The Balance Between Higher Education Autonomy and Public Quality Assurance: Development of the Portuguese System for Teacher Education Accreditation

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Abstract
The accreditation systems of higher education institutions and/or programmes are becoming a policy measure used to find a balance between their autonomy and public assurance concerning the quality of the qualifications they award. This article analyses, from the point of view of this balance of power, the process of development of the Portuguese accreditation system aimed at providing public assurance that initial teacher education programmes are more driven by social demand, namely by the changing school education needs. This was a political and cultural process rather than a merely rational and technical one. Thus the emergence of the need for, and possibility of, external pressure upon higher education institutions is related to the evolution of several social factors. On the other hand, the implementation of the accreditation system means a significant change for these institutions which implies new practices and comes into conflict with some of their values and with power sharing within and among them and with society. For these reasons a strategy of wide participation of significant stakeholders was deemed more suitable for the formulation, adoption and implementation of this new public policy. The way in which

Government, the accreditation body and the significant stakeholders exercised their power in this process influenced the characteristics of the system, the rhythm of its implementation and the abrupt governmental decision to put it on stand by, until now.

The accreditation systems of higher education institutions and/or programmes are becoming a policy measure used to find a balance between the autonomy of these institutions and public assurance concerning the quality of the qualifications they award. This article (Note 1) analyses, from the point of view of this balance of power, the development of the Portuguese system for the accreditation of initial school teacher education programmes (Note2). It starts by making a short reference to the higher education accreditation movement, especially in the field of teacher education, and by pinpointing the role of an accreditation system within the process of public certification of qualified teacher status. The second section outlines the historical and social process leading to the social awareness that there was a social issue urging a new policy measure. The third characterises the structural and functional elements of the system developed. The description of the strategy chosen for the formulation, adoption and implementation of this policy appears in the fourth section. Finally, the way social actors exerted their power in the process of development of this policy is highlighted and some lessons are drawn from it.

I. Introduction

1. Higher education accreditation

To have recourse to accreditation procedures for quality assurance and development of higher education institutions and programmes is an Anglo-Saxon tradition (Myers et al., 1998; Van Damme, 2000) that has been developed or, at least, seen and debated as an hypothesis, in continental Europe, since the eighties (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002); firstly in Central and Eastern Europe in the framework of political, economic and social changes driven by the fall of the Wall (Westerheijden, 2001) and afterwards all over Europe (Campbell & Van der Wende, 2000; CRE, 2001; Danish Evaluation Institute, 2003; Hamalainen et al, 2001; Van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2001) mainly following the Bologna declaration in 1999 (Reichert & Tauch, 2003; Sebkova, 2002). Moreover, as a recent OECD/CERI document (2003) summarises: "during the last quarter of a century, external quality assurance and accreditation systems have been established in all regions of the world" and " have become full features of modern regulation systems in higher education" (p.10). Higher education accreditation has also become part of the agenda of international organisations such as UNESCO (2002), the World Bank (El-Khawwas *et al,* 1998*)* and OECD (OECD, 1999; OECD/CERI 2003).

El-Khawas (1998), in the contribution of the World Bank to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (1998), sees the worldwide movement towards new approaches to higher education quality assurance as emerging from the inadequacy of traditional academic controls:

"As governments in most parts of the world have considered their agenda for higher education over the last few decades, issues of quality assurance and quality enhancement have been a major focus of attention. Despite differences in the size and stage of development of their higher education sectors, many

governments have decided that traditional academic controls are inadequate to today's challenges and that more explicit assurances about quality are needed. Organisations such as the European Commission or OECD have reinforced this trend by their own calls for new structures and new approaches to quality assurance ". (p.2)

Massification and for-profit provision, on one hand, and internationalisation and delivery globalisation, namely by e-learning, on the other hand, are the most frequently mentioned reasons for the recent interest in, and development of, new instruments of higher education quality assurance and accreditation all over the world.

However, the chosen approaches differ from country to country (van Damme, 2000); for El-Khawas (1998) this variation "reflects political and cultural preferences within each country, differences in government leadership, as well as varying stages of development for the higher education sector" (p.4). Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition that national quality assurance and accreditation systems are insufficient to address the recent explosion of higher education cross-border provision (OCDE/CERI, 2003; Van Damme, 2000). The most commonly mentioned models for the internationalisation of higher education quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms are *(i)* mutual recognition of the national systems, *(ii)* an umbrella organisation defining standards for and accrediting national systems and, finally, *(iii)* international agencies. The first two generally are better accepted but all the three have already been implemented (CRE, 2001; OCDE/CERI, 2003).

