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IBAR PROJECT

QUALITY AND STUDENTS – THE PORTUGUESE CASE

Work Package 7

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1. INTRODUCTION

WP 7 on *Quality and Students* is concerned with the topic of student assessment, since according to the project's brief quality of student learning is most commonly assured by means of the student assessment procedures. Therefore, this report aims to undertake a detailed analysis of the implementation of Standard 1.3 *Assessment of students* of the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in four Portuguese higher education institutions.

Standard 1.3 states (for the detailed guidelines accompanying the standard see Annex 1): 'Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.'

In looking at the implementation of Standard 1.3, institutional policies and practices related to student assessment have been analysed and attention has been given to how these impact on the quality of student learning and assessment. To this purpose, the report's ultimate aim is to highlight on the one hand barriers and on the other hand examples of good practice observed in the implementation of the standard.

The same four institutions described in the WP 5 report have been analysed: HEI α , HEI β , HEI γ and HEI δ . They intend to represent the diversity of the Portuguese public higher education system from the point of view of its binary division (university/polytechnic sector), and the size and geographic location of institutions.

The report begins with a look at the national context, highlighting some general tendencies in policy and practice observed across the analysed institutions. It then moves on to explain the research methodology upon which this research is built. Next, the findings across the four institutions are presented under three broad sections: institutional policies, student assessment procedures, and learning outcomes. The report concludes with a synthesis of the identified good practice and barriers to the implementation of ESG Standard 1.3.

2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

Legislation under the framework of the Bologna Process was passed to regulate and advise on procedures and practices related to the assessment of students in higher education, among other. Decree-Law 42/2005, alongside establishing the adoption of the European credit system (ECTS), introduced some principles of student assessment, e.g. scale definition, pass mark of 10, specification of qualitative references for marks, comparability between the quantitative scale and the European scale (A, B, C, D, E). HEIs should fulfil these principles and publish the grades accordingly.

Beyond these regulations, the principle of pedagogical autonomy enshrined in Law 108/1988 grants each HEI decision-making power with regards to its student assessment policy, procedures and methods. A certain degree of convergence of policies and practices across institutions has, nonetheless, been noted. Some broad tendencies have been observed in the data collected across the surveyed HEIs, as reported below.

First, *institutional policies unanimously acknowledge the circumstances of special-regime students* (i.e. working students, students in the army, student representatives on institutional governing bodies, etc., which are contemplated in legislation) and indicate the exemptions which apply to them. Especially with respect to working students – the group most commonly referred to among special-regime students – special conditions apply to their attendance and assessment regimes. This is most likely a reflection of legislation which has acknowledged the status of working students since 1981 (Law 26/1981), with the latest regulations in Law 7/2009. However, this status appears more noticeable now further to the increasing numbers of working students facilitated by the national changes in legislation aimed at widening higher education participation to non-traditional student populations. Decree-Law No. 64/2006 approved a new path to higher education for students older than 23 years not holding the standard requirements to access higher education.

A *growing emphasis on continuous assessment* is also noticeable among the surveyed institutions. Thus, in three of the four HEIs (HEI α , HEI β and HEI δ) institutional policies explicitly favour continuous assessment. This is rather unsurprising in Arts given their highly practical, hands-on nature, and the gradual process of artwork creation students engage with.

Nevertheless, Engineering also appears to be increasingly embracing continuous assessment, as testified both by policies and academics' accounts.

A third aspect observed across all the surveyed study programmes¹ is *the absence of explicit qualitative assessment criteria* corresponding to the different levels of the Portuguese 0 to 20 marking scale (i.e. general descriptors of the quality levels of student work corresponding to specific marks on the scale). The only indication given in policies is the pass mark of 10 as stipulated in Decree-Law 42/2005.

Identical exam periods, regulated in detail in all the analysed institutional policies, apply in the four HEIs. Thus, there are three clearly-delimited periods: the normal period (for final assessment exams), the resit period (*recurso*) for the re-examination of students who have failed the course or who wish to improve their marks, and the special period for the assessment of special-regime students and students who miss a limited amount of credits to complete the study programme in which they are enrolled.

High levels of academic autonomy in designing assessment methods have been noted across the sampled study programmes. Generally, institutional policies indicate a broad framework of reference, but do not go into detail with regards to assessment approaches and methodologies. Academics are trusted to be the most appropriate actors to assess the fitness-for-purpose of various assessment methods for the courses they teach. However, some academics do report increasingly prescriptive regulations, for instance the compulsory inclusion of continuous assessment in one Engineering programme.

Finally, a relatively new trend appears to be *an increasingly formalised process of course evaluation* manifest in reports, staff meetings for course revisions and pedagogic student surveys. Thus, in three of the four HEIs, academic or quality assurance regulations (either institutional or at faculty/school level) require lecturers to draft a report at the end of the course as a reflective exercise on its performance and possible improvements in teaching and assessment. In all the institutions academic staff refer to ongoing meetings and dialogue to discuss the appropriateness of assessment procedures and to consider how these could be improved. In addition, according to both academics and students, student feedback (both

¹ *Study programme* (or *programme*) designates a whole study cycle (e.g. a master or first degree in Civil Engineering, Physics etc.). *Courses* will refer to the different components which together make up the curriculum for a study programme (i.e. Mechanics, Descriptive Geometry, Technical Drawing, etc in an Engineering programme).

formal via questionnaires, and informal) is generally taken into account to adjust and improve pedagogical practice, including student assessment.

3. METHODOLOGY

The report draws on two sources of data. First, an analysis of official institutional documents (i.e. pedagogic, academic and assessment rules and regulations) publicly available on the websites of the four surveyed HEIs was undertaken. The search for institutional documents included both university-wide regulations and faculty/school-level regulations; however at the latter level these were generally scarce. The documents consulted for each HEI are indicated in Annex 2.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the same target groups of institutional actors identified in the WP 6 report: central management and administration representatives, members of faculties/schools (deans, study programme directors and teaching staff) and students. As explained in the WP6 report, the faculty/school members and the students belong to two major scientific areas, Engineering and Arts. Two programmes per institution were chosen: Civil Engineering and Design in HEI α ; Civil Engineering and Communication Design in HEI β ; Civil Engineering and Arts and Design in HEI γ ; and Civil Engineering and Plastic Arts in HEI δ (see table below). For ease of reference and consistency, the broad terminology *Engineering* and *Arts* is used throughout the report to name the two investigated areas.

Table 1 - Faculty/schools and respective study programmes selected for the study

	Faculty/Schools	Study Programme
HEI α	School of Sciences and Technology (Rural Engineering Department)	Civil Engineering
	School of Arts (Visual Arts and Design Department)	Design
HEI β	Faculty of Engineering	Civil Engineering
	Faculty of Fine Arts	Communication Design
HEI γ	School of Technology and Management	Civil Engineering
	School of Education	Arts and Design
HEI δ	School of Technology	Civil Engineering Plastic Arts – Painting and Inter-Media

Findings based on officially-stated rules and regulations are presented primarily in section 4.1 *Institutional policies on student assessment*, but also feed into sections 4.2 and 4.3. On the contrary, interviews have been the main source of the findings related to practices around assessment procedures and recent changes. These are addressed particularly in section 4.2 *Student assessment procedures*.

In order to organise the analysis, the various dimensions mentioned in the guidelines accompanying Standard 1.3 (see Annex 1) have been grouped in three major sections.

First, the report considers the *institutional policies on student assessment*, specifically:

- *general provisions* with regards to the assessment of student performance
- requirements for *communication of assessment information to students*
- regulations on *attendance requirements, absence, illness and marking*
- role of *external actors* in defining student assessment procedures
- *single/multiple examiners*.

Second, attention turns to *student assessment procedures*, namely to pedagogic practices of assessment design and actual student assessment methods. It thus considers:

- *assessment procedures and their purpose* (formative, summative, diagnostic, etc.)
- *recent changes* in assessment
- *compliance with institutional procedures and administrative checks*.

Third, policy and practice related to *learning outcomes* are considered in a separate section, given the pivotal role with which learning outcomes have been invested by the Bologna Process and their association with a new student-centred pedagogy. In this respect, they are also mentioned at the very beginning of the Standard 1.3 guidelines as driving assessment. Assessment procedures are thus expected to ‘be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives’.

4. FINDINGS

The following sections offer a synthesis of the findings across the four surveyed HEIs. Annex 2 presents the detailed findings for each institution.

4.1 Institutional policies on student assessment

This section reports the results of an analysis of institutional policies on student assessment. First, it considers general policy provisions. Second, it looks at the requirements for communication of assessment information to students. It then considers regulations on attendance requirements, student absence, illness and marking; on the role of external examiners; and on the presence of single or multiple examiners. Wherever available, the documentary analysis is complemented by interview data.

