

REVIEW OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION  
POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN THE PORTUGUESE HIGHER EDUCATION

# **SELF-EVALUATION REPORT**

April 2006

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ACQUIN</b>	Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungs-Institut.
<b>ADISPOR</b>	Association of the Portuguese Public Polytechnics ( <i>Associação dos Institutos Superiores Politécnicos Públicos</i> ).
<b>APESP</b>	Portuguese Association of Private Higher Education ( <i>Associação Portuguesa do Ensino Superior Privado</i> ).
<b>CCISP</b>	Coordinating Council of the Public Polytechnics ( <i>Conselho Coordenador dos Institutos Superiores Politécnicos Públicos</i> ).
<b>CIPEs</b>	Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education ( <i>Centro de Investigação de Políticas do Ensino Superior</i> ).
<b>CNAVES</b>	National Council for the Evaluation of Higher Education ( <i>Conselho Nacional de Avaliação do Ensino Superior</i> ).
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe.
<b>CRP</b>	Constitution of the Portuguese Republic ( <i>Constituição da República Portuguesa</i> ).
<b>CRUP</b>	Portuguese University Rectors' Conference ( <i>Conselho de Reitores das Universidades Portuguesas</i> ).
<b>ENQA</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
<b>EU</b>	European Union.
<b>EUA</b>	European University Association.
<b>FUP</b>	Foundation of the Portuguese Universities ( <i>Fundação das Universidades Portuguesas</i> ).
<b>HRK</b>	German Rectors' Conference ( <i>Hochschulrektorenkonferenz</i> ).
<b>MCIES</b>	Ministry for Science, Innovation and Higher Education (former MCTES).
<b>MCTES</b>	Ministry for Science, Technology and Higher Education ( <i>Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior</i> ).
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.
<b>OCES</b>	Observatory on Science and Higher Education ( <i>Observatório da Ciência e do Ensino Superior</i> ).

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** The present review of the quality assurance and accreditation policies and practices in the Portuguese higher education was determined by a Ministerial decision of 21 November 2005 in the scope of a comprehensive international evaluation of the national higher education system. In this sense, the review does not fit strictly into the cyclical external reviews of ENQA's member agencies foreseen in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted at the Ministerial Summit in Bergen, since it was not an initiative from the higher education evaluation councils or from CNAVES, which are in a process of adaptation to the European standards and at the proper time could decide on the best way to be revised, under the general principles for the cyclical reviews proposed in the European Guidelines, namely in what concerns the subsidiarity principle. Also, in the present circumstances the review must go quite beyond an exercise of conformity with more or less routine procedures.

Indeed, the Portuguese quality assurance system was developed under special circumstances, in a contractual way in which the initiative was mainly on the side of the higher education institutions. The evaluation process was first launched as a pilot-project of the Portuguese University Rectors' Conference (CRUP), based on sound underlying principles with the core objective of contributing to the embedding of a quality culture inside the higher education institutions and, for this effect, to involve them strongly in a shared construction and development of the evaluation model. This philosophy was later adopted by a law approved by Parliament, which allowed for the institutions in each higher education sector to organise themselves to coordinate the internal evaluation process and to develop the external evaluation process under specified general requisites.

In face of this innovative approach, quite unique in the Portuguese public administration, the most important exercise to carry out at the end of the just finished evaluation round is to analyse its impact on the higher education system, particularly within the institutions, to learn from the successes and from the difficulties in its implementation and to clarify the contractual model, defining more clearly the responsibilities of the political and academic powers. The leitmotif for the structural changes to be introduced in the evaluation system is not the conformity to the European standards, although of course they are important and must be met, but the improvement of the contractual model, keeping its basic principles while addressing its weaknesses, such as the need for clearer results, more tangible consequences and better information to the society.

**1.2** The fact that the review by ENQA is somewhat untimely does not mean that CNAVES and the evaluation councils will not try to make the best of it and learn from the reflections to be made and from the experience and recommendations from the review panel.

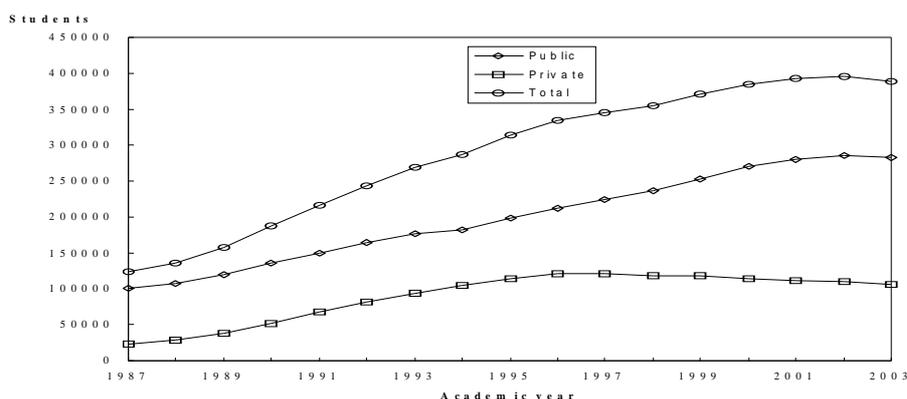
There was, therefore, a good mobilisation of the main actors which proved to be a great help in the preparation of this self-evaluation report. A Self-Evaluation Group was set up, including two elements from CNAVES (the coordinator of the Group, with the responsibility to draft the report and to act as liaison person with the review panel, and one student) and one element (and a substitute) from each of the four evaluation councils. However, all the executive bodies and secretariats have participated in the work and the report was thoroughly discussed in the evaluation councils and in CNAVES, where very valuable inputs were taken in.

The composition of the Self-Evaluation Group with a brief biography of its members is indicated in Appendix 12.1.

## 2. NATIONAL CONTEXT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

### 2.1 The Expansion of Higher Education

The Portuguese higher education system has expanded very rapidly over the last decades, as indicated by the enrolments shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 – Evolution in the number of enrolments** (source: OCES 2005).

In the late sixties only four universities were operating in Portugal, but a major Reform launched by Minister Veiga Simão in 1970 was responsible for the creation of new higher education institutions outside the traditional university centres, contributing to the decentralisation of higher education as well as to the economic and social development of the host regions. This started a considerable growth that was intensified by the rapid development of the public polytechnic and private institutions in the eighties.

A summary description of the rationale and dynamics of expansion can be found in a booklet <sup>1</sup> prepared by the Directorate-General of Higher Education for the Portuguese EU Presidency in 2000 (included as Appendix 12.3 to this report). The system developed in an under-regulated and unequal way, responding to the high pressure of demand in the eighties as a result of the increasing number of pupils who were completing secondary education and of the difficult situation in the labour market, which encouraged students to continue their studies. The political decision taken in 1989 to abolish the eliminatory character of the admission exams, clearly thought as a mechanism to support the growth of private higher education, artificially increased the pressure for demand – an increase of 40% in the number of applicants in a single year – leading to the mushrooming of private higher education institutions. To give an idea of this effect, it can be mentioned that between 1987 and 1992 the

<sup>1</sup> *Higher Education in Portugal*, Directorate-General for Higher Education, Ministry of Education, December 1999.

number of vacancies for new students in the public sector increased about 40%, whereas the number of places in the private sector increased by 250%.

The introduction of compulsory exams in 1995 to complete secondary education, combined with the effect of decreasing birth rates and the implementation of more demanding entrance standards, resulted in a reduction of the number of applicants, and since then the demand for higher education has been lower than the offer from the public and private sectors together. Another turning point was reached in 2001, when for the first time the number of vacancies offered by the public institutions was larger than the total number of applicants, in a situation of oversupply that is getting more evident each year and results in a loss of weight for the private sector. The data on enrolments in 2003/04 shows, for a total of around 389 000 students enrolled, a distribution of 43.9% in public universities, 28.7% in public polytechnics and 27.4 in private institutions (after a peak share value of 37% in 1995/96<sup>2</sup>). Still more significant of the recent trends are the data on new enrolments: for the current academic year, the public universities filled only 89% of the supplied vacancies, and the public polytechnics 73%, whereas the private universities filled 37% of their vacancies and the private polytechnics 56%.

A recent report from an international committee appointed by the former Cabinet, published under the auspices of the former Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education<sup>3</sup>, presents an analytical view of the present situation in higher education, pointing out a number of weaknesses and consequent problems, viz (the data refers to 2004):

- A disproportionate number of higher education institutions spread all over the country, although with a high concentration in the coastal zone, in a total of 162 establishments<sup>4</sup>, of which 44 are public, one is the catholic university and 117 are private, many of them being teaching-only institutions with a very local clientele;
- An excessive number of undergraduate courses<sup>5</sup> (*bacharelato* and *licenciatura*), in a total of 1 763, with very imaginative denominations (647

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2 Source: OCES, 2005.

3 Veiga Simão, J. *et al.* (2005) *Strategic Orientations for the Reorganisation of the Portuguese Network of Higher Education Institutions*, MCIES, Lisbon, January 2005.

4 Detailing the typology of the establishments, the report identifies: (a) in the public sector - 14 universities, 1 university institute, 15 polytechnic institutes, 4 military university schools, 5 military polytechnic schools, 3 health polytechnic schools and 2 non-integrated polytechnic schools; (b) in the private sector - 14 universities, 2 polytechnic institutes, 1 health polytechnic institute, 27 establishments for university education and 4 establishments for university and polytechnic education, denominated *higher institute* or *higher school*, 67 establishments mostly for polytechnic education, denominated *higher school*, *higher institute*, *academy* or *conservatory*, and 2 units for university education in an early stage of installation.

5 Many of these study programmes are attracting a low number of students: 842 courses enrol a total of less than 100 students each; 502 of these have less than 50 students and 212 have less than 20 students each (source: OCES, 2005).

in public universities, 58 in the catholic university, 299 in private universities, 532 in public polytechnics and 227 in private polytechnics);

- An imbalance of supply not only in geographical terms, but mainly in regard to areas of knowledge, with a predominance of non-experimental or non-technological courses, especially in the private sector;
- The still too traditional organisation of teaching, in terms of a curricular emphasis on cognitive contents and magisterial teaching methodologies, lacking the flexibility and the students' centred learning methodologies adequate to the acquisition of transversal graduate competences and skills which are vital for the changing labour market;
- The low weight of research in many institutions, particularly in the polytechnic and the private sectors;
- A somewhat uncaring attitude in regard to regulation criteria, on the part of both the political and the academic powers;
- The still erratic relationship of many institutions with the economic, social and cultural environment, which is mainly based on individual initiatives rather than on explicit institutional policies;
- The relatively low level of internationalisation, especially with the USA and Asia.

The same report also indicates “the multiple positive aspects of the evolution of higher education in Portugal” and signals “the existence of organic units and courses of excellence by any international standards”, referring specifically:

- The good performance of many research units within the universities, confirmed by international review panels, as well as successful cases of contractual co-operation with national and multinational corporations, as well as with European universities;
- The growing number of doctoral degrees awarded by Portuguese universities;
- Emergent cases of good practices in the organisation of teaching and learning;
- The existence of courses, e.g. of professional bachelor degrees in the polytechnics, with a high level of employability;
- The recent positive impulses on the implementation of the Bologna process, after the initial delays, concerning a deep analysis of the reforms to be undertaken within the institutions, for example in regard to the correct introduction of the ECTS credit system;
- A growing awareness of the role of innovation as a strategic goal.

A last point in this brief analytical presentation of the national higher education system refers to its image. For a long time, Portuguese higher education had a very positive image in public opinion, but the situation has been changing since the massive increase in access in the late eighties: the huge and rapid expansion has unbalanced the binomial quantity-quality, with a worrying negative effect on public opinion. This fact puts an extra pressure on the quality assurance system to act with

reinforced credibility and a wider visibility of its results and consequences, in order to help restoring the public image of higher education.

## **2.2 The Organisation of Higher Education <sup>6</sup>**

### Education system

The Comprehensive Law on the Education System (Law 46/86, of 14 October, subsequently amended by Law 115/97, of 19 September, and by Law 49/2005, of 30 August) establishes the framework for the education system.

School education encompasses the following stages of teaching: basic, secondary and higher education. Pre-school education is optional and intended for children from the age of three to the age for admission into the first cycle of basic education. Pre-school education is run free in nursery classes of the public sector supported by the Ministry of Education (with the collaboration of regional or local authorities) and by other public or private organisations.

Basic education is universal, compulsory and free, and consists of three consecutive cycles. The first cycle lasts 4 years, the second 2 and the third 3 years.

Secondary education is not compulsory and comprises a 3-years cycle (10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> years of schooling). Permeability is guaranteed between courses mainly geared to working life (technological courses) and courses oriented to continued studies (general courses).

### Admission into higher education

The legal regime for the access to higher education interprets the constitutional principles of “equality of opportunities” and “democratisation of the educational system”, aiming at the “elevation of the educational, cultural and scientific level of the Country” (CRP, article 76.2).

Access to higher education is subject to a *numerus clausus*. In order to qualify for admission to higher education through the national competition, students are required to:

- have successfully completed the 12<sup>th</sup> year of schooling or equivalent;

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<sup>6</sup> This section follows closely the text prepared by the Ministry to be included in the item *Information on the National Higher Education System* of the Diploma Supplement issued by all the Portuguese universities and polytechnics since the current year.

- have completed the national specific examinations for the study programme the student wishes to attend;
- have obtained the minimum marks required by the higher education institution;
- have fulfilled special vocational, functional or physical prerequisites for the higher education study programme the student wishes to attend, if required.

Until now, persons aged over 25 without formal qualifications at high school level could apply to be submitted to special national examinations (*exames ad-hoc*) to demonstrate their capacity to attend higher education. However, very few were successful in the examinations. For example, in 2003<sup>7</sup>, from a total of 3 794 candidates, 2 287 failed the compulsory Portuguese Language exam and only 732 were admitted. In order to open higher education wider to the new publics, Law 49/2005 introduced a greater flexibility by opening the access to candidates over 23 years old who demonstrate the necessary capacity through special examinations run by the higher education institutions themselves and also to holders of an appropriate post-secondary education diploma. A new decree-law to regulate these mechanisms was very recently approved (Decree-Law 64/2006, of 21 March).

### Structure of higher education

Higher education in Portugal is organised as a binary system, comprising university education and polytechnic education, provided respectively by university and polytechnic institutions, which can be public or private.

The university and the polytechnic subsystems are differentiated by their conceptual and formative matrixes, although the definition of the borderlines has always been a controversial matter. In simple words, one can say that the polytechnic institutions are more oriented towards professional training, providing a scientific and technical education more focused on the transfer of existing knowledge to meet today's needs, rather than on the advancements of knowledge to meet the future needs of society and industry.

Regarding the degree structure still in place, both universities and polytechnics can award the degrees of *bacharel* and *licenciado*, whereas the postgraduate degrees of *mestre* and *doutor* can only be awarded by universities.

The study programmes leading to the degree of *bacharel* (*bacharelatos*) have a normal duration of three years. The study programmes leading to the degree of

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<sup>7</sup> Veiga Simão, J., Machado dos Santos, S. & Almeida Costa A. (2005) *Ambição para a Excelência – A Oportunidade de Bolonha*. Gradiva, Lisboa. pp 147-9.

*licenciado (licenciaturas)* usually take four years, but may last for five or six years, depending on the field of study. Most of the *licenciaturas* awarded by polytechnics are two-tier degrees, the first tier corresponding to a *bacharelato* and the second tier awarding the degree of *licenciado (licenciatura)* after a total period of four to five years of studies.

The study programmes conducing to the degree of *mestre (mestrados)* have a duration of four semesters and include a curricular part and the preparation and public discussion of an original dissertation. The access to a programme of *mestrado* is open to the holders of a *licenciatura* or a legally equivalent degree, with final marks of at least 14 in a scale from 0 to 20 (passing level at 10), although lower marks may be admitted on the basis of a relevant curriculum of the candidate.

The doctoral degree (*doutoramento*) is awarded by a university after the elaboration and public discussion of an original thesis. The admission to the *doutoramento* is open to the holders of a degree of *mestrado*, or to the holders of a *licenciatura* either with final marks of at least 16 or with a relevant academic, scientific and professional curriculum, confirmed by a decision of the competent academic body.

The highest possible qualification is the *agregação*, reserved to holders of the doctoral degree. It requires the capacity to undertake high level research and special pedagogical competences in a particular field, and is awarded after passing specific public examinations.

In what concerns the organisation of teaching, until now many courses in the public universities were organised in credit units, although measuring contact hours. In the other higher education sectors and also in some university areas the credit system was not used.

### *The Bologna reforms*

Under the Bologna reforms in progress, some changes are being introduced in the organisation of higher education, concerning both the degree structure and the organisation of teaching, with effects that may start in the academic year 2006/07 and are obligatory from the year 2009/10 onwards.

Regarding the organisation of teaching, the Decree-Law 42/2005, of 22 February, established an ECTS-type national credit system based on the workload of students and geared towards learning outcomes as the core element for curricular

design, as well as a number of tools to support mobility, including the official model for the diploma supplement.

