Different academics' characteristics, different perceptions on quality assessment?

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore Portuguese academics' perceptions on higher education quality assessment objectives and purposes, in general, and on the recently implemented system for higher education quality assessment and accreditation, in particular. It aims to discuss the differences of those perceptions dependent on some academics' characteristics, such as: gender, disciplinary affiliation, type of higher education institution and experience in quality assurance activities.

An online questionnaire with Likert-type answer scales was distributed to the Portuguese academic population. In total, 962 answers were collected from academics belonging to the public higher education system. Data were treated resorting to descriptive statistics, hypothesis tests and analysis of variance. Portuguese academics tend to support the majority of goals and purposes quality assessment may have, as well as the main features of the newly designed quality assessment and accreditation system. Nevertheless they tend to support more quality assessment mechanisms privileging improvement over control. This support is slightly more evident among female academics, academics from public polytechnic institutions, from medical and health sciences and with former experience in quality assurance activities.

The study adds to the discussion on academics' perceptions on quality assurance, highlighting the influence played at this level by some of their characteristics. It is especially relevant for those working either in higher education institutions or governmental agencies, since it may contribute to the design of quality assurance systems academics are more likely to support.

Keywords: Academic staff; Higher education; Portugal; Quality assessment; Quality assurance

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