



## **10<sup>th</sup> European Quality Assurance Forum**

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**London, UK**

**Taking stock and looking forward**

**Paper proposal form**

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Graduated in Sociology (ISCTE-IUL); post-graduated in "Institutional Management and Change in Higher Education Institutions" (The Open University and U. Twente).

As Head of Técnico Lisboa Institutional Studies and Planning Office, she coordinates a multidisciplinary expertise team with proven experience in the field of Higher Education (HE) assisting the Governing Board of Técnico Lisboa in specific areas that facilitate decision-making processes, promote quality and contribute to optimize institutional management and strategic development, while carrying out studies and projects in various areas of activity, with emphasis on strategic management, organisation and assessment in HE.

She is a member of the Quality Management Boards of Técnico Lisboa and Universidade Europeia, she collaborated in several international projects: SUMUP – Strategic University Management: Unfolding Practices (EU-LLP); PEOPLE-Promoting Educational Organization through PEOPLE (EU-Tempus) ATTRACT – Enhance the Attractiveness of Studies in Science and Technology (EU-LLP); Self-assessment exercise and evaluation of the EFQM model as applied to IST (CESAER); Quality Assurance: Public Policies and Management in HEI (EU-ALFA).

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Maria Alexandra Sevinate Pontes is graduated in Agronomy in 1990 from the Instituto Superior de Agronomia of the Technical University of Lisbon and earned her Master Degree in Quality Management, from Universidade Aberta.

From October 1995 to May 2013 she performed her activity in Universidade Aberta and focused her professional activity on the areas of Quality and Strategic Planning. She currently performs her activity at Técnico Lisboa Institutional Studies and Planning Office.

She also collaborated in Universidade Aberta, as trainer, in MSC and lifelong learning courses in quality management through E-learning.

Between 2007 and 2014 she coordinated a working group for quality management in higher education (GT2) of the Sectoral Committee for Education and Training (CS11), which develops its activity under the Portuguese Quality System. She has been the vice-president of this committee since 2013.

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Graduated in Decisional Systems Engineering she is a member of the Evaluation and Planning team from Técnico Lisboa Institutional Studies and Planning Office since 1995. She has always been linked to the area of Quality in Higher Education Institutions, in particular through the coordination of the Programmes Assessment and Accreditation process (Self-assessment and External Evaluation processes), and the elaboration of strategic planning documents released by the School. She has participated in several national and international projects, such as the pilot assessment exercise of IST Integrated Quality Management System (SIQuIST) and QUEST-SI-Quality System of Sc&T Universities for Sustainable Industry (EU-LLP).

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He is a Civil Engineering Student at Técnico Lisboa and Vice-President of its Pedagogical Council. He participates in regular decision making processes as a full member of the Pedagogical Council, including problem solving regarding students and teachers interaction & improvement of Student Services.

He is a Member of the Quality Management Board of Técnico Lisboa.



## Proposal

**Title: CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS A RESULT OF A NEW PARADIGM IN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract (150 words max):**

By contextualizing quality assessment in light of changing Higher Education, a brief characterization of the main changes in the Portuguese quality assurance system is provided, with emphasis on the quality monitoring and control mechanisms available at Técnico Lisboa and on the model adopted for the integration of those mechanisms in an internal quality management system (SIQuIST). A reflection is also made on the articulation of SIQuIST with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, considering weaknesses and improvement recommendations of a quality system audited and certified by the Portuguese Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education<sup>2</sup>.

**The paper is based on:** practice

### **Text of paper (3000 words max):**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The effects of expanding Higher Education (HE) in Portugal in the 1980s, led to the need to control *numerus clausus* and implementation of quality assurance systems. Furthermore, the new university autonomy, covering academic, pedagogical and administrative aspects, involved a regular assessment of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) programmes, under a process led by the national HE Assessment Council.

In November 2005, the Portuguese Ministry of Education launched an international assessment system, involving organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European University Association (EUA), which worked in cooperation with the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). OECD assessed the performance of Portuguese HE in the international context, while ENQA focused its analysis in the quality assurance system culminating in a series of recommendations on the organization, processes, and methodologies needed to establish a national accreditation system that followed the European guidelines.

