

CONTEXT FOR THE NATIONAL DATA: PORTUGAL

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Western European higher education systems remained, in general, subject to strong State regulation and the existence of private institutions remained minimal in most of these systems. The only significant exception to this Western European pattern is the Portuguese higher education system, where a very large private sub-sector developed during the last two decades. Until the 1974 revolution the Portuguese higher education system was clearly an elite system: a very low rate of enrolment, significant regional concentration of supply, an almost inexistent vocational sector, and a regressive socio-economic recruitment in its student population. The political and social changes brought by the revolution created a very strong pressure for structural changes and expansion of the system. In the mid-eighties, the expansion of the system was regarded as a policy priority and private higher education was regarded as a crucial instrument in that respect (the only non-public institution was then the Catholic University, which had been established in the early seventies).

The analysis of the growth of enrolments during the last decades confirms the profound transformation of the system during that period and the overall pattern of rapid expansion (see section on data). The system's expansion consolidated important structural changes with the strengthening of the non-university sector and of the private sector. From the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties, private higher education became the fast-growing sub-sector. The rapid and significant development of the private sector created important regulatory challenges which led to the **General Law on Private and Cooperative HE of 1994** (see section of Laws).

Since the mid-nineties the system has stabilized in terms of its size and nowadays the emphasis in terms of policy is in improving its quality and effectiveness rather than on an overall expansion. It is in this new context that was published the **Basic Law of Higher Education Funding of Higher Education** (see section on laws), which places a greater emphasis on cost-sharing and in quality improvement.

After a massive expansion private higher education faced far more difficult times since the mid-nineties. The stabilization and then the slight decline in the number of applications to higher

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education, plus the steady expansion of public higher education, has reduced the pool of potential candidates to private HEIs. Moreover, the geographical concentration of private HEIs made it more difficult to these institutions to find alternative ways to attract students. Most private institutions are located in the capital area (Lisbon) and in the second largest city (Porto).

Enrolments in any part of the system are dominantly at the undergraduate, on-site and full-time categories. All higher education institutions in Portugal offer learning on site. There is only one distance learning institution, which is a public university that focuses its activities in promoting postgraduate and lifelong learning training for basic and secondary teachers. Most higher education institutions (private and public) only enroll students on a full-time basis. The growing but still small proportion of postgraduate students is basically limited to the public university sub-sector. Due to their vocational ethos, polytechnic institutions were not allowed in general to award postgraduate degrees and therefore only in very special cases can be found postgraduate students in those institutions. Private institutions remained almost exclusively focused on undergraduate programs. Their recent nature, their poor emphasis on research activity, and the more demanding requirements, in terms of qualification of teaching staff, to start a postgraduate program, all contribute to explain that situation.

There is still very limited information on the private sector of higher education, besides that referring to student enrolments and graduates. The private institutions do not release publicly any data referring to their financial situation or to the teaching staff. The latter was due to the fact that when most private institutions were established, the context of rapid expansion and the lax regulation of the system stimulated them to use staff from public institutions on a moonlighting basis. This led to significant tension and controversies, especially with public institutions. Nowadays, they are obliged to submit their list of staff to the Ministry of Higher Education but this information is not readily available.