General provisions

All four HEIs have institutional policies either specifically on assessment or on academic procedures which include assessment. At the same time, some faculties/schools have their own academic/assessment policies which bring an additional layer of detail to institution-wide regulations and tailor these to the specificity of the scientific area in question. Sometimes departments, too, have their own regulations, such as the case of the Department of Visual Arts and Design in HEI α , meant to give some degree of coherence to student assessment across courses.

As a general rule, policies contain broad regulations on possible assessment types and methods, assessment procedures, examination periods, attendance requirements, marking and student rights (access to exam papers, complaints and appeals). As mentioned previously, all analysed institutional policies contain provisions for special-regime students, allowing them flexibility with regards to assessment methods and periods.

Communication of assessment information to students

All academic or student assessment policies stipulate clearly the obligation of academic staff to inform students of assessment procedures, methods, criteria, dates, marking, etc. Usually regulations require this information to be included in course specifications which must be

drafted for all the courses in a study programme. All policies require course specifications to be made available at the beginning of the semester or of the course (the longest deadline is two weeks in the case of HEI α). Some call explicitly for the online publication of course specifications, whereas others state solely that the information must reach students at the beginning of the course.

Academics and students alike mention that assessment-related information is also communicated verbally in the first class. Students raise no concerns or issues with the communication process and appear to be satisfied with their knowledge of assessment procedures. Nonetheless, the vice-rector in HEI α believes that more work should be done to ensure the clarity and diffusion of information, since poor student knowledge is sometimes noted despite institutional measures and efforts.

Attendance requirements, absence, illness and marking

Policies either give clear information on attendance requirements, or ask study programmes to establish their own criteria. All the programmes considered here in both scientific areas have clear attendance requirements, compulsory for a proportion of between two thirds and eighty percent of classes. Some institutional regulations, for instance in HEI δ , distinguish between different types of classes (theoretical, practical, tutorial) and different attendance requirements apply to these.

The minimum required attendance functions as a pre-requisite to assessment, since students can otherwise be denied the right to be assessed. Attendance can also influence the final mark for a course, such as in the Arts programme in HEI α where students receive a mark for their attendance record. In these cases too, the circumstances of special-regime students are taken into account and they are exempt from such attendance requirements.

With regards to absence or illness, there is wide variation in the information provided in regulations. Thus, in HEI α absence must be justified with a medical certificate. Absence at exams is only accepted in cases of force majeure. In HEI β , policies contain no information on illness or course absence, referring only to absence from exams. In HEI γ , the regulations state that duly justified absences are accepted and explain the administrative procedure. In HEI δ , illness and absence is only addressed in relation to disabled and working students.

Regarding marking, all policies contain generic provisions usually on the marking scale, the pass mark and indications on the calculation of the final mark for a course with a continuous assessment regime. Only in one instance (Arts students in HEI α) do students complain that there is not enough transparency in the way a final mark has been calculated.

The absence of qualitative criteria corresponding to the different tiers of the 0 to 20 marking scale has been noted, as mentioned previously, in spite of Decree-Law 42/2005 that includes the possibility of adding a qualitative description.

Role of external actors

Institutional policies make no reference to external actors' input in student assessment procedures. In two instances (HEI β and HEI δ) the indirect influence of the national accreditation agency is referred to in interviews, for example in relation to the inclusion of learning outcomes in course specifications. The influence of industrial partners is mentioned by one programme representative (Arts in HEI α) because students often develop projects in partnerships with companies. Although students are assessed according to pedagogic regulations and criteria, the companies' feedback is taken into account.

Overall, it appears that the participation of external actors in assessment procedures is either very low or absent.

Single/multiple examiners

Only one institutional policy (HEI α) and one faculty policy (Engineering in HEI β) require the constitution of an assessment panel for each course made up of a minimum of three and, respectively, a minimum of two academics. Both these institutions belong to the university sector. In the other two HEIs, belonging to the polytechnic sector, institutional regulations make no reference to the number of examiners. There is one exception only: regulations for Arts in HEI γ stipulate that although the course leader is responsible for assessment, marks must be certified by the head of department and another member of the academic staff. In the other instances across the surveyed HEIs and study programmes, interviews reveal that responsibility for assessment lies solely with the course leader. When teaching a course is a joint activity between several academic staff, then assessment will usually be shared, too.

One discrepancy emerges from the interviews with academic staff and students. In HEI α , both in Engineering and Arts, academics report that the 3-member panel rule is respected. Whereas Arts students confirm that 3-member panels indeed conduct the assessment, students in Engineering, however, claim that assessment is conducted by one lecturer only (the one responsible for the course), except for the courses taught by several academics.

Another concern is worth highlighting. Arts students in HEI β (where university-wide regulations make no reference to the number of examiners and there is no official faculty policy) complain that in practical courses taught by one lecturer only and assessed on a continuous basis, if a student fails for whatever reason, he/she has no possibility to ask for a re-examination. This does not apply to courses assessed by exam or submission of a final piece of work. This raises a potential issue with regards to the transparency of the assessment process in practical courses assessed continuously by one lecturer only.

4.2 Student assessment procedures

This section analyses the appropriateness of assessment procedures for their envisaged purpose, i.e. diagnostic, formative or summative. It then addresses recent changes in assessment procedures and the extent to which procedures are compliant with institutional regulations and are subject to administrative verification.

Assessment procedures and their purpose

In all four institutions the principle of pedagogic autonomy applies and academics have a high degree of freedom to design and develop assessment methods as they consider appropriate. However, in the Engineering programmes of two institutions, both from the university sector, academic autonomy is to some extent overridden by institutional regulations which favour continuous assessment over final exams. Thus in HEI α , for a course to have final assessment only, the academic in charge must make a request justifying it. In HEI β , regulations prescribe that at least one course per semester must have continuous assessment.

According to the accounts of both Engineering and Arts teaching staff across the four surveyed institutions, the type of course (i.e. theoretical, practical, project-based etc.) and its

objectives determine the choice of assessment procedures (exams, various tests or student tasks throughout the semester, projects etc). In discussing types of assessment, reference is made to continuous and final assessment rather than formative and summative.

Continuous assessment is sometimes formative and sometimes summative. For instance, in Engineering in HEI β it reflects a concern with inducing a regular pattern of student learning along the semester rather than with its potentially formative function. In practice it often translates into summative mini-tests during the teaching period which academics believe can be disruptive for attendance and learning in other courses around the time of the test. Continuous assessment is also hindered by large student numbers.

On the contrary, in the Arts programmes in the four HEIs continuous assessment appears to fulfil primarily a formative purpose. It is the most widespread assessment method, too. Academics and students alike discuss the practical nature of arts courses in which students have to perform practical tasks and develop projects. The function of continuous assessment during the course is to follow closely the students' performance and progress, to give feedback and to guide further work. Then, the final assessment is summative, the evaluation of the final piece of work.

As opposed to Arts where continuous assessment appears to be the main assessment method, in the Engineering programmes considered here there seems to exist a greater blending of continuous assessment with final assessment in the form of a final exam. The degree of reliance on final assessment varies. For instance, Engineering lecturers in HEI β report that final exams are the most commonly-employed assessment method with the exception of one course per semester which must be assessed continuously. In HEI α , both students and academics speak of a variety of assessment methods (exams, various tests throughout the semester, projects), including the students' possibility of sometimes choosing between these. In HEI γ , students emphasise two methods: tasks done during the semester and the final exam. They complain about the undervaluation of tasks, which they believe are more beneficial for learning than exams. In HEI δ , practical tasks are generally the assessment method in practical courses, while final exams are employed in foundation courses.

To summarise, assessment procedures are informed by course type and objectives. In Engineering they appear more eclectic than in Arts. In the latter, continuous assessment is

predominant, as it adapts well to the practical nature of the courses and the nature of the discipline and is facilitated by lower student numbers. Some somewhat forced attempts to increase the weight of continuous assessment are, nonetheless, observed in the Engineering programmes.

Whereas final assessment has clearly a summative purpose, continuous assessment can have both summative (i.e. mini-tests) and formative purposes (i.e. the ongoing assessment of pieces of art work in Arts before their actual completion). Diagnostic assessment has not come up in discussions.

Recent changes

The most noteworthy change emerging from this study is a diversification of assessment methods and the increasing weight of continuous assessment and assessed student work to the expense of the final exam, particularly in Engineering programmes. This has been noted in three of the four institutions: in HEI β and HEI α , it has occurred partly further to regulations; in HEI γ , this difference in assessment procedures is classified as pre- and post-Bologna.