#### **2. THE NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**

In 2007, under a new HE policy, Portuguese government defined the structure of a new quality assurance system for HEIs. A new legal framework was adopted, which took into account reference documents at European level, such as the ENQA (ESG) guidelines.

The 4 development priorities for this system were:

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted and updated for the 10th EQAF from article “Mudanças no Ensino Superior resultantes das alterações aos referenciais europeus e ao paradigma da avaliação da qualidade no Ensino Superior”, published in Book entitled “PROGRAMA DE MONITORIZAÇÃO E TUTORADO: Oito anos a promover a integração e o Sucesso Académico”, IST, ISBN: 978-989-8481-10-8, November 2011

<sup>2</sup> A3ES <http://www.a3es.pt/>



- to extend the scope of assessment, covering the performance of institutions and not just their programmes;
- to target the assessment criteria, for comparable results, and clarify the consequences of assessment in what concerns the functioning of programmes and institutions;
- to internationalize the assessment process, in particular from the perspective of institutional assessment;
- and to require tangible results, as HEIs should implement their own quality assurance systems, which are likely to be certified.

### **2.1. AGENCY FOR ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

In 2007, considering the European quality assurance system of HE, the Portuguese government decided to set up the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES).

A3ES is a private law foundation with legal status, recognized as being of public utility, and it is independent in its decisions, which must take into account State guidelines.

A3ES is responsible for contributing to improvement of quality of HE in Portugal, through the assessment and accreditation of HEIs and its study cycles (SC), assuring compliance with basic requirements of official recognition, while promoting an institutional quality assurance culture.

### **2.2. ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION MODEL OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

In order to ensure quality of performance of HEIs, the new quality assurance model followed by A3ES aims at measuring the degree of compliance of the mission of institutions through performance parameters related to the respective action and with the results arising out of them. In this respect, quality assessment, made through self-assessment and external assessment exercises, is a basis for accrediting HEIs and their SC, ensuring compliance with basic requirements that lead to the official recognition both of HEIs and their SC.

## **3. TEACHING ASSESSMENT AT TÉCNICO LISBOA**

Técnico Lisboa started promoting performance assessment exercises of its teaching activity in the 1990s, seeking to obtain an effective repercussion in the improvement of processes, programme results and faculty performance. Over the years, the purpose was to develop an assessment system that could:

- set up structures and ensure necessary resources for regularly carrying out external and internal assessment of its teaching activity;
- put a simple and effective system in place that could identify, collect, process and disclose information;
- and ensure that the assessment exercises had visible and timely effects on the (re)formulation of the educational process.

Through regular cycles, all scientific areas of BSc programmes offered by Técnico Lisboa were assessed. In response to weaknesses identified in self-assessment processes, different internal and systematic quality control mechanisms have been developed, tailoring the needs identified and the resources available.

Despite all these developments, the need to adapt to the Bologna Process and to the international reality, led to a far-reaching reflection about these mechanisms, which culminated in a broad review of all quality monitoring processes.

A3ES itself assumed the principle that each HEI is primarily responsible for its teaching quality, and should set up adequate internal quality structures and procedures. In turn, the Agency shall be responsible for conducting audits to certify internal quality assurance procedures. Therefore A3ES started developing broader assessment processes of HEIs in 2012. That included certification of internal quality assurance systems, and the commitment of adopting simplified accreditation procedures regarding institutions that implement these systems and present performance indicators clearly above legal minimum standards.

#### 4. INTERNAL QUALITY SYSTEM - SIQuIST

In 2007 Técnico Lisboa reflected internally on its quality policy, towards the development of an Integrated Quality Management System, known as SIQuIST, following the best European practices and covering Teaching, RD&I and Technology Transfer activities.

