Introduction

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Portugal is one subsystem of the National Qualifications Framework, based on a specific legal framework for the National Qualifications System that integrates the National Agency for Qualifications (for all qualifications excluding Higher Education), the National Council for Professional Training and the Sectoral Councils for Qualifications, Novas Oportunidades Centers, Basic and Secondary Schools, Professional training centres and Companies providing training for their employees.

It was a clear objective of the legislator to consider the higher education system within an autonomous qualifications framework, bearing in mind the particular nature, diversity and autonomy of higher education institutions.

The Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education regulates the NQF subsystem for HE and CE using the specific legal framework of the higher education system.

The XVII Government established the qualification of the Portuguese in Europe as one of the policy objectives for higher education, thus implementing the Bologna Declaration.

Rationale and the main policy objectives

Higher education and Continuing Education includes universities and polytechnics administered by public, non-public or cooperative institutions. Universities award first degrees, master's degrees and doctorates. Polytechnic institutions award first degrees and master's degrees.

The XVII Government established the qualification of the Portuguese in Europe as one of the policy objectives for higher education, thus implementing the Bologna Declaration.
To do this, the principal mains are:

- To improve the quality and the relevance of educational provision;
- To encourage student mobility;
- To promote the internationalisation of training;
- To make institutions more open to society and the economy.

In this process assessment is essential to the operation of a qualifications framework based on learning outcomes. Besides for increasing Quality Assurance procedures the Portuguese Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (‘A3ES’) was established in 2007 and is responsible for the assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their cycles of studies, with accreditation being fully dependent upon the results of the assessment procedure. The Agency ‘A3ES’ is also responsible for Portugal joining the European system of quality assurance in higher education. [http://www.a3es.pt/](http://www.a3es.pt/)

Quality assessment takes the form of (I) self-assessment and (ii) external assessment. Self assessment is carried out by each higher education institution and external assessment is carried out by the Agency ‘A3ES’, the latter forming the basis of the accreditation procedures.

The quality assessment system necessarily includes the contribution of external bodies relevant to the process, specifically professional associations as well as other scientific, cultural and economic entities.

The quality assessment system ensures student participation by including students in self-assessment procedures, specifically through the compulsory involvement of educational councils and students’ associations, their participation in anonymous educational surveys of the teaching staff and courses which form a compulsory part of the self-assessment.

Portugal with a Qualification System composed by a National Qualification System and by a specific sub-system for Qualifications in Higher Education should increase permeability between sub-systems.

There is a need for transparency, coherency and consistency in the Portuguese qualification system. The NQF should facilitate the integration of different subsystems (academic qualifications, VET qualifications, higher education qualifications, sectoral qualifications (like tourism, agriculture, transports …) into a single (overarching), transparent and coherent framework and support policy coordination at national level. By means of the NQF, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to both labour market and society in general should be improved and the mobility in the education and training system and in the labour market facilitated. NQF should contribute to legibility of qualifications, more permeability between subsystems and easier referencing of national qualifications to the EQF levels.
Involvement of stakeholders

The National Agency for Qualifications is designated national coordination point (NCP) for the implementation of EQF in Portugal. It will develop its functions in cooperation with the General Directorate of Higher Education. There is a lake of information about the involvement of stakeholders in this process.

Levels and descriptors

Qualification descriptors are a statement of outcomes, achievement of which is assessed and which a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. Qualification descriptors should also provide a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed.

Each descriptor sets out the outcomes for typical qualifications at each of the four levels of the FHEQ-Portugal. The qualification descriptors provide points of reference that will help institutions determine at which level of the FHEQ-Portugal any qualifications resulting from such programmes should be placed. Each level is deliberately broad to provide flexibility and space for the development of new qualifications.

Qualification descriptors also reflect the binary nature of higher education in Portugal, with university education oriented towards the provision of solid academic training, combining the capabilities and competencies of both teaching and research units, while polytechnic education concentrates particularly on professionally driven vocational and advanced technical training. The organisation of the binary system reflects the needs of the increasingly diversified demand for higher education that meets the requirements of those who have completed secondary education and those who are seeking vocational and professional courses and lifelong learning.

Use of learning outcomes in HE & CE

Portugal is making progress towards a more comprehensive implementation of learning outcomes. Progress on mainland Europe is often initially being achieved by national legislation. A further complication is that the 2007 Stocktaking report indicated that, while many countries have begun to use credits for transfer and for accumulation, a much smaller number currently link credits with learning outcomes. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) clearly requires the use of learning outcomes, but progress is slow to date.
Overall, official reports indicate positive but slow progress in the national and institutional adoption and implementation of learning outcomes. This is not a negative situation as learning outcomes are part of a massive reform package that spans enormous structural and process changes from macro to micro levels, encompassing qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, institutional and curriculum reform. Such innovations, if to succeed at the first attempt, require careful and slow implementation.

