Quality Actors' Perspectives: The Academics

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Topics to Cover

- Introduction

- Academics Resistance and Support Towards QA

- Method and Data

- Academics' Perspectives on Quality Assessment

  - ✓ Overall perceptions on QA objectives and purposes

  - ✓ Different academics' characteristics, different perceptions?

  - ✓ What factors do promote quality in HEIs?

- Concluding Remarks

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Academics support to quality assessment processes (core values, purposes, goals and methods) is **essential to their successful implementation** and a factor influencing the accuracy and meaningfulness of the results achieved.

(Laughton 2003)

What about the **receptivity of Portuguese academics** towards **Quality Assessment**?

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The Research Project…

"Perceptions of higher education institutions and academics to assessment and accreditation"

Contribute to a better understanding of the **consequences of quality assessment and accreditation** over the quality of teaching and the **behavior of institutions and academics towards quality**.
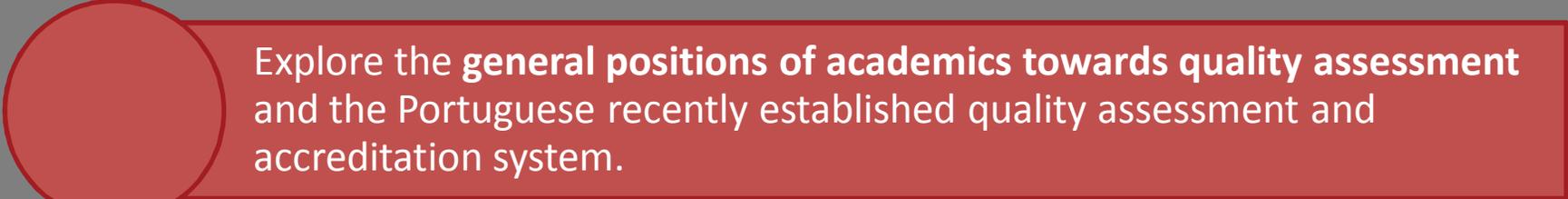
Explore the **general positions of academics towards quality assessment** and the Portuguese recently established quality assessment and accreditation system.

The loss of trust in HEIs and academic professionals

The market emerging role

The rhetoric of new public management

Movement from less intrusive forms of QA to Accreditation

Portugal was no exception…

1st Phase of QA (1993-2005)

- government at distance; umbrella organisation coordinates the system in cooperation with HEIs; study cycles evaluation; mainly oriented to quality improvement

2nd Phase of QA (2006-…)

- influence of European developments; study cycles and HEIs assessment and accreditation; a new Agency is responsible for the system; higher preponderance of the control purpose

How do Portuguese Academics Perceive QA under this new context?

Do their perceptions translate a more **resistant** or a more **supportive position** towards QA **objectives** and **purposes**?

Are the perceptions **homogeneous** i.e. identical and shared by all academics? Or do they **differ** according to *disciplinary affiliation, type of institution, gender* and *experience with QA activities*?

What are the **factors** they do think are effectively **promoting quality** in HEIs?

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Still a relatively **underdeveloped subject** in the research devoted to QA

Different degrees of acceptance/resistance, support and adaptation to the QA idea, policies and implementation procedures, t**ranslating** (Newton 2002):

- 'intransigency' (involvement in a minimum degree)

- 'colonisation' (involvement as a routine)

- 'conversion' (conversion rather than mere compliance)

- 'rational' adaptation (engagement while trying to gain from it)

- 'pragmatic' scepticism (scepticism but adaptation)

- 'sinking' (confusion but resignation)

- 'coping' (dealing well with it although there is a sense of burden)

- 'reconstructing' (assumption of an active role)

Reasons for Academics Resistance

Assessment as an **imposition** and **prescription**, **clashing** with the values characterising **academic culture** (academic freedom, self and collegial accountability and self-improvement)

Concerns regarding **QA implementation**

- bureaucratic, time consuming, administrative and cost burden
- not aligned with the 'academic endeavour' and diverting attention from teaching and research
- academics 'distance': less positive idea of its purposes

Perceived impact on the HE system

- unintended consequences upon personal and organisational behaviour
- stimulus to inspection, regulation and standardisation
- mainly related to monitoring and control and less to enhancement, transformation or even excellence

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Reasons for Academics Adhesion

Higher adhesion when assessment processes and procedures are more directed at **institutions as a whole**

Agreement with **accreditation** - an opportunity for HEIs to **reflect** on their mission and purpose, as well as to 'join an elite club'

QA contributing to **increase** decision making processes **transparency**, developing **teaching** and benefiting **students**
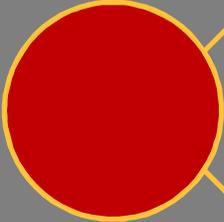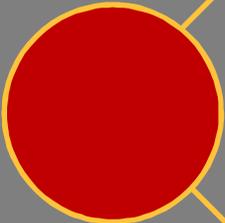
Empirical data deriving from an **online questionnaire** - academics' perceptions on **quality assessment**, generically, and the **Portuguese quality assessment system**.