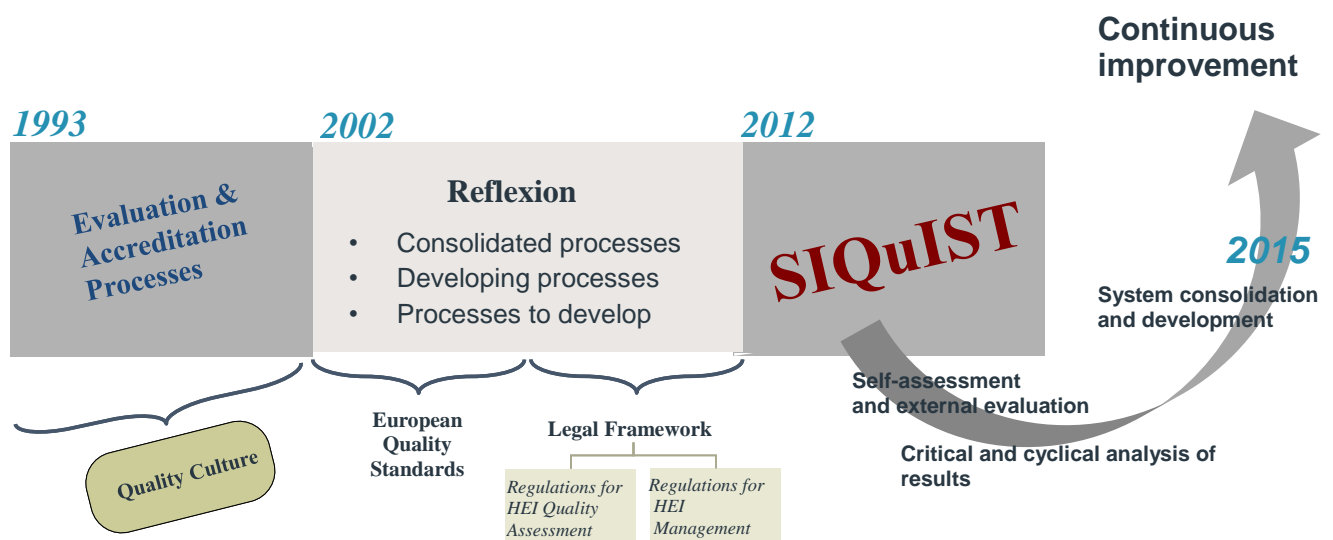


Figure 1 – Técnico Lisboa path towards Quality

Any quality management system should reflect the way an institution controls its activities, through a structure that supports the way the planning processes, resources and documents are used to achieve the institution's objectives with certain levels of quality, while promoting the continuous improvement of the services provided.

In this regard, the development of SIQuIST sought to identify and integrate the major processes in a trustworthy and effective system, giving an impetus to continuous improvement and readjustment, in real-time, of internal procedures.



The SIQuIST is pivotal for the institution's external Assessment and Accreditation processes, by stimulating a global and integrated quality culture which links the strategic objectives of Técnico Lisboa to its operating goals. Nevertheless, more than responding to external demands, this system ensures updated information on how Técnico Lisboa operates, and helps to create feedback mechanisms to improve performance conditions.

SIQuIST Regulations contain a group of assumptions deemed essential to build up any assessment system, in order to:

- set objectives for assessment and assessors;
- get stakeholders involved in decisions regarding assessment processes and policies;
- redress the balance between institutional vs individual needs;
- disclose information on assessment in a clear way (criteria, processes and procedures);
- provide resources for teaching quality promotion and improvement;
- promote assessment regularly and continuously over time;
- use and adapt instruments to specific teaching situations;
- use validated instruments for institutional assessment purposes;
- keep formative assessment separate from summative assessment.

#### **4.1 BENCHMARKS**

Processes were integrated according to EUA recommendations<sup>3</sup> for quality systems, in light of the need to ensure that they are flexible and involve academic community.

These guidelines were clearly expressed at the ESG of 2005<sup>4</sup>, with emphasis on the 7 key internal quality assurance requirements. Nevertheless, these guidelines were particularly focused on the area of Teaching/Learning, so that A3ES<sup>5</sup> guidelines were also adopted.

