



Universidade de Aveiro
Portugal

Non-traditional students at the University: the M23 case in two HEI in Portugal

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The M23 regime

The law-decree 64/2006 allows mature students older than 23 years (M23) to apply to Higher Education Institutions (HEI), widening the participation of adult population in Portugal. In the University of Aveiro (UA), a student enrolled through this specific regime has had to pass a three steps evaluation process, with the following weights in the final mark: (A) the analysis of the candidate curriculum vitae (20%); (B) a set of thematic exams with the purpose of evaluation of their academic skills (60%); (C) finally, an individual interview where an appointed jury questions the applicant about his or her motivations and life history (20%). After successfully passing this process, the candidates can apply for a course at the UA. Also an innovative "one-stop shop" was created in the Lifelong Unit of the UA (Uinfoc), where the M23 candidates deal with all the related administrative procedures.

University acknowledgment of acquired competences

Recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired by mature students is a centerpiece of Lifelong Learning. Besides the UA's Internal Regulation of this process, and in order to enhance specific educational pathways, the M23 regime, at the UA, emphasizes the recognition of prior learning in the plan of studies, since the jury involved in the process identifies professional experience and previous training which may be acknowledged and credited by the University's Scientific and Pedagogical Boards. The M23 evaluation process itself relies on evidences and includes the following elements: 1) academic qualifications (level and classification); 2) training; 3) professional experience and 4) personal experience, regarding, for instance, linguistic knowledge, associative experience, sports, cultural activities and self-taught learning (in the last three items, mainly those relevant to the course of appliance). The consideration and analysis of all these elements are weighted and included on steps A) and C) of the process. Once the candidate actually enters University he/she may immediately ask for the possible accreditations identified on the candidature portfolio.

Searching solutions to improve academic success

From the individual contact with the mature students at Uinfoc and the feed-back from teachers, some obstacles to the progression of this students in their trajectory inside the University became apparent. A research project called "*Non-traditional students in Higher Education Institutions: searching solutions to improve academic success (PTDC/CPE-CED/108739/2008)*", funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, was designed by the UA and the University of Algarve. It intends to triangle different perspectives (from students, teachers and management), combining a quantitative and a qualitative approach. In the end, a set of recommendations aiming to the improvement of the conditions that both universities offer and to promote the students' success will be presented.



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