

# Information on the Portuguese Higher Education System

## Section 8

The Framework Law on the Education System (Law nr. 46/86, dated 14 October 1986, further amended by Laws nr.115/97, dated 19 September and nr. 49/2005, dated 30 August) establishes the general legal framework of the Education System.

According to this Law, the educational system comprises three levels: basic, secondary and higher education.

Pre-school education is optional and is for children between the ages of three and the age of entering basic education.

Basic Education is universal, compulsory and free and comprises three cycles, the first cycle lasts for four years, the second lasts for two years and the third lasts for three years.

Secondary education is compulsory and it comprises a three year cycle (corresponding to 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> year of schooling).

### Higher Education Structure

The first steps towards the legal reform of the system of higher education were made in 2005, with the introduction of the new credit system (ECTS) for the cycles of study, mobility mechanisms, diploma supplement, amongst others. Changes were also made to the Basic Law for the Education System in order to implement the Bologna Process.

The new structure divided into three cycles of studies was created in 2006 and it was completely implemented in Portugal in 2009/2010. Generic qualification descriptors were also defined for each of the cycles of studies, based on acquired competences, as well as the structure for the first and second cycles of study in terms of typical ECTS intervals.

Portuguese higher education includes university and polytechnic education. University education is offered by public and private university institutions while polytechnic education is offered by public and private non-university institutions. Private higher education institutions must be subject to the previous recognition of the Ministry of Education and Science. The higher education system comprises also a concordatory institution.

### Licenciado degree

Both university and polytechnic institutions confer the degree of *licenciado (bachelor)*. In polytechnic education, the cycle of studies that leads to the degree of *licenciado* has 180 credits and a normal length of six curricular semesters of students' work. In certain cases namely those covered by internal legislation or by European legislation, the cycle of studies can have up to 240 credits with a normal length of up to seven or eight curricular semesters of students' work.

In university education, the cycle of studies that leads to the degree of *licenciado* has from 180 to 240 credits and a normal length between six to eight curricular semesters of students' work.

In the first cycle of studies the degree of *licenciado* is conferred, by universities or polytechnics institutions, to those that, after concluding all the curricular units that integrate the study programme of the *licenciatura* course, have obtained the established number of credits.

### Mestre degree

Both university and polytechnic institutions confer the degree of *mestre (master)*. The cycle of studies that leads to the degree of *mestre* has from 90 to 120 credits and a normal length of between three to four curricular semesters of

students' work or in exceptional circumstances, 60 credits and a duration of two semesters, resulting from a stable and consolidated practice in that specific field at international level.

In polytechnic education, the cycle of studies that leads to the *mestre* degree must ensure predominantly that the student acquires a professional specialization. In university education, the cycle of studies that leads to the *mestre* degree must ensure that the student acquires an academic specialization resorting to research, innovation or expansion of professional competences. In university education, the *mestre* degree may also be conferred after an integrated cycle of studies, with 300 to 360 credits and a normal length of 10 to 12 curricular semesters of students' work, in cases for which the access to the practice of a certain professional activity depends on that length of time established by legal EU standards or resulting from a stable practice consolidated in the European Union. In this cycle of studies the degree of *licenciado* is conferred to those who have obtained 180 credits corresponding to the first six semesters of work.

The degree of *mestre* is conferred to those that, after concluding all the curricular units that integrate the study programme of the *mestrado* course, have obtained the established number of credits, as well as successfully defended in public their dissertation, their project work or their traineeship report.

### **Doutor degree**

The *Doutor* (doctor) degree is conferred by universities and university institutes. The degree of *Doutor* is conferred to those that, after concluding all the curricular units that integrate the study programme of the *Doutoramento* (doctorate) course, when applicable, and have successfully defended their thesis in the public act.

### **Access conditions**

#### **General regime to accede to higher education**

National and foreign students wishing to apply through the general regime to the first cycle of studies, must fulfil the following conditions:

- Have successfully completed a secondary course or a national or foreign qualification legally equivalent;
- Have set for the entrance examinations required for the degree programme the student wishes to attend and get the minimal mark required (there are higher education institutions that accept foreign tests or exams);
- Have fulfilled the prerequisites for the higher education course the student wishes to attend, if required.

#### **Special conditions**

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

#### **Special Competitions**

Besides the general regime and the special conditions there are also special competitions for applicants with certain specific qualifications thus allowing new publics to accede to higher education in a perspective of lifelong learning, namely:

- applicants over 23 years old who have passed a especial exam for assessing their capacity to accede to higher education;
- holders of a specialization technological course (non higher education post-secondary course).

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

#### **Admission to the second cycle of studies**

Those who meet the following conditions may apply to the cycle of studies that leads to the *mestre* degree:

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

#### **Admission to the third cycle of studies**

Those who meet the following conditions may apply to the cycle of studies that leads to the *doutor* (doctor) degree:

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

#### **Classification System**

The degrees of *licenciado* and *mestre* shall have a final classification between 10 and 20 on a numerical scale of 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 university that confers it.