Técnico Lisboa should:

1. clearly define and disclose its quality assurance policy and related procedures;
2. adopt, monitor and review, on a regular basis, the programs of their SC;
3. assess students according to fully explained criteria and procedures, applied consistently;
4. ensure quality of faculty in terms of qualifications and competencies;
5. make adequate resources available to students;
6. have an information system which helps collect, analyze and use relevant information to manage all activities;

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<sup>3</sup> Report "Improving quality, enhancing creativity: change processes in European higher education institutions", project QAHECA (Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda), 2009

<sup>4</sup> ENQA (2005) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (*Helsinki, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*).

<sup>5</sup> Análise Comparativa dos Processos Europeus para a Avaliação e Certificação de Sistemas Internos de Garantia da Qualidade, Sérgio Machado dos Santos, Working version 1.0), Dec. 2009

7. make public objectively and impartially updated quantitative and qualitative information on its study cycles;
8. adopt mechanisms to promote and assess scientific, technological and artistic activity, adequate to its institutional mission;
9. establish mechanisms to promote and assess inter-institutional cooperation and technology transfer, in particular its contribution to the regional and national development.

#### 4.2 QUALITY POLICY

Técnico Lisboa statutes establish a commitment to quality assurance in HE, research and technology transfer as fundamental bases for the accomplishment of its mission.

Thus, Técnico Lisboa’s quality strategy relies on an institutional development programme with formally established milestones in strategic management documents, including actions to be carried out, monitoring fundamentals, time scales and the responsibilities and competences of the different bodies, services and agents involved.



Figure 2 – Strategic management documents of Técnico Lisboa

The quality assurance policy also seeks to stimulate active participation of stakeholders, in order to make activities assessment a common procedure in the eleven strategic areas.

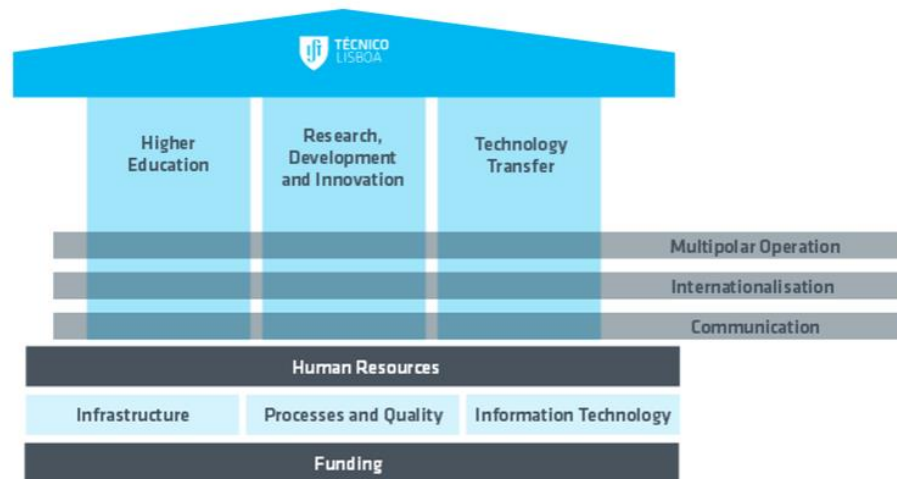


Figure 3 - Schematic representation of Técnico Lisboa eleven strategic action areas

Every decision and strategic action is monitored and supported by a Quality Plan (QP), which aims at specifying targets and indicators that substantiate the strategy for development, the quality assurance and the continuous improvement of Técnico Lisboa.

But, are we doing the right things the right way? To measure success, 2 types of indicators were included in the QP:

- quality indicators, to measure the process, expectations, perceptions, satisfaction, improvement, impact of activities carried out;
- and progress indicators, to measure results, the accomplishment of targets, the achievement of the objectives.

The following strategic objectives have been established for the Processes and Quality area, in 2014 and 2015:

- to keep a continuous improvement policy based on demanding self-assessment exercises, and on the development of comprehensive assessment procedures, based on mechanisms used worldwide;
- to ensure adequate practices that promote quality and assessment processes in every area of action, investing in the consolidation and innovation of functioning models, structures and processes, with the purpose of increasing productivity and commitment of collaborators in achieving the institution's strategy.

