**A3ES**
Agência de Avaliação
e Acreditação
do Ensino Superior

# The experience
# of the panel of the
# Audit Program in Portugal

A. Guimarães Rodrigues

Chair of the Portuguese panel for external assessment of IQAS

ENHANCING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS
Erasmus[+] - EIQAS
**10:30 – 11:00 H**

1 / 18

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## 1. The Process

- The A3ES audits of IQAS started back in 2012, in a experimental 1st edition.

- Included higher education institutions, both private and public, polytechnics and universities.

- In all, so far, I've been involved in 13 audits.

- The audit report is prepared on-line, making use of a predefined format in the electronic platform of A3ES. These reports are publicized by A3ES.

2 / 18

## 2. The Audit Panel (CAE)

- The Audit Panel consists of members, with the following profile:

  - the Panel's Chair, who is a person with leadership experience at top level in higher education and with experience on quality assurance;

  - one professor or specialist with experience in higher education management and quality assurance;

  - a foreign expert, with experience on quality assurance;

  - a student, with experience on quality assurance;

  - the Project Manager – a A3ES member, who will act as the Panel's Secretary.

## 3. The CAE methodology (before the visit)

- Considering the A3ES Guidelines, analyse previously available  information: Auto Evaluation Report (RAA); Annexes provided  (Quality Manual, Stage of Development, Other); Walk through the webpages; Annual Plans; Reports; Quality Balances where available.

- Share comments and questions among external audit committee (CAE) members. (Comments over the content and organization of the Quality Manual, the RAA, and other documents and also over the essence and effectiveness of the IQAS).

- Given the variables under observation, establish the most probable level where the assessment of the stage of development for each vector will fall. Agree on aspects to clarify at the visit meetings.

- Simultaneously, identify the additional evidence material to be requested. Submit this request to the Institution in advance to the visit.

# 4. The CAE methodology (at the visit)

- Each CAE member has a form to register the assessment (or range) from the CAE analysis against the degree of development for each vector, as assessed by the institution.

- In first meeting before the visit the CAE performs a general discussion centred on this summary, broadening the discussion into relevant details from the information supplied and collected.

- The CAE strategy to clarify particular aspects is agreed among the team.

- The CAE seeks to gradually build on the participants at the various meetings the perception leading to the interpretation that it came to communicate orally at the conclusion of the visit.

- By the end of the visit, in order to prepare the Oral Report, the CAE discusses the assessments for each and all vectors. Also agrees on a final result, re-checking the consistency of the analysis and conclusions against the defined criteria.

5 / 18

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**Institution: XYZ**

**2.1. Definition and documentation of the institutional policy for quality**
Insufficient -  ☐   Partial - ☐  Substantial - 🟥  Very Advanced -  ☐
Insufficient -  ☐   Partial - 🟩  Substantial - ☐ Very Advanced -  ☐

**Assessment Form**

**2.2. Scope and efficacy os procedures and structures for quality assurance**

**2.2.1. In teaching and learning**
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  🟥 Very Advanced -  ☐
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  ☐ Very Advanced -  🟩 ☐

**2.2.2. In research and development**
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  🟥 Very Advanced -  ☐
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  🟩 Substantial -  ☐ Very Advanced -  ☐

**2.2.3. In interinstitutional cooperation and with society**
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  🟥 Substantial -  ☐ Very Advanced -  ☐
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  🟩 Substantial -  ☐ Very Advanced -  ☐

**2.2.4. In staff management policies**
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  🟥 Very Advanced -  ☐
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  🟩 Very Advanced -  ☐

**2.2.5. In Support Services**
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  🟥 Very Advanced -  ☐
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  🟩 Very Advanced -  ☐

**2.2.6. In internationalization**
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  🟥 Very Advanced -  ☐
Insufficient  ☐ Partial -  ☐ Substantial -  🟩 Very Advanced -  ☐