A set of questions was presented requesting academics' agreement level on a scale from *1-Totally Disagree* to *5-Totally Agree*. **Five main groups**:

- QA objectives
- QA purposes
- The Portuguese QA system priorities
- The Portuguese QA system parameters in relation to HEIs operation
- The Portuguese QA system parameters in relation to the results of HEIs activities
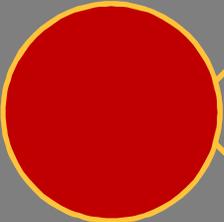
Two **open questions** were also included, asking academics about the **factors promoting or hindering quality** in their department.

36,215 Academics

1,782 Answers

962 from Public HEIs

1,330 Answers to Open Questions

Descriptive Statistics

Hypothesis Tests

Data Analysis

Anova (or Kruskal-Wallis)

Content Analysis
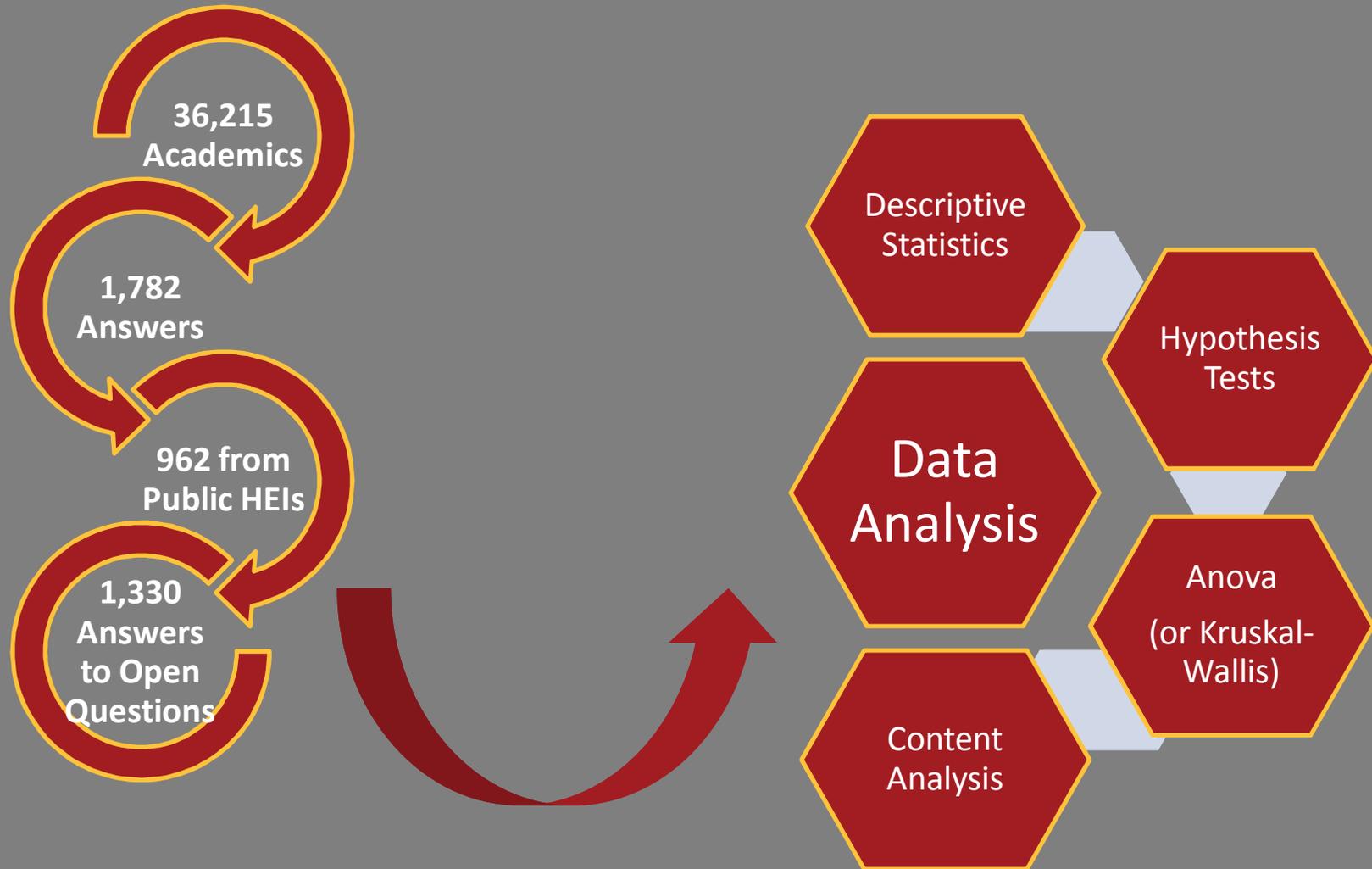
Sample Characterisation (respondents from public HEIs)