Changes reported by Arts academics are of a more varied nature. For instance, in HEI α the School has been developing some general assessment rules to do away with the inconsistencies students experienced between different courses. In HEI β , academics note a diversification of assessment methods as well as more systematic course specifications focused on what the students are expected to achieve, thus making assessment more reliable and appropriate for its purpose. In HEI γ , changes have taken place in procedures related to the communication of assessment-related information to students, now done online.

Some of these changes (continuous assessment, course specifications focused on student learning outcomes as a vehicle to inform teaching and assessment, etc.) imply an increased attention to pedagogic practices aimed to enhance the quality of student learning. Furthermore, other reported initiatives suggest an increased engagement with reflective activities around teaching and assessment. Thus, in two HEIs (HEI α and HEI β) regulations require academic staff to write a report at the end of each course to evaluate the fulfilment of its objectives and make recommendations on how it can be improved. Initiatives which foster reflection and discussion around pedagogic issues including assessment (and ways to improve these) also occur at faculty/school and programme level: e.g. a relatively new

teaching and learning lab in the Faculty of Engineering in HEI β which has resulted in increased pedagogic awareness; an annual workshop launched recently by the Engineering programme, also in HEI β , meant as an ongoing revision of the programme; or similar regular meetings among the Arts academic staff in HEI α with the same reflection and enhancement purpose. Formal student feedback (questionnaires) collected in all four HEIs, as well as informal student feedback, serve as reflection material for academics, helping them to improve the courses and the study programme. All of the above activities result in ongoing adjustments and improvements in pedagogic practices, including assessment. In HEI γ , the Bologna Process is claimed to have strengthened this continuous adjustment process.

Compliance with institutional regulations and administrative checks

Information on whether or not student assessment procedures are undertaken in accordance to the officially stated rules was not explicitly elicited during interviews. However, this aspect could be inferred from the discussion around the various dimensions considered in this analysis. The interviews suggest awareness of institutional regulations and compliance with these (for example in relation to informing students of assessment procedures early on, drafting course specifications, attendance requirements, students complaint procedures, etc). Generally there is a feeling that the regulations are flexible enough to allow disciplinary and programme specificity. However, in one case (Arts in HEI β) some resentment is noted with rules perceived as rigid and failing to take into account the characteristics of individual faculties.

With regards to administrative checks, a range of monitoring mechanisms, varying by HEI, are mentioned: validation of course specifications by programme directors (HEI β); the programme directors' duty to check the online publication of course specifications (HEI β and HEI α); the institutional information system as a monitoring tool, where all the information related to the different phases of assessment must be published (HEI α and HEI β); course evaluation reports to detect faults and suggest corrective measures (HEI β and HEI α); double-checking of assessment by programme director (HEI γ); administrative services monitoring whether teaching and assessment are carried out as defined in course specifications (HEI δ). In HEI γ , students give examples of unprofessional practices by academics (i.e. non compliance with marking schedules or lecturer absence from exams) which have not been addressed, thus complaining that no checks are performed.

It therefore appears that monitoring is less an administrative function (with the exception of HEI δ) and more one assumed by programme directors and facilitated by institutional online platforms. There is no consistent pattern of monitoring mechanisms across the four institutions, but some similarity is noted between the two HEIs in the university sector (HEI α and HEI β).

4.3 Learning outcomes

The first observation to make is the lack of a consistent terminology in Portuguese for learning outcomes. This has been noted both in official institutional documents and in the research participants' vocabulary. Several terms which appear to refer to learning outcomes are used interchangeably: competences (*competências*), learning outcomes (*resultados de aprendizagem*) or objectives (*objetivos*).

Thus the academic regulations in HEI α state that assessment aims to quantify the mastery of student *competences*. The general assessment regulations in HEI β require that course specifications should state *objectives* and *learning outcomes*. In HEI γ , Engineering pedagogic regulations require that the envisaged *learning outcomes* and student *competences* should be stated in course specifications. Assessment is described as a process which determines to what extent the learning outcomes and competences corresponding to each course have been reached. The Arts policy highlights assessment as having a central role in the promotion of *competences* and the development of appropriate methodologies. In HEI δ , according to the regulations, assessment tests acquired knowledge, taking into account the *objectives* defined in course specifications. However, it is unclear whether these terms are consistently employed to mean learning outcomes.

A second observation is related to the dichotomy between the official discourse in institutional policies and the actual understanding and practice related to learning outcomes. As seen above, in all the analysed HEIs student assessment or academic regulations make reference to competences, learning outcomes or objectives. Institutional representatives at high and middle levels also demonstrate understanding of the concept of learning outcomes and its pedagogic function. However, a majority of the interviewed lay academics did not seem to have grasped the concept. In answering the question about learning outcomes, they

led the discussion in other directions. This is despite the fact that they drafted course specifications where they were required to define the learning outcomes. Indeed, the vice-rector for quality and the Engineering quality representative in HEI β confirm that despite institutional efforts to introduce a learning outcomes approach, this is not yet properly understood, implemented and has not yet triggered changes in pedagogic methods.

However, Arts academics in general appear to be more familiar with the notion of learning outcomes and with its pedagogic function (in three of the four surveyed HEIs). This appears to be facilitated by the fact that Arts courses involve the acquisition of practical skills through hands-on product development and creation of artworks. Nonetheless, Engineering is arguably a practical applied discipline, too, given its laboratorial component, but this does not appear to influence Engineering academics' perception of learning outcomes. It can be speculated whether this is due to the first years in Engineering being dedicated to more theoretical foundation courses, and a maybe less practical nature of courses than overall expected. Arts students, too, seem to grasp better the concept of learning outcomes as opposed to Engineering students. They are also more satisfied with how assessment and teaching methods reflect the intended learning outcomes.

No difference has been noted between the understanding and embedding of learning outcomes between the institutions belonging to the polytechnic and the university sector.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the various dimensions considered in this synthesis as well as the detailed institutional data have allowed the identification of both good practice and barriers to the quality of student assessment and the implementation of Standard 1.3 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. These are summarised below.

5.1 Good practice

The first good practice to be highlighted is the very *existence of institutional student assessment or academic policies* which give transparency to assessment procedures and regulations. In addition, to ensure students' awareness of the assessment process, these

policies stipulate that relevant information should be communicated to students early on so that all parties are aware of the rules of the game, thus creating an additional level of *transparency*. Institutional online platforms emerge as useful tools to this purpose, as well as for communication between academics and students in general.

Another aspect worth highlighting is the *inclusive character* of assessment procedures (at least at the level of the rhetoric), since institutional regulations acknowledge the circumstances of special-regime students and stipulate exemptions from the attendance and assessment requirements applicable to normal-regime students.

Another set of activities which could be subsumed under good practice comprises *initiatives intended to foster reflection and discussion around assessment* (and other pedagogic approaches). Examples are: the teaching and learning lab in HEI β which, acknowledging the importance of assessment for student learning, has organised a session on assessment design informed by envisaged learning outcomes; periodic course revisions in HEI β and HEI α addressing, among others, assessment issues (high failure rates, mini-tests and impact on student learning); the student surveys employed in all four institutions to evaluate academic staff, courses, the programme, the adequacy of the teaching and assessment process, the numbers of hours students spend on learning activities etc. Such initiatives testify an *increased attention to the quality of student learning and assessment* and a tendency towards the *ongoing improvement of pedagogic practices*.

In Arts programmes *the match between assessment practices and the nature of the disciplinary area* could also be highlighted as good practice. Students thus speak of a positive experience of continuous assessment and practical tasks and of high levels of interaction with academic staff resulting in better learning. Especially in HEI α and HEI δ , this appears to be complemented by close attention and involvement with student work facilitated by continuous assessment. In HEI α , for instance, the quality of student results is demonstrated by national prizes.

5.2 Barriers

At the same time, barriers to the quality of student assessment and the implementation of Standard 1.3 have also emerged. While the existence and inclusiveness of assessment policies

have been highlighted as good practice above, these same policies present some shortcomings. Thus, their inclusive character is not always reflected in practice. Central management representatives in HEI α , for instance, speak of *academics' reticence to acknowledge the special status of working students* and a faculty representative in Arts reports the difficulty of reconciling flexible attendance requirements for working students with courses with a pronounced practical or laboratorial component.

In addition, the analysed documents contain only *scarce regulations on student illness and absence*. However, this does not exclude the presence of such regulations in other faculty or departmental documents which have not come to the attention of the research team.

