
- Contribution to regional and national development, in accordance with its institutional mission;
- Collection of own income, through the activities undertaken.

Reference 8 – *Internationalisation:* *The institution adopted mechanisms which allow it to promote, assess and improve its international cooperation activities.*

In the ambit of its internationalisation policies, the institution defined procedures to promote, monitor, assess and improve international activities, namely those in relation to:

- Participation/coordination of international education and training activities;
- Participation/coordination of international research projects;
- The mobility of students, teaching and non-teaching staff.

3. Quality assurance in the management of resources and support services

Reference 9 – *Human resources*: *The institution adopted fair and transparent mechanisms to ensure that the recruitment, management and training of its teaching and support staff is undertaken with the guarantee of the necessary qualifications and competence, in order that they may properly perform their functions.*

The role of teachers is essential for quality education that enables the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences. The role of non-teaching staff is equally crucial in student-support

services. Considering that the diversification of student bodies, together with a greater focus on learning outcomes, require a more student-centred learning and teaching approach, which also has repercussions on changes in the role of teachers, the institution provides its teachers with an environment conducive to effective performance in these new contexts, in particular as regards the following aspects:

- Adoption and implementation of clear, transparent and fair recruitment procedures and employment conditions that recognize the importance of teaching;
- Promotion and offer of professional development opportunities;
- Encourage scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research;
- Encouraging innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.

The institution is primarily responsible for the quality of the performance of its staff. In this sense, the institution:

- Adopted norms and procedures for collection and analysis of information relating to competences and results of the performance of the teaching and non-teaching staff, with a view to performance assessment, staff development and promotion and recognition of merit;
- Adopted procedures to regulate and guarantee the corresponding decision-making, implementation and follow-up processes.

Reference 10 – *Material resources and services*: *The institution adopts mechanisms which enable it to plan, manage and enhance services and material resources with a view to appropriate development of student learning and other scientific and pedagogic activities.*

For this purpose, the institution:

- Provides a variety of resources to support learning, from physical resources (facilities, libraries, ICT resources, pedagogical and scientific equipment, ... including safety and environmental aspects, as well as the specific needs of students with disabilities) to mentoring, supervision and counselling support, promoting their publicity to students;
- Takes into account the needs of specific groups, such as part-time or employed students, international students and students with disabilities;
- Has in place mechanisms for collection and analysis of information on maintenance, management and suitability of material resources and services, including students support services;
- Adopted procedures to regulate and guarantee the corresponding decision-making, implementation and follow-up procedures.

4. Management and publication of information

Reference 11 – *Information management*: *The institution adopted mechanisms which allow it to guarantee the collection, analysis and use of the results and of other relevant information for the effective management of the study programmes and other activities.*

For the purpose, the institution:

- Adopted mechanisms to gather information on the needs and expectations of different stakeholders, in relation to the quality of the educational offer and the services rendered;
- Developed data collection systems on results and other relevant data and indicators, which cover, *inter alias* (*cf.* guidelines of standard 1.7 of the ESG):
  - key performance indicators;

- profile of the student population;
- student progression, success and drop-out rates;
- students' satisfaction with their programmes;
- learning resources available and their costs;
- employability and professional paths of graduates;

- Defined procedures to regulate and ensure the processes of decision-making related to the utilisation of results, as well as action strategies for improvement of processes and results;
- Identified ways to involve stakeholders in the appreciation, analysis and improvement of results.

Reference 12 – *Public Information**: The institution adopted mechanisms which permit the publication of clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date, impartial and readily accessible information about the activities undertaken*.

For this purpose, the institution defined procedures for regular provision of public information on a pre-defined set of data and results. In accordance with the legal requirements established in article 162, 2, of the RJIES, in article 18, e), ii) of Law 38/2007 and in the guidelines of standard 1.8 of the ESG, specify aspects in relation to which the institution should make available precise and sufficient information include:

- The mission and objectives of the institution, and its statutes, regulations and basic units;
- Its educational offer;
- The intended learning outcomes, qualifications awarded and employment perspectives, in relation to each study programme;
- Qualifications of teaching staff and their type of contract;
- Policies for admission and for student guidance;
- Planning of study programmes;
- Teaching and learning methodologies and student assessment methods;
- Opportunities for mobility;
- Students' rights and duties;
- Student social support services;
- Mechanisms to deal with complaints and suggestions;
- Access to material resources and teaching support;
- Teaching outcomes, expressed in the academic results, integration in the labour market and level of satisfaction of stakeholders;
- Internal quality assurance policies, accreditation certificates and results of evaluation of the institution and of its study programmes.

5. Periodical external assessment

**Reference 13 – *Cyclical external quality assurance:* *The institution undergoes external quality assurance on a cyclical basis, in line with the ESG.*

External quality assurance, besides offering validated information that assures the institution and the public in general of the quality of its activities, verifies the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system, acts as a catalyst for improvement and can offer new perspectives to the institution. It should:

- Take account of the requirements of the national legislative framework applicable to higher education and its evaluation;
- Demonstrate and take into account the progress made since the previous external assessment.