Small changes were also introduced in the Comprehensive Law on Education by Law 49/2005, of 30 August. According to the new provisions in the law, the 3-cycle degree structure will correspond to the degrees of *licenciado*, *mestre* and *doutor*, *i.e.*, the degree of *bacharel* was dropped. The requisites to award the new degrees are:

- The degree of *licenciado* is awarded by the university and polytechnic institutions after a cycle of studies with a number of credits corresponding to a duration of six to eight semesters of studies.
- The degree of *mestre* is also awarded by both the university and polytechnic institutions, after a cycle of studies with a number of credits corresponding to a duration of three to four semesters of studies, although, exceptionally, the duration may be of two semesters.
- The degree of *mestre* may also be awarded after an integrated cycle of studies of 10 to 12 semesters, in cases where, in order to access the right to practice a regulated profession, such a duration is determined by a EU Directive or results from a consolidated practice in the EU member states. The integrated cycle of studies may be a two-tier programme, awarding also the degree of *licenciatura* after completion of a period of studies of at least six semesters.
- The access to a programme of *mestrado* is open to all holders of a degree of *licenciado*, or an equivalent foreign degree by decision of the competent academic body.
- The degree of *doutor* is awarded only at university institutions with a qualified faculty, adequate facilities and an accumulated scientific experience demonstrated by relevant scientific and academic production in the corresponding scientific field.
- The admission to the doctoral degree is open to the holders of a degree of *mestre* and also to the holders of a relevant academic, scientific or professional curriculum confirmed by a decision of the competent academic body of the institution.

### **2.3 The Legal Framework**

A first essential aspect of the legal framework on higher education is that the *university autonomy* is a fundamental Constitutional right: “the universities are entitled, in the terms of the law, to statutory, scientific, pedagogic, administrative and financial autonomy” (CRP, article 76.2 in its original version; *cf.* section 3.2, note 15).

The main legal documents regulating the area of higher education are:

- a)** *The Comprehensive Law on the Education System (Law 46/86, of 14 October, amended by Law 115/97, of 19 September, and by Law 49/2005, of 30*

August), where the scope and organisational structure of higher education and the conditions for access are defined.

**b)** *The University Autonomy Law (Law 108/88, of 24 September)*, establishing the basic principles for the autonomous organisation of the public universities and regulating the universities' constitutional right to a statutory, scientific, pedagogic, administrative, financial and disciplinary autonomy. According to the provisions in the Law, each university has the right to draw up its own statutes, plan and carry out scientific research, create and abolish study programmes and draw up their respective study plans. In terms of financial autonomy, the universities have their own assets, are free to manage the annual sums granted to them by the State and are able to earn income which is managed annually through private budgets. The universities' governance is based on democratic principles, elections being held periodically e.g. for the Senate and the University Assembly, as well as for Rector.

**c)** *The Law on the Statute and Autonomy of Polytechnic Higher Education Institutions (Law 54/90, of 5 September)*, which follows many of the provisions applying to the universities, but is more restrictive in some areas, such as the creation of study programmes which remains subject to approval by the Ministry.

**d)** *The Statute of Private and Cooperative Higher Education (Decree-Law 16/94, of 22 January, amended by Law 37/94, of 11 November and by Decree-Law 94/99, of 23 March)*: in accordance with this statute, private higher education institutions may result from the initiative of companies, co-operative societies or foundations created specifically for the development of higher education. They must be officially recognised in order to be able to grant academic degrees. The recognition is based on a proposal defining the intended internal organisation, the plans for recruitment and development of the academic staff, the facilities and equipment available and a study on the economic viability of the project. The decision is taken by the Ministry, on the advice of a committee of experts, taking the form of a Decree-Law. The recognition of study programmes follows a similar procedure, based on the study plans, the teaching staff, the premises and the forecast on the number of students. The organisation of the private institutions is more flexible, but there must be a clear separation between the academic bodies of the higher education institution and the administrative and financial bodies on the side of the owner's entity.

**e)** *The Law for the Evaluation of Higher Education (Law 38/94, of 21 November)*, as a framework law establishing the basis for the quality assurance system, as detailed in section 3.2 of this report.

**f)** *The Decree-Law 252/97*, of 26 September, which adopts special provisions to strengthen the administrative and financial autonomy in the public universities, introducing a greater flexibility in the rules applying to the management of staff, budget and patrimony.

**g)** *The Decree-Law 205/98*, of 11 July, which regulates the development of Law 38/94 by establishing the general rules for the coordination and implementation of the quality assurance system and creating the National Council for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CNAVES).

**h)** *The Decree-Law 125/99*, of 20 April, defining the legal regime for the research institutions, including the basis for the evaluation of the research units.

**i)** *The Law for the Development and Quality in Higher Education (Law 1/2003*, of 6 January), which inserts an amendment in Law 38/94, clarifying the consequences from the results of the evaluation processes and determining the obligatory adoption of a rating of the evaluated programmes, and introduces the concept of academic accreditation associated with fulfilment of the requisites necessary for the creation and operation of the higher education establishments or study programmes. In practice, this may be considered as a still-born law, since it was quickly forgotten and never regulated by the Government and consequently produced no effects at all.

**j)** *The Law for the Funding of Higher Education (Law 37/2003*, of 22 August), which establishes the basis for the public funding of higher education obeying two basic principles – the adoption of objective criteria, performance indicators and standard reference values relating to the quality of teaching, and the respect for the tripartite relationship between the State, the institutions and the students.

**k)** *The Decree-Law 42/2005*, of 22 February, concerning the development of tools to contribute to the creation of the European area of higher education, namely the new system of credits and the diploma supplement.

**l)** *The Decree-Law 74/2006*, of 24 March, regulating the organisation of higher education in respect to the new degree structure established by Law 49/2005.

Two other legal documents worth mentioning are the statutes for the academic careers of the university teaching staff (*Decree-Law 448/79*, of 13 November) and the polytechnic teaching staff (*Decree-Law 185/81*, of 1 July).

## **2.4 Financing of Higher Education**

The public funding for teaching and research activities in higher education institutions comes from two main sources:

**a)** The public funding allocated directly to the higher education institutions (public or private), including:

- The basic funding for teaching in the public institutions, through a funding formula;
- Contractual funding for specific issues;
- Direct funding to students (grants);
- Indirect funding to students in the public institutions (meals, accommodation, sports, healthcare).

**b)** The public funding for science and technology, through the Foundation for Science and Technology, comprising:

- Direct funding for the R&D units, through pluriannual funding based on periodic evaluation (every three years);
- Competitive funding for R&D projects;
- Competitive funding for individual researchers (grants).

Additionally, the public institutions negotiate with the Ministry the funding for investments on new buildings and equipment, based on the proposed institutions' development plans.

The first item of a) relates to the running costs of the public institutions. The use of a formula negotiated between the institutions and the Ministry to define the lump sum to be allocated to each institution was started in the late eighties, associated with a growing institutional autonomy. The initial formula was based on a throughput perspective, taking into consideration the number of students enrolled in each field of study, the staff/student ratios, the unitary costs of academic and non-academic staff, the expenditure of central administration based on a personnel/student ratio, and an agreed budgetary structure in terms of the percentage weight of personnel costs as compared to other operational costs. The formula produced a target value that was expected to be attained in a gradual process to progressively correct the institutions' budgets imbalances, but in practice this process has been erratic and distorted.

Since 2003 the formula started to introduce some performance-based criteria. For instance, in the current year the formula included two types of quality and performance indicators: the qualification of the teaching staff (percentage of

PhD's in the total academic staff); and the graduation efficiency rates, taking as indicators the number of graduates in the first cycle degrees and the number of master and PhD degrees awarded.

Two other sources of income add to the funding of public institutions: the tuition fees and the earned income. The tuition fees used to be very low in Portugal, but were significantly increased in 1992 and again in 2003. Each institution may decide the level of fees within a range defined by law, under the idea that the institutions may create a price differential related to quality. In the current academic year the minimum and the maximum legal values are 487 and 902 Euros. The actual fees vary significantly among institutions and sometimes among the schools within the same institution, and in general the fees established by the polytechnics are lower than in universities: in these, the fees range from 530 to 902 Euros (8 out of the 14 universities fixed the maximum value) and in the polytechnics they vary between 487 and 902 Euros (but only 3 polytechnics out of 15 have established values above 700 Euros and only 2 schools of nursing fixed the maximum value).

The composition of the income budget for the public higher education institutions is presented in Table 2.1 One can see that the State funding is by far the most important funding source, although with a slow steady decrease. Earned income is gaining a more prominent role, contributing with about a quarter of the total income, but its weight varies in the different institutions. The weight of the tuition fees is growing, but is still at around ten percent.

**Table 2.1 – Evolution of the composition of the income budget in public higher education institutions.**

	Public budget	Fees	Earned income	Investment	Total
2001	61.69%	6.14%	23.15%	9.02%	100%
2002	61.20%	6.58%	23.61%	8.61%	100%
2003	60.95%	7.07%	23.35%	8.64%	100%
2004	57.09%	9.75%	26.32%	6.84%	100%

Source: OCES, 2005.

The situation is obviously very different at the private institutions, which are basically supported by students' fees, ranging at present between around two thousand and three thousand Euros.

### **3. THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**

#### **3.1 Historical Background**

The monitoring and assessment of the higher education institutions' activities was, since very early, felt by the intervenients of the higher education system – the institutions in the first place and also the political power and the coordination bodies – as one of the fundamental pillars of their autonomy. The concern for the systematic assessment of the educational system is present in the Comprehensive Law on the Education System <sup>8</sup> (Law 46/86, of 14 October). Two years later, the approval of the University Autonomy Law (Law 108/88, of 24 September) opened the ways for a healthier development of higher education and concomitantly to greater responsibility and accountability of the Universities. In particular, the Law establishes, in its article 32, that “the Government must submit to Parliament a proposal for a law on the quality assurance of the activities in the universities”. A similar provision was made by the Law on the Statute and Autonomy of the Polytechnic Higher Education Institutions (Law 54/90, of 5 September).

Although the Autonomy Law was approved by a unanimous decision of the Parliament, in its origin was a proposal from the opposition political parties <sup>9</sup> and maybe for that reason the law was not cherished by the Government at the time. Consequently, there were significant delays and omissions in the preparation and approval of the legal provisions and regulations foreseen in Law 108/88 for its further development. For example, by the end of 1992 the Government had not yet taken any initiatives on quality assurance.

Conscious that quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions, public university leaders decided in early 1993 that it was time to take action by themselves, since the universities, more than any other partners, should be interested in a sound and credible process of evaluation. As a consequence, the Portuguese University Rectors' Conference (CRUP) defined a strategic programme to launch a pilot project on quality assurance starting with the scientific fields of Physics, Electrical Engineering and Electronics, Economics, and Portuguese and French Studies involving all the public universities and the Portuguese Catholic University. Simultaneously, an intensive programme of Seminars to create awareness on quality assurance issues was initiated, focusing on

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<sup>8</sup> Article 49 of Law 46/86 establishes that “the educational system must be the subject of a systematic assessment”.

<sup>9</sup> A former proposal from the Government did not obtain a consensus.

the European current practices for external evaluation, as well as on the procedures for the preparation of self-evaluation and of external evaluation. Local Seminars in the universities were also supported, to reach deeper into the academic communities.

An independent evaluation council was set up within the Foundation of Portuguese Universities (FUP) to coordinate all the process of evaluation, namely the establishment of guidelines for the self-evaluation reports and the organisation of external evaluation. The methodology used was inspired in the Dutch model, assessing study programmes in the two-phase process of self-evaluation followed by on-site peer review.

The pilot project provided excellent conditions for a fruitful dialogue between CRUP and the Ministry of Education. The project was presented to the Minister in March 1993 and soon after the Ministry produced a first draft of “Normative Guidelines for the Evaluation of Higher Education” which raised great reserves from the universities. Based on the knowledge acquired through the discussions in the Seminars, with the support from foreign experts, CRUP assumed a very pro-active attitude, advancing a counter-proposal based on three complementary documents: (i) a definition of the basic principles that should underlie the quality assurance system and, as such, embodied the concrete proposals from CRUP; (ii) an alternative draft for the proposal of a framework law on quality assurance, following as closely as possible the Ministry’s proposal but reinforcing the positive and creative perspective of the evaluation system, improving the systematisation of the text and the clarity of concepts, and incrementing the flexibility of processes; (iii) a project for the development of the framework law, in the form of a draft protocol concerning the creation and responsibilities of a “representative entity” to coordinate the evaluation of the higher education institutions.

This strategy from CRUP created a dynamic interaction not only with the Government, but also with the Parliament, which culminated in the approval and publication of the Law for the Evaluation of Higher Education (Law 38/94, of 21 November), which follows very closely the principles and the draft proposed by CRUP. For their relevance and still present actuality, it is worth to remember, in a synthetic way, the fundamental principles advanced by CRUP in 1993:

**a)** The law must assume the form of a “framework law”, in the sense that it should establish only the general orientations and action lines for the evaluation system, leaving the further normative development to be made in a contractual way, preferably through protocols, in order to facilitate its progressive improvement.

**b)** The evaluation system must contribute to strengthen the institutional autonomy and the corresponding accountability towards society, in terms of a continuous modernisation of teaching, of a permanent improvement of quality and of the capacity to face the great challenges of the present times; in other words, the object of the evaluation system is two-faced: on the one hand, the continuous enhancement of quality; on the other hand, to foster responsibility towards society, by addressing societal needs.

**c)** The legal framework must define common principles and actions applied to the public and the private sectors, as well to the harmony and global coherence of the evaluation mechanisms for the university and the polytechnic sub-systems, in order to allow for coherent global reports on higher education and on its social and economic impact in the national, European and international contexts.

**d)** The relationship between the Government and the higher education institutions must be based simultaneously on the respect for the institutional autonomy and on the legitimacy of the Ministry of Education to watch over the harmony, cohesion and credibility of the evaluation system; in particular, it must be the Minister's responsibility to approve the criteria for the composition of the peer review teams and to recognise the representative entities empowered to coordinate the external evaluation of the represented higher education institutions.

**e)** The scope of the evaluation must include all the institutional activities – teaching, research, culture and interaction with the community.

**f)** Self-evaluation must be placed at the centre of quality assurance; therefore, each higher education institution must set up institutionalised self-evaluation procedures with reference to preset indicators.

**g)** The system must guarantee the impartiality and independence of the review teams, whose composition must include the participation of academics as well as of personalities from the economic, social and cultural life.

**h)** As the primary objective of the evaluation system is to promote the quality of the academic activities, the results from the evaluation should have consequences on the public funding of the institutions only when the recommendations from the review teams are not fully implemented within a time period determined by a ministerial decision.

**i)** The Government must set up a global and independent national information system on higher education, based on reliable statistical data and an agreed set of performance indicators.

**j)** The evaluation system must pay attention to the experiences in other European countries, as a decisive contribute to the orientations established in the European Union Treaty, namely in regard to the recognition of qualifications and periods of study.

A very innovative aspect of Law 38/94 is expressed in article 14, by allowing the normative development of the law to be made by decree-law or by protocols, *i.e.*, the rules for the operation of the evaluation system, as well as the general principles for the recognition of the representative entities responsible for the coordination of the external reviews, can be established by the Government in the usual top-down approach by decree-law or can be mutually agreed in a contractual way.

It was under this provision that the Minister of Education signed a protocol with the Presidents of CRUP and FUP, in June 1995, which recognises the Foundation of the Portuguese Universities as the representative entity for the public universities and the catholic university and defines the general guidelines to be met by the evaluation system. A remarkable consequence of this process was that the pilot project launched in 1993 was integrated into the new framework and considered as the “first round of evaluations” to be concluded until 1999 under the coordination of the evaluation council already established by FUP <sup>10</sup>.

At the time, the other higher education sectors were starting to prepare their own representative entities. The public polytechnics, by the initiative of the Coordinating Council of the Public Polytechnics (CCISP), started in 1996 the self-evaluation of some study programmes <sup>11</sup>, but it was not possible to proceed with the external reviews because the Minister of Education delayed the recognition of the polytechnic representative entity and did not finance the process <sup>12</sup>. Indeed, the Government had meanwhile decided to wait for the approval of a decree-law dealing with the global coordination of the evaluation system and establishing the requisites

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<sup>10</sup> The Council of Europe (CoE), through its Legislative Reform Programme, has shown interest in knowing about the Portuguese experience on the contractual model of evaluation at its early stages. A study visit of the CoE to Portugal was organised by FUP in March 1997, aiming at the presentation and discussion of the legal framework concerning the university autonomy and the evaluation system, as well as the organisation of FUP and the evaluation council, and the self-evaluation and external review processes.

<sup>11</sup> From 1996 to 1999, 83 self-evaluation reports were prepared.

<sup>12</sup> The Minister preferred to launch an institutional evaluation of the polytechnic schools, in 1997. A total of 49 public polytechnic schools prepared self-evaluation reports, according to guidelines homologated by the Minister, and were visited by review panels. The final reports are still available at the ADISPOR site [www.adispor.pt](http://www.adispor.pt). Unfortunately, the Government extracted no conclusions or consequences from these assessments.

for the recognition of other representative entities. It was, unfortunately, a lengthy process, culminated with the publication of the Decree-Law 205/98, of 11 July. As a consequence, the protocols to recognise the Association of the Portuguese Public Polytechnics (ADISPOR) and the Portuguese Association of Private Higher Education (APESP) were signed only in December 1998 and March 1999, respectively. It was then too late to enter the on-going process of evaluation carried out by FUP, mentioned earlier, but meanwhile they could prepare to join the new round <sup>13</sup> starting in the year 2000.