Also in relation to rules and regulations, the *absence of clear tiered criteria to inform marking* (levels of acquired knowledge, skills etc. corresponding to the different marks) has been noted across all the institutions and study programmes considered in this report. Another obstacle to a reliable and objective assessment process is *the presence of a single examiner only* in some of the cases considered here, especially in the polytechnic sector.

A practice which could be detrimental to student learning is the *prevalence of final assessment* in the Engineering programme in HEI β . Academics' opinions are divided in relation to the introduction of more continuous assessment. Some believe it would trigger more regular student learning patterns and predict the disappearance of the final exam. Others refer to big student numbers and the high level of work continuous assessment would imply for academic staff, and to the disruption it brings to learning in other courses. It is maybe the way that continuous assessment is understood and practised (currently administered as mostly summative in character mini-tests) that presents a barrier, hence the need for creative thinking in designing alternative assessment methods with a formative purpose.

The *poor understanding of learning outcomes* is another significant barrier to the implementation of Standard 1.3. The apparent lack of a consistent terminology to designate learning outcomes probably hinders to some extent the formation of a clear understanding of the concept. Although academics were required to indicate the learning outcomes for their courses in course specifications, this research has revealed that particularly in the Engineering programmes the task was performed as an administrative exercise and has not

led to a change in either understanding or practice. Some institutional representatives also confirm this finding.

Student surveys were identified as one manifestation of the increased attention to student learning and ongoing reflection on pedagogic practice. However, *low student participation in questionnaires* and the lack of student feedback on aspects which need improving has emerged as a drawback.

To sum up, the good practice and barriers identified above are relevant for the consideration of the different policy implementation levels as suggested below. They emerge as primarily relevant for the institutional level since decision-making on pedagogic matters (including assessment) is an institutional prerogative. However, some might also provide food for thought to the national level, especially in relation to awareness-raising and the promotion of certain practices.

Good practice

National level:

- reflection and discussion around assessment (and pedagogic matters)
- increased attention to the quality of student learning and assessment as well as ongoing improvement of pedagogic practices.

Institutional level:

- existence of institutional assessment or academic policies
- transparency of procedures (early communication to students, online platforms etc)
- the inclusive character of assessment procedures
- match between assessment practices and the nature of the disciplinary area
- initiatives intended to foster reflection and discussion around assessment (and pedagogic matters)
- increased attention to the quality of student learning and assessment and tendency towards the ongoing improvement of pedagogic practices.

Barriers

National level:

- poor understanding of learning outcomes.

Institutional level:

- academics' reticence to acknowledge the special status of working students
- scarce regulations on student illness and absence
- absence of clear tiered criteria to inform marking
- the presence of a single examiner only
- prevalence of final assessment
- poor understanding of learning outcomes
- low student participation in questionnaires.

Referred legislation

Law 26/1981 – establishing legally the working student status

Law 108/1988 – establishing the autonomy of universities

Decree-Law No. 64/2006 – establishing a new path to higher education for students older than 23 years not meeting the standard access requirements

Decree-Law 42/2005 – regulating the introduction of ECTS and general principles of assessment

Law 7/2009 – Revised Portuguese Labour Code with articles 89 to 96 dedicated to the working student status

ANNEX 1: ESG STANDARD 1.3 ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

STANDARD:

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

GUIDELINES:

The assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on students' future careers. It is therefore important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and that it takes into account the extensive knowledge which exists about testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learners' support.

Student assessment procedures are expected to:

- be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives;
- be appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;
- have clear and published criteria for marking;
- be undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification;
- where possible, not rely on the judgements of single examiners;
- take account of all the possible consequences of examination regulations;
- have clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances;
- ensure that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution's stated procedures;
- be subject to administrative verification checks to ensure the accuracy of the procedures.

In addition, students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance.

([http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf), pp. 17-18, retrieved 22/11/11.)

ANNEX 2: INSTITUTIONAL DATA BY HEI

HEI α

1. Institutional policy on student assessment	<p><i>Internal Academic Regulations (Regulamento Escolar Interno)</i> is the institutional policy on pedagogic matters issued in 2008. It contains a Chapter which stipulates in detail the General Assessment Regime (Regime Geral de Avaliação).</p>
Main provisions of the policy	<p>Assessment can be continuous or final, the former being designated as the preferred option whenever possible. It must also cater for specific situations, such as the case of working students or other students with special circumstances. No matter what the assessment regime, its criteria must be clear and communicated to students at the beginning of each semester through the HEI's information system.</p> <p>The institutional policy contains provisions related to: assessment types and methods; marking; dates; student access to corrected exam papers and complaints; re-sits; cheating; exam cancellations; absence from exams; assessment panels; examination periods (normal, resit², special). Special clauses for working students.</p> <p>The department which hosts the Design study programme has its own regulations in addition to the university ones. It states that assessment must take into account three criteria: the final quality of the work; a mid-way assessment of progress; and attendance (each receiving a grade, but with different weights).</p>
Clear criteria for marking, illness, absence, class attendance etc.	<p>Broad indications on marking are given both in the case of continuous and of final assessment (scale, weight of different components, pass mark, required percentage of acquired credits per year so that the student can continue onto the next year).</p> <p><i>Arts</i> students complain that they only know the global mark for the course, but not the marks they have received, for instance, for individual projects they have developed for the course. They would thus welcome more transparency on how a mark has been arrived at, without having to specifically ask the lecturer to give them this information. That is, more detailed feedback on marking to know how to improve performance.</p> <p>The policy indicates the course of action in the case of student absence at exams in the case of force majeure.</p> <p>According to the institutional written response, each study programme must inform students of attendance requirements, and absence must be accompanied by a medical certificate. However, exemptions apply to students covered by special regimes, such as working students.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> The Department requires attendance at minimum 75% of classes for students to be assessed, aligned with requirements in a rector's note.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> Attendance of over 80% is assessed with the maximum grade, and afterwards the grade decreases proportionally.</p>

² Exame de recurso

<p>Communication of assessment type, methods, criteria etc. to students</p>	<p>According to the institutional policy, by the end of the second week in each semester teaching staff must publish information on the assessment regime of the courses they teach (type, methods and criteria, dates etc) online and in specially designated places within departments. According to the institutional representatives, students also receive this information via 'moodle', which is another tool meant to guarantee communication.</p> <p>Central representatives consider that more work needs doing to ensure the clarity and diffusion of information regarding assessment, despite the provisions in the policy meant to ensure these aspects. Some lack of knowledge by students is sometimes noted.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> Staff and students say that all course information (including assessment) is given in the first class and it must be made available on 'moodle', too. Students find 'moodle' a useful tool which facilitates learning.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> The director of the Pedagogic Council refers to the two-week period academics have to make available course specifications. In addition to the online publication and the verbal communication in the first class, course specifications are all lodged with the department secretary and students can find the information they need there too. The Design programme director also underlines that it is on the first day that students receive information on how they are assessed and why. Academics say that they announce the assessment rules to students on the first day and that, in addition, this information appears in the course specification also distributed on day one. Students confirm that they receive assessment-related information at the beginning of the course (assessment components, dates, panel composition etc).</p>
<p>Role of external actors</p>	<p>No information in policy documents.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> – According to the programme director, the department works closely with companies. Students develop projects in partnership with these, and so companies have a say in the creation of products. Although students are assessed according to pedagogic regulations by academic staff, the companies' input and feedback is also taken into account.</p>
<p>Single/Multiple examiners</p>	<p><i>Internal Academic Regulations</i> require that for each course there must be an assessment panel of between 3 and 5 persons. Departmental teaching committees are responsible for panel composition, afterwards approved by the rector.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> – the panel composition of minimum three people is confirmed by the department head and the academics, including in the case of courses taught by one lecturer only. Students, however, report that assessment is conducted by one lecturer only, except for the courses where teaching is shared between several, in which case assessment is also done by all academic staff involved.</p>

