

Information on the Portuguese Higher Education System

Section 8

The Framework Law on the Education System (Law no. 46/86 of 14 October, amended by Law no. 115/97, dated 19 September and Law no. 49/2005, dated 30 August, republished and renumbered in annex to the latter) establishes the general legal framework of the Education System. The **educational system** comprises three levels: basic, secondary and higher education.

Pre-school education is for children aged between 3 and the age of entering basic education, and is universal for children from the age of 5.

Basic education is universal, compulsory and free and comprises three sequential cycles, the 1st lasting four years, the 2nd lasting two years, and the 3rd lasting three years.

Secondary education comprises a three-year cycle (corresponding to the 10th, 11th and 12th years of schooling) and must be completed by school-aged young people, an obligation that ceases at the age of 18.

National Qualifications Framework

The National Qualifications Framework (QNQ) was adopted in 2009. It comprises the formal qualifications of all education and training subsystems as well as the non-formal qualifications derived from professional experience within the framework of the National Qualifications System. It includes eight levels of qualification, following the levels and descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The QNQ is referenced to the EQF.

Higher Education Structure

Portuguese higher education includes university and polytechnic education. University education is provided by public and private university institutions while polytechnic education is provided by public and private non-university institutions. Private higher education institutions

are subject to prior recognition by the competent Ministry.

Licenciado degree

Both university and polytechnic education institutions award the degree of *licenciado*.

In polytechnic education, the cycle of studies leading to the degree of *licenciado* normally lasts six curricular semesters corresponding to 180 ECTS credits. In exceptional cases covered by national or European Union legislation, it may last up to seven or eight curricular semesters with up to 240 ECTS credits of student work.

In university education, the cycle of studies leading to the degree of *licenciado* ranges from 180 to 240 ECTS credits, and normally lasts from six to eight curricular semesters.

In the 1st cycle of studies the degree of *licenciado* is awarded to those who pass all the course units of the *licenciatura* study programme, therefore obtaining the required number of credits.

The degree of *licenciado* corresponds to the level 6 of the QNQ and EQF.

Mestre degree

Both university and polytechnic education institutions award the degree of *mestre*. The cycle of studies leading to the degree of *mestre* ranges from 90 to 120 credits, and normally lasts from three to four curricular semesters. In exceptional circumstances resulting from a stable and consolidated practice in that specific field at international level, it may amount to 60 ECTS credits and last two semesters.

In polytechnic education, the cycle of studies leading to the *mestre* degree must ensure predominantly that the student acquires a professional specialization. In university education, the cycle of studies leading to the *mestre* degree must ensure mainly that the student acquires an academic specialization through research, innovation or development of professional competences.

In university education, the *mestre* degree may also be awarded upon completion of an integrated cycle of studies, ranging from 300 to 360 ECTS credits and usually lasting 10 to 12 curricular semesters, in cases where the access to the practice of a certain professional activity depends on that length of time in accordance with European Union legal standards or results from a regular practice consolidated within the European Union. Within this cycle of studies, the degree of *licenciado* is awarded to those who have obtained 180 ECTS credits corresponding to the first six curricular semesters.

In the 2nd cycle of studies, the degree of *mestre* is awarded to those who have passed all the course units of the *mestrado* study programme, and who have publicly defended an original dissertation, project work or traineeship report, therefore obtaining the required number of credits.

The *mestre* degree corresponds to the level 7 of the QNQ and EQF.

Doutor degree

The *Doutor* degree is awarded by universities and polytechnic higher education institutions to those who have passed all the course units of the *Doutoramento* study programme, when applicable, and who have publicly defended an original thesis. It may also be awarded on account of a coherent and relevant set of research works or, in the field of the arts, on a work or a set of works or achievements.

The *doutor* degree corresponds to the level 8 of the QNQ and EQF.

Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais

The *técnico superior profissional* diploma is awarded upon completion of a non-degree higher education cycle of studies entitled *curso técnico superior profissional* (CTeSP). It corresponds to a short cycle of studies within the cycle of studies leading to the *licenciado* degree. The CTeSP are provided by polytechnic higher education institutions as well as polytechnic organic units integrated in universities.

The CTeSP have 120 ECTS credits and normally last four curricular semesters including general, scientific and technical subjects, as well as a training period at the workplace.

Other diplomas

Higher education diplomas may also be awarded following the partial completion of a cycle of studies. In such cases, the chosen title must differ from the title of the final award of the applicable degree.

Diplomas may also be awarded for non-degree courses, some of which are regulated, e.g. postgraduate specialization courses in Nursing or supplementary courses in Nursing or Teaching.

Access conditions

Admission to higher education institutions is subject to *numerus clausus*.

Admission to the first cycle of studies

General regime

National and foreign students wishing to apply to the 1st cycle of studies leading to the *licenciado* degree through the general regime must fulfil the following conditions:

- Have successfully completed a secondary education course or a national or foreign qualification legally equivalent;
- Have taken the entrance exams required for the programme the student wishes to attend with a mark equal or higher than the minimum required (there are higher education institutions that accept foreign tests or exams);
- Have fulfilled the prerequisites (when applicable) of the programme the student wishes to attend.

An annual competition is held by the Directorate-General for Higher Education for admission to public higher education through the general regime.

Institutional competitions are held for admission to private higher education through the general regime.