The first round was considered as an experimental phase, as part of a learning process to build up a sense of belonging and ownership in regard to a quality assurance system widely shared by all the relevant partners. Its main goal was the development of a self-evaluation culture and not so much the promotion of any sort of rating mechanisms, although clearly defining the strong and weak points of the study programmes. The accumulated experience was very useful in the transition to the second round, when the other higher education sectors joined the evaluation system and common procedures and guidelines were developed. On the other hand, a better basis existed then to reinforce the accountability dimension of the evaluation processes.

As a consequence, several improvements were introduced. For example, the review panels were required to produce a new type of report, highlighting the results from the evaluations in the whole scientific area, besides the individual reports for each assessed study programme. Also, in the planning of the second round some additional elements were introduced in the guidelines for the external reviews, which were subject to further improvement along the process, with the aim to bring a more quantitative dimension to the assessments, namely: (i) the specification of “fields of appraisal” to be addressed by the review teams; (ii) the definition of a rating scale, adopted from the third year onwards (following first attempts by some panels to introduce levels of classification in each field of appraisal, which were however proving to be too heterogeneous); (iii) as a further clarification, a better definition of the aspects to be considered in each field of appraisal.

A major effort was also made to increase the participation of experts from abroad, but two important constraints were the imposed budget limitations and the use of the Portuguese language in the vast majority of the evaluations.

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**13** The first task of the university evaluation council of APESP was the preparation and execution of an exercise of institutional evaluation with incidence on a global assessment of study programmes in the period 1999-2000. The main objective was to acquaint the private sector with the quality assurance procedures and therefore facilitate the integration into the new round of evaluations. The reports on the study programmes assessed are available at the APESP site [www.apesp.pt/inforavalia.htm](http://www.apesp.pt/inforavalia.htm).

A further step for the comprehensiveness of the evaluation system was the inclusion of the military higher education in the 2000-2005 evaluation round <sup>14</sup>, in accordance with the Decree-Law 255/98 and in a very positive initiative from CNAVES, which culminated in the publication of Decree-Law 88/2001.

### **3.2 The Legal Framework** <sup>15</sup>

The Portuguese quality assurance system for higher education is regulated by Law 38/94, of 21 November, complemented by Decree-Law 205/98, of 11 July, Decree-Law 88/2001, of 23 March, and the protocols with the representative entities.

A close observation of the main characteristics of the quality assurance system shows that the legal framework retains much of the Dutch initial methodology:

- The main objective is the improvement of the quality of the scientific and pedagogical activities, taking especially into account the nature and typology of teaching, the qualifications of the academic staff and the operating conditions. The results of the evaluations will also be used for accountability purposes.
- The system is national – all institutions have the right and the duty to participate –, periodic and comprehensive.
- The institutions of higher education themselves have the main responsibility for quality assurance. The most important document of the evaluation activities is the self-evaluation report to be submitted to the external review panel.
- The staff and the students will participate in the evaluation activities and the review teams will take their opinions into account.
- The external evaluation reports will be made public and will contain the refutations from the assessed institutions.
- There will be no direct relation between the results of the evaluations and the level of the current funding of the institutions. However, the results will have implications for the institutions – in case of successive negative evaluations or when, upon a negative evaluation, the institution fails to implement the recommendations of the review team, the Minister in charge of Higher Education may take one or more of the following actions: (i) to decrease or to suspend the public funding; (ii) to suspend the registration of the degrees conferred by public universities; (iii) to withdraw the permission to confer degrees, in the public polytechnics; (iv) to withdraw the permission to confer degrees or to suspend the degrees, in the private institutions.

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**14** Only university military study programmes were assessed in this round.

**15** In the 1997 revision of the Portuguese Constitution, in the sequence of the evaluation process launched by CRUP and FUP, article 76.2 had the following addition: "(...) without prejudice to adequate evaluation of the quality of education". In the way this provision was introduced, evaluation is not understood as a limitation to autonomy but, indeed, as its internal and external reinforcement while demanded by the higher education institutions themselves.

- The evaluations will take place by disciplines and will be implemented in successive phases, starting with the evaluation of education and extending later to research activities and services to the outside community in a more integrative approach.

Law 38/94 reserves for the Minister in charge of higher education the competences to watch over the harmony, cohesion and credibility of the quality assurance system and to ratify the composition of the peer review panels proposed by the representative entities, and determines that the Inspectorate has no direct action in the evaluation activities.

Decree-Law 205/98 establishes the general rules necessary to implement and coordinate the global quality assurance system, covering three main issues:

#### Right and duty of participation

All higher education institutions are entitled to participate in the evaluation system. Any institution that does not make use of this right will be subject to an assessment to be undertaken under conditions to be defined by decision of the Minister in charge of higher education, which may include a visit by the Inspectorate. Additionally, the institution can not be granted public funds (except for funds related to social services for students' support), can not admit new students and loses the recognition of its degrees <sup>16</sup>.

#### Representative entities and evaluation councils

The representative entities are recognised as such by a protocol with the Government, *i.e.*, the alternative of being recognised by decree-law foreseen in Law 38/94 has been ruled out. The representative entities must create evaluation councils to carry out their responsibilities on external evaluation, with the following composition:

- The Chairperson, appointed by the representative entity;
- One personality of recognised merit, appointed by the Minister;
- Three personalities of recognised merit, appointed by the representative entity;
- Two professors, appointed by the coordination body of the respective sector (CRUP, CCISP or APESP);
- One member from the representative entity's governing body;
- Two students representing the students' unions.

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<sup>16</sup> So far, the Ministry has never applied these sanctions.

## Harmony and coherence of the evaluation system – CNAVES

The Decree-Law 205/98 founds the National Council for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CNAVES) as a strategic and global coordination body on which the Government delegates the responsibility for the harmony, cohesion and credibility of the national evaluation system. The composition of CNAVES reflects its strategic and representative nature, as it includes:

- The President, appointed by a Cabinet Resolution from among personalities of the highest prestige;
- Personalities of recognised competence, appointed by a Cabinet Resolution;
- The Chairpersons of the Evaluation Councils;
- One delegate from CRUP, one delegate from CCISP and one delegate from APESP;
- Three students representing the students' unions (one from the public universities, one from the public polytechnics and one from the private sector).

The Decree-Law 88/2001 establishes the rules for the integration of the military higher education institutions into the quality assurance system. It lists the existing military university institutions and the military polytechnic institutions and determines that they are integrated into the evaluation system through the representative entities of the public university education and public polytechnic education (FUP and ADISPOR), respectively. It also establishes that the evaluation procedures can be adapted to the specificities of the military education, namely in what concerns the composition of the peer review panels and the incidence on the scientific and technological aspects rather than on the professional aspects.

The protocols between the Ministry and the representative entities (in Appendices 2.4 to 2.6) complement the legal framework for the quality assurance system, defining the rules for its operation. As mentioned before, the Ministry signed three protocols recognising FUP, ADISPOR and APESP as representative entities, which in turn created the four evaluation councils corresponding to the different higher education sectors:

- FUP: The Evaluation Council for Public Universities (includes also the Catholic University and the military institutions for university education);
- ADISPOR: The Evaluation Council for Public Polytechnics (includes also the military institutions for polytechnic education);
- APESP: The Evaluation Council for Private Universities;
- APESP: The Evaluation Council for Private Polytechnics.

The present members of CNAVES and the evaluation councils are indicated in Appendix 12.2.

### **3.3 Mission, Roles and Responsibilities**

The mission of CNAVES is "to ensure the harmony, cohesion and credibility of the higher education evaluation process, having in mind the observance of the standards for excellence in regard to the global operation of the evaluation system" (article 11.1 of Decree-Law 205/98).

As for the evaluation councils, their mission is to coordinate the activities which are the duty of the representative entities in the scope of the evaluation of their member institutions (article 5 of Decree-Law 205/98).

The role of the representative entities is to set up the evaluation councils as autonomous independent bodies, to provide their logistical support and to co-finance the external evaluation.

The specific responsibilities of the evaluation councils are:

- To organise and coordinate the external review process;
- To propose to CNAVES the composition of the peer review panels;
- To propose to CNAVES the guidelines for the self-evaluation process;
- To monitor and support the developments of the self-evaluation process;
- To ensure the publication of the external review reports, as well as the refutations offered by the institutions being assessed;
- To issue suggestions and recommendations with the aim of stimulating quality and improving the evaluation model.

CNAVES is the global coordination body for the quality assurance system. In the terms of the law, to fulfil its mission CNAVES will devote special attention to the following areas of intervention:

**a)** The development of international cooperation, seeking to maintain a permanent assessment of the existent capacities and of the responsibilities to be met in this area;

**b)** The contribution of the higher education system to an economic, cultural and social integrated development;

**c)** An appraisal of the institutions' performance in face of the internal and external challenges in a knowledge society;

**d)** The convergence of the higher education system towards the exercise of citizenship.

Specific responsibilities of CNAVES are:

- To appraise the global coherence of the quality assurance system, based on a comparative study of the evaluation reports;
- To coordinate the proposals from the evaluation councils, in order to ensure that the same review panels apply in each field of study, to both the public and the private sectors of each subsystem;
- To ensure that the same guidelines for self-evaluation are applied within each subsystem, allowing however for differentiation between the subsystems;
- To produce global and prospective reports concerning quality assurance in higher education, as well as to issue recommendations for the rationalisation and improvement of the higher education system.

As a result from the specified roles and responsibilities, the main tasks performed by CNAVES and the four evaluation councils can be summarised as:

**a)** CNAVES' most important task is to coordinate the overall quality assurance system, guaranteeing its harmony, coherence and credibility. For this effect, an important factor was the successful inclusion of all the higher education institutions in the national evaluation system in what proved to be a delicate and lengthy task. CNAVES does not participate directly in the external quality assurance assessments, but its responsibilities include the organisation of multiple public debates with representatives of the academic, cultural and economic sectors interested in, or involved with, higher education, the publication of the corresponding proceedings, and the preparation and publication of policy statements and recommendations on higher education and on the quality assurance system.

**b)** The main task of the evaluations councils is to conduct all the external review processes in relation to the higher education institutions in the respective sector, including the overall planning of the evaluation round, the preparation of the guidelines, procedures and protocols for both the self-evaluation and the external review phases, the selection of the peer review panels, the training of experts, the training and guidance in relation to the self-evaluation processes, the logistics for the work of the review panels, namely the preparation of the site visits, the control of schedules and deadlines, the publicity of the reports and all the daily activities to keep the evaluation processes moving.

In what regards international activities, it has been difficult for CNAVES to participate in relevant international networks, such as the projects of the Ibero-American network in which Spain is involved, due to the severe financial limitations. As a consequence, the direct representation of CNAVES in initiatives such as the General Assemblies of ENQA occurred only a few times. However, CNAVES was able to participate regularly in the ENQA meetings and to follow activities in the scope of EUA and the Council of Europe, since some of its members coincidentally have personal responsibilities in these organisations and therefore bring pertinent information into the Council. In the scope of the evaluation councils, the most relevant aspect on internationalisation is the recruitment of experts from abroad to integrate the review teams, although this is still mainly done on a personal basis and not institutionally through the quality assurance agencies in other countries.

### **3.4 Internal Organisation and Staff**

#### CNAVES

The organisational chart of CNAVES and its internal regulations are presented in Appendices 5.1 and 6.1. The Council assembles in Plenary meetings and also in two Standing Committees, one for university education and the other for polytechnic education. The Plenary meets on a monthly basis and assumes the responsibilities mentioned in the previous section, as well as the responsibility for the adoption of the annual action plans and reports of activities. The Standing Committees have an advisory role in relation to the Plenary and meet when convened by the President of CNAVES.

The Plenary may create other *ad-hoc* or permanent committees, defining the terms of reference for their objectives, mandate and composition. At present, the following permanent committees are established, all of them chaired by the President:

- The Committee of Chairpersons of the evaluation councils, with the aim to facilitate the articulation between the evaluation councils and coordinate the proposals for the guidelines or other common issues;
- The Committee of Professional Societies and Associations;
- The Committee for Economic Activities.

The President and the Secretary-General presently hold full-time positions.

The technical and administrative support is provided by a secretariat, coordinated by the Secretary-General. The secretariat includes six full-time elements

for administrative and auxiliary support, one full-time advisor for publications and public relations, and one part-time technician on information technologies. Only one of the administrative elements has a degree of *licenciatura*.

The Secretary-General has a degree on Law and a doctoral degree on Political Science and has previous experience as lecturer in an university institution.

### Evaluation Councils

The internal regulations of the evaluation councils of FUP and ADISPOR are included as Appendices 6.2 and 6.3. The evaluation councils of APESP did not feel the need to adopt formal internal regulations. The organisational charts, presented in Appendices 5.2 and 5.3, are organised by subsystems, to show the interaction between the evaluation councils.

The evaluation councils operate in plenary meetings and also as executive committees constituted by the Chairperson and the Vice-chairperson. The frequency of meetings varies among the different councils: the evaluation councils of APESP meet on average nine times each year, whereas the evaluation councils of ADISPOR and FUP meet two to three times a year. The reason for this difference is that the latter councils prepare and approve the proposals for the composition of the review panels at the executive committee, reserving for the plenary the adoption of the proposals for guidelines and the discussion of strategic issues, as well as the adoption of action plans and reports of activities, while the evaluation council of APESP does not have a full-time executive body.

The technical and administrative support is provided by secretariats, under the coordination of the Chairperson and Vice-chairperson. APESP has set one single secretariat for its two evaluations councils, comprising three persons: two elements with a technical profile, holding a degree of *licenciatura* and one administrative with secondary education qualifications. The evaluation council of ADISPOR has a secretariat of five full-time elements: the Chairperson and the Vice-chairperson, who are retired polytechnic professors (*Professores Coordenadores*) and two technical and one administrative elements with a degree of *licenciatura*. The evaluation council of FUP is supported by a secretariat including: the Chairperson (full professor) on a part-time basis, the Vice-chairperson (retired full professor) on full-time, two elements with a technical profile (one holding a degree of *licenciatura* and one in part-time) and three elements for administrative and auxiliary support.

As for staff development activities, staff members of the evaluation councils have participated in the induction Seminars organised for self-assessment coordinators and members of the review panels.

### **3.5 Financing**

The funding of the quality assurance system comprises several types of expenditure, involving different actors:

- The costs of the self-evaluation activities (higher education institutions);
- The costs of external evaluation (evaluation councils);
- The costs with the global coordination of the system (CNAVES).

#### Self-evaluation

The costs inherent to the self-evaluation activities are supported by each of the higher education institutions. The protocols of the Ministry with FUP (1995) and ADISPOR (1998) include a Clause establishing that the Minister of Education, the Portuguese Rectors' Conference and the Coordinating Council of the Public Polytechnics shall annually agree on the specific provisions to be included in the budget of each higher education institution for the self-evaluation processes.

During the first round of evaluations, there was indeed some co-participation from the Government to the public universities, based on a fixed amount for each assessed degree course <sup>17</sup>. However, since 1999 that Clause is not being met by the Ministry.

#### Funding of the evaluation councils and CNAVES

The three protocols with the representative entities establish that ninety per cent of the costs with the external evaluation are financed by the Ministry, which approves the budget and the programme of activities annually submitted by the representative entities. The remaining ten per cent are therefore the responsibility of the representative entities, through their evaluated member institutions.

CNAVES is fully funded by the State budget.

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<sup>17</sup> The total comparticipation from the Government was 900 000 Euros, in the period 1995-1998.

Two main components of expenditure may be considered:

- The costs related directly to the activities of the peer review panels, including:
  - the fees paid to the team members;
  - the expenses with travel, communications and local costs associated with site visits and meetings;
- The costs with the operation of the evaluation councils and CNAVES.

The fees due to the review panel members are based on a formula that takes into consideration the duration of the preparatory work, the number of visits and the roles of the team members:

$$H = (h_1 \times m) \times fF_1 \times fN_1 + h_2 \times fF_2 \times fN_2$$

where:

H – fee of a team member

$h_1$  – basic component of the monthly fee for participation in the team

$h_2$  – basic component of the fee for the visits

m – number of months of work (up to 8)

$fF_1, fF_2$  – factors for functional correction:

$fF_1$ : President = 1.0; Vice-President = 0.5; Secretary = 0.5; other members = 0.25

$fF_2$ : President of visiting team = 1.0; Secretary = 0.5; other members = 0.75

$fN_1, fN_2$  – factors related to the number of visits:

$fN_1$ : 1.0 up to 3 visits; + 0.05 for each additional visit

$fN_2$ : 0.3 for 1 visit; 0.6 for 2 visits; 1.0 for 3 visits; + 0.25 for each extra visit, up to 6.

In terms of the actual spending in the full round, Table 3.1 shows the expenditure with the review panels and Table 3.2 indicates the costs with the operation of the evaluation councils and CNAVES. The total expenditure was around 16.5 million Euros and on average the assessment of each study programme had a cost close to 13 600 Euros (differentiating by subsystem, the values are 15 190 Euros per university programme and 12 100 Euros per polytechnic programme).