6 / 18

3

**Assessment Form (cont.)**

**2.3. Articulation between the internal quality assurance system and the institution management and governance bodies**
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟥 **Very Advanced -** ☐
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟩 **Very Advanced -** ☐

**2.4. Participation of the interested parties (internal and external) in the quality assurance processes**
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟥 **Very Advanced -** ☐
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟩 **Very Advanced -** ☐

**2.5. Information system (mechanisms for information collection, analysis and internal communication; scope and relevance of the generated information)**
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟥 **Very Advanced -** ☐
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟩 **Very Advanced -** ☐

**2.6. Publicity of information relevant to interested parties**
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟥 **Very Advanced -** ☐
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟩 **Very Advanced -** ☐

**2.7. Monitoring, assessment and continuous improvement of the internal quality assurance system**
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟥 **Very Advanced -** ☐
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟩 **Very Advanced -** ☐

**2.8. The internal quality assurance system seen as a whole**
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** ☐ **Substantial -** 🟥 **Very Advanced -** ☐
  **Insufficient -** ☐ **Partial -** 🟩 **Substantial -** ☐ **Very Advanced -** ☐

# 5. The CAE methodology
## (the Oral and Preliminary Reports)

- In general, at its final (closed) meeting, the CAE agrees on a draft comprehensive report which resembles what the provisional full report is expected to be. In this way, the perceptions and analysis of each and every member of the panel are clarified and consolidated.

- The Oral Report is then extracted from the previous comprehensive report, as a summary completed with supplementary comments adjusted for the presentation.

# 6. The CAE methodology
## (the response from the Institution)

- In general, the audited institutions submit a response to the Preliminary Report.

- In general they recognize the value of the analysis developed by the CAE and consider the process and recommendations very useful.

- In general, by the time the response is submitted, the institutions have already started or gone through some of the recommendations.

- The CAE inserts its analysis of the response of the institution in a specific section of the report.

- The Administrative Board of the A3ES decides over the arguments developed, and closes the process.

9 / 18

# 7. The Visits

- The visits follow a Visit-Plan, previously agreed with the institution, based on a standard plan supplied by A3ES.

- In particular, the meetings aim at capturing the participation of those involved in the chains of reference of the central processes of teaching and learning, research and development, and extension.

- There are also meetings which address the student body, the teaching and non-teaching staff. The strategic quality policy definition, the IQAS structure, the Information system, etc., are also explored.

10 / 18

# 8. The emphasis of the audits and the ESG revision of 2015

- The SIGQ auditing carried for A3ES, based on the Audit Manual and Guidelines, assumed a broad and deep analysis of the SIGQ in every vector leading to a set of mandatory recommendations, with a defined schedule, needed for a conditional certification, and another set of optional recommendations.

- The decisions from the Ministers meeting in Yerevan on 14-15 May 2015 confer a prescriptive nature to some guidelines which previously were interpreted and set as orientations.

- The Guidelines of the A3ES Audit Manual seem to be sufficiently robust to absorb this change, but the CAE will have to adopt a more strict philosophy on the conditions set for the certification.

11 / 18

# 9. Most critical aspects

- In general there is agreement between the auto-assessment and the external assessment.

- Both the CAE and the Institution agree on the assessment of the development stage of the IQAS in each dimension, based on the Guidelines.

12 / 18

# 10. Most critical aspects

- The Synthesis of the Stage of Development must be concise and clear in the description of the leading line of development of the IQAS, identifying the stages started, accomplished, and under development. Weaknesses and the solutions adopted to overcome them must be identified.

- The RAA should not be simply descriptive. It is essential that it is demonstrative. The audit is based on evidences. To define excellence as the objective, and to auto-declare the achieved results as excellent does not convey substantial information, and wastes important space needed for the description and explanation. The simple enumeration of measures or actions or orientations is not sufficient to allow the interpretation of the degree of implementation. Often it is not clear if some action was, is, will be performed, or is intended to be pursued.