		N.º of Academics	% of Academics
Gender	Male	515	53.5%
	Female	378	39.3%
	No answer	69	7.2%
Type of HEI	Public University	480	49.9%
	Public Polytechnic	482	50.1%
Experience in QA activities	Yes	240	24.9%
	No	714	74.2%
	No answer	8	0.8%
Disciplinary affiliation	Natural Sciences	116	12.1%
	Engineering and Technology	270	28.1%
	Medical and Health Sciences	134	13.9%
	Agricultural Sciences	67	7.0%
	Social Sciences	254	26.4%
	Humanities	116	12.1%
	No answer	5	0.5%

Overall perceptions on QA purposes

Statement	Value
Provide the State with instruments to control the higher education…	3,1
Promote cooperation between academic and non-academic staff	3,2
Have effects on the criteria defined by HEI for non-academic staff…	3,2
Have effects on the criteria defined by HEI for student selection	3,2
Allow governance bodies to define sanctioning policies for inadequate…	3,2
Allow the Government to allocate resources to institutions based on the…	3,3
Promote the existence of academics performance control mechanisms	3,5
Have effects on the criteria defined by HEI for academic recruitment…	3,5
Allow the institutions´management and governance bodies to internally…	3,5
Allow the governance bodies to define rewarding policies for good…	3,6
Increase students' involvement in teaching and learning issues	3,7
Provide to an external entity information on the institution that allows…	3,7
Allow to close study cycles that have no quality, based on its non-…	3,8
Rewarding academics innovative practices	3,9
Contribute to convergence among teaching, research and management…	3,9

Overall perceptions on QA purposes

Purpose	Score
Contribute to the definition of new routines and procedures	3,9
Facilitate the adoption of new methodologies for teaching and learning	3,9
Induce institutions to be concerned with their reputation or social image	3,9
Publicly assure a higher education system accountability	3,9
Allow institutions' management and governance bodies to promote policies for the development of new teaching and learning practices	3,9
Increase academics involvement in teaching and learning issues	4,0
Promote students support systems improvement	4,0
Provide students with information on the quality of teaching/learning so that they can make choices	4,1
Allow the institutions management and governance bodies to have information on their quality so they can take decisions	4,1
Improve the links between teaching and research	4,1
Favour the development of academics' individual skills	4,1
Promote the creation of quality assurance internal systems	4,1
Contribute to the collective and shared identification of a institution's strengths and weaknesses	4,2
Allow institutions' management and governance bodies to promote continuous quality improvement processes for teaching/learning	4,2
Allow the academic community to know and reflect on the institution's quality so strategies to improve it can be defined	4,3

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Overall perceptions on QA purposes

Communication Innovation

Improvement

Motivation Control

- All sentences reflecting the **improvement** purpose are **highly agreed** by academics
- Academics favour QA systems leading to:
  - improvement of **teaching and learning** processes
  - **development** of their own **skills** and **competences**
  - better **link** between **teaching** and **research**

- Academics agree with the need to make more **transparent** to both society and HEIs the **quality level** of the HE system, its institutions and study cycles

- Academics believe QA systems should contribute to **innovation** in:
  - new **academic practices**
  - new **teaching and learning methodologies**
  - new ways to **link teaching**, **research** and **management**

- Aspects covered by the **motivation** purpose **are less supported** – is it possible to design a QA system capable of **influencing academics' behaviour**?
- Academics are more in favour of **motivation** if it links with their **traditional norms and values**

- **Not** so much **support** for **control** purposes:
  - QA as **having effects** on HEIs criteria for **student selection** or **staff recruitment and promotion**
  - QA as a **way** to provide the State with instruments to **control the HE network**

Different Academics' Characteristics, Different Perceptions?

Gender determines differences between responses on the objectives and purposes of QA – **female academics** tend to show a **higher agreement position**

- Quality connected with caring?
- Appropriation of quality as a way to enhance their rights and power?
- The idea of QA as a process promoting fairer, more equitable institutions?