**Table 3.1 – The costs of the external reviews – round 2000-2005 (in 10<sup>3</sup> Euros)**

Subsystem	Study Programmes	Experts	Fees	Other Expenses	Total
Universities	596	637	4 878 (85.0%)	846 (15.0%)	5 724 (100%)
Polytechnics	613	534	3 895 (87.8%)	544 (12.2%)	4 439 (100%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1 209</b>	<b>1 171</b>	<b>8 773 (86.3%)</b>	<b>1 390 (13.7%)</b>	<b>10 163 (100%)</b>

**Table 3.2 – The costs with the coordination structures – round 2000-2005 (in 10<sup>3</sup> Euros)**

Evaluation Council	Study Programmes	Salaries	Other Expenses	Total
Public Universities	432	628 (47.0%)	702 (53.0%)	1 330 (100%)
Private Universities	164	515 (64.3%)	286 (35.7%)	801 (100%)
Public Polytechnics	421	730 (77.1%)	216 (22.9%)	946 (100%)
Private Polytechnics	192	515 (64.3%)	286 (35.7%)	801 (100%)
CNAVES		1 340 (55.3%)	1 085 (44.7%)	2 425 (100%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1 209</b>	<b>3 728 (59.1%)</b>	<b>2 575 (40.9%)</b>	<b>6 303 (100%)</b>

As expected, the experts' fees represent by far the heaviest part of the expenses (53%), since external reviewing is a specialised labour intensive exercise. A somewhat surprising factor is, however, the fact that the assessment of each university study programme is, on average, 26% more expensive than for the polytechnic study programmes. Two main reasons justify this difference: the participation of international experts was higher in the university review panels (98, as compared with 17 in the polytechnic <sup>18</sup>); and on average each university review team included four experts, whereas the polytechnic review teams included three experts.

### **3.6 External Quality Assurance Activities**

**3.6.1** As mentioned in section 3.3, CNAVES has no direct participation in the external quality assurance assessments. Thus, the following considerations refer exclusively to the evaluation councils.

The historical note and the considerations about the legal framework have already given a fair idea about the scope and level of the external assessments. The national evaluation system is discipline-oriented, and for the reasons already advanced, and corresponding to pressures from the society in terms of quality of the degrees and professional titles, the first stages of evaluation were mainly focused on the assessment of study programmes. Based on the experience, all the preparations for the third round were made in terms of a more comprehensive model, focusing on a scientific area and considering all the activities within that area – teaching, research and its relation to teaching, cultural activities, relations with the community, internationalisation.

<sup>18</sup> There were ten foreign members in the panels, but several of them participated in several panels on the same field of studies.

The evaluation system applies to all the officially recognised higher education institutions. However, the participation in the evaluation system is formally voluntary, *i.e.*, the institutions are free to join the evaluation or not. Nevertheless, the consequences for not making use of the right to participate, mentioned in section 3.2, are severe enough and should be applied<sup>19</sup> to put a legitimate pressure on the institutions to enter the evaluation system.

In the first two rounds, the assessments were aimed at the study programmes that had produced graduates for at least two years (*cf* footnote 25), *i.e.*, some recently installed study programmes were left out. The experience has shown that in a few cases this had a perverse effect, since some institutions tried to use it as a stratagem to avoid the assessment of courses running for enough time but which had been subject to changes in the study plans, or even in their designation, although with similar objectives, arguing that the new study programme had not yet produced any graduates. The future discipline-oriented model envisaged by CNAVES will automatically solve this problem, since all the study programmes within the scientific area will be assessed regardless of their stage of development.

**3.6.2** The evaluation system is cyclical, repeating the assessments every five years. The first two rounds took place in the periods 1995-2000 and 2000-2005 and the third round should already be in place. However, the new Government, installed in March 2005, is delaying the process in the context of the international evaluations launched on the higher education system (commissioned to the OECD) and on the quality assurance system. There is still no firm indication on the go ahead and financing of the new round of evaluations. This represents a serious drawback on the dynamics of the evaluation process, since it implies a delay of at least two years in the launching of the third round of assessments and the motivation and dynamism of the higher education institutions regarding the evaluation process may be endangered.

**3.6.3.** Different levels of reports are produced, besides the reports on each of the assessed study programmes:

- Each external review panel produces a summary report (*relatório síntese*) underlining the main findings and recommendations resulting from the individual reports on the study programmes assessed by the panel (examples are presented in Appendices 8.3 and 8.4);
- Each evaluation council produces annual reports on their activities, some of them with a significant analytical approach;

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<sup>19</sup> As mentioned before, so far the Ministry applied no sanctions to the institutions that left study programmes out of the evaluation system.

- At the end of each round, global reports are prepared for each of the sectors/subsystems. In relation to the second round CNAVES has just published a book <sup>20</sup> including the following reports:
  - University Higher Education – FUP/APESP – Final Report: *Ten Years of Evaluation* <sup>21</sup>;
  - Polytechnic Higher Education – ADISPOR/APESP – Preliminary Report: *A Reflection on Evaluation*;
  - Military Higher Education – First Reflection.
- The evaluation council of ADISPOR published the following mid-term and end-of-the-round reports:
  - Evaluation Paths in the Public Polytechnic Education: 2000-2003 (December 2003);
  - The Evaluation of the Polytechnic Education – Quality as a Challenge, the Future as Horizon (December 2003);
  - The Evaluation of Study Programmes in the Public Polytechnic Education: 2000-2005 (March 2006) <sup>22</sup>.
- The polytechnic evaluation council of APESP, at the end of the evaluation round, prepared the report:
  - Private Polytechnic Education – Evaluation of Study Programmes (2000-2005) – Synthesis (December 2005) <sup>23</sup>.

Some other documents published by CNAVES also built upon findings and results from the external quality assurance assessments to draw up general comments and recommendations on the higher education system. That is the case, for example, of the publications:

- *Higher Education and Competitiveness* – Proceedings of the Seminar *Ensino Superior e Competitividade*, held in Porto on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2001, counting with a wide participation of relevant stakeholders. This Conference dealt with the themes of university education, polytechnic education and oriented research, and their interaction with the economic activities, as well as with the presence of the economic activities in the higher education system and the impact of the internationalisation of markets on higher education.
- *Higher Education and Competitiveness – Studies* (2001), which includes four invited papers on the following themes related to the discussions in the Seminar referred in the previous paragraph: competitiveness and the education system, education and the information society, higher education and life long learning, and the juridical framework for the recognition of degrees and the accreditation of study programmes.

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**20** CNAVES (2006) *Avaliação – Contributos para a Reformulação*. Almedina, Coimbra.

**21** A translation of the second part of the report, concerning the second evaluation round, is included as Appendix 12.5.

**22** A translation of this report is included as Appendix 12.6.

**23** A translation of this report is included as Appendix 12.7.

- *From Education and Training to the Labour Market* – Proceedings of the Colloquium on *Da Formação ao Mercado de Trabalho*, held in Lisbon on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2003, to present and discuss the perspectives from the professional societies and associations.
- *Themes on the Bologna Process* – Proceedings of the Colloquium held in Lisbon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2005.
- *Statements and Recommendations*, ed. Almedina, Coimbra, 2004. This publication is a *collectanea* of the formal statements and recommendations issued by CNAVES in the period 2000-2004, also published in the Official Journal. Examples of particular interest for the rationalisation and improvement of the higher education system are: the statute of private and cooperative higher education – foundational model, mergers and the rights of students (2000); validation and accreditation of periods of study and experience in higher education (2002); the degree structure in higher education (2002); regulation and evaluation of transnational education (2002); requirements for the creation and operation of degree awarding study programmes (2002); the concept of higher education institution (2003); transparency in the denomination of the study programmes (2004); creation of a national data base (2004).

Three other important studies on the evaluation processes and on the results from the assessments are presented in section 5.3.

It can therefore be concluded that there was a lot of reflection on the results and findings from the external quality assurance assessments and on the evaluation processes themselves, with some positive impact on the evaluation system and on the higher education institutions. However, as a rule the political powers so far have ignored most of the reflections, recommendations and proposals in the publications from CNAVES and the representative entities.

**3.6.4** In the first round (1995-2000) a total of 376 university study programmes were assessed in an institutional universe comprising 14 public universities, the Catholic University and one university institute. As mentioned at the end of section 3.1, in the public polytechnic sector 83 self-evaluation reports were prepared in the period 1996-99 and 49 polytechnic schools were submitted to an institutional evaluation; in the private sector 30 study programmes were assessed in the scope of a preliminary “institutional evaluation”.

In the last five years (second round) 1209 higher education study programmes were assessed, as follows:

- 596 university programmes (432 public and 164 private);
- 613 polytechnic programmes (421 public and 192 private).

The yearly distribution of the number of assessments in each higher education sector is shown in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3 – Number of assessed study programmes (2000-2005)**

Year	University Study Programmes			Polytechnic Study Programmes		
	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total
2000/01	86	11	97	66	61	127
2001/02	141	59	200	57	46	103
2002/03	100	24	124	75	13	88
2003/04	49	32	81	98	39	137
2004/05	56	38	94	125	33	158
TOTAL	432	164	596	421	192	613

**3.6.5** The concept of academic accreditation was introduced by Law 1/2003, but the Government did not produce the necessary regulations foreseen for its implementation, concerning for example the definition of the minimum requirements to be met for the successful accreditation of a study programme. As said in section 2.3, this was a still-born law, with no practical effects <sup>24</sup>.

Consequently, at present there is no national accreditation system run by the State or by an independent agency. The official recognition of study programmes obeys a mere bureaucratic process, which differs from one sector to another. For example, the University Autonomy Law grants full pedagogic autonomy to public universities, which means that in practice they have almost complete freedom to create, suspend or cancel study programmes. The new degrees must be registered at the Ministry, but the registration can not be refused unless the degree does not obey the general guidelines applying to the corresponding level of higher education (such as requisites on total duration or number of credits). The only control that the State can exercise is through the annual definition of the numerus clausus, through the funding formula and also through the evaluation system on what regards quality assurance.

However, public polytechnics so far have to submit their proposals on the creation, suspension or cancelling of study programmes for the Ministry's approval. Similarly, private institutions must ask for permission before starting or modifying any study programmes, and must apply for State recognition of all their degrees and diplomas.

<sup>24</sup> Very recently Decree-Law 74/2006 (of 24 March) revoked the articles of Law 1/2003 concerning the provisions on accreditation.

The recently published Decree-Law 74/2006 establishes that in future a unit of principles and procedures will apply to the approval of study programmes in all higher education sectors. The future creation of an accreditation agency is planned in this Decree-Law.

In regard to the accreditation of institutions, the creation of a new public university or polytechnic establishment is an Act of the Government, in the form of a Decree-Law. In the case of private institutions, a new establishment can not start operating before the approval of the Ministry.

The national evaluation system for higher education has no competences on the professional accreditation of study programmes in regard to the traditional liberal professions, which rest with professional associations established by an Act of Parliament as “statutory membership organisations”.

## **4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **4.1 Information Procedures and Transparency in the Quality Assurance Assessments**

#### **4.1.1** *Overall planning of the evaluation round and communication with the institutions*

At the beginning of the latest round, the evaluation councils, in interaction with the representative entities, developed an overall planning for the assessment of the study programmes in all the higher education institutions along the period 2000-2005. The objective was to assess all the study programmes that had already concluded their normal period of duration, *i.e.*, those that had been producing graduates for two years at the time of the evaluation <sup>25</sup>.

A first task was to define the fields of study in which all the study programmes should be grouped. For the university programmes, the ISCED 97 classification was used and 44 fields of study were identified. In the polytechnic subsystem, the grouping was made into 12 wider areas, based in the same international classification.

The planning was organised in five phases, one per academic year. The university evaluation councils distributed the 44 fields of study along the five academic years (7 to 11 fields each year, depending on the number of study programmes). In the polytechnic subsystem, because many programmes had been subjected to structural changes in the late nineties and would not fit immediately in the criteria to be assessed, a different strategy was used: the evaluation councils invited the institutions to make a proposal on the academic year for the assessment of their study programmes in each field of study, with the aim of maximising the number of programmes to be assessed. Some adjustments had to be made, to ensure that the number of programmes in each year stayed within reasonable limits. Thus, many of the polytechnic fields of study were object of evaluation at several phases, implying a total of 42 review panels for the 12 fields of study. This meant that similar study programmes were assessed in different years and not always by review panels with the same composition, which made the comparison of results more difficult.

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<sup>25</sup> In 2003 the polytechnic evaluation councils started assessing all the study programmes that had concluded their normal period of duration.

Anyway, in both subsystems the institutions knew, from the beginning of the round, when their study programmes were going to be assessed, aside a few cases where minor annual adjustments were later necessary.

In each phase, the assessments had incidence on the operation of the study programmes in the academic year object of the evaluation, and the external reviews took place in the academic year immediately after (for example, the first phase had incidence on the year 1999/2000 and took place in the year 2000/01). Calendars were established for the different steps to be observed in each phase and in general the deadlines were met by all the intervenient actors. The procedures and dates for communication with the assessed institutions in regard to the planning of the assessments are referred in the calendars. The planning of the 2000-2005 round and the typical annual calendars are documented in Appendix 4.

#### **4.1.2** *Procedures related to the formulation of terms of reference*

The basic documents defining the terms of reference for the assessments are the guidelines for the self-assessment and the guidelines for the external reviews, as will be discussed in the next sections.

In the public university sector, CRUP had established a standing committee for the quality of the evaluation system, with representatives from each university, which helped to build upon the accumulated experience from the first evaluation round, bringing new suggestions and consensus for the improvement of the guidelines. Input was also received from the private universities, through APESP. The guidelines were then discussed and adopted by the two evaluation councils (of FUP and APESP) and approved by CNAVES. The polytechnic evaluation councils, in articulation with the representative entities ADISPOR and APESP, prepared and adopted the guidelines for the evaluation of the polytechnic study programmes, which were equally approved by CNAVES.

There were no specific consultations with the stakeholders. However, they had the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the guidelines through their presence in the evaluation councils. The professional societies and associations were not involved in any of the phases of preparation or discussion of the guidelines.

#### **4.1.3** *Predefined criteria for the assessments*

There are two essential reference documents defining the procedures and criteria for the evaluation of the study programmes, in the university as well as in the

polytechnic subsystems: the guidelines for the self-evaluation process and the guidelines for the external reviews.

The guidelines for self-evaluation are very detailed in what concerns the factual descriptions and data on the assessed programme and on the institution and school that runs it, as well as in what relates to the critical analysis of the organisation and operation of the programme, as will be seen in section 4.2.3. The objectives of the assessment and the main aspects to be considered are objectively stated, making clear the most pertinent points that are going to be analysed and judged by the review team.

On the other hand, the guidelines for the external reviews give valuable indications for the higher education institutions themselves on the way the external assessments are going to be developed, which in some way adds to the knowledge and understanding of the criteria for the assessments. Most importantly, the guidelines include, as addenda, the definition of the fields of appraisal to be explicitly object of a judgement and rating, as well as a clarification on the meaning of each level of the rating scale (*cf* section 4.2.5).

#### **4.1.4**     *General reference points*

The Law for the Evaluation of Higher Education points out the scope and incidence of the assessments (Law 38/94, article 3), by establishing that the evaluation system is directed at the quality of the higher education institutions' pedagogic and scientific performance, in accordance with the nature and type of teaching, the composition of the teaching staff and the operating conditions, taking into consideration: (i) teaching, in particular the curricular structures, the scientific level, the pedagogic processes and their innovative features; (ii) the qualifications of the teaching staff; (iii) the research performed; (iv) the links with the community, e.g. through specialised services and the cultural action; (v) the condition of the facilities and of the pedagogic and scientific equipment; (vi) the projects on international cooperation. Specific aspects to consider are: the students' demand, the success rates and the social support mechanisms; the interdisciplinary, interdepartmental and inter-institutional collaboration; the insertion of graduates into the labour market; and the efficiency in the organisation and management of the programmes.

At a different level, the protocol with CRUP and FUP states, in Clause 4, that the self-evaluation of the higher education institutions has a compulsory and cyclical nature, and shall be carried out in accordance with guidelines adopted by the FUP and approved by the Minister, thus providing an official status for the

enforcement of the guidelines. Also, according to Clause 7 of the protocol, the final reports on the external reviews shall include a global evaluation, an individualized appreciation of the several items specified in the guidelines and the review team's recommendations. The protocols that were later signed with ADISPOR and APESP include provisions similar to those in Clause 7 <sup>26</sup>.

There are no explicit subject benchmarks, but in a peer review system the experts tend to take into account the paradigms of their scientific area, on what concerns curricular contents and methodologies, learning outcomes, scientific production and other relevant aspects, as a natural reference for their appraisal on the assessed subjects.

There are also no explicit professional standards available, since the professional associations did not yet define the graduate skills that should be required to access and practice the corresponding regulated profession. As a consequence, one can observe the anomalous situation of professional accreditation procedures, run by some professional societies or associations, which are based on the learning paths (curriculum contents, number of contact hours, ...) without reference to previously specified learning outcomes. One of the professional associations (on engineering) is at present working on a different approach, bringing the outcomes into consideration.

It can therefore be said that the legal documents regulating the evaluation system provide the most important reference points for the external assessments.

#### **4.1.5** *Fitness to the aims of the evaluation processes*

To analyse the degree of fitness of the evaluation processes to achieve the aims of the individual assessments, it must be recalled that the main objective of the evaluation system is to contribute to the improvement of quality within the higher education institutions, while fostering responsibility and accountability towards society.