Therefore, various lines of action have been defined:

1. consolidation of the assessment processes regarding the programmes offered;
2. consolidation of the internal assessment of faculty, researchers and non-academic staff;
3. review/implementation of evaluation process for Departments, Research centers and laboratories;





4. redefinition and optimization of administrative processes;
5. identification, consolidation and dissemination of good institutional practices;
6. alignment and monitoring Técnico Lisboa positioning in international rankings.

## 5. CERTIFICATION OF SIQuIST

In January 2013 SIQuIST was certified by A3ES, as a result of an audit process that included a self-assessment process on the coverage and effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and structures, in each strategic area of Técnico Lisboa.

### 5.1 WEAKNESSES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SIQuIST

According to the audit plan, Técnico Lisboa should:

- assess the degree of SIQuIST estimated development (insufficient, partial, substantial and advanced);
- justify that assessment through evidence or examples;
- summarize aspects identified for improvement;
- present a SWOT analysis.

Thus, weaknesses have been identified and improvements proposed<sup>6</sup> in different areas. The following is the result of that reflection<sup>7</sup>, and includes a parallelism between the recommendations made by A3ES and the benchmarks of the new version of ESG 2015<sup>8</sup>.

- **ESG 1 - Policy for quality assurance**

Considering that *Quality Assurance policy translates into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes that allow participation across the institution*, Técnico Lisboa should ensure the articulation of SIQuIST with the quality system of the University in which it is integrated, which requires the identification of processes links, in particular a better identification of sub-processes, owners, performance indicators, related assessment mechanisms and articulation between processes and sub-processes.

Furthermore, and considering that *the way policy is implemented, monitored and revised is the institution's decision*, the Follow-up Committee of Técnico Lisboa Strategic Plan should speed up the elaboration of its Quality Plan, which is indispensable for SIQuIST to be a true improvement tool, counting on annual quality balance sheets for each strategic area.

- **ESG 2 - Design and approval of programmes**

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<sup>6</sup>Final report of the external assessment committee of A3ES to SIQuIST (2013), Available at [http://www.a3es.pt/sites/default/files/ASIGQ\\_12\\_00021\\_asigq\\_2012\\_aasigq.pdf](http://www.a3es.pt/sites/default/files/ASIGQ_12_00021_asigq_2012_aasigq.pdf)[http://www.a3es.pt/sites/default/files/ASIGQ\\_12\\_00021\\_asigq\\_2012\\_aasigq.pdf](http://www.a3es.pt/sites/default/files/ASIGQ_12_00021_asigq_2012_aasigq.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>FOLLOW-UP REPORT of Certification of SIQuIST, 8 January 2013

<sup>8</sup>ENQA (2015). Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Available at <http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>. Access on 01-06-2015



Considering that *Programmes are designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and are subject to a formal institutional approval process*, Técnico Lisboa should set up a task force with a clear definition of competences and adequately articulated with the University of Lisbon (ULisboa), in order to assure preservation and adaptation of SIQuIST to any changes arising out of the merger process with ULisboa.

- **ESG 3 - Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment**

Considering the *regular assessment and adjustment of the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods*, it is recommended that participation of Department Presidents in the coordination of course unit assessment processes is acknowledged and clearly defined in the SIQuIST support documents.

- **ESG 4 - Student admission, progression, recognition and certification**

Considering that *fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility*, it is recommended to include in SIQuIST the share of experiences in benchmarking exercises, notably in defining and assessing learning results and benchmarks of the European qualification framework.

- **ESG 5 - Teaching staff**

Considering that *Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff*, Técnico Lisboa should ensure that the teaching/learning field is totally covered by the quality assurance system, extending faculty pedagogical assessment surveys to PhD SC.

- **ESG 6 - Learning resources and student support**

Considering that *the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences*, Técnico Lisboa should implement mechanisms that ensure that the objectives of support services are in line with the institution's strategy, and that differentiation of staff performance allows for awarding excellence in a regular basis.

- **ESG 7 - Information management**

Considering that *reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for knowing what is working well and what needs attention*, Técnico Lisboa must develop an integrated platform supporting RD&I assessment and planning activities that help monitor its performance indicators.