	<p><i>Arts</i> – the director of the pedagogic council refers to the university regulations, saying that they always comply with these and that panels sometimes even have 5 people. The programme director and academics also confirm the existence of assessment panels of minimum three people in compliance with university regulations. Students confirm that 3-member panels are responsible for assessment, although the course lecturer’s opinion carries more weight.</p>
<p>2. Assessment procedures</p> <p>Development so as to fit purpose (formative, summative etc)</p>	<p>According to the central university representatives, the institutional regulations are under revision. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot cater for specificities of some disciplinary areas (e.g. arts), since some assessment methods can be incompatible with some disciplines. It thus needs to recognise such particular cases.</p> <p>The circumstances of working students must be kept in mind in any modifications. The regulations must cater for everyone’s needs and provide equality of opportunity for all students, whether under a normal or special regime. For instance, alternative assessment methods must be available for students who cannot take part in continuous assessment. Teaching staff are said not to be very receptive to the particular conditions applying to working students, such as non-compulsory attendance.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i></p> <p>The dean declares that most courses are assessed by continuous assessment. For a course to have final assessment only, the academic in charge must make a request justifying it.</p> <p>Each lecturer has autonomy to decide on the methods which best fit the purpose of the course. One programme director gives the example of one of his courses which has continuous assessment only, and one which has final assessment only. Another one has made changes to the type of assessment further to student feedback which resulted in better student performance.</p> <p>Students confirm that they experience different methods of assessment, depending on the nature of the course. For instance, some have a final exam only, some have various assessments during the semester, while in some they have to develop a project. In some courses they can choose between final and continuous assessment.</p> <p>On the negative side, students also give examples of courses shared with other engineering programmes in which either both classes and exams are shared, or only the exams. In these cases, they feel that assessment does not test the knowledge and competences they need as civil engineers, being rather a one-size-fits-all assessment. When classes are shared, too, they feel that essential knowledge for their field and knowledge (a prerequisite for more advanced courses) can be missing. However, they have noted improvements in this respect over the years, as the number of students grew and it became less necessary to merge courses.</p> <p><i>Arts</i></p> <p>Academics say that continuous assessment is basically the rule given the nature of student work involving product development. Thus progress is assessed on a continuous basis and then the so-called final exam is the assessment of the final product by a panel.</p> <p>Student report the prevalence of project-based continuous assessment accompanied by close weekly guidance, thus a more formative type of assessment.</p>

<p>Recent changes</p>	<p><i>Engineering</i> Increase weight of continuous assessment. Teaching staff mention they have made changes to assessment methods in their courses. At the end of the course they have to write a course report and suggest improvements; for instance, one has increased the number of tests further to student feedback. In the report requested when failure rates are over 25%, explanations must be given and measures to overcome the problems must be proposed. This, in turn, leads to improvements.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> According to the director of the Pedagogic Council, the academics' autonomy granted by university regulations to define the assessment methodology for their courses sometimes results in inconsistencies and lack of coherence between or within courses in the same department. As a result (and part of a bigger exercise which is the revision of the university regulations) the School has been developing some general rules, wherever possible, to be applied to all courses. Beyond those, academics still have autonomy to define appropriate assessment methodologies. Academics appear overall happy with the functioning of the assessment regime. Meetings are organised at least once a semester to discuss the departmental assessment regulations. As a result, necessary changes and adjustments are made on a continuous basis to improve assessment procedures. Students confirm that they are constantly asked to give feedback on how the course could be improved. They feel that their opinions are taken into account and are reflected in the new course plan (more focused, more specific), meaning better learning for the students to come.</p>
<p>Compliance with official rules and regulations</p>	<p><i>Engineering</i> Programme directors refer to the general university regulations and the fact that academics comply with them. Teaching staff statements suggest that they are aware and comply with official rules such as communicating information to students within the first two weeks, attendance requirements, assessment panels, complaints procedures.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> Academics demonstrate awareness of official regulations as regards the timely communication to students early on, the assessment panels, student complaints procedures etc.</p>
<p>Administrative checks</p>	<p>There is only one mention of administrative intervention in the policy. Academic Services must receive the list with exam results within a determined period, and lists must be validated by assessment panels. Otherwise, the existence of the HEI's information system allows verification to some extent, since the regulations require that course-related information, including assessment, should be made available online.</p>

	<p><i>Engineering</i></p> <p>In the case of a failure rate higher than 25% for a course, the lecturer must write a report to explain possible reasons. Assessment-related information is made available in the HEI's information system, including marks and reports, thus allowing verification. Teaching staff feel, indeed, that the HEI's information system acts as a tool to check compliance with regulations and with what they have themselves defined in their own course specifications. However, they do not seem to resent this, as they feel that it is beneficial for everyone to know the rules of the game and play according to them.</p> <p><i>Arts</i></p> <p>The director of the pedagogic council refers to the programme directors' duty to check that course specifications are made available online. Again, the online portal appears as a tool which facilitates verification.</p>
<p>3. Learning outcomes (whether or not they inform assessment)</p>	<p>According to the Internal Academic Regulations, assessment aims to quantify the mastery of student competences (<i>competências</i>) envisaged by the course in question.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i></p> <p>Programme directors state that learning outcomes are defined at the beginning and then verified by means of assessment (or at least the minimum required level). Teaching staff, overall, seem to have difficulty in understanding questions around learning outcomes and generally fail to answer them. Few seem aware of the fact that learning outcomes refer to the competences students are expected to acquire. However, they do define such competences for their courses, that is, they define objectives for students; assessment then tests whether or not they have been reached. Academics add that this information is clear and published in the course specification made available to students in the first two weeks. However, they claim that students especially in the first years, do not pay attention to information on learning outcomes. Students refer to learning outcomes more in relation to the competences and skills required in an engineering career, and not only to what is covered in books, and discuss the extent to which academics pay attention to these aspects. They make a distinction between two types of academic staff, the ones that have already been on the engineering job market and those that have only had an academic career. As opposed to information on course content, they claim to receive hardly any information on course learning outcomes.</p> <p><i>Arts</i></p> <p>The director of the Pedagogic Council says that the coherence between course objectives and pedagogic and assessment methods represents a topic of continuous dialogue between academics and programme leaders. Adjusting methodologies is a dynamic process, in evolution. Meetings are organised at the beginning, middle and end of the semester for academic staff to exchange opinions based on experience and to improve pedagogic and assessment procedures. Student opinions are also taken into account. Adjustments are thus made when mismatches are identified. The programme director believes it is more difficult to assess the desired competences in theoretical subjects evaluated by exams or tests than in practical, project-based ones. He also underlines the multiple facets and the versatility necessary in the design profession (learning outcomes such as understanding of the responsibility and role of a designer, team work, basic working tools,</p>

	<p>various areas of knowledge etc.) and states that these are taken into account during the creation of the programme.</p> <p>Academics believe that continuous assessment and project-based assessment facilitate the verification of achieved learning outcomes, since work is usually divided in stages, each with a different learning objective (e.g. searching for information). The student evolution during the project, made possible through acquired competences and application of acquired knowledge, thus allows testing the learning outcomes. The close academic-student relationship allows dedicated attention to each student's progress and whether or not they reach the intended outcomes. According to academic staff, they inform students of intended learning outcomes and explain to them what each serves for. A linkage is thus created with the relevance of learning outcomes for the labour market.</p> <p>Students say that learning outcomes inform the design of courses, namely that certain components are present to prepare them for such and such professional situation in the future. They also feel that this is reflected in assessment.</p>
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HEI β

<p>1. Institutional policy on student assessment</p>	<p><i>General regulations for the assessment of first-cycle, integrated masters and second-cycle students</i> (2010) represents the HEI's policy on student assessment.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> The Faculty has its own assessment policy, <i>General Assessment Rules (Normas Gerais de Avaliação)</i> 2010. It is based on the HEI assessment policy, adapted to the specificities of the faculty, and provides an additional level of detail on the general regulations.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> The Dean reports that there are no formalised assessment rules or procedures at the level of the Faculty. This is mainly a consequence of the traditionally high level of academics' authority over their courses and the lack of accountability to any institutional bodies. However, he refers to the need of changing this organisation pattern. Students refer to the university policy and say that its regulations apply to the various courses.</p>
<p>Main policy provisions</p>	<p>The institutional policy contains provisions on the following: course specifications (responsibility lying with the corresponding teaching staff) which include methods of assessment and calculation of final mark; assessment regimes and methods (predominantly continuous, with or without final exam; only exceptionally by final exam only); organisation of written exams; types of final exam; forms of continuous assessment; examination periods (normal, resit, special); re-sits; absence at exams; cheating.</p> <p>Different conditions apply to special-regime students (working students, high-performance athletes, students with children, students with disabilities) with regards to continuous assessment, exam periods etc.</p> <p>According to the vice-rector for quality, schools have to define their individual policies, too. He states that assessment receives a lot of attention both among students and pedagogic councils, it is regulated to a great extent, but at the same time it is in constant evolution and change.</p> <p>The <i>Engineering</i> policy contains provisions on the following: assessment types (final only, continuous only, mixed or by public defence); course specification and components; conditions applying to the organisation of continuous assessment and exams; examination periods (normal, resit, special); marking; student access to exam papers; re-sits.</p> <p>As above with regards to special-regime students.</p> <p>According to the dean of the Faculty, the quality representative and the academics, the assessment regulations are currently under revision. The dean reports on a tendency towards more student work along the semester and increased linkages between learning and assessment. The quality representative describes revision as an ongoing process, since new issues that require regulation appear all the time.</p>