It is quite apparent that the guidelines for self-evaluation are carefully designed to lead the institutions to reflect on aspects of their organisation and operation, which are essential to the monitoring and promotion of quality and to the establishment of good practices. Indeed, the reflexive effects from the self-assessments are perhaps one of the most important results from the evaluation

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<sup>26</sup> These two protocols do not contain the provisions in Clause 4 of the protocol with FUP, due to the fact that CNAVES had, meanwhile, been created. So, a new Clause was introduced, stating that APESP and ADISPOR shall follow the programmes and obey the principles established by CNAVES. The same is implicitly applied to FUP.

system, contributing in some cases to more or less immediate corrective measures or to the elaboration of action plans to overcome the detected shortcomings. On the other hand, the systematisation of the data required from the institutions is one important element for accountability purposes. In this respect, one must say that unfortunately the Ministry was, so far, not up to its responsibilities in the setting up of a national data base on higher education, explicitly assumed in the protocol signed in 1995 (Clauses 11 and 12 of the protocol Ministry/CRUP/FUP) and later in the protocols with ADISPOR and APESP. The institutions have also responsibilities, e.g. on what concerns data on the costs of teaching.

The two most important results from the external reviews are also directly geared towards the envisaged aims: the recommendations from the review teams are intended as a support to a sound institutional development; and the multi-dimensional ratings provide objective and validated information on the performance of the assessed institution in regard to essential aspects of its operation of the study programmes. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the ratings were introduced in the process later than desired by many sectors of the academic community and society.

#### **4.1.6**     *Strategy for student participation*

The participation of students in the evaluation processes is encouraged at all levels and phases of the assessment: in self-evaluation, in the external evaluation and in the policy-definition bodies.

The guidelines for the self-evaluation of the university education refer the obligatory intervention of students in regard to the questionnaires to obtain the students' point of view on the organisation and operation of the study programme, namely in what concerns the suitability of lectures, the support from teachers, the study materials, the availability of computers, the access to the libraries, the spaces for work and for social activities, the total work load, specific provisions for student-workers, and the evaluation processes, including the ways in which the students can intervene in these processes. In a similar way, the guidelines for the self-evaluation of the polytechnic education state that the collection of data and the formulation of quality judgements must involve all the parts interested in the study programme, including teachers, students, staff and future employers. The guidelines include a detailed suggestion for a questionnaire to be applied to the students. In a few institutions, the questionnaires were already an established practice and the students were directly involved in the self-evaluation groups. However it is felt that, in many cases, students were not as much involved as expected. This may be due to their lack

of interest and to the way institutions organised their own self-evaluation processes. As a matter of fact, in many cases the team appointed to prepare the self-evaluation report did not regard highly the consultations and direct involvement of students and even other staff, whereas the students themselves did not show a real interest in participating.

In what concerns the external reviews, the terms of reference for the site visits include an obligatory meeting with the students, to collect their opinions on the self-evaluation report, on their involvement in the pedagogic structures and on the operation of the study programme. The guidelines for the external evaluation of the polytechnic institutions are even more detailed on aspects to discuss with the students, such as the motivations behind their choices of study programmes, the social support, or their expectations of professional insertion, and recommend a separate meeting with representatives from the students' unions, aiming at the discussion of policy issues like the role of evaluation in regard to the students' desires and expectations, or the participation of the students' union in the identification and proposal of measures to promote the quality of the study programmes. Unfortunately, in some cases the number of students participating in interviews during the visits was very low. This fact may have different explanations, but it must be recognised that so far this shortcoming has not been overcome.

At policy level, the students are represented in each of the evaluation councils, where they have the opportunity to participate for example in the discussions for the elaboration of the guidelines for self-evaluation and for the external reviews, in the definition of the terms of reference for the composition and operation of the review teams, or in the planning of the evaluations rounds. They have also responsibilities at the top coordination and strategy level, since the composition of CNAVES includes three students.

In the terms of Law 38/94, the students do not, however, integrate the peer review teams. Article 12 of the law establishes that the reviews shall be carried out by recognised experts, preferably with a doctoral degree, making no provisions for the inclusion of students.

## **4.2 Methodological Model**

### **4.2.1** *Overall methodological model*

As has been said along this report, the national evaluation system is strongly based on the principle that the responsibility for quality culture and quality

assurance lies mainly inside the institutions and must involve all the relevant actors. The methodological model for the assessments was naturally influenced by this assumption, namely by placing self-evaluation at the centre of the evaluation process and by requiring an active role of the institutions at different levels of intervention.

The overall methodological model for one individual assessment develops along the following steps:

- The preparation of a self-evaluation report on the study programme being assessed, which must be mainly analytical, must involve teachers, students, staff and relevant stakeholders in its preparation, must be thoroughly discussed by the appropriate entities and bodies inside the institution and must be formally adopted.
- The external review of the study programme by a peer review team. The review panels are appointed by CNAVES, following a proposal from the evaluation councils of the appropriate subsystem (according to the university or polytechnic nature of the study programme to be assessed), are subject to the Minister's homologation<sup>27</sup> and are published in the Official Journal. The external reviews are based on the self-evaluation reports and on site visits.
- The preparation of a report by the review team, and its submission to the assessed institution for the identification of eventual factual errors and for a refutation from the institution in case there are disagreements with the judgments formulated in the report. The team may introduce corrections in the report as a result of the reply from the institution.
- The publication of the report, together with the refutation in case it exists.
- The presentation of the report to the Ministry, for the effect of the consequences that can be legally drawn out from the results of the assessment.

#### **4.2.2** *The role of the external experts*

##### Appointment of the review panels

It is the responsibility of CNAVES to ensure that in each field of study the same review panels assess both the public and the private sectors. In order to facilitate this endeavour, it was agreed that the composition of the review panels should be jointly prepared by the public and private evaluation councils in each of the subsystems, before being proposed for approval by CNAVES. The procedures used in the two subsystems are slightly different and must be dealt with separately.

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<sup>27</sup> The Minister can refuse names, but can not propose any names.

In the evaluation councils of FUP and APESP (university sector), the following criteria and procedures were adopted to identify potential experts and select the review panels:

**a)** For each field of study there is one review panel. The number of members in the panel depends on the number of study programmes to be assessed – as a rule, each member participates on average in four visits and each site visit involves a review team of four members (the Chairperson or a Vice-chairperson and three other members). Each panel includes also a Secretary (or more than one, in the case of very large panels). In the case of some fields of study that included courses of great specificity, the panel included also one or more specialists, as advisors.

**b)** The Chairperson of the review panel has the responsibility to organise the distribution of the experts by the different review teams and appoint the Vice-chairpersons.

**c)** The criteria for the selection of the panel members, besides recognised expertise in the field of study, include observance of the following aspects, whenever possible:

- *institutional diversity* – the members of the panel must not come, as a rule, from the same institutions or organisations;
- *individual autonomy* – the experts act as such, and not as representatives of any institution or professional organisation; the selection of experts is based only on their scientific competence and not on their affiliation;
- *rank* – to avoid professional conflicts of interests, academic members of the panels should, whenever possible, be full professors;
- *internationalisation and external participation* – there must be enough foreign members in the panel to ensure, in principle, one foreign expert in each review team; the same applies to the participation of experts external to the academic community;
- *conflict of interests* – the review team visiting a particular institution may not include teachers, researchers, other employees or directors of the institution under evaluation, as well as those with family ties with directors or teachers of the institution (Law 38/94, article 12.4).

**d)** The identification of potential experts involves the advice from the higher education institutions. In the public university sector, the internal organisation of FUP includes Advisory Thematic Committees in each of the study fields, which are composed of representatives from the member universities. The members of these committees are invited to suggest names of possible experts (including experts from abroad and from the external community, but not members of their own institution) to be invited. In the private university sector, APESP promotes a similar invitation directly at the private universities under assessment.

**e)** The Presidents of the two university evaluation councils, with the support of their staff, based on those names suggested by the institutions, as well as on other possible names, and taking into consideration the above mentioned criteria, work together in the preparation of the proposal for the nomination of the Chairperson and the composition of the review panel. This informal mechanism proved to work well and did not create tensions between the two councils.

**f)** The proposals are sent to CNAVES as joint decisions from the two councils, together with a biographic note of each of the panel members. CNAVES uses to discuss thoroughly the adequacy of the proposed composition for the review panels and in a few cases has decided to ask for the re-composition of panels.

In the polytechnic subsystem, the overall process put in place by the evaluation councils of ADISPOR and APESP are equivalent to those in the university councils, including the close cooperation of the two councils. There are, however, some specificities in the organisation of the review panels and in the adopted criteria, as follows:

**1)** For each field of study assessed in each academic year a review panel and a Chairperson are appointed. When the number of the programmes to be assessed exceeds six, the panel is organised in several review teams, each of them responsible for the assessment of three to six programmes. Each review team is composed by a Vice-chairperson and two other members. The Chairperson coordinates the overall activities of the panel, including the articulation with the review teams, and may assume the direct coordination of one or two review teams. Under proposal of the Chairperson and with the agreement of the two evaluation councils, each review team may include also up to two specialists as advisers, in cases justified by the breadth of the field of study. Each panel includes also one or more administrative secretaries, depending on the number of review teams – each secretary assumes the responsibility to support two to three review teams.

**2)** The criteria for the selection of the panel members are the following:

- The Chairpersons must be professors with a doctoral degree, preferably either retired professors from the polytechnics or active professors in the universities;
- The other members may be academics with a doctoral or master degree, or personalities of recognised social or professional prestige, with teaching experience whenever possible. Active polytechnic professors can not integrate the review team assessing the institution to which they are affiliated;

- Further criteria aim to ensure that: (i) the expert's master or doctoral degree was awarded in a scientific domain of relevance to the field of study being assessed; (ii) the selected member has a rank of at least assistant professor in the polytechnic or the university academic careers (*professor-adjunto* or *professor-auxiliar*, respectively); (iii) the expert has a reasonable knowledge of the polytechnic education; (iv) there is commitment and time availability; (v) in case of previous participation in a panel, the opinion of the Chairperson was not negative. Additionally, there is a preference for persons with some experience in scientific coordination and administrative management.

**3)** In terms of international participation, each panel should include a foreign expert as an advisor to the Chairperson, selected by the evaluation councils on the advice of the Chairperson.

### Briefing and training

The evaluation councils in each subsystem have prepared detailed guidelines for the external review processes, which constitute an important way of briefing the experts.

The guidelines for the external reviews of the university education (Appendix 9.2.1) start by elaborating on the scope and objectives of the evaluation system and, especially, of the external reviews, exemplifying with a number of questions that must be answered in relation to the quality and adequacy of the study programmes. It proceeds with orienting rules for the organisation of the work of the panel in its different phases – the organisation of the site visits, the analysis of the self-evaluation reports and the drawing and presentation of conclusions -, including many suggestions for an in-depth assessment. The guidelines for the external reviews of the polytechnic education (Appendix 9.2.2) cover basically the same aspects, also in great detail. The polytechnic evaluation councils produced one other document (*Procedural Questions for the Review Panels* - Appendix 9.2.3) with further advice for the external reviews.

Every year the evaluation councils promoted induction meetings with the experts, either as preparatory meetings with all the members of the panels or, as it is the case in the polytechnic subsystem, as yearly induction sessions with the Chairpersons and Vice-chairpersons, whom would later meet with all the members of their panels to discuss the methodologies and the criteria to be used. However, not all members were always present and some hints were not followed by the reviewers, despite the experience of the promoters and key speakers. On the other hand, it is felt that a more in-depth training is necessary to help improving the performance of the review teams, especially in terms of the site visits.

## Quality of the experts

A number of safeguards, already mentioned in previous sections, contribute for the assurance of the quality of the experts, namely:

- The suggestions from the higher education institutions, either through the Advisory Thematic Committees of FUP or directly in the other sectors, help in the identification of a pool of potential experts validated, from the start, by the academic community;
- The criteria used by the evaluation councils for the selection of the experts is rigorous and aims at recognised outstanding quality;
- When a panel in a particular field of study is not set up for the first time, former members who got a negative opinion from the Chairperson are not reappointed; in the meetings with the polytechnic institutional coordinators, some cases of less adequate behaviour of particular team members were related – such members were not invited in the following years;
- Each proposal for the composition of a review panel is subjected to a careful analysis in a plenary meeting of CNAVES, based on the biographic notes of the proposed experts (in a few cases, CNAVES has asked the evaluation councils to reformulate the proposals, which has always been accepted by the councils);
- The significant number of university professors appointed to integrate the polytechnic review panels (44% of the members), or to act as Chairpersons (88%) or Vice-chairpersons (69%), shows the great care taken with the independence of the panels and the diversification of personal experiences in their composition.

## Meetings between the experts

The guidelines for the external reviews in both subsystems are explicit on the organisation of the work of the review panels, including the meetings to take place.

In the university subsystem, the following formal meetings of the review panel are obligatory (sections 8, 9 and 13.2.2 of the guidelines), but others may take place by initiative of the Chairperson:

- A preliminary meeting, within ten days after the reception of the self-evaluation reports by the panel members, in order to: discuss the organisation and preparation of the external reviews; define the methodologies, working conditions and distribution of tasks; perform a global analysis of the self-evaluation reports and identify any need for further information from the institutions; and start discussion on the terms of reference for the site visits.
- A first formal meeting, within three weeks after the preliminary meeting, with the objective to deepen the analysis of the self-evaluation reports,

prepare a synthesis of the comments on the self-evaluation reports, adopt the terms of reference for the site visits and prepare a list of specific questions to tackle in each visit, to be sent in advance to the institutions.

- A formal final meeting to discuss and approve the report from the external review.

In the polytechnic subsystem, the guidelines suggest the following meetings of the review panel (section 8 of the guidelines):

- A first (preliminary) plenary meeting, in which the self-evaluation reports are handed out to the panel members and the following aspects must be discussed while briefing all the panel members: roles and working conditions of the Chairperson, Vice-chairpersons, other panel members and secretaries; objectives and established procedures for the assessments; structure and contents of the self-evaluation guidelines, to identify and understand the different aspects covered by the self-evaluation reports; clarification of the role of the external review in the context of the whole evaluation process; and adoption of the panel's working plan. By decision of the Chairperson, this meeting may take place in two steps: a meeting of the Chairperson with the Vice-chairpersons followed by meetings of the review teams.
- A second formal meeting of the Chairperson with all the Vice-chairpersons should take place, to analyse the comments issued by the panel members on the self-evaluation reports (which were meanwhile worked out in one single document for each study programme by the appointed rapporteurs), identify additional information to be collected, adopt the terms of reference <sup>28</sup> for the site visits and fix the calendar for the site visits. The Chairperson may decide to convene all the panel members to participate in this meeting.
- Other meetings of the Chairperson with the Vice-chairpersons, whenever necessary to continue the reflections of the second meeting.
- A final plenary meeting, to discuss and approve the final reports.

### Division of labour

The roles of the Chairperson, the Vice-chairpersons, the Secretary and the Rapporteurs are defined in the guidelines for the external reviews (sections 10 and 13.2.1 of the university guidelines; sections 1, 5 and 14 of the polytechnic guidelines).

The Chairperson is the overall coordinator of the panel's activities and represents the panel in all its external relations, namely in liaising with the evaluation councils. The Vice-chairpersons cooperate with the Chairperson and coordinate their own review team.

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<sup>28</sup> Most terms of reference consist only of the programme for the site visit.

The Rapporteur drafts the report on the assessed study programme. In the university panels, the Rapporteur is the Vice-chairperson or a member chosen within the review team. In the polytechnic panels, the Rapporteur is chosen within the review team. Exceptionally, the functions of Rapporteur may be committed to the Secretary of the review team.

The Secretary assists the Chairperson in the organisation of the work of the panel and drafts the minutes of the meetings. In the university panels, the Secretary receives comments, proposals and reports from review teams and prepares synthesis documents, prepares the final summary report under the supervision of the Chairperson and organises the site visits with the administrative support from the FUP and APESP evaluation councils. In the polytechnic panels, the Secretary assists also the Vice-chairpersons in the review teams, may participate in some visits and ensures the administrative and financial procedures associated to the site visits.

The staff of the evaluation councils have no direct intervention in the assessments, but assist the Chairpersons in promoting institutional relations with other partners, promote the contacts with the higher education institutions, namely for the reception of the self-evaluation reports, the preparation of the site visits, the expedition of the external review reports and the reception of refutations, receive the final reports from the review teams, prepare their publication and make executive summaries.

The staff of CNAVES have also no direct intervention in the assessments. CNAVES receives the reports and refutations, as well as the summary reports, makes them available to its members and sends them to the Ministry.

#### **4.2.3**     *Self-evaluation procedures*

##### Guidelines for self-evaluation

Some of the features of the guidelines for the self-evaluation process were already outlined in relation to the information procedures. Also, English translations of the guidelines are presented in Appendices 9.1.1 and 9.1.2. Thus, only a brief synthesis of their contents is presented here.

The guidelines for the self-evaluation of the university study programmes were jointly prepared by the evaluation councils of FUP and APESP and approved by CNAVES. The guidelines are very synthetic, specifying the following chapters that must appear in the self-evaluation report and the main aspects to be considered in each of them:

- An introduction on the procedures for the elaboration of the self-evaluation report – the composition of the self-evaluation group, the entities and bodies involved in the discussions of the report and the process for its institutional approval;
- A presentation of the institution, including financial data and facilities and equipment for general use;
- Data on the study programme – genesis and evolution, structure, operation, students, human resources, material and financial resources, post-graduation and research in areas related to the study programme (the points to be considered in this chapter are specified in great detail);
- Questionnaires – a reference to the methodologies used in applying questionnaires to students, academic staff and alumni;
- Analysis and comments, taking into consideration the dimensions of *relevance, adequacy, students, processes and resources* (i.e., answering the questions *why/what for, which/what, to whom, how, and with what* in relation to the study programme);
- Appendices (dossiers for each subject, including the summaries of the lectures and the written examinations; scientific and pedagogic publications of the academic staff; MSc dissertations and PhD theses).