Differences emerge between academics belonging to different **types of institutions – more positive positions** are assumed by academics from **polytechnic institutes**

- A matter of age? Polytechnics are younger institutions, usually more keen to QA…

Different Academics' Characteristics, Different Perceptions?

Disciplinary affiliation is the academics' characteristic determining more differences – in the majority of cases academics from **Medical and Health Sciences** are those presenting a **higher agreement level** while academics from **Engineering and Technology** tend to **agree less**

- Same broad scientific area, but different specific cultures within it?

Almost **no significant differences** emerge between academics with or without **experience in quality assurance activities**

- Would it be reasonable to expect a different result?
- Experience in QA leads nevertheless to a higher agreement level…

What factors do promote quality in HEIs?

Institutional Dynamics

Governance and Management (184)

Institutional governance; Leadership; Management strategies and procedures; Academics' appreciation and recognition

- "Internal democracy and the consequent possibility of engaged teaching staff to participate in the definition – at least partially – of the institution's strategy and management"
- "The school's managers motivation towards this issue"
- "Leadership; Study programs coordinators"
- "Teaching staff scientific and academic appreciation"

Facilities, Resources and Services (99)

Facilities, resources and services quality

- "Facilities improvement and availability of equipment for classes in the last years"
  "*E-learning* platform and the B-On"
- "Good organization in the staff and other resources distribution"
- "Facilities: libraries, laboratories, study rooms, etc.."

Quality Culture (94)

Internal QA commitment and mechanisms; External QA and its implication for internal quality improvement

- "Continuous reflection on the quality of teaching and learning"
- "The quality system implementation"
- "The use of students pedagogic surveys each semester for every course, with public results"
- "The existence of higher education quality assessment systems"

Higher Education Institution's Activities

Teaching and Learning (235)

Pedagogical relation student/professor; resources available to teaching and learning; teaching and learning organisation; vocational training pendor

- "Good relationship student/teacher"
- "Teaching staff commitment towards rigorous teaching and learning and support to students"
- "Applied teaching and learning, based on methodologies directed to the practicalities of the profession. The implementation of new pedagogic tools allowing proximity with students (e-learning platform)."
- "Autonomy in the management of the curricular programs"

Research (163)

Promotion of research quality and dissemination; linking teaching and research; integration of students in research activities; availability of resources to research

- "Research projects, students supervision"
- "Research development in areas related to teaching"
- "Investment in scientific research at the higher level, including the support to the development of international research networks"
- "Strong link teaching-research"
- "Financial support and time for research"
- "The rigor in the teaching of subjects and student assessment results from a culture based on the importance of scientific research"

What factors do promote quality in HEIs?

Institution's Actors

Academic Community (115)

Quality results from the contribution of all the institution's actors and their interaction

- "The quality level of a significant percentage of the staff (both academic and not) and of the students"
- "Staff good performance"
- "Staff professionalism; involvement and communication between all actors; will to answer to new challenges"

Students (54)

High quality incoming students; students' skills and competences

- "Students' high ability"
- "Training, motivation and sucess in students' learning"
- "The establishment of strict rules that only allow the admission of students highly motivated for the scientific and professional areas they apply to."

Academics (593)

Academics' qualifications, skills and competences; academics' performance; academics' scientific and research performance

- "Teaching staff scientific competence, as well as their individual effort to improve it"
- "Teaching staff academic quality. Teaching staff capacity of self-motivation"
- "Competences, responsibilities, accomplishment, research development, publication in journals, high quality scientific projects"
- "Teaching staff individual effort; the clear perception that they need to accompany their teaching duties with updated research"

Portuguese Academics

Strongly agree with the idea that QA should promote **improvement** and **innovation** (namely in **teaching/learning**)

Are in favour of **external accountability** and **providing information** to students and institutional governance bodies

Support the promotion of **institutional reputation** and **social image** and the **collective** identification of institutional **strengths** and **weaknesses**

Do **not tend to support** the link between QA results and **penalising/rewarding** mechanisms, **resource allocation** or the **control of the HE network**

Gender, **type of institution** and **disciplinary affiliation** seem to influence academics perceptions on QA – more support from female academics, from polytechnic institutes and from Medical and Health Sciences

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- **Increasing number of national QA systems based on accreditation**

- **Move to ranking systems**

- **Move towards Quality Enhancement as a way to reinstate trust in HEIs**

- The available literature and our results show academics' preferences towards

  Quality Enhancement…

- But many European countries seem to go in the opposite direction…

- Academics' support is essential for QA systems adequate implementation…

Governments and QA agencies:

- **How to get academics support?**

- **How to go from Academics as mere "passive recipients" of QA to Academics as engaged and effective participants in QA?**

THANK YOU!

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