There are two categories of higher education accreditation: *academic* and *professional*. Each can refer to *institutions* or to *programmes* (Hämäläinen et al., 2001; Myers et al., 1998). The *academic* accreditation of an institution or a programme leading to a certain academic degree consists of a judgement on its suitability to the criteria that characterise the degree in question and it is often related to the process of recognition of its national (or international) value. The *professional* accreditation of an institution or a programme which aims to provide a certain professional qualification consists of a judgement on its suitability to the demands of the professional activity they prepare for, and it is often related to the process of awarding a professional title and license to act as a professional.

That is, whereas the professional accreditation focuses on the criteria concerning the level and field of a certain professional qualification, the academic accreditation is centred on criteria characterising the education leading to the academic degree to be awarded. Suitability to academic criteria does not necessarily assure suitability to professional criteria; yet, whenever professional qualification programmes lead to an academic degree, matching the academic criteria is also considered necessary.

Taken as whole, there are several features that, in international terms, characterise the process of accreditation and distinguish it from other processes:

(i) the existence of a conclusive statement on the suitability of the institution or programme to predefined criteria;
(ii) the definition of criteria is the responsibility of an instance external to the higher education institutions
(iii) the existence of an accreditation body independent of the accredited institutions.

And furthermore, in the case of professional accreditation:

(iv) the existence of criteria specific to the professional qualification level and field the programme is aimed at; and the participation of employers and professionals from the sector in the setting out of such criteria and in the programme accreditation process.

The accreditation system analysed in this article *is a system of professional accreditation of programmes.*

2. Quality assurance of teaching qualifications

Apart from the systems encompassing all higher education institutions and/or programmes, there is also a trend for developing programme-specific professional accreditation systems (Myers et al., 1998; OECD, 2003). Here, awareness of consumer protection need (OECD/CERI, 2003) is greater and the specific concern is the appropriateness of the qualifications to the demands of the socially expected professional role or the "match [of] the output of institutions with the needs of modern workplaces in an increasingly competitive and transformative economy" (Van Damme, 2000, p.11). What matters is the fitness-*of*-purpose and not only the fitness-*for*-purpose judgement, as Randall (2002) stresses.

This is the case regarding teacher education institutions and programmes. In some countries, all over the world, accreditation systems for initial or in-service teacher education have been developed, or are being proposed, as an instrument of teaching quality assurance policy (Avalos, 2000; Buchberger et al., 2000; Campos, 2000b; European Commission, 2003 Hirsh et al.,2001; Moon, 2003; NCTAF, 1996;; Sander, 1999; Zafeirakou, 2002). Mostly in US, where the recourse to this instrument started earlier, teacher education accreditation is not only intensivly debated, as in other countries, but also the object of more research studies (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2002; Delandshere, G. & Petrosky, A., 2004; Roth, 1996; Wilson et al , 2001)

Professional accreditation of teacher education programmes aims, first of all, to contribute to the solution of a key education policy issue: *assuring society that people wishing to teach are properly qualified to respond to the demands of teaching in a satisfactory way.* That means, ensuring they hold the qualifications and competences needed for teaching, so as to be awarded their respective professional title and teaching license.

The most common solutions that public policies have called for to solve this issue are the following:

(i) accreditation/recognition of teacher education programmes targeted at professional teaching qualifications;
(ii) external individual certification of teaching qualification;
(iii) both accreditation and certification.

Sometimes, selection procedures for licensed teachers who apply for a teaching job constitute a complementary device for, or even an alternative strategy to, these solutions. It should be underlined that in the countries where most teachers are public employees, the State does not always clearly distinguish among its responsibilities - regulating admittance to the teaching profession, assuring quality of public and private provision of school education (which includes concern with the quality of teachers) and recruiting teachers for state schools - and only intervenes in the latter process.

A situation of total social deregulation happens when there is no selection in recruitment to employment, no programme accreditation, and no external certification

awarding teaching licenses. This was the situation in Portugal until the setting up, in 1999, of the accreditation system for initial teacher education.

Apart from the need to assure society about the quality of teachers' qualifications, with the increasing internationalisation of higher education and the labour market another policy issue arises. Programme accreditation has been pointed out as an alternative solution to a new individual process of certification of teaching qualification by *assuring that teaching qualification and the license to teach obtained by a person in one State are comparable to those obtained in the State where this person wishes to attend part of his/her higher education or be allowed to teach.*

Public assurance at national level was largely responsible for the setting up in Portugal of the accreditation system of initial teacher education programmes for school education. However, the system is also relevant for the policies aimed at enhancing student mobility and teacher employability in the European and international education and employment space.

3. Entities interested in teacher education quality assurance

So far, we have stressed the contribution of teacher education accreditation to the regulation by public authorities of the license to teach, where it exists (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein, 1995): professional programme accreditation, by itself or complemented with external certification of individual qualifications, is a sufficient condition or a necessary one, as the case may be, for licensing graduates to teach in the country or countries where it is recognised for this purpose.