To facilitate the systematic and homogeneous presentation of data, the guidelines include the lay-outs to be used in the different sections of the report (a total of 44 lay-outs is identified for the obligatory data). Some practical suggestions for the elaboration of the report are included as an appendix to the guidelines.

The guidelines for the self-evaluation of the polytechnic study programmes were jointly prepared by the evaluations councils of ADISPOR and APESP and equally approved by CNAVES.

These guidelines are much more detailed, having in mind that the polytechnic institutions were entering the full study programme evaluation system for the first time in the 2000-2005 round and therefore had less experience on quality assurance procedures. In the same line, an introductory note recalls the phases of the evaluation process, to highlight the context for the self-evaluation.

The specifications for the lay-out and contents of the report are quite comprehensive. To stress the importance of its analytical nature, the report is organised in two parts, the first dealing with factual information and data and the second with a critical self-appraisal of the study programme. The chapters to be included are:

- Factual description (first part)
  - Characterisation of the polytechnic institute – its historical evolution, organisational structure and national and international institutional relations;
  - Characterisation of the school where the course is taught – its institutional mission, evolution, internal organisation, resources, indicators on scientific, technical and pedagogical consistency, the dynamics of staff development, internationalisation, relation with the society, social support to the students;
  - Descriptive analysis of the study programme and the conditions for its operation.
- Critical self-appraisal (second part)
  - Objectives of the analysis – organisation and running of the study programme, available resources, performance, learning environment, quality culture, information to society and public image;
  - Methodology to hear the opinion of the academic staff, students, employers, alumni and professional associations;
  - Conclusions – qualitative judgements on the relevant aspects, SWOT analysis, action plans.

As appendices, the guidelines present suggestions for the questionnaires to be applied to teachers and students, as well as a check-list on questions to be addressed in relation to the insertion of graduates in the labour market.

Realising that the institutions were having difficulties with the systematisation and the normalisation of formats in the data collection process, which hindered the subsequent comparison and divulgation of relevant data and indicators, the evaluation council of ADISPOR prepared a new document in 2003, entitled “SYNOPSIS – The self-assessment of a polytechnic study programme” (Appendix 9.1.3), as a contribution to simplify and facilitate the self-evaluation process and to allow for better and continued reflection and analysis. It consists of suggestions for the lay-outs of 60 tables concerning data required in the self-evaluation reports, as well as some additional data considered relevant in other European countries.

#### Procedural advice

Since the beginning of the operation of the self-evaluation system great attention was paid to the active involvement of the higher education institutions, in order to raise awareness on the quality assurance issues and help the institutions in setting up their internal quality assurance mechanisms, in which self-assessment

plays a central role. Institutional coordinators were appointed to act as facilitators of the self-evaluation processes and as liaison persons with the evaluation councils.

The evaluation councils, working together in each subsystem, organised annual seminars and induction courses for institutional coordinators and leaders, as well as individual self-evaluation coordinators, dealing with aspects of relevance to the internal quality culture. Other meetings took place, whenever required <sup>29</sup>.

### Composition of the self-evaluation groups

The composition of the self-evaluation groups is an internal matter for each higher education institution. The only requirements established in the guidelines are the following:

- University study programmes: the self-evaluation report must indicate the composition of the self-evaluation group and the underlying principles for its appointment;
- Polytechnic study programmes: the self-evaluation report is prepared under the responsibility of the adequate institutional bodies, in the assumption that teachers, students, other staff and future employers are involved in the collection of data and in the formulation of quality judgements.

As a rule, the self-evaluation groups should include teachers, other staff and students. However, there are some indications that, as was mentioned before, the formal participation of students has been small, although their opinions are obligatorily taken into consideration and mentioned in the reports.

### Calendar for the self-evaluation

As mentioned in section 4.1.1, the higher education institutions know quite in advance the academic year in which their study programmes are going to be assessed and can start preparing beforehand.

According to the established calendar, the self-evaluation groups must be appointed before April of the year object of assessment, in order to be able to attend the induction courses run by the evaluations councils. The deadline for the presentation of the self-evaluation reports is in early January of the following year, therefore the time available for the institutions to conduct the self-evaluation goes from April to late December.

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<sup>29</sup> The polytechnic evaluation councils, in the period 2000-2004, organised 14 induction courses all over the country, involving a total of 1 008 participants. Additionally, 12 meetings with the institutional coordinators were organised in the same period.

#### **4.2.4** *Procedures related to the site visits*

The procedures to be observed by the review teams in the site visits are defined in the guidelines for the external reviews (Appendices 9.2.1 and 9.2.2).

The terms of reference for the site visits are prepared and adopted by each review panel, according to the general specifications in the guidelines, and are sent beforehand to the institutions by the evaluation councils.

The guidelines for the university study programmes state that, for the formulation of the terms of reference, the review panels must discuss in detail what they want to search during the visits, how to compensate the lack of information resulting from not attending any lectures or seminars, the objectives of the interviews with teachers, students and staff and the criteria for the selection of participants in these interviews. In what concerns the interviewing protocols, the guidelines exemplify some of the questions to be answered, such as: are the objectives and the learning outcomes of the study programme clearly formulated? Are they reflected in the curriculum? Do the assessment of the students and the examinations express, in a satisfactory way, a formative perspective? With the adopted organisation of teaching, can the graduates get a useful education in a social and personal perspective? What is the level of interaction between teachers, researchers, technicians and the students? And is it useful for the quality of teaching?

In regard to the scheduling of the site visits, the guidelines state that a typical plan should include: a meeting with the academic authorities and with the students' union, to analyse the objectives of the assessment; a meeting with the self-evaluation group, to clarify doubts on the self-evaluation report; a meeting with the students, to collect their opinions on the self-evaluation report, on the operation of the study programme and on their participation in the pedagogic structures; a meeting with teachers, for a in-depth analysis of the curricula, the objectives and learning outcomes, the methods to assess the students, and the relevance of their research projects to teaching; a meeting with stakeholders, to assess the impact of the course in society and the adequacy of the education and training of the graduates in face of the professional activities; visits to the buildings, laboratories, libraries, study rooms, workshops; a final meeting with the academic authorities, to present an oral report with the preliminary conclusions. The review panel may decide to include an "open hour" in the programme, to be widely announced, open to any persons from the institutions who want to express their views.

A site visit lasts for up to two days (from 2003 onwards, all visits were one and a half day long). Each meeting usually takes one to one and a half hours.

For the external review of the polytechnic study programmes, each visit has a duration of up to two days (usually one and a half days), according to the terms of reference adopted by the panel. The schedule must include a visit to the different kinds of facilities, and meetings with the academic authorities of the polytechnic institute, the institutional coordinator for quality assurance and the self-evaluation group, the academic bodies of the school, the professors, and the assistant teachers, representatives of the students' unions, the students and stakeholders. The objectives of these meetings, specified in detail in the guidelines, are similar to those mentioned above for the visits to the university institutions. The schedule must include an "open hour", as an opportunity for any members of the institutional community to talk with the experts and express their opinions. The visit finishes with a meeting with the directive bodies of the institution and of the school, to present preliminary conclusions and inform on the schedule for the next steps of the evaluation process.

As a rule, the terms of reference give no indication for the selection of participants in the interviews, because the meetings are open to all the members of the group being interviewed. In what concerns stakeholders, the institution usually sends many invitations to relevant external personalities or institutions, to be able to attract a representative number to the interviews.

#### **4.2.5** *The process and content for reporting*

The guidelines for the external reviews include comprehensive indications on the procedures for reporting and the structure of the reports. The process for reporting is analogous in both subsystems, but there are some specificities, that will be mentioned in the next sections when appropriate.

##### Purpose

The purpose of the final report on each study programme is directly linked to the objectives of the evaluation system, expressed in article 4 of Law 38/94: to promote quality, to inform the society, to ensure a more transparent dialogue between institutions and to contribute to the regulation of the network of higher education institutions. Consequently, the report shall include a global evaluation of the study programme, an individualised appreciation of the different items specified in the guidelines and the recommendations for the qualitative improvement of the

institutional performance, as remarked in the protocols with the representative entities (*cf* Clause 7 of the protocol with CRUP and FUP).

The guidelines interpret these views by observing that the reports must allow inferring on the degree of trust on the self-evaluation process, as well as on the objective suggestions, recommendations and proposals from the review team for the improvement of quality and the consolidation of a quality culture.

There is also an accountability dimension in the purpose of the report. It is up to the Ministry to extract the consequences from the judgements passed in the report in what concerns the recognition of the degree and, eventually, the public financing of the institution. As already repeated, until now the Ministry has drawn no consequences from the results of the evaluations.

### Drafting

The review panels are directly responsible for the drafting of the reports. The rapporteur for each study programme is a member of the review team, nominated as explained in section 4.2.2, who drafts the report under the general supervision of the Chairperson and the specific supervision of the Vice-chairperson, based on the contributions from the different members and on the comments and conclusions from oral discussions inside the team. The draft is sent to all the panel members and is discussed and approved in a final meeting of the review panel.

The staff of the evaluation councils has no intervention in the drafting and approval of the reports.

### Structure and content

The structure of the reports on the study programmes, in terms of the chapters to be developed and the points to be considered in each of them, is defined in detail in the guidelines for the external reviews (as annexes to the guidelines in Appendices 9.2.1 and 9.2.2).

The guidelines for the university subsystem indicate that the report must be concise and objective, with an indicative dimension of 50 pages, and enumerate the following chapters and contents to be treated in a critical analysis: an *introduction*, with the composition of the review team, the methodologies adopted and the terms of reference for the site visits; *insertion* of the study programme in the institution and relevant bodies for the pedagogic coordination; *teaching programme* – objectives, organisation, contents and their evolution in the last five years, nature of

teaching and learning methodologies, methods for assessment; *students* – numbers, access requisites, workloads and timetables, success rates, average time for conclusion of the degree, tutorial support; *human resources* - composition of the teaching, technical and administrative staff, pedagogical responsibilities, staff management; *structures* – administrative efficiency, budget and sources of income, expenses, facilities, equipment; *quality management* – follow-up policy, internal quality control, links with research, procedures for innovation; *external relations* – towards society, national and international institutions, EU programmes; *final recommendations* – passing a global judgement and presenting specific suggestions and recommendations on the most relevant points.

From 2003 onwards, the review panels were asked to include in the reports a rating of the assessed study programmes in fourteen “fields of appraisal”: institutional organisation, objectives, curricula, contents, students, pedagogic processes, teaching staff, other staff, facilities and equipment, financial resources, external relations and internationalisation, academic environment and social support, quality management, employability. A rating scale was defined in the following terms:

- A – *Excellent*
- B – *Very Good*    no structural problems detected; small problems of secondary importance.
- C – *Good*            small problems with relevance for the organisation and running of the study programme, easy to solve at departmental level.
- D – *Fair*              structural problems detected, requiring institutional intervention, but a positive dynamics is in place to overcome them on the short term.
- E – *Negative*        serious deficiencies, some of them structural, with limited perspective of rapid recovery.

This rating scheme, which reinforces the accountability dimension of the reports, was applied on a trial basis, leading to somewhat heterogeneous approaches by the different review panels. This problem, anyway, should be expected, since there was no proper briefing or training of the experts on its application. However, the experience has been positive and provides a good basis for a systemic and more homogeneous approach in the next round of evaluations.

In practice, there were cases where the indications about the structure of the reports were not properly followed by the review panels, raising difficulties in the comparison of results and making some reports very cumbersome to read, especially when they were much longer than recommended.

For the polytechnic subsystem, the guidelines are equally very explicit on the structure of the reports, although no indication is given on their desirable

dimension. The chapters and contents to be considered in the critical analysis are: an *introduction* with the composition of the review team and the methodologies and organisation of the work; *institutional condition* – brief reference to the institutional insertion of the study programmes, scientific and pedagogic consistency of the school, coordination structures; *running conditions* – facilities and equipment, budgets and sources of income, indicators on expenses, external support; *human resources* – composition of the teaching, technical and administrative staff, scientific and pedagogic responsibilities; *organisation of the study programme* – objectives and their validity in the scope of the polytechnic education, scientific and pedagogic consistency; *development of the study programme* – organisation of teaching, students and teachers workload, methods of assessment, success rates, average time for conclusion of the degree; *students* – demand, access requisites, numbers, support to students; *research* – relevance and relation with community problems and with teaching, results, publications; *external relations* – in connection to society, national and international institutions and EU programmes; *employability* – support to the professional insertion of graduates, employment rates, adequacy to the profession; *final recommendations* – global judgement, reference to specific qualitative aspects, suggestions, recommendations and proposals on relevant points, identification of weak and strong points.

The polytechnic evaluation councils, from the second year of the evaluation round onwards, established also rating procedures on sixteen “fields of appraisal”: quality of the self-evaluation report, adequacy of facilities and equipment, ICT resources, teaching staff, other staff, teaching staff development, awareness of the institutional mission and functions, methodology for the conception and organisation of the curricular structure, research and its relation to teaching, pedagogic coordination and learning environment, performance indicators on student demand, success rates, employability, external relations and internationalisation, financial resources, and quality and management.

For each field of appraisal, the aspects to be considered are explicitly defined. The rating scale develops in four levels (A, B, C, D) without qualitative mentions, although one can say that they correspond roughly to Very Good, Good, Fair and Insufficient. The criteria for the rating are prescribed for each field of appraisal, in quantitative terms. Consequently, its application by the different review teams is much more homogenous than in the university subsystem.

### Feedback on the draft report

As soon as the report is formally approved by the review panel, it is sent to the assessed institution, which has a period of 30 days to indicate eventual factual errors for correction or to contest the report by presenting a refutation. The review panel may then accept to introduce corrections in the report or to keep it unchanged.

The final report and the refutation in case it exists, are sent by the evaluation council to the representative entities, to CNAVES and to the Ministry, and are published together.

There are no appealing procedures. Nevertheless, when an institution puts forward a complaint CNAVES always discusses it and, if that is the case, recommends some kind of action.

### Summary reports

In the transition from the first to the second round, the evaluation councils of FUP and APESP decided that each review panel should prepare a summary report of a comparative nature, stressing the main findings from the assessments of all the programmes in its field of study. The guidelines (sections 10.4 and 13.3.2) entrust the secretary with the responsibility to draft the report under the supervision of the Chairperson and define the main aspects to be considered. The experience shows, however, that the summary reports do not always have the necessary comparative nature.

The guidelines for the polytechnic subsystem are not so prescriptive, but state that the review panel, in its final plenary meeting with the objective to approve the reports on each study programme, may prepare one other report of a global nature, with incidence on generic aspects that the panel considers worth of being emphasised. From the 42 review panels, 35 followed this recommendation and produced a global report.

A sample of the summary reports is presented in Appendix 8.

### 4.3 Publication and Follow-up

#### Publication procedures

One of the underlying principles of the evaluation system, established in article 7 of the Law 38/94, is the publication of the evaluation reports, obligatorily together with the refutations from the institutions.

The procedures for publication consist of the introduction of the reports in the web pages<sup>30</sup> of the evaluation councils and CNAVES, for consultation or download. CNAVES has recommended that the higher education institutions should also include the reports on their study programmes in their home pages. Many institutions, however, are not yet doing it.

In the second round there has been no strategy regarding the media in connection with the publication of the reports (and the immobility of the Ministry can not be discarded). This is a point to take into consideration in the next round, since it could contribute to the visibility of the assessment results and to improve the public image of the evaluation system. In face of the contractual nature of the evaluation model, a suggestion is to launch the publication of the reports at an annual press conference jointly organised by CNAVES, the Ministry, the representative entities and the evaluation councils. This strategy was used for the first batch of reports in the initial round of evaluations, with a good impact in the media, but was forgotten afterwards.

#### Follow-up

There are no established policies or procedures for the follow-up of the assessments. At the beginning of the second evaluation round, it was decided that the institutions should present mid-term reports (around two years after the assessment) indicating the progresses achieved as a consequence of the evaluation and, particularly, the actions taken in regard to the recommendations from the review panels. These reports were produced for the study programmes assessed in the first round and in the first year of the second round, *i.e.*, until 2003. However, in face of the financial difficulties and understaffing of the evaluation councils, and the consequent impracticability in processing and making use of the mid-term reports, the idea was abandoned and unfortunately was not replaced by an alternative lighter

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<sup>30</sup> The site addresses are: [www.cnaves.pt](http://www.cnaves.pt); [www.fup.pt](http://www.fup.pt); [www.adispor.pt](http://www.adispor.pt); [www.apesp.pt/inforavalia.htm](http://www.apesp.pt/inforavalia.htm). The reports are also available at CNAVES and the four evaluation councils and at the Observatory on Science and Higher Education (OCES). There is also a link at the Ministry's web site specific for the access to higher education.

process, as for example to determine that the institutions should produce concise mid-term reports and publish them in their homepages. It could, somehow, be expected that the institutions, in the annual reports of their activities, would address the consequences from the assessments <sup>31</sup>, but in practice that is not usual.

The fact that the evaluation system is periodic provides some sort of feedback on the consequences from the previous assessments. Indeed, it should be a matter of common sense for the institutions, as well as for the review teams, to analyse the impact of the former assessment and the actions taken in respect to the recommendations. That is, maybe, the reason why the guidelines do not address explicitly this question. However, it seems that practical wisdom did not work out and most of the reports on the public university study programmes, which were already assessed twice, do not refer that aspect.

