

PORTUGAL

NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS (AUGUST 2003)

Adoption of a system of comparable degrees, with two main cycles

The current Portuguese system of degrees has a short first degree for the Polytechnical sector (*Bacharelato*, 3 years), and a longer first degree for the Universities (*Licenciatura*, 4 to 5 years - Medicine 6 years). This is now changing, with a common first degree. To this end, a new law is currently under discussion in Parliament and should be adopted soon. The reference length for the first degree is 4 years, and conditions for the adoption of shorter (3 years or 3 ½ years) or longer durations for the first degree have not been fixed and adopted by Parliament yet.

The existing Master (two years, with thesis) and Doctorate degrees will be maintained, although some flexibility may be adopted for the Master degree, in view of its professional relevance in certain areas.

The offer of **courses** of doctorate studies has been in existence in certain restricted cases for a number of years (20 years in one case) but this practice is now expanding rapidly in the University sector. The traditional PhD in Portugal was via thesis, only.

The offer of doctorate studies and doctorate degrees must be restricted to institutions with well established research centers and research activity, subject to the existing national research evaluation scheme, largely internationally participated, operated by FCT, a Foundation controlled by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

In what concerns recognition, Portugal is applying the Lisbon Convention, fostering the speeding up of the legal procedures and reducing the time to handle every individual application. This is largely the responsibility of the Public Universities. The procedures for the evaluation of PhD recognition requests have been particularly improved following a law of 1997. In this case, recognition usually takes not more than a couple of weeks.

In brief, the more complex problem when implementing a system of comparable degrees in Portugal, has been the transition from a binary higher education system **with legally different first degrees** to a still diverse (binary) higher education system with a **common degree system**, compatible with the Bologna process, easily readable and comparable at European level.

Common guidelines for the diploma supplement are under discussion, but some universities are already offering this document with the diplomas.

Establishment of a system of credits

A system of credits has been in existence in Portugal for more than 20 years and adopted by the large majority of institutions and courses.

A transition is under way from the traditional Portuguese credit system to the European credit system (ECTS), which follows the following lines:

- a) Adoption by many institutions of a transition period during which the two credit “currencies” are listed in all documents, regulations and information data;
- b) Discussion and implementation at Departmental level, within the institutions, of the change of philosophy from a previous credit system that was strictly based on contact hours (lectures + laboratory work) to a new system based on the average time taken by the student to follow the course (1 credit = 25 hours);
- c) Fast progress is being made by the institutions in the use of ECTS to facilitate the mobility of students.

Care is being taken to ensure that the environment of the home and the visiting institutions must be of comparable nature, or that adequate measures have been taken through **institutional** agreements to meet the needs of the students in adapting to the new environment.

Promotion of mobility, European dimension, and attractiveness of the EHEA

Portugal has been an active participant of the Erasmus-Socrates and Tempus programs. Despite the travelling distances and the gap in the cost of living, the families support the cost required, either when an Erasmus grant is or is not available, since the grant covers a minor part of the expenses. On the other hand, entering higher education at the age of 18 in other European countries is now common for students from families with higher incomes – this seems to occur mainly to Spain, France and the UK.

The large expansion of an immigrant population from East European countries (in excess of 100,000, mostly from Ukraine and Romania) now opens the way to an increase in the exchange with the countries concerned, usually based on family ties.

Outside Europe, the countries with larger participation in cooperation programs in higher education are the so called PALOP (5 Portuguese speaking African countries), Timor and Brazil (frequently involving post-graduate studies in this case). Also, provision is made, by law, facilitating the admission of foreign students of Portuguese origin. The immigrant Portuguese communities in the USA, Canada, Venezuela and South Africa are the main beneficiaries of this law.

In recent years, following a provision made possible by law, there is a trend to accept students from international schools, based in Portugal or not, through the national contest for places in the public higher education system.

The increase of the attractiveness of Portugal for international students will probably follow the existing trends, although the potential of several countries in Asia (India, Japan, Sri Lanka, China) and Latin America (outside Brazil) is promising. There has been a conspicuous increase in the attraction of students from those areas in the last ten years, usually at post-graduate or even post-doctoral level. The cultural environment and the historic ties of Portugal with those countries seems to facilitate the attraction.

Quality Assurance

The current system of evaluation of the higher education courses was set-up 10 years ago, and the choice of the model adopted was mostly based on the Dutch system, after a period of scrutiny of various alternatives. Evaluation is compulsory and the system is now well established and has been extended in recent years to the polytechnical and private sub-sectors of higher education. The national agency (CNAVES) is affiliated to ENQA and is fully prepared to cooperate internationally.

Apart from this mostly pedagogic evaluation, many Portuguese universities have been evaluated institutionally by the EUA. Also, the engineering courses can go through an accreditation procedure to speed up entrance of the graduates to the profession. Similar accreditation procedures have been set up by the professional associations of architects and of pharmacists. Other professional associations have other less formal ways of cooperating with the higher education institutions.

Lifelong learning (LLL)

Portugal has dramatically expanded the level of participation in higher education (18-22 age bracket) from 5%, 40 years ago, to 40% nowadays. As a consequence, the percentage of the active population with a higher education degree in the age range 25-34 years (23%) is twice the percentage in the age range 45-65 years (13%), and the percentage with minimum qualifications is 18% and 62%, for the two age ranges mentioned.

This situation calls for long-life learning programs, not only to take account of the need to retrain, up-date and expand the knowledge of those with a proper initial education, but also as a second chance for the many who didn't have a proper education at the proper age.

The activities and programs to cover all the lifelong learning needs are expanding fast and the private sector is playing a relevant part in that expansion. Further regulation of formal and non-formal post-graduate studies will be required. Although most LLL courses are self-supporting financially, further financial or fiscal incentives may be required in certain cases.

Role of the students and alumni

The role of the students in higher education institutions has been revised by a law of 1988, and may change further in line with the increased flexibility to be introduced in the governance of the institutions. Still, the tradition of significant participation of students in the Senates and of parity of teaching staff and student members in the pedagogical councils will be continued. Also, participation of alumni in advisory councils is being encouraged.

August, 2003