- In its essence, the audit does not aim at assessing the competences gathered by the institution nor evidenced by the result of its exercise. The demonstration of the IQAS efficacy requires evidence of the way observed dysfunctions are identified and overcome. This demonstration requires that at least one operation cycle has been completed.

- The auditing refers to an assessment which is considered as formally closed by the CAE when it presents its Oral Report. It considers the RAA submitted by the Institution, the additional requested documentation before and during the visit, and evidences collected along the meeting held in the visit. It will not include, in any circumstance, progresses achieved after the conclusion of the visit.

13 / 18

# 10. Most critical aspects

- **Quality Manual**

  - The Quality Manual is a central piece of the IQAS.
  - It must express the institution identity in its strategic and objectives definition.
  - Must establish the implementation architecture of the IQAS and the way in which it guarantees the connection to the coordination bodies and to the interested parties.
  - Must have a focus on the central processes: teaching, research and extension and on how they are covered by the IQAS.
  - In the context of the adopted referential, the Quality Manual can not be a simple Management Manual.
  - The service and support units should be directed to a second level, traversal and of support to the mission vectors.

14 / 18

# 10. Most critical aspects

- **Organization and content of the meetings**

  - There is a rule that determines that the same elements should not participate in several meetings. The CAE seeks to obtain complementary information and evidences from cross sources in order to confirm the IQAS effectiveness.

  - There is also a limit to the maximum number of participants in any meeting.

  - External elements that participate in the specific meeting of the Visit Programme are guests of the Institution. It is the Institution responsibility to ensure the presence of the internal element capable to coordinate the adequate balance of the interventions, in order to provide evidence of the SIGQ coverage of the extension vector.

# 10. Most critical aspects

- **Participation in the meetings.**

  - The identification of the way the system has detected anomalies, and reacted, is the necessary evidence of its relevance and contribution for continuous improvement.

  - The absence of a record of anomalies can only occur in a system insufficiently tested.

  - Even when invited to identify some recommendation considered useful for the improvement of the IQAS if included in the CAE Report, students, teaching and non-teaching staff, and management usually avoided doing so.

## 11. General findings - 1

- **IQAS Scope** - Often institutions consider that they have an integrated IQAS if their teaching is organized and reasonably monitored, but Research and Development represents a set of procedures hardly integrated into the IQAS, and extension is left altogether outside the scope of the IQAS.

- **Degree of Development** - Often institutions consider the auditing as an ongoing process to help them build and develop their IQAS. With this in view, they approach the audit with a system in a premature stage of development, and unable to produce evidences.

- **Nature of the IQAS**:
  - In general, public institutions have a somewhat more creative approach to Quality Assurance, centred on the main vectors of the mission of the institution. For these institutions the adoption of the ISO 9002 (Quality systems — Model for quality assurance in production, installation and servicing) Norms is limited to the service units.

  - Institutions which started by adopting Norms (ISO 9002) have then evolved to conceptions that they consider appropriate to accomplish the ESG requirements. In general this effort has not been particularly successful. In these cases, the Quality Manual turns out to be a Management Manual, and misses the essence of the institution mission. Even when stated differently, students tend to be dealt as "customers".

17 / 18

## 11. General findings - 2

- **Learning outcomes:**
  - Often the learning outcomes either are not defined or are not sufficiently publicized.
  - Their revision is not visible.

- **Meta evaluation: Monitoring, assessment and continuous improvement of the IQAS.**
  - The consideration given to the meta evaluation of the IQAS is often centred (and limited to) in the "mechanical" monitoring, and the correction of detected non-conformities.

  - The data collected, the methodologies adopted, the system structure and the effective embedding of the IQAS in the strategic planning are not sufficiently criticized.

  - The essence of the mission processes is not subject to an holistic discussion, with the participation of all the interested parties.

- **Interinstitutional Cooperation and Cooperation with society.**
  - Often the institution translate this aspect into an extensive list of protocols and service projects, and relies in what they broadly express as "customer satisfaction", missing the point of a IQAS which integrates this vector.

18 / 18

# We are still learning …

19 / 18