There was, however, some follow-up at system level, as will be seen in section 5.3.

#### **4.4 System of Appeal**

In an evaluation model based on peer-review assessments and mainly geared towards the improvement of quality, through recommendations from the review team, and where the assessed institution has the right to produce a refutation that is obligatorily published with the report <sup>32</sup>, a formal system of appeal on the results from the evaluation is not a priority and it was not established in the Portuguese case, as was mentioned before.

However, since the introduction of the rating procedures the judgements on quality have changed in nature and are more liable to bring about some conflicts with the review panels (some cases have already emerged). It is, therefore, a question that needs attention in the near future, particularly if the Ministry finally decides to extract consequences from the results of the assessments and starts acting accordingly (although there is no legal need for a specific regulation of the consequences from negative results of the assessments, it would help).

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**31** As a matter of fact, article 8.3 of Decree-Law 205/98 establishes that the institutions must assume the results from the assessments as a directive for the qualitative improvement of their performance and publicise the internal measures that were adopted in that direction.

**32** In our opinion, this is a powerful mechanism to protect the institutions. Indeed, most evaluation systems do not allow for a refutation in this sense, but only for debugging factual errors.

On a different level, there are procedures for appeal regarding the composition of the review panels. Indeed, Law 38/94 establishes that the higher education institutions may present an incidental plea of suspicion in relation to the experts designated for the evaluation (article 12.5). So far, it has not happened, although there have been a very small number of cases of complaints on the composition of the review panels after the evaluation process was finished and the reports and ratings were known<sup>33</sup>. The complaints came from institutions that were not pleased with a particular rating and, instead of making their case in the refutation, tried to raise suspicions on the review team. These types of complaints were obviously not considered. As a matter of fact, nobody was able to show, until now, that the composition of any of the review panels was biased.

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**33** In fact, there was one case of complaints before the external review took place, but no incidental plea came to light, except in the media, which is not a proper way to act and therefore the case was disregarded.

## **5. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **5.1 Policy and Organisation**

The policy for internal quality assurance in CNAVES and the four evaluation councils reflects the contractual nature of the evaluation model and the progressive construction and improvement of the evaluation processes, aiming at the active involvement of the higher education institutions and stakeholders in all phases of the overall process, including the critical analysis of the evaluation processes. In this sense, the evaluation councils and CNAVES can not be seen as mainly bureaucratic agencies that carry out predefined procedures; on the contrary, they are representative bodies of strategic nature, with the responsibility not only to execute the routine work for the organisation of the assessments, through the executive members and secretariats, but also to contribute, in a shared way with the main partners, to the definition of criteria and procedures in a developmental approach.

Therefore, the policy for internal quality assurance favours two complementary mechanisms:

- Systematic internal reflections in plenary meetings, based on annual activity reports, analytical reports on the processes and results, internal studies and papers, and similar documents;
- Public sessions involving the higher education institutions and stakeholders, to discuss essential aspects for the conception and implementation of the evaluation model, aiming at its continuous improvement.

As a consequence, there is no specific internal organisation, with allocated manpower, for certification-type procedures focused on internal quality assurance. The understaffing and small size of the secretariats would, anyway, hinder the setting up of such a structure.

### **5.2 Procedures and Mechanisms in the Internal Quality Work**

**5.2.1** The procedures for internal quality assurance are naturally related to the mechanisms referred in the previous section. In what concerns the internal monitoring, feed back and reflection mechanisms, the following levels of intervention may be considered:

**a)** the evaluation councils elaborate annual reports of their activities, some of them quite analytical, which are sent to CNAVES and are discussed and approved by the representative entities;

**b)** the summary reports in each field of study, by synthesising the main findings from the assessments, provide an overview of the results of the evaluations, allowing the evaluation councils and CNAVES to monitor the level of attainment of the objectives of the reviews;

**c)** the final reports from the evaluation councils, covering the whole period of the evaluation round, present a detailed and critical analysis on the procedures of the evaluation process, with an explicit discussion of strong and weak points and suggestions for improvement – in a way, they constitute self-evaluation exercises;

**d)** mid-term reports<sup>34</sup> or presentations on the development and results of the evaluation process add to the reflection;

**e)** the plenary meetings of CNAVES are mainly prospective, building upon the monitoring and discussion of the evaluation results and reports, and on reflections from the evaluation councils;

**f)** CNAVES organises periodically especial introspective meetings, lasting for two days, to dwell on the organisation and development of the evaluation process, looking particularly at the weaker points to be overcome;

**g)** the President and the members of CNAVES, individually or in working groups, elaborate internal studies to be discussed in the plenary meetings, dealing with sensitive and strategic matters and frequently leading to statements or recommendations to enhance the evaluation system.

On the other hand, CNAVES has been active in promoting meetings with outside partners, relating either to the improvement of the higher education system and its relation with the society, as commented in section 3.6.3, or to discussions on the evaluation process and the dissemination of its results. From the countless number of such debates, involving wide audiences and an extensive participation of stakeholders, it is worth mentioning explicitly those in which complete proceedings were published, as follows:

- *Evaluation of Higher Education*, Seminar held in Lisbon, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 1999, with the main objective to promote a cross-sector reflection on the evaluation process, bringing to the discussion the aims of the

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**34** As, for example, the publication: Almeida Costa, A. & Pinto Andrade, V. A. (2003) *Percurso da Avaliação no Ensino Superior Público Politécnico*, ADISPOR – Conselho de Avaliação.

evaluation system and the experiences and state of the art at the higher education institutions in the different sectors;

- *Global Evaluation of Higher Education*, Seminar held in Lisbon, on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2000, which provided an analysis and reflection on the evolution of the evaluation system, its internationalisation and articulation with the professional organisations, and the articulation between the higher education sectors;
- *Introduction to the Evaluation of Military Higher Education*, Colloquium held in Lisbon, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2001, summing up the experience from the evaluation councils as a means to help launching the evaluation of the military higher education institutions;
- *Evaluation and Accreditation*, Seminar held in Lisbon, on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2001, covering the topics of internationalisation of accreditation, relations between education and professional aptitudes, plurality of instances (formal and informal accreditation) and the legal framework for accreditation;
- *Trajectory of the Evaluation of Higher Education in Portugal*, Colloquium held in Lisbon, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2003, to promote a critical analysis on the development of the evaluation process, based on presentations from the evaluation councils, CRUP, CCISP and the National Council for the Liberal Professions, and draw conclusions in terms of corrections of trajectory that can improve the system.

**5.2.2** The question of the enforcement of a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of the experts in the review teams was already treated in section 4.2.2, in regard to the appointment of the review panels (the review team visiting a particular institution may not include either teachers, researchers, other employees or directors of the institution under evaluation, or members with family ties with directors or teachers of the institution), and also in section 4.4, concerning the right of the higher education institutions to raise an incidental plea of suspicion in relation to any of the experts designated for the review panels. The two mechanisms, one internal to the work of the evaluation councils and the other of an external control nature, complement each other.

**5.2.3** There is another important dimension in the analysis of how the processes and results from the evaluations carried out by the evaluation councils reflect the mission and goals of the quality assurance system, that goes beyond the internal quality assurance procedures in the councils and has to do with external independent studies of the evaluation process, its results and the corresponding impact on quality and on the embedding of a quality culture. These studies are briefly presented in the next section, together with their most relevant findings.

### **5.3 External Studies on the Evaluation System and its Impact on Quality Culture and Quality Management**

#### **5.3.1** *An external view on the first round of evaluations*

At the end of the first round (in 2000) FUP and CRUP have jointly decided to commission an external critical study on the procedures and results of the evaluation process until then. This study <sup>35</sup>, published in 2003, presents a thorough analysis of the first round, including also some comments on aspects from the initial period of the second round that are related to critical points from the previous round, and advances with a significant set of proposals to the improvement of the evaluation system. Many passages from this book are transcribed into the recent final report from the FUP/APESP university evaluation councils.

The study sums up the main aspects of the first round, in terms of scope, organisation, development and results, and presents suggestions for adjustments in the organisation of the evaluation process, such as: to proceed, as soon as possible, with more comprehensive assessments focused on scientific areas (rather than on study programmes); to reformulate the cyclical planning for the assessments, according to the results from previous assessments and taking into consideration the social pressure in regard to problematic areas; to pay more attention to certain aspects, like scientific research and its influence on the quality of teaching, internal mechanisms for quality management, or management of resources; to intensify the internationalisation of the evaluation process; to improve the depth and quality of the evaluation reports, including rating mechanisms based on a set of performance indicators suitable for international benchmarks, and to promote their visibility in the media; to articulate the on-going parallel processes for the evaluation of teaching and research; to extract more visible consequences from the assessments. The study also recommends that the Government should comply with its duties as contractual partner, not alienating its responsibilities.

Some of these suggestions were already partially adopted in the second round, such as the possible reinforcement of internationalisation or the improvement of the external reviews, and others were taken into consideration in the planning of the (postponed) third round of evaluations, but altogether the far-seeing observations presented in the study are still worth further reflection inside the evaluation councils and CNAVES.

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**35** Veiga Simão, J. (2003) *Modernização do Ensino Superior – Da Ruptura à Excelência*. Ed. Fundação das Universidades Portuguesa, Coimbra. 490 p.

The study promotes a deep analysis of the self-evaluation and external reports, drawing proposals to improve operational aspects and also conclusions on structural aspects for the quality of the higher education system.

**5.3.2** *A study on the institutional consequences from the evaluation process at the public universities.*

In the middle of the second evaluation round some persistent negative references to the (lack of) consequences from the evaluation system started to appear in the media, frequently fed by messages originating in governmental circles. The idea passed to the media was that the reports from the review panels were not sharp enough and were not contributing to the clarification of the higher education system. The universities in CRUP felt that, in spite of the need to improve the reports, this was a narrow and distorted vision on the aims and results of the evaluation system and decided to take the initiative to analyse how the evaluation process was influencing the universities in relation to the setting up of structures and mechanisms for quality management and to the emergence of a quality culture. For the effect, FUP invited CIPES to carry out a survey on the *institutional consequences from the evaluations of the universities*. The questionnaire, which was applied to the leadership of the CRUP's member universities, included qualitative and quantitative questions on four main areas: critical analysis of the evaluation system; proposals for improving the evaluation process; follow-up activities; and the establishment of quality management processes and the development of an internal quality culture.

The results from the survey were presented and discussed at a Seminar organised by FUP <sup>36</sup>, together with the study on the first evaluation round referred in the previous section. From the conclusions in the paper presented by CIPES <sup>37</sup> the following are worth mentioning for their relevance in the context of the independent analysis that was performed and also because they present a certain character of premonition:

- The emerging concerns with quality and its assessment and improvement felt inside the universities are directly related to the on-going national programmes on the assessment of teaching and research. In some institutions, internal mechanisms for the assurance and improvement of quality are starting to appear, mainly focused on teaching and on research, covering a wide range of tools, such as pedagogic surveys applied to the students, the creation of offices responsible for the evaluation processes, the monitoring and improvement of quality, the establishment of contracts with the research units, additional procedures for the assessment of study programmes, the preparation of written protocols for pedagogic and administrative procedures, among others.

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**36** Seminar *Consequências Institucionais da Avaliação das Universidades Públicas*, Coimbra, 22 May 2004.

**37** Amaral, A. & Rosa, M. J., *A alteração do relacionamento entre as instituições de ensino superior e o Estado e as suas consequências em termos de qualidade*, FUP, 22 May 2004.

- It seems, therefore, unquestionable that the implementation of the national evaluation system had a positive effect and has induced the (embryonic) emergence of a quality culture. However, in the present situation of a growing demand for accountability, the universities have committed a capital sin, by not evidencing to the society, with enough visibility, the progresses that were achieved. So, as cautioned in other studies on evaluation, either the institutions are able to show to society that the evaluation system produces effects or, sooner or later, some Minister will be tempted to implement a more “muscular” system, with all the inconvenient consequences. And with the media constantly searching for “blood and dead bodies”, it is easy to understand that the approach followed in the evaluation reports does not provide those ingredients which the media are thirsty of.
- The authors express their feeling that the evaluation system must proceed within its initial principles, aiming essentially at the improvement of the quality of institutions, but correcting some negative aspects like the obvious insufficiency of communication. They suggest that the implementation must be slow and careful, since its final objective is a quality culture and this cannot be achieved by coercive methods or without the commitment of the leadership and the other actors in the institutions.
- Raising the question of eventual alternatives, the authors refer to the fashionable solution, in the scope of the Bologna process, of an accreditation system, following the USA example. But they raise a strong word of caution, by citing Martin Trow <sup>38</sup>: “to a considerable extent, external academic accountability in the U.S., mainly in the form of accreditation, has been irrelevant to the improvement of higher education; in some cases it has acted more to shield institutions from effective monitoring of their own educational performance than to provide it; in still other cases it distinctly hampers the efforts of institutions to improve themselves. It encourages institutions to report their strengths rather than their weaknesses, their successes rather than their failures – and even to conceal their weaknesses and failures from view.”
- The final recommendation goes in the direction of prudence and the acknowledgement that cultural changes are slow and it is preferable to improve the existing model than to proceed to abrupt transformations that will hinder the stability of the evaluation system.

CIPES has extended this study after the Coimbra Conference, applying the questionnaire also to the academics responsible for coordinating the self-evaluation of the study programmes in the same universities <sup>39</sup>. A summary of the results is presented in a paper <sup>40</sup> included as Appendix 12.4.

### **5.3.3** *A survey on the opinion of the public polytechnic institutes*

The Coordinating Council of the Public Polytechnics (CCISP) took the initiative to organise the *First National Meeting on the Evaluation of Polytechnic Education*, held in Coimbra on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2005, with the presence of the

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**38** Trow, M. (1996) Trust, Markets and Accountability in Higher Education: a comparative perspective. *Higher Education Policy*, 9.4. pp 308-324.

**39** The results show that there are no statistically significant differences between the answers from the rectors and from the coordinators, except for a few questions.

**40** Rosa, M. J., Tavares, D. & Amaral, A. (2006) Institutional Consequences of Quality Assessment. Accepted for publication at *Quality in Higher Education*.

Chairpersons of CNAVES and the evaluation council of ADISPOR, aiming at a reflection on the concluding evaluation round. In this meeting, the results from a survey on the opinion of the public polytechnics on several aspects of the evaluation process were presented and discussed.

The survey considered seven main items for the analysis of the quality assurance process and addressed the following questions for each of them (the numbers in brackets refer to the percentage of answers on the specific item, or the percentage of very positive answers, as applicable; by very positive answers is meant *very good/good* or *very effective/effective*, since *satisfactory* and *unsatisfactory* were also possible answers):

- The degree of fitness of the evaluation procedures to achieve the envisaged goals in relation to:
  - the support to the strategic objectives of each institution (75% positive);
  - the objectives of self-assessment (92% positive);
  - the objectives of the external reviews (76% positive).
- The type of internal organisation set up for the self-assessment:
  - a global structure in charge of preparation and implementation (31%);
  - coordinating structures at programme or departmental level (23%);
  - direct responsibility taken by the institutional managing bodies (8%);
  - *ad-hoc* self-evaluation groups (25%);
  - other (13%).
- The balance between the means invested by the institution in the evaluation process and the results achieved:
  - time and money spent with the process were a good investment (67%);
  - same results could be achieved investing less time and money (23%);
  - excessive investment, in spite of the results (8%);
  - evaluation process is a complete waste of time and money (2%).
- The global opinion on the quality of the evaluation process, in what concerns:
  - the routine procedures (29% positive);
  - the criteria (42% positive);
  - the transparency/independence (71% positive);
  - the effectiveness of the review teams (43% positive);
  - the clearness of the recommendations (58% positive).
- The institutional commitment and mobilisation in what regards:
  - internal coordination (75% positive);
  - mobilisation of services (60% positive);

- mobilisation of teachers (53% positive);
  - mobilisation of students (48% positive);
  - mobilisation of other staff (62% positive);
  - mobilisation of stakeholders (33% positive).
- The importance of the self-assessment and external review processes for the improvement of quality:
    - self-assessment and the corresponding internal reflection (96% positive);
    - recommendations from the review teams (43% positive).
  - The most positive and negative points in relation to the self-assessment and the external review processes (to be considered in the next Chapter).

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

**6.1** The evaluation system established by Law 38/94 has undoubtedly an enormous potential for the promotion and fostering of quality in the higher education system, regardless the fact that it is yet far from being completely exploited. Most of the present shortcomings, such as the limited scope of the assessments and the sort of information made available to the public, do not stem from the legal framework but, indeed, from the options taken in its implementation, mostly justified by the circumstances as explained along this report, e.g. the options to adopt a programme-oriented approach and to focus primarily on the creation and consolidation of a quality culture inside the institutions. Since very early, the evaluation councils were aware of the existing limitations, as expressed in successive analytical reports, and tried to set in motion an evolutionary movement to overcome the insufficiencies and answer the pressures from society for better information. It is not surprising, therefore, that the preparations for the next evaluation round, on which the evaluation councils and CNAVES have been working for the last two years, encompass a new paradigm for a more comprehensive model of implementation, discipline-oriented and able to provide better and more consistent multidimensional ratings.

