

# ***A3ES QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES***

## ***A Brief Overview***

**ENQA's 2nd Seminar for Recently Reviewed Agencies**

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**A3ES**

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# Agency for the Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education – A3ES

- **Created by Law 38/2007**
  - One single Agency for the whole Portuguese HE system
- **Legal status**
  - Private law foundation, established for an indeterminate period of time and recognised as being of public utility
  - Independent from the State and from HEIs
- **Remit of A3ES**
  - Assessment and accreditation of HEI and study programmes

## A3ES QA Activities

### ➤ **Prevailing process: programme accreditation**

- **Prior accreditation of new study programmes**

→ *ex-ante* accreditation – initiated in 2009/10

- **Assessment and accreditation of all study programmes in operation (every 6 years)**

→ *ex-post* – launched in 2010; 1<sup>st</sup> round in 2012-2016;  
2<sup>nd</sup> round 2018-2022

### ➤ **Institutional Assessment**

- **In 2017, as a “rounding up” of programme accreditation**

- Aiming at a global and comprehensive view of the Institution

- **To be repeated in 2023**

## A3ES QA Activities

### ➤ **Voluntary process**

- **Audit model to assess and certify IQAS (since 2012)**
  - 21 IQAS certified so far (+6 underway)
  - Certification taken into account in programme accreditation

### ➤ **Cross-sector studies on the HE system**

- **Research-based agency**
  - Office of research and analysis
  - Publications in international journals and books
  - Series *A3ES Readings*

## ENQA-coordinated reviews of A3ES

### ➤ **1<sup>st</sup> review in 2013/2014**

- **Substantially compliant:** standards **2.1** (Use of IQA), **2.4** (fitness for purpose), **2.5** (reporting), **3.1** (Use of EQA)
- **Fully compliant:** all the remaining standards.

### ➤ **2<sup>nd</sup> review in 2018/2019**

- **Substantially compliant:** standards **2.4** (experts), **2.5** (criteria)
- **Fully compliant:** all the remaining standards.

## **What after the 2012-2017 1<sup>st</sup> round?**

- **Aware of concerns with programme accreditation!**
  - **Unquestionable added-value in the official recognition of qualifications meeting the required standards**
  - **But: Little added-value in just repeating a round of programme accreditation**
  
- **Tendency towards less intrusive external QA**
  - **As HEIs become more responsible and transparent**
  - **To stimulate the emphasis on quality enhancement**

## The way forward

- **Lighter touch** ⇒ “Risk-management” approach
  - **Conditions for a (selective) lighter-touch approach in areas of proven quality**
    - **Internal QA system certified by the Agency – *Trust label***
    - **Good performance in the 1<sup>st</sup> assessment/accreditation round**
    - **Good performance indicators on**
      - **Qualifications of academic staff**
      - **R&D**
- ⇒ **Programme assessment by sampling**

# Quality Assurance Systems

Compliance/bureaucracy or quality enhancement?

“The quest for the Holy Grail of  
**optimum quality assurance**  
is more about smart systems  
than about large ones” (Ko Scheele\*)