Referencing to the EQF

The Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education published in March 2009 the document “FHEQ in Portugal - Framework for Higher Education Qualifications” where the Portuguese levels of Qualification in HE have a corresponding qualification on the EQF levels (levels 5 to 8). The legal framework of higher education established the organisation of cycles of studies based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The typical higher education qualifications of the FHEQ-Portugal and the corresponding level of EQF and cycle of the FQ-EHEA are described below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher education qualifications of the FHEQ-Portugal</th>
<th>Corresponding FQ-EHEA cycle</th>
<th>Corresponding EQF levels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degrees</td>
<td>Third cycle qualifications</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral course diplomas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degrees</td>
<td>Second cycle qualifications</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s course diplomas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Licenciatura degrees</td>
<td>First cycle qualifications</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education short cycle diplomas</td>
<td>Short cycle qualifications</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(within the first cycle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological specialisation diplomas</td>
<td>Short cycle qualifications</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(linked to the first cycle)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please note that at a post-secondary level, higher education institutions can also provide qualifications associated with Technological Specialisation Courses (CETs), leading to a technological specialisation diploma. By their nature and objectives, these qualifications are short cycle programmes, with the main goal of preparing students for employment, but also providing preparation for, and access to, the first cycle.
National legislation on EQF and relation with HE & CE

The implementation of the Bologna Process in Portugal has included the establishment of key measures to ensure the qualifications of Portuguese citizens in the European space, to promote equality of opportunity in access to higher education, to improve participation and completion levels in higher education programmes, and to attract new publics in a context of lifelong learning and improved educational welfare benefits. This process included a comprehensive set of major legislative and policy actions.

The first step in the reform was an Act amending the Basic Law of the Education System, passed by Parliament in order to provide the legal basis for implementing the Bologna Process of higher education reform. This was followed by the regulatory Decree-Laws passed by the Cabinet, in particular the Legal Framework of Higher Education Degrees and Diplomas (i.e., Decree-Law no. 74/2006), establishing the general principles for the organisation of degree programmes and their accreditation, and establishing transition rules for the reorganisation of existing degree programmes and the creation of new ones. This has had a significant mobilising effect throughout the higher education system and approximately 98% of all degree programmes taught in Portugal in the 2008/09 academic year were already adapted to the Bologna model (compared to 90% in 2007/08).

Full institutional adaptation to Bologna is due for completion in the coming months. The following developments have also taken place:

- New legislation was passed, regulating the creation of post-secondary education programmes (i.e., Technological Specialisation Courses, CETs, by Decree-Law no.88/2006), aiming at increasing the availability of technical and vocational education and widening access to such programmes for new publics. This process has brought a new dynamism to post-secondary education in Portugal, in particular at polytechnic institutes. About 5000 students were enrolled in these programmes in 2007/08 (compared to around 1000 students in 2005), which represents a significant opening up of higher education in Portugal.

- New legislation was passed, providing greater flexibility in admissions and access to higher education, in particular for students aged over 23 and those meeting certain specific educational qualification criteria, thereby widening the recruitment pool and making it possible to reverse the decline in student numbers in higher education observed in recent years. About 12 000 new students were enrolled in higher education through this type of mechanism in 2007/08 (up from around only 900 adults who started higher education in the 2005-06 academic year), representing another significant opening up of higher education in Portugal.

- The new Legal Regime of Higher Education Institutions (RJIES) (Law no. 62/2007, of 10th September), establishes the organisational principles of the higher education
system, defining the autonomy and accountability of institutions, establishing governing Boards with external participation, allowing for diversity of organisation and of legal status of public institutions (these can become public foundations under private law), allowing for the establishment of consortia, and recognising research centres as part of the university management framework.

- The new legal framework for the assessment of higher education (Law no. 38/2007, of 16th August) and the creation of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Decree-Law no. 369/2007, of 5th November), both designed to ensure the quality of higher education through the assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their cycles of studies, according to best international practices, in which independent external assessment is mandatory.

- The creation of conditions to foster national and international mobility of students and graduates (Decree-Law no. 40/2007, of 20th February), namely: i) the new regulations on arrangements for changes between cycles of studies, transfers between institutions, and re-entry into higher education. These conditions seek to facilitate the entry of higher education students into Portugal to continue their studies, with rapid and objectiverecognition of their previous school education and occupational training, and to create simplified arrangements to re-entry into higher education; and ii) the new legal framework for the recognition of foreign degrees, which simplifies the system for recognising foreign degrees in Portugal.

- The introduction in autumn 2007 of an innovative system of student loans with mutual guarantee underwritten by the State, which complements the system of public grants, thereby improving access to higher education for all students. About 5500 loans had been contracted up to December 2008 through the banking system; this represents an important new achievement for Portugal and Portuguese families, which follows current practices in modern societies at the OECD level.

- The creation of a National Qualifications System (Decree-Law no. 396/2007, of 31st December) and the establishment of the National Qualifications Agency (Decree-Law no. 276-C/2007, of 31st July), which has specific functions to regulate, accredit and control the quality of vocational and professional education, establishing the necessary conditions to foster access to tertiary education.

It should be noted that each of the legal documents described above and part of the legal reform of higher education was implemented after a wide-ranging consultation process with diverse higher education stakeholders, notably the Council of Portuguese University Rectors, the Coordinating Council of Polytechnic Institutes, the Portuguese Association of Private Higher Education, students’ associations, and professional associations.
The most important lessons learned and the way forward
Level of implementation of EQF/NQF

Further work and elaboration is needed:
- the level descriptors specification (what level of detail) is needed to enable referencing to NQF levels; there is a need for further common methodological work;
- NQF as a bridge between different subsystems including the relation between higher education and basic and secondary education (cooperation with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the other stakeholders involved within the NQF levels 1 to 4.