Special conditions

Besides the *regime geral* (general regime), there are special conditions that apply to top-level athletes, Portuguese citizens on an official mission abroad, national or foreign diplomatic staff, permanent staff of the Portuguese Armed Forces, and scholarship holders within the framework of cooperation agreements agreed by Portugal.

An annual competition is held by the Directorate-General for Higher Education for admission to public higher education through the special conditions.

Special competitions

Besides the general regime and the special conditions, there are special competitions for applicants holding specific qualifications, thus opening higher education to new publics in a lifelong learning perspective, namely:

- Applicants over 23 years old who have passed special exams for assessing their capacity to accede to higher education;
- Holders of other higher education courses, *técnico superior profissional* diplomas, and *diploma de especialização tecnológica* (a post-secondary course certificate).
- Holders of Secondary School Double Certification and Specialised Art Courses;
- Holders of the *licenciado* degree wishing to apply to Medicine.
- International students.

In addition, students who have been or are registered and enrolled in higher education are allowed to apply for readmission or to opt for another institution/programme pairing.

The special competitions for applying to higher education are held by higher education institutions.

Admission to the second cycle of studies

Those who meet the following conditions may apply to the 2nd cycle of studies leading to the *mestre* degree:

- Holders of the *licenciado* degree or legal equivalent;
- Holders of a foreign academic degree fully recognised as satisfying the objectives identical to the *licenciado* degree by the relevant scientific body of the higher education institution they wish to be admitted to;
- Holders of an academic, scientific or professional *curriculum vitae* that is recognised as attesting to the capacity to carry out this cycle of studies by the relevant scientific body of the higher education institution they wish to be admitted to.

The relevant bodies of each higher education institution are responsible for the regulations, application requirements and selection criteria for admission to this cycle of studies.

The access and admission to the integrated cycle of studies leading to the *mestre* degree are governed by the norms applicable to the access and admission to the 1st cycle of studies leading to the *licenciado* degree.

Admission to the third cycle of studies

Those who meet the following conditions may apply to the 3rd cycle of studies leading to the *doutor* degree:

- Holders of a *mestre* degree or legal equivalent;
- Holders of a *licenciado* degree who have a particularly relevant academic or scientific *curriculum vitae* that is recognised as attesting the capacity to carry out this cycle of studies by the relevant scientific body of the higher education institution they wish to be admitted to.
- Holders of an academic, scientific or professional *curriculum vitae* that is recognised as attesting the capacity to carry out this cycle of studies by the relevant scientific body of the higher education institution they wish to be admitted to.

The relevant bodies of each higher university, university institute, or polytechnic higher education institutions, are responsible for the regulations,

application requirements and selection criteria for admission to this cycle of studies.

Admission to CTeSP

Those who meet the following conditions may apply to a CTeSP:

- Holders of a secondary education course or legal equivalent;
- Applicants aged over 23 who have passed the special exams for assessing their capacity to attend higher education required for a particular course;
- Holders of *diploma de especialização tecnológica*, *técnico superior profissional* diploma or of a degree wishing to undergo reskilling.

The specific conditions to apply for a *técnico superior profissional* course are set by higher education institutions, according to the field of the course. The competitions are held by higher education institutions.

Classification system

The *técnico superior profissional* diploma, as well as the **licenciado** and **mestre** degrees are assigned a 10-20 final classification on a numerical scale from 0 to 20, as well as its equivalent in the European scale of comparability of classifications.

The academic degree of **doutor** is assigned a final classification pursuant to the regulating standards approved by the awarding university, university institute, or polytechnic higher education institutions.

WHERE APPLICABLE

Former higher education structure

Degree programmes

Prior to Law no. 49/2005, dated 30 August, and ensuing adoption of the regulatory principles for the creation of the European Higher Education Area:

- The degrees of *bacharel*, *licenciado*, *mestre* and *doutor* were awarded in university education;
- The degrees of *bacharel* and *licenciado* were awarded in polytechnic education;

- Diploma to *licenciatura* programmes, organised in two stages, the first leading to the *bacharel* degree and the second to the *licenciado* degree, could be provided in polytechnic education.

The first stage lasted six semesters and the second lasted two to four semesters;

- The programmes leading to the *bacharel* degree usually lasted three years, but under certain conditions could be one or two semesters shorter;

- The programmes leading to the *licenciado* degree usually lasted four years, but under certain conditions could one to four semesters longer;

- The programmes leading to the *mestre* degree had a maximum length of four semesters;

- Degree programmes were not assigned a given range of ECTS credits. The former degrees remain valid as there is no matching mechanism or automatic conversion from the former to the current degrees.

The degrees and diplomas prior to the Bologna Process implementation were given the following correspondences within the framework of the QNQ:

- The *bacharel* and *licenciado* degrees correspond to level 6;
- The *mestre* degree corresponds to level 7;
- The *doutor* degree corresponds to level 8.

Cursos de Especialização Tecnológica

Higher education institutions were given the deadline of 31 December 2016 to conclude the provision of post-secondary courses aimed at specialized professional training, entitled *Cursos de Especialização Tecnológica* (CET).

The CET range from 60 to 90 ECTS credits and include subjects in general, scientific and technical areas, as well as a training period at the workplace.

The completion of a CET implies a technological specialization certificate providing a level 4 professional qualification, in accordance with Council Decision 85/368/CEE of 16

July, which corresponds to a level 5 qualification within the framework of the QNQ.