The most important **strengths** of the evaluation system are:

**a)** The contractual nature underlying the evaluation model, which strengthens the sense of ownership and belonging, and the consequent responsibility and responsiveness. The review teams are not seen – and do not act – as inspectors, but as partners of a shared evaluation process <sup>41</sup>.

**b)** The strategic dimension of CNAVES and the evaluation councils and their representative composition, still in the line of the contractual model, allowing a proper context for a permanent and prospective reflection on the evaluation process, considered in its essential role of contributing to reinforce the institutional autonomies, as well as on the rational development of the higher education system.

**c)** The institutional comprehensiveness, since all the higher education sectors are now actively involved and all the officially registered institutions must participate

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**41** In general, the higher education institutions did not feel threatened by the evaluation process, since most of them realised that evaluation is an important mechanism for their enhancement, as well as for the enhancement of the higher education system. This feeling is based in two complementary juridical principles: the *principle of cooperation* (allied to the principle of transparency) among the different institutions, public or private; and the *principle of trust*, strongly supported by CNAVES and the evaluation councils.

in the assessment. The successful inclusion of the whole higher education system and the fruitful cross-sector cooperation are surely among the best achievements.

**d)** The good acceptance and enthusiasm by the part of many institutions, which have assumed their participation in the evaluation process as an opportunity to reflect on their organisation and activities, and to take up quality culture and quality assurance as strategic elements for their institutional development. The work and commitment of the evaluation councils and the bottom-up approach in the construction of the evaluation system have been decisive to involve the institutions.

**e)** Consequently, the positive movement towards the institutionalisation of internal quality assurance procedures, as well as the positive impact inside some institutions regarding the quality of teaching, as a result (mainly) from the reflective effects of the self-evaluation process and from the recommendations made by the review teams. The appointment of institutional coordinators contributed to a new dynamism in the internal evaluation processes and provided a more effective liaison mechanism with the evaluation councils, enhancing in this way the contractual character of the evaluation model. Nevertheless, although this trend is visible and confirmed by the surveys referred in section 5.3, many institutions are still at an embryonic phase of quality management and a long way lies ahead in regard to adequate internal quality assurance mechanisms.

**f)** The high potential of the evaluation system to provide reliable data to the different stakeholders. The standardized lay-outs for data gathering presented in the guidelines facilitate the treatment and comparison of a wealth of data, to a certain point validated by the external reviews, that can easily be integrated into a national data base on higher education. They also provide a useful reference for the institutions to organise their internal information systems which, once installed, will facilitate a practice of systematic self-assessments regardless the cyclical external reviews.

**g)** In summary, a positive movement towards the assumption that the primary responsibility for quality culture and quality assurance lays inside the higher education institutions themselves. As stated in the reports from the evaluation councils, a critical retrospective at the latest evaluation round clearly shows a progressive functional evolution in both the attitude of the institutions and the work of the review teams, concluding nevertheless that the progress was more expressive in relation to the self-assessment reports than to the external reviews.

**6.2** The reflections in the reports from the evaluation councils and CNAVES, in spite of their positive appraisal, also identify, in an open and frank way, problems and fragilities that can be observed in the evaluation process. The main **weaknesses** to report are:

**a)** The complexity of the two-tier organisational structure (evaluation councils and CNAVES) hinders efficiency and dilutes responsibilities. This structure could be justified at the beginning of the evaluation process to help in the building up of trust between the different higher education sectors, in face of previous mistrusts and mutual ill-feelings, and also to place the (independent) coordination of the external reviews as close as possible to the higher education institutions, through the representative entities, while guaranteeing the articulation among sectors and the global coherence and credibility of the evaluation system. At present, and due to the positive work in promoting the dialogue among sectors, the conditions are appropriate for a more operational and efficient structure, without endangering the underlying principles of the evaluation model, e.g. its scope and contractual nature, as well as the strategic and prospective dimensions performed by CNAVES.

**b)** As a consequence of the organisational structure, the technical and administrative support is fragmented in several secretariats of little consistency. Most of the staff are on provisional contracts or are affiliated to other institutions (working at CNAVES or the public evaluation councils in the framework of mobility schemes), which compromises staff development and the building up of a historical memory and accumulated expertise on quality assurance. The overall budget for the coordinating structures is significant, but its division by five entities (*cf* Table 3.2 at section 3.5) does not allow for critical mass at any of the secretariats.

**c)** The already mentioned limited scope of the programme-oriented assessments, in view of the decision taken in 1995 to implement the evaluation system by phases, starting with teaching at the *bacharelato* and *licenciatura* levels. This approach allowed for an in-depth assessment of the study programmes, but now is the time to move to a model more comprehensive in scope, as said earlier. The overall knowledge already acquired through the assessments and the experience gained on the institutionalisation of quality assurance provide conditions for a lighter-touch discipline-oriented evaluation process, which did not exist at the beginning of the first round. It is however arguable whether it would have been preferable to start this new approach in the second round, building on the experience from the evaluation of the public universities, in spite of the smaller experience in the other higher education sectors.

**d)** The still heterogeneous situation in the assumption of a quality culture. As mentioned before, there is a positive trend in the institutionalisation of mechanisms for quality assurance and quality management, but there is not a systematic approach to monitor the situation and to support (and put some pressure on) the higher education institutions that are lagging behind.

**e)** The difficulties in setting up the appropriate follow-up procedures. As discussed in section 4.3, the follow-up of the assessments is almost inexistent and the evolution from the beginning of last round was even negative. A heavy bureaucratic approach to deal with this problem must be avoided, but workable solutions can be envisaged, such as the obligation for the institutions to prepare progress reports two years after the assessments and publish them in their home page. It would not be difficult for the coordination structures to monitor the compliance with such a rule and act in case of failure. In addition, samples of these reports should be analysed at random and comparative studies on the implementation of the recommendations could be commissioned. In the case of assessments that identified structural problems in some key fields of appraisal requiring institutional intervention to overcome them in a short time period (rating level of *Fair*), the progress reports should always be analysed and action should be taken if the recommendations are not satisfactorily implemented. It must be stressed that the follow-up mechanisms are important not only for the transparency of the evaluation process and the visibility of its consequences, but also to help in the preparation of “institutional progress charts” as strategic tools for institutional development.

**f)** The terms of reference for the external reviews and for reporting, notwithstanding the progresses achieved with the introduction of pre-defined fields of appraisal which have somehow disciplined the work of the review teams, are still too vague. As a consequence, the reports are heterogeneous – ranging from acute, focused and well founded reviews to benevolent public relation documents – and do not provide in many cases a consistent, clear and sufficient source of information to the stakeholders. As has already been planned for the next round, an effort must be put in a better training and briefing of the experts and in a further clarification of the guidelines for the external reviews, including a more precise definition of the fields of appraisal and the criteria associated to the rating scale. In particular, the dividing line between the *Fair* and *Negative* levels must be based on pre-defined parameters. The reports should also include an executive summary with the essential information relevant to the students, families and public opinion.

**g)** The composition of the review panels is seen by some external circles as not independent from the institutions and reflecting some inbreeding. These comments, however, are generally unfair, in spite of the improvements that can and should be introduced. Indeed, the criteria for the selection of the experts are very explicit on the individual autonomy of the experts and the rules on the conflict of interests (*cf* section 4.2.2). As for the balance and externality in the composition of the reviews panels, in the university subsystem the percentage of foreign experts and of experts from the external community has been steadily growing. In the latest round, 98 foreign experts (16%) and 111 non-academic experts (18%) participated in the external reviews. This trend should be maintained, aiming at a percentage of 25% for each of those two categories of experts. In the polytechnic review panels, for the reasons already explained (*cf* section 4.2.2) only 3% of the experts were foreign, 10% were non-academics, but 44% were university professors, *i.e.*, the experts affiliated to polytechnic institutions account for only 42% of the total of experts involved, which shows a good degree of independence of the experts.

**h)** There is a need for systematic internal quality assurance procedures in the evaluation councils and for explicit appeal mechanisms. In sections 4.5, 5.1 and 5.2 it was explained why these were not priority issues, although they were cared for in a wider context and a refutation system is in place. However, with the changes foreseen in regard to the organisational structure of the evaluation process and the growing concern for accountability, it is necessary to start introducing self-monitoring and internal quality assurance mechanisms at procedural level and to define, set up and publicise an appeal system.

**i)** The evaluation councils did not have, so far, conditions to establish bilateral cooperation mechanisms with other quality assurance agencies in Europe. The future organisational structure, with a solid technical support, should take internationalisation as an important issue in its agenda.

**j)** The total omission in the extraction of the consequences from the results of the assessments that are prescribed in the law (*cf* article 5.2 of Law 38/94), due in part to the indetermination in the levels of responsibility of the different actors in the process, but also and mainly from the paralysis of the Ministry in relation to the evaluation results. It is true that there have been some justified complaints about the quality of some reports, for the reasons mentioned in paragraph f) above. But it is equally true that there are clear cases of negative assessments of some study programmes and the Ministry took no action on them. Indeed, there are no news of any consistent analysis of the reports by the Ministry and the prevailing feeling is that

they are ignored. This is a crucial aspect for the evaluation system, that needs to be clarified for future action in terms of the responsibilities of each instance and the definition of requisites and parameters to issue *positive* or *negative* judgements in the assessments. Another point to consider relates to the procedures and timing for special follow-up procedures in the cases of a *fair* rating.

**k)** No actions were equally taken in the (few) cases of refusal, for different reasons, to participate in the evaluation process. As explained in section 3.2 (right and duty of participation), any institution that refuses to participate in the evaluation system will be the subject of an assessment determined by the Minister, which may include a visit by the Inspectorate. Nevertheless, all the cases communicated by the evaluation councils, through CNAVES, to the Ministry have been ignored.

**l)** The inconceivable inexistence of a national data base on social, academic and financial facts and indicators. As said earlier, the evaluation system has an enormous potential to provide reliable and comparable data that should be fed into the national data base planned in the protocols with the representative entities, to be implemented by the Ministry, which unfortunately did not happen.

**m)** As a consequence of the many omissions, the public opinion on the evaluation system has been damaged, in the sense that the evaluations are felt as having too few or no consequences. This less positive image is in some way unfair for the evaluation process, since the assessments, regardless the fragilities that were pointed out, are producing workable results and there is a positive trend in regard to the impact on the quality culture within the institutions. The different actors in the evaluation system should pay a special attention to this annoying aspect, particularly in what concerns the visibility of the results from the assessments and their impact on the improvement of quality. The annual press conference suggested in section 4.3 may be a good public relations exercise for this effect.

**6.3** The transition to a new round, based on a new paradigm for the evaluation process, represents a window of **opportunities** to address the fragilities and shortcomings discussed in the previous section and consequently to strengthen the contractual evaluation model, to reinforce its social dimension and to improve its image. The fact that there have been no clear higher education policies established at political level for a long time obviously makes these objectives more difficult to achieve, since evaluation must essentially be a tool at the service of such policies.

Many comments and suggestions were already presented in this report, in terms of a possible action plan to overcome or at least attenuate weaknesses and

reinforce strengths. A crucial point deserving further clarification is, however, the question of the organisational structure. The present two-tier structure has accomplished its objective of promoting and facilitating the interaction and cooperation between the different higher education sectors – the adoption of commonly shared tools and procedures is already established. The agility of processes and the assumption of new responsibilities in regard to the accountability dimension require a simpler, stronger and more efficient structure. The reorganised structure must however safeguard the basic principles of the contractual model and a balanced representation of all the higher education sectors, as well as its strategic and prospective capacity in regard to the development of the evaluation system, while gaining on the operational level.

One possible idea in regard to this question was presented in the study already mentioned in section 2.1, carried out by an international committee set up in 2004 by the former Cabinet <sup>42</sup> to propose guidelines for the reorganisation of the national network of higher education institutions. In its report <sup>43</sup>, reflecting the work that was developed in close collaboration with the former Minister, the committee argued for the creation of one single Council, meeting the ENQA standards, to be responsible for the external evaluation of all higher education institutions. The Council should include a strategic board to liaise with the State, the representative entities and the students <sup>44</sup>, keeping in this way the contractual approach of the quality assurance system without however losing independence. The Council should also have a full time (short) executive body and strong and high qualified staff and infrastructures. Two standing committees should be established, to deal with the specificities of the university and polytechnic subsystems while preserving the harmony and global coherence of the evaluation process. A solution of this kind would obviously help to overcome many of the mentioned problems and is easily compatible with Law 38/94, although it implies some changes in Decree-Law 205/98.

In what concerns the evolution and consolidation of the quality assurance guidelines and procedures, there is a wide consensus around the new evaluation paradigm proposed by CNAVES, to move towards a more comprehensive, consequential and institutional approach, discipline-oriented, with a better articulation with the research evaluation system. The evaluation process must produce consistent ratings by fields of appraisal, which may lead to the withdrawal of

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<sup>42</sup> Cabinet Resolution 67/2004, of 29 May.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, note 3.

<sup>44</sup> The present composition of CNAVES basically meets the requirements for such a strategic board, although it would be advantageous to include also one or two foreign experts. For the sake of the board's independence, it must be clearly stated that its members are irremovable during the duration of their mandates.

the official recognition of study programmes. A better articulation with the entities responsible for professional accreditation and higher levels of internationalisation are necessary, as well as some special provisions to deal with the specificities of distance learning and transnational education.

**6.4** There are, nevertheless, **threats** to the contractual model. The frequent changes of Minister <sup>45</sup> raised difficulties in maintaining or even fully understanding the spirit behind this innovative experience in the scope of the public administration. The present situation of a big delay and political silence in relation to the launching of the third round is not a good omen.

CNAVES has been blamed for an alleged deficit in the implementation of accreditation-type procedures. It is true that the ratings in the assessments started a bit late and on a trial basis, not fully consistent, but on the other hand nothing was done to extract consequences from the results of the assessments, as said earlier. The Law 1/2003 introduced the concept of academic accreditation and empowered CNAVES to proceed with its implementation, based on criteria to be fixed by the Government, e.g. the minimum requirements for the accreditation of a study programme. CNAVES made, in due time, a proposal for such criteria <sup>46</sup>, but the decree planned in the law was never published.

The Government is now announcing the intention to create an accreditation agency, but little is said about the improvement-oriented evaluation system, in a move that seems more geared towards public opinion than to the improvement of quality in higher education. The cautious words from the experts in CIPES mentioned in section 5.3.2, about the little capacity of an accreditation system to improve the quality of teaching, should be carefully considered, as well as their final recommendation that prudence is needed and “it is preferable to improve the existing model than to proceed to abrupt transformations that will hinder the stability of the evaluation system”. It would also be worth looking at the experiences in other European countries, for example in Germany where universities are strongly complaining about the unbearable workload and costs resulting from the individual accreditation of study programmes <sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Since the beginning of the cooperation with the Ministry, in early 1993, for the setting up of the contractual model, until now, nine different Ministers were in charge of higher education, meaning that the average time of permanence in office was 17 months.

<sup>46</sup> *Criação e Autorização de Funcionamento de Cursos Conferentes de Grau Académico*, CNAVES, 1 de Outubro de 2002. In CNAVES (2004) *Pareceres e Recomendações – Volume I*. ed. Almedina.

<sup>47</sup> The Germany agency ACQUIN, in partnership with four German universities and the HRK Quality Assurance Project (Project Q), has launched a pilot project entitled *Process Quality for Teaching and Learning – Concept and Implementation of a Process Accreditation Approach* that includes in its objectives the development of a system for certifying process quality in the field of teaching and learning, under the assumption that “a functioning quality management system in the sense of the process itself leads to improved – and in particular also to reliable,

The evaluation process, through a rating system based on sound pre-defined criteria, has all the conditions to provide the Ministry with the information necessary for the periodic renewal of the official recognition of the study programmes. A different problem is the initial accreditation, for the registration of a new study programme before it starts operating. This is a delicate subject, that must combine the respect for the institutional autonomy with the assurance of relevance and quality, and the main responsibility to document and demonstrate these attributes must belong to the higher education institution. The accreditation process must be agile and non-bureaucratic. Within the existing structures, the technical work to check whether the project for the new study programme meets the basic requirements on resources could be done by the Directorate-General of Higher Education, within a pre-determined period of time, and the peer review assessment for the judgement on relevance and quality can be carried out by the review panels in the scope of the evaluation process, under the coordination of CNAVES as defined by Law 1/2003.

*The two evaluation rounds have provided a mighty of experience and created a dynamics within great part of the higher education institutions. It would be a tragic political and scientific error if all this was lost as result of any unfounded voluntariness.*

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

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- 1.5 The Decree-Law 252/97 (flexibility in university management)
- 1.6 The Decree-Law 125/99 (regime of the research institutions)
- 1.7 Law for the Development and Quality in Higher Education
- 1.8 The Law for the Funding of Higher Education
- 1.9 The Decree-Law 42/2005 (credit system)

### **2. Main Legal Documents on the Higher Education Evaluation System**

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  - 12.1 The Self-Evaluation Group
  - 12.2 Composition of CNAVES and the Evaluation Councils
  - 12.3 Higher Education in Portugal (*cf* note 1)
  - 12.4 Institutional Consequences of Quality Assessment (*cf* note 40)
  - 12.5 University Higher Education – FUP/APESP – Final Report (2000-2005)
  - 12.6 The Evaluation of Study Programmes in the Public Polytechnic Education (2000-2005)
  - 12.7 Private Polytechnic Education – Evaluation of Study Programmes (2000-2005) – Synthesis.