- **ESG 8 - Public information**

Considering that *information on institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students*, Técnico Lisboa must consolidate the integration of some administrative and financial management processes, and on-line access tools in databases with relevant information for the quality of certain activities, while integrating various platforms to facilitate access to important documents for mobility processes.

- **ESG 9 - On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes**



Considering that Programmes should be *reviewed and revised regularly*, Técnico Lisboa must extend internal and regular assessment mechanisms to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programmes (Annual Self-Assessment Reports), to PhD study cycles.

- **ESG 10 - Cyclical external quality assurance**

Considering that *external quality assurance in its various forms can verify the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a catalyst for improvement and offer the institution new perspectives*, it is recommended to collect information systematically for benchmarking in light of the national and international universe, in teaching, research and external cooperation.

## 5.2 – BENEFITS OF THE SIQuIST CERTIFICATION PROCESS

In addition to the external visibility of SIQuIST and promised simplification of accreditation procedures by A3ES, many other benefits have been identified at Técnico Lisboa, following the certification of its Quality System, in particular:

- Reinforced commitment of institution's governing bodies concerning quality issues.
- An opportunity for involving all leaders of the institution's different strategic areas in a joint reflection on quality monitoring/promotion mechanisms.
- The development of new SIQuIST support documents;
- Greater visibility for the quality system itself, inside and outside the institution.
- Greater transparency and involvement of people in quality processes, establishing better links and information channels on the monitoring processes and quality promotion among stakeholders.
- An opportunity to share experiences and clarify doubts among stakeholders.
- An opportunity to review and reformulate some bureaucratic and complex processes.
- Increased participation of students in the quality management and assessment system.
- Greater awareness of the whole institution not only concerning quality assessment/promotion procedures but also concerning their effectiveness: what is done with the results of assessment processes (corrective measures, improvement plans).
- Recognition that external assessments always end up being an encouragement, an additional stimulus to the processes of change and continuous improvement in the institution.
- There are neither unique nor ideal quality systems, only benchmarks with minimum requirements (such as the ESG) from which HEIs should develop their quality system.



## 5. FINAL REMARKS

In recent years, Portuguese HE has undergone a troubled phase due to far-reaching adaptations required by the Bologna process, in parallel with other major changes in the legal framework itself. The concerns that HEIs have voiced for quality issues over recent years are manifested in institutions' everyday life. Nevertheless, there is still little control and formal assessment.

Some HEIs have invested, from the beginning, in these quality issues (as was the case of Técnico Lisboa with the creation of quality support structures) whereas other institutions have not gone beyond the conduction of student surveys, with little use of collected information.

However, and regardless of greater or lesser degree of development, assessment exercises ended up contributing to the implementation of internal quality assurance mechanisms in institutions, despite much remains to be done in order to articulate them in a cohesive and integrated system. It is true that information is gathered and results analyzed, but what has been lacking is a more comprehensive assessment, more oriented to thinking about the results in view of set objectives.

It is important that efforts of HEIs continue to devise quality systems and make accountability an obligation, but should not overshadow the importance of continuous improvement. The critical sense of those who prepare the self-assessment exercises in institutions should be emphasized, allowing for the introduction of changes for a true quality enhancement process. Institutions should look for quality assessment models and systems that allow them to internally ensure and improve quality, irrespective of the external mandatory assessment systems.

In this new phase, the implementation and consolidation of Quality Management systems in Portuguese HEIs is observed, and performance indicators can now be included in Quality Plans linked to the Strategic Planning of institutions. In this regard, self-assessment results may finally be used to support institutional strategic decisions, effectively contributing to the quality improvement of their performance.

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### **Expected learning outcomes for participants:**

By sharing experiences, it is expected that participants in this session are able to get acquainted to:

- the perspective of evolution of quality assurance systems in HE in Portugal and their consequences in HEIs;
- the main results of a specific audit experience to a certified quality assurance system;
- the benefits identified at Técnico Lisboa as a result of the development, consolidation and certification of its Integrated Quality Management System, (SIQuIST).