However, there are other entities or "users", as Randall (2002) calls them, interested in the public assurance that accreditation provides of the suitability of teacher education programmes to the demands of future professional activity.

The *Ministries of Education,* responsible for school education policies and for their quality assurance, are no doubt in the top rank; and this is the case whether or not they are direct providers of school education. *Teacher education institutions* also have an interest in this process, both when dealing with the admittance of students who have started their studies in another institution, and for the sake of the social credibility accreditation may provide to teacher education at large, and to each accredited institution; besides, accreditation avoids competition with programmes that have less quality.

Assurance provided by the accreditation system is also of interest for *students* applying for or attending teacher education programmes and for *teacher employers,* namely those responsible for state schools whether or not they rely on specific selection procedures. It is also of interest for *teachers* themselves because of the public image of their own qualification and of the quality of their future colleagues' qualifications in a school context where teamwork is a growing concern.

Finally, it is of interest for the whole *society,* which holds a legitimate expectation that school education of all citizens is in the hands of well-qualified teachers.

II. Emergence Of The Need For Teacher Education Accreditation In Portugal

The political importance attributed to the process of public recognition of teaching qualifications and the amount of attention paid to it in Portugal has varied over the

years. The emergence of the need for, and possibility of, external pressure upon higher education institutions providing these qualifications, for its public quality assurance is related to the evolution of several social factors This section analyses this evolution and identifies factors responsible for the recent adoption of this specific recognition system, which is accreditation (Campos, 1996, 1999, 2000 a; Formosinho, 2002).

Regarding the analysis of the recognition policies adopted in the latest forty years, we can distinguish three periods that correspond to different overall goals for school education and to different roles the Ministry of Education has played in relation to teacher education (Table 1):

Table 1
Evolution of the policies regarding the
recognition of teaching qualifications (1960-2002)

Period	School education	Teacher education responsibility	Qualification recognition
To the mid seventies	Selective & elitist	Ministry of Education	Unnecessary
Up to the mid nineties	Mass school education	Higher education	Nominalistic
Present time	Quality mass school education	Higher education qualifying professionals	Qualitative

1. Up to the mid seventies

The first period corresponds to a selective and elitist education and to the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education for teacher education, which made a process of recognition unnecessary.

Until the mid 70's, the State did not need to recognise educational programmes as teaching qualifications because it was directly responsible for institutions' management and for the processes leading to the acquisition of such qualifications. Primary school teachers were prepared in the non-higher education schools governed by the Ministry of Education. Higher education graduates were allowed to teach as secondary school teachers and only some years later were some of them provided with a specific teacher training programme, also organised by the Ministry of Education and carried out in only a few secondary schools; at the end of the programme there was a "State Examination", which certified each individual teacher with a teaching qualification. (Campos, 1979)

In this period the following aspects should be highlighted:

(i) The entity responsible for teacher education, in this case the Education Administration, certified graduates' teaching qualifications; there are policies under which both responsibilities – that of providing qualification and that of certifying – are separate, although the teacher education institutions can participate in certification together with other entities; the principle "the one who qualifies is the one who certifies" has continued in Portugal up to the present. Public recognition of programmes as teaching qualifications was not necessary because the Ministry of Education directly organised and governed the qualifying education;

(ii) In secondary education the quality of the specific teacher training programmes was not a policy issue, as they were only available to a small percentage of teachers and corresponded to the need to obtain a permanent contract rather than to the suitability of teachers' qualifications to the demands of teaching. Graduates from the few existing university programmes created by the Ministry of Education with an identical academic curriculum structure, which were more or less automatically recognised as academic teaching qualification, were enough to ensure selective and elitist secondary education, attended by a small percentage of the corresponding age group;

(iii) The first type of recognition of teaching qualifications was that of the programmes as academic qualifications, carried out through an automatic or superficial process; until recently and maybe nowadays, to most people the expression "teaching qualification" only refers to *academic* qualification and the recognition of teaching qualifications means recognition of *academic* teaching qualifications; yet, during the last thirty years over 300 higher education programmes have already been created, implemented and recognised as providing *professional* teaching qualifications.

2. Up to the mid nineties

The second period was characterised by mass school education and by a shift in the responsibility of teacher education to higher education institutions where several changes occurred which, by the end of this period, created the need for the setting up of a more rigorous system for the recognition of professional teaching qualifications.

The growing massification of post-primary education, starting in the late 60's, led to the need for speedy recruitment of a larger number of people to ensure a supply of teachers (São-Pedro et al.,, 2001); as a result, there was an increase in the percentage of people who taught with no professional title and with increasingly insufficient qualifications, even in academic terms.