<p>Clear criteria for marking, illness, absence, class attendance, etc.</p>	<p>The institutional policy and the engineering policy both give broad indications on marking scale and pass mark.</p> <p>The former states that class attendance (max 25% missed classes) can be a requirement for assessment, students with special regimes being exempted, i.e. working students.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> – the maximum allowed absence amounts to 25% of classes, except for special regime students. Students have the right to be informed at any time about their attendance record.</p> <p>According to the programme director, only practical classes are compulsory. Lectures can only be compulsory if a lecturer decides so and communicates this information to students at the very beginning of a course.</p> <p>Consequences of absence at exams must be communicated in the course specification.</p> <p>No information on illness.</p>
<p>Communication of assessment type, methods, criteria etc. to students</p>	<p>The policy gives teaching staff a firm deadline to communicate to students information on assessment methods, marking etc. through course specifications which must be made available in the HEI's information system.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i></p> <p>The faculty policy stipulates the deadline for the publication of the course specification as the end of the first week of each teaching period. It also stipulates the assessment-related elements which must be included in the course specification: assessment method, assessment components and estimated time to undertake these (i.e. written or oral tests, with or without books etc), pass requirements; how the final mark is calculated; special exams for special-regime students unable to undertake continuous assessment.</p> <p>Students are aware of academic staff's duty to communicate assessment information to students (assessment criteria, how the mark is calculated, assessment components etc) at the beginning. They confirm that they get the information in the first class and it is also published for student reference. However, they say that sometimes the formality of the language makes it difficult to understand and they have to ask for clarifications.</p> <p>They also say that many times they can choose the assessment method, choice allowing students to opt for the method best suited to them (i.e. there are students who cannot do the continuous assessment).</p> <p><i>Arts</i></p> <p>Academics mention the university regulation which requires the publication of course specifications on the online platform, to include objectives, assessment method, components, attendance requirements. In addition, this information is communicated to students in the first class and handed in so that they can access it when necessary.</p> <p>Students are aware of the academics' duty to publish course information on the online platform at the beginning of the year. This includes assessment methods, components and their percentage in the final mark, etc.</p>

<p>Role of external actors</p>	<p>No mention in policy. The vice-rector for quality declares that external actors have no input in assessment procedures. They concern is global institutional results and indicators.</p> <p>In Engineering, the quality representative believes that accreditation bodies indirectly influence assessment procedures, for instance as regards the requirement of having course specifications which indicate the learning outcomes. However, there is no external input in assessment procedures as such, as confirmed by academic staff.</p>
<p>Single/Multiple examiners</p>	<p>No mention in institutional policy.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> In the case of exams, assessment must be conducted by at least two teaching staff. In the case of exams results contested by students, a re-assessment will have to be conducted by three staff members. The quality representative says that even when only one academic does the course and conducts the assessment (in the case of small courses) the programme director afterwards analyses the results and can detect irregularities, especially if complaints are raised. However, in the case of courses taught by more than one lecturer, they are all responsible for the assessment process. He believes the issue of single/multiple examiners is not relevant, since there are other mechanisms which can detect if things go wrong (for instance a project which analyses courses with high failure rates).</p> <p><i>Arts</i> Students complain that practical courses are usually taught and assessed by one academic only, Assessment is continuous, so if for any reason a student fails, he/she has no possibility to ask for a re-examination. This is not the case for courses assessed by exam or submission of works.</p>
<p>2. Assessment procedures</p> <p>Development so as to fit purpose (formative, summative etc)</p>	<p><i>Engineering</i> The Faculty Dean reports a tendency of overvaluing continuous assessment, and believes that a hybrid methodology is a better solution, given the fact that the final exam has specific purposes (i.e. to prepare students to act under stressful circumstances). The programme director discusses a consequence of this emphasis on continuous assessment, namely a faculty regulation requiring that at least one course per semester should be assessed through continuous assessment. However, the regulation also stipulates that this can be done by means of two tests during the semester. This interferes negatively with student attendance and poor performance in other courses after missing sessions. As a result, it is intended to do away with this regulation. In addition, other courses supposed to have combined assessment (continuous and final) were also using this method of mini-tests during the semester, increasing the previously mentioned negative impact. As a consequence, last year mini-tests were no longer allowed. The programme director says that there should be no constraints on courses to use certain assessment methodologies, but that assessment should be tailored so as to fit the purpose of the course.</p> <p>Academics report that most courses are assessed by final exam, but also have some continuous component of lesser weight. The</p>

<p>Recent changes</p>	<p>exception is just one course which regulations stipulate should have continuous assessment only. However, they report an institutional tendency which favours continuous assessment. The burden involved for academic staff in a context of large student numbers is noted.</p> <p>There are various opinions as to the fitness for purpose of assessment methods. Some academics would prefer more continuous assessment which could lead to increased student engagement with the learning process and a more regular learning pattern. Big student numbers can, however, act as a challenge; thus assessment methodologies should take into account this factor and adapt to it. At the same time, an opinion is that continuous assessment (which would make more sense for year-long courses to avoid the accumulation of large amounts of knowledge) can be counterproductive for short semi-annual courses, as it can disrupt student learning in other courses which students ignore when faced with the urgency of a test. Continuous assessment can also be tiring and stressful. Thus, learning should ideally be kept separate from the stress triggered by (continuous) assessment. Others predict the disappearance of the final exam and believe that alternative assessment methods can be found to trigger regular learning patterns without inducing anxiety.</p> <p>There is a belief that academic staff should be trusted to employ the assessment method best suited to their course, whether final or continuous, in a context of diversity as it is the case in the Faculty of Engineering. Programme directors and pedagogic councils can intervene when problems are detected.</p> <p><i>Arts</i></p> <p>Academics report that assessment methods are tailored to the nature of the courses (practical, theoretical, project-based etc). Assessment, thus, changes from course to course. They do not refer necessarily to formative or summative assessment, but rather to the design of assessment so as to fit the course specificities. They also say that assessment can also be different in the early years as opposed to the final years.</p> <p>Students report that most assessment is continuous, since the courses are highly practical.</p> <p>The vice-rector for quality highlights the increasing use of continuous assessment, sometimes exaggerated, such as the case of the Faculty of Engineering which at one stage only allowed continuous assessment.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i></p> <p>The Faculty has a teaching and learning lab which organises initiatives with a pedagogic focus. According to the quality representative, participation in these initiatives has resulted in some changes in academic practice and better pedagogic awareness. However, the initiatives only reach a limited number of teaching staff, hence the process of change is a slow one. At the same time, he notes that students, too, are also becoming increasingly aware of pedagogic issues and more demanding. They also have more complaint mechanisms at their disposal. This aspect also leads to increased academic and institutional attention to pedagogic matters. The latest pedagogic questionnaires testify an increase in the quality of teaching and learning.</p> <p>Academics note the increase in prescription in relation to assessment, i.e. the general rule of a course per semester with continuous assessment only, or an earlier regulation which only allowed continuous assessment. They feel such measures imposed from above impinge on their pedagogic autonomy.</p>
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	<p>Bologna meta-frameworks. This is not yet the case in the Faculty, although course specifications do list learning outcomes. Nevertheless, he seems to doubt that assessment actually considers the defined outcomes.</p> <p>The quality representative mentions that the teaching and learning lab has organised a workshop on designing assessment to take into account learning outcomes. He discusses the alignment between learning outcomes, curriculum design and assessment and the effect on the quality of learning if teaching staff understand and apply this concept. The programme director confirms that learning outcomes are still not properly implemented.</p> <p>Only to a limited extent do academics relate to learning outcomes. Their answers have little to do with the above expected alignment, and more with different first-year student competences and abilities as opposed to 10-15 years ago, especially higher expectation of ready-made, quick information, poorer skills of analysis and synthesis, and less willingness to look for solutions. Students feel that assessment does not test the achievement of the expected learning outcomes (for instance the time is too short to assess an outcome which could only be properly assessed in real life, or tasks do not reflect everything a student knows). Another complaint is that students sometimes do not have the competences which are pre-requisites for some courses and which students should supposedly have from previous ones. At the same time, students do not appear convinced of the utility of having explicit learning outcomes.</p> <p><i>Arts</i></p> <p>The Dean refers to the academic staff's duty to indicate the course objectives in course specifications and make these available in the institution's online platform.</p> <p>See above under recent changes in relation to the increased consideration of learning outcomes.</p> <p>Students feel that assessment does take into account the learning outcomes defined in course specifications.</p>
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HEI γ

1. Institutional policy on student assessment	<p><i>General Exam Regulations (Regulamento Geral de Exames) 2009</i> <i>Pedagogic Regulations of the School of Management and Technology (Regulamento Pedagógico da Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão)</i> <i>Attendance and Assessment Regulations 2011/2012 (Regulamento de Frequência e Avaliação) – School of Education</i></p>
Main provisions of the policy	<p>The institutional policy contains broad regulations on: examination periods (final, resit, special); conditions applicable to exam enrolment; and exams for mark improvement. It also has provisions related to the students’ right to access exam papers and make complaints. The policy states that each of the HEI’s schools is responsible to define its assessment regime. Special circumstances apply to special-regime students, i.e. working students.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> The School’s pedagogic regulations contain a chapter on <i>Assessment of Competences</i>, covering the following areas: assessment components and methodology; detailed provisions on exams and how they are organised and run; student access to exam papers and the right to complain; marking. Special conditions apply to working students regarding assessment methods and periods.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> The <i>Attendance and Assessment Regulations</i> constitute the School’s assessment policy. Main provisions cover: attendance; assessment methods; conditions related to continuous assessment and assessment by exam; examination periods: resit and special (NOTE: There is no normal period. Apparently the assessment regime only envisages assessment by exam only for students who failed the continuous assessment, those who want to improve their mark, and special-regime students.); pass conditions; student right to see exam papers and make complaints. Special provisions apply to special-regime students.</p> <p>The rules and regulations allow, nonetheless, flexibility and dialogue between academic staff, leading to adjustments. Students (in both programmes) also state that some academics show flexibility and adapt the initially stipulated assessment methods to students’ needs (for example, more or less “mini” tests than initially predicted, or one or two more tasks instead of, or additionally to, the tests).</p>
Clear criteria for marking, illness, absence, class attendance, etc.	<p><i>Marking</i> <i>Engineering</i> - calculation of final mark for course, marking scale, pass mark are regulated. <i>Arts</i> - the contribution of different assessment components to overall assessment and the pass mark are regulated.</p> <p><i>Illness and absence</i></p>

<p>Communication of assessment type, methods, criteria etc. to students</p> <p>Role of external actors</p> <p>Single/Multiple examiners</p>	<p><i>Engineering</i> – absence must be accompanied by a justification to be handed in to the School Secretary (procedure explained). <i>Arts</i> - absences are accepted when students can duly justify them (procedure explained).</p> <p>Class attendance <i>Engineering</i> - students must attend at least 80% of taught classes to be able to take part in exams. Working students and students in the army are exempt from this requirement. <i>Arts</i> - students must attend at least 80% of taught sessions in order to be assessed. Special regime students are exempt.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> Teaching staff must fill in a course specification for the courses they teach before the start of the semester which states, among others, the assessment methods. The policy gives no clear information on how this information is to be communicated to students. However, a website search revealed that course specifications are available online for the programme’s courses and indicate the assessment method employed. Students confirm that academics give them the specifications with all the assessment criteria and the weight of different assessment components. These are previously defined, students having no input in the process. However they say that the schedule of tests, exams and works is sometimes changed in response to student feedback.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> Course specifications with assessment information (procedures, techniques and criteria) must be made available to students at the beginning of the course. Assessment differentiated by student regime is noted. Students and academic staff claim that all the information is available online at the beginning of the semester. Moreover, academics explain to students the assessment methodologies at the beginning of the semester.</p> <p>No mention in institutional/faculty policies or academics’ accounts.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> - No mention. <i>Arts</i> – responsibility for assessment lies with the lecturer in question. Marks must be certified by the lecturer, the head of department and another member of the academic staff.</p> <p>According to the interviews, academics are responsible for student assessment. However, the course leader (who may or may not have taught the course) double-checks the assessment every time it occurs.</p>
<p>2. Assessment procedures</p> <p>Development so as to fit purpose (formative, summative etc)</p>	<p><i>Engineering</i> Students emphasize two assessment procedures: the works/tasks done during the semester and the final exam. The method depends on the course, its goals and on the lecturer. In the drawing course, for example, students have several tasks (5 or 6) and</p>

<p>Recent changes</p>	<p>an exam. However, students consider that in some cases assessment procedures do not seem to fit the course objectives. For instance, in the case of mathematics they think that their learning would be improved if they had at least one task instead of a single exam. In other courses, they also consider that the tasks (for example, hydraulics) should be more valued. They are important tasks, some of them difficult, and students think they learn more with those tasks than in the exam, for example.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> The assessment procedures change with the course and with the objectives. Academics try to align the type of assessment with the course objectives and with what they want to achieve with the course. They also emphasize the importance of a reflexive assessment done by the students, so they can become aware of their work, their difficulties and the main objectives they have to achieve. Since the practical component is significant in Arts, practical tasks are the most important part of student assessment, always adapted to the specificities of the courses. Students also consider the practical component to be very important in the programme. They prefer tasks and believe that, in general (with the exception of some courses), they learn more through practice.</p> <p>Changes to improve the quality of student assessment are made whenever necessary. However, the Bologna Process has led to improvements in the way academics define assessment procedures and strengthened the continuous adjustment process.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> Academics say that whereas before Bologna tests and exams were the main assessment methods, individual assessment and group work gained more prominence after Bologna.</p> <p>Students have noted some changes in their assessment in some courses, especially in the last 3 years, namely an increase in assessed student work and tests. In their opinion, this is good for their learning and facilitates their final evaluation. However, there are still courses with only one exam. Students disagree with this approach, as they do not learn as much as with student work, and all the course contents are concentrated in one exam. They also consider that Bologna made things harder, because they have the same contents to learn but now have less time.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> Academics consider that the main change is not related with the assessment itself, but with the communication of assessment-related information. Now it is done online. According to students, the assessment procedures change from one year to another informed by previous year's student results.</p>
<p>Compliance with official rules and regulations</p>	<p>The official course specification is run by at least four levels: the lecturer, the programme director, the school director and the school board. This is based on the regulations and rules of the pedagogic council and the scientific council.</p>

<p>Administrative checks</p>	<p><i>Arts</i> If it emerges during the semester (usually through a student complaint) that the lecturer failed to define the time and methods of assessment or does not follow a defined procedure, this is discussed in the programme committee and often does not have to go to the school board. The programme director encourages students to communicate with the director and talk about any problems that they may have. However, students can also follow the institutional complaint procedure related to assessment, should they wish to.</p> <p>Students are aware of their right to complain about an assessment issue to the course lecturer, the course leader, the programme director, but they feel that most of the time they are not listened to. They also report situations when an academic does not respect the stipulated schedules and times (for example, it happened twice that the lecturer did not attend the exam that was scheduled). So in the students' opinion no administrative checks take place in terms of assessment and their word has no weight at all.</p> <p>In <i>Engineering</i>, students report that assessment is checked by the course leader and by the programme director.</p>
<p>3. Learning outcomes (whether or not they inform assessment)</p>	<p><i>Engineering</i> Pedagogic regulations require that the envisaged learning outcomes (<i>resultados de aprendizagem</i>) and student competences (<i>competências</i>) should be stated in course specifications. The assessment chapter starts with a statement that 'assessment consists of a process which determines academic achievement, that is, to what extent the learning objectives and competences corresponding to each course have been reached'. Later on, it also states that assessment verifies the acquisition of competences defined by the Dublin descriptors.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> Regulations start with a reference to the Bologna Process and the transformation it brought regarding the transition to a teaching model based on the development of competences. The policy highlights assessment as having a central role in the promotion of competences and the development of appropriate methodologies.</p> <p>Academics state that student assessment procedures are made to measure the learning outcomes. Assessment methods try to evaluate if the students achieved the goals of the course. Hence in some courses tests are more appropriate to evaluate students' knowledge, whereas in other courses group or individual work is more accurate to measure the level of knowledge and learning.</p> <p>In <i>Engineering</i> a final project evaluates several types of knowledge from the various courses, helping academics to assess if the knowledge students were supposed to acquire in certain subjects (materials, geometry, etc.) is actually learned or not. For students the learning outcomes are not clear. They do not know why they do a certain task or answer some question in a test or exam, and do not understand the goals. This happens mainly in the first academic year. Some engineering students declare that later (in the 3rd year mainly) they understand why they learnt some contents and issues in the years before and understand better the learning outcomes and the associated assessment.</p>

	<p>In <i>Arts</i>, learning outcomes are defined for each course and they are discussed in the pedagogic council and the programme committee. The lecturer must explain the outcomes to students in the beginning of the semester.</p> <p>Due to the specificity of the field, practical work has been progressively valued as an assessment method because a main learning outcome is related to the skills learnt when students do practical work. For example, in drawing or sculpture the main skills are the accuracy of the technique or the adequate use of materials.</p> <p>In general terms, students know the learning outcomes of the programme because they are written in the programme specification. As concerns individual courses, students also seem to be aware of their learning outcomes.</p>
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HEI 8

<p>1. Institutional policy on student assessment</p>	<p><i>School of Technology Academic Regulations (Regulamento académico da Escola Superior de Tecnologia) 2008</i> (Both scientific areas considered here belong to the School of Technology, one of the institution's three schools.)</p>
<p>Main provisions of the policy</p>	<p>The academic regulations contain a chapter on assessment. Clauses cover the following topics: assessment methodology (to be defined by academic staff); assessment forms (continuous and final, the latter being in most cases compulsory); marking; cheating and plagiarism; communication of results; conditions of access to final exam; examination periods (normal, resit, special); mark improvement; access to exam papers and clarifications; complaints. The regulations take into account special-regime students and their needs (i.e. with regards to attendance, exam periods, continuous assessment).</p> <p>These official guidelines allow at the same time flexibility and freedom to the schools, programmes and the courses to plan their own student assessment regulations.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> Internal procedures regulate assessment. For example, in the beginning of the semester, each lecturer drafts the course specification with the assessment methodology, the schedule of tests, exams, information which enables students to know what work they will have during the semester. In the end of the semester, the information on the way the course worked (which will now be compiled in a report), is analysed to know how the activities and assessment plan worked out.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> In broad lines, the institutional orientation of the school is followed. The school calendar specifying the assessments periods is approved annually. Within these institutional rules, programmes define their assessment periods.</p>
<p>Clear criteria for marking, illness, absence, class attendance, etc.</p>	<p>Marking - Marking scale and calculation of final mark for the course in the case of continuous assessment.</p> <p>Illness - only mentioned in the case of disabled students and working students.</p> <p>Class attendance - Depending on the types of teaching activity or class (theoretical, practical, tutorial etc) attendance can be: optional; optional or compulsory (as defined by academic staff); compulsory. Absences amounting to 1/3 of teaching sessions are tolerated.</p>
<p>Communication of assessment type, methods, criteria etc. to</p>	<p>According to the policy, teaching staff must draft a course specification for each course they teach and include information on assessment procedures, criteria and forms. This is to be communicated to students at the beginning of the course.</p>

<p>students</p> <p>Role of external actors</p> <p>Single/Multiple examiners</p>	<p>Academics report a special concern to give students all the information related to assessment methodologies and criteria, so that they have no doubts about the assessment processes in place.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> students state that they are aware of the programme, goals and assessment methods in the courses.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> academics also report a concern to inform students of assessment procedures.</p> <p>No mention in the policy. According to the interviews, external actors (namely A3ES) influence quality patterns in several areas of the HEI. This is a positive influence, since the external evaluation helps the institution to make better choices and correct faults.</p> <p>No mention in the policy. In <i>Engineering</i> the responsibility for assessment lies with the lecturer. Students report that the number of examiners depends on the course and its structure. For example, some courses are taught by several academics and these are jointly responsible for assessment. Another example is courses taught by more than one academic (because of the schedule, lecturers' availability or other reasons), but one academic only is the course leader ultimately responsible for assessment, while the others are 'support' lecturers who just give classes.</p> <p>In <i>Arts</i>, the responsibility for student assessment lies with the course lecturer.</p>
<p>2. Assessment procedures</p> <p>Development so as to fit purpose (formative, summative etc)</p>	<p>The institution employs several assessment models: group and individual work, continuous assessment, exams, resit exams and special exams. Assessment models are adapted and adjusted to the type of course.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> The assessment methodology varies by qualification level (first degree, master), by course, type of students, objectives, etc. Academic autonomy is one of the main principles. <i>Engineering</i> has several areas and academics decide how they divide the work contents and the assessment, so that students have in the end the knowledge and the skills to apply on the labour market. Therefore, there are groups of academics according to their scientific area (mechanics, drawing, etc.) who work together and discuss contents and student assessment.</p> <p>Courses with practical application are assessed through practical work. This is explained by the objective of such courses to prepare students for the labour market, hence the relevance of practical tasks similar to what they will do in their future job/work. On the contrary in the basic courses the written exam is considered more appropriate.</p>

	<p>The school is small, academics know their students, there is a close relationship between them, and academics readjust assessment if they feel it is necessary (i.e. inappropriate volume of work). Consequently, in the next academic year the volume or type of work, the number of tests or exams, the schedule of work delivery can be changed.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> The programme director believes student questionnaires can be a useful tool to tailor assessment procedures to different assessment purposes. Academics promote close and informal relationships with the students, also to understand the negative and positive aspects of the assessment so they can adjust it from one academic year to the next. Academic staff also emphasise interdisciplinarity as an advantage in the adaptation of assessment procedures to several purposes, since dialogue between academics ends in consequent adjustments of assessment methodologies. In this sense, inside an institutionally-defined structure there is flexibility. Art academics highlight that the informal dialogue, between themselves and with students, and the adjustment of assessment methodologies and other issues are facilitated by the small number of students in the course. Students also agree that some academics communicate informally and closely with them and try to listen to student feedback. Nevertheless, this does not apply to all, since some are not open to a closer communication.</p> <p>Due to its specificity <i>Arts</i> is a mainly practical programme. However, there are two types of courses: theoretical courses (semi-annual), where the standard assessment is a continuous assessment with different assessment moments, one test and a final individual work, and the exams; and practical courses (annual), where assessment is based on practical tasks during the academic year. In the latter there is no final exam. In the end of the semester, students present the work done during the semester and the lecturer gives them a qualitative, rather than quantitative, evaluation. This is mainly formative, based on students' work and evolution and advising how they could improve during the second semester.</p> <p>Although changes were made further to Bologna, there have been no changes in the main principles of the institution in terms of student assessment. Even with the new organisation model of the institution, it keeps the same assessment practices which are grounded in the dialogue between the different courses.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> students say that academics change the assessment procedures if they see they are not working and also take into account the students' opinion about the subject. However, students complain that many times academic staff cannot adjust the amount of work between the different courses in order to diminish the big amounts of work which students have at the same time in several courses. They also complain that some courses will have few practical applications in the labour market. At the same time, they consider that other contents, not included, would be more useful and should be taught. They believe that such situations have been aggravated by the Bologna Process and the restructuring of some programmes.</p> <p>In <i>Arts</i>, it is emphasized that an ongoing effort is made to change or adapt assessment processes to improve their efficiency.</p> <p>Compliance with official rules</p> <p>There is compliance with general institutional orientations, but programmes have a great degree of autonomy in defining</p>
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<p>and regulations</p> <p>Administrative checks</p>	<p>assessment procedures.</p> <p>An administrative institutional process applies to assessment calendars. Each school has a calendar which defines the assessment periods: when the first semester ends, when continuous assessment ends, when the test period starts and ends, when the exam period starts and ends. All programmes have to follow this annually defined plan. Within this school calendar in the different assessment periods, institutional regulations are monitored by the administrative services.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> An administrative process is in place to monitor teaching and assessment. Thus, a committee makes the schedule for the programme, academics draft course specifications and deliver them to the secretary, the content of classes is also scheduled at the very beginning, and the secretary checks whether the planned classes are performed accordingly. Exams are also scheduled early and checked administratively. Thus, all the teaching and assessment process is subject to administrative checks. The assessment procedure is decided by the lecturer, approved by the programme director and then given to students. According to academic staff, administrative services record electronically the student marks delivered by academics and then these check if everything is correct. In the next year academics will record the marks themselves in the online platform.</p>
<p>3. Learning outcomes (whether or not they inform assessment)</p>	<p>No mention. According to the regulations, assessment tests acquired knowledge, taking into account the objectives (<i>objetivos</i>) defined in the course specification.</p> <p><i>Engineering</i> Academics report that they have meetings to discuss the relation between assessment and learning outcomes. However, it appears that they do not understand the notion of learning outcomes. They refer rather to institutional rules and regulations and how they try to change and/or adjust those regulations to achieve better student learning outcomes. There seems to be confusion between better learning in general and learning outcomes.</p> <p><i>Arts</i> Neither the academics nor the students refer to the relation between assessment and learning outcomes. They actually appear not to know the meaning of learning outcomes (at least as they are generally defined and understood).</p>