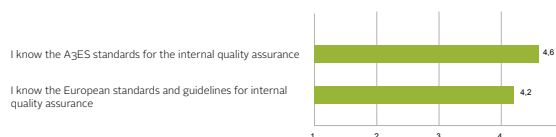


# The Importance and Degree of Implementation of the A3ES guidelines for internal quality assurance in Portuguese Higher Education Institutions

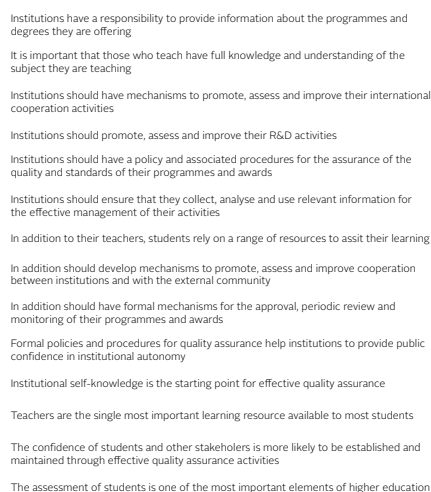
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Similarly to what has been happening in other European countries, and much as a consequence of the Bologna process and the development of the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area (ESG), we can observe in Portugal a tendency towards the development and implementation of internal quality assurance systems (IQAS) in higher education institutions (HEIs). In a more or less systematic manner, with a broader or narrower scope and with different degrees of consolidation, the truth is that a significant number of Portuguese HEIs has been designing and implementing internal systems capable of assuring their processes' quality, namely teaching and learning.

The research project described in here had as its main goals to understand the importance that the A3ES standards have for national HEIs, as a framework for the implementation of their IQAS, as well as to assess these standards' degree of implementation in Portuguese HEIs. A questionnaire was developed with a set of sentences meant to collect Portuguese academics' perceptions on their degree of knowledge about the ESG and the A3ES standards; the importance each one of the A3ES standards has for IQAS implementation; and the degree of implementation of the A3ES standards in their institutions. Generically, the answers collected point to some unfamiliarity with the ESG and the A3ES standards. Nevertheless, most of the academics tend to consider the A3ES standards as important, or even very important, which represents a favorable environment to IQAS development within HEIs, since the implicit acceptance of the standards seems more relevant than the explicit knowledge about them. The degree of implementation of the A3ES standards in Portuguese HEIs is also quite significant, despite the fact that it tends to be lower than the importance attached to them by Portuguese academics.



The comparisons made between the means of the answers of different groups of academics allowed for the conclusion that the higher education subsystem they work in, their age, sex, scientific area, having or not performed management functions and their degree of involvement in quality management activities are relevant for both the importance they give to the different standards and the degree of implementation they consider to exist in their institutions. These differences point to the need of developing some work along different academic groups in order to better involve them in quality management activities, mainly because those involved also know the standards better, attach more importance to them and have the perception they are more implemented.



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FIGURE 1

Portuguese academics' knowledge about the ESG and the A3ES standards (mean scores of the answers).

FIGURE 2

Portuguese academics' perceptions on the degree of importance of the A3ES standards (mean scores of the answers).