Pressure from unions for the professionalisation of secondary education subject teachers before they started teaching increased, mainly because of economic consequences and job security. Moreover, awareness began to emerge, although slowly, that the massification of the school population would require better qualified teachers. At the same time, the trend arrived in Portugal for shifting the responsibility for professional teacher training to higher education institutions (a phenomenon internationally known as the "universitisation" of teacher education) which was particularly well received by recently created new Universities in search of a specific identity in relation to the older ones (Coimbra, Lisboa and Porto).(Campos, 2002; Formosinho, 2002)

These factors, among others, contributed not only to the building up of the political and social acceptance of the need to professionally qualify secondary education

teachers, before starting their activity, but also to the emergence of a university supply in most teaching areas, even in classic universities.

Transference of all the components of secondary teachers' education to the university course was followed by transference of teacher education for pre-school and primary school education to recently created vocational higher education and to universities (Note 3).

Initial teacher education therefore ceased to be directly organised and governed by the services of the Ministry of Education, the responsibility being transferred to higher education institutions, as had happened in the US several decades previously (Angus, 2001), and has been happening in other European countries (Campos, 2000 b; Moon et al., 2003; Sander et al., 1996) and Latin American countries (Avalos, 2000). In Portugal, competence to certify graduates' professional qualifications was also attributed to higher education institutions, the principle under which "the one who qualifies is the one who certifies" having been kept on; therefore, teacher education programmes provide and award not only an *academic degree* ("licenciatura") but also a *certificate of qualification for teaching* and those holding such a certificate can apply for a job as a teacher in state or private schools because they are thereby licensed to teach (Note 4).

As is well known this is not what happens in all countries; the other international tradition in this matter is external certification, in general available only to graduates from programmes recognised as suitable to assure a professional teaching qualification.

Meanwhile, in a short period of time, a number of changes occurred in higher education, some of which should be highlighted: massification; recognition of autonomy, not only scientific but also pedagogic; and the proliferation of private providers (Amaral & Teixeira, 2000; Amaral et al, 2002; Magalhães, 2001; Simão et al., 2002). These phenomena have also influenced initial teacher education programmes, which nowadays ascend to about 330 and represent about 20% of the total number of undergraduate higher education programmes. Up to the present, corresponding to these changes, there has not been a credible system of public regulation for higher education nor for teacher education programmes (Note 5).

In this period the following aspects should be stressed:

(i)   Recognition of programmes supplied by higher education as professional teaching qualification became necessary. It was important to know which higher education programmes would see their graduates accepted by the Ministry of Education which has the responsibility for primary and secondary education policy and is the greatest employer of teachers.

(ii) The recognition process was, however, diluted in the process leading to the programmes' State license to run as higher education degrees. This process was led by the Directorate of Higher Education, which did not take into consideration the fact that they were teacher education programmes. This is understandable in a context of an urgent need for more teachers with professional qualifications and of the need to foster the supply of teachers from autonomous higher education institutions, which presumably would do this better than had been done before "universitisation" of teacher education

(iii) Although the programmes to be recognised were all provided by higher education institutions, different Government departments recognised different teaching qualifications: departments of higher education recognised those leading to *professional* qualifications and the departments of basic and secondary

education those leading only to *academic* qualifications, since it was still necessary to resort to people only holding this latter qualification.

(iv) Therefore, in professional qualification recognition the methodology already used for the recognition of *academic* qualifications was adopted: a *nominalistic* methodology based on the name of the programmes or the subjects and on the assumption that these designations always report to identical realities.

3. Present time

As the nineties passed by, and most conditions of access to school had been ensured, success of a greater number of pupils in higher and higher school education levels started to be a matter of more evident social concern. This aim for quality mass school education has direct implications on the role of the teachers, which is no longer seen as that of a technician, but rather that of a professional, and raises new demands concerning their education (Campos, 2001 b; Edwards, 2001)

Although the changes that occurred in the previous period significantly contributed to solve the quantitative issues of teacher education, doubts arose as to the qualitative similarity of the qualifications certified by the different institutions for the same teaching activity, and their suitability to the demands of teaching, with added doubts driven from the new demands quality mass education were raising. Competition among higher education institutions, due to a growing decrease in the demand for school teachers and in the number of students applying to higher education, led them to begin echoing these doubts themselves.

No wonder, then, that in the second half of this decade new recognition policies for teacher qualifications emerged. These policies continued not to call for the system of external certification of each graduate's qualification, put aside after 25[th]April 1974; however, they formally announced a specific system for higher education programme recognition as professional teaching qualification.

Some aspects of these policies defined in 1995 should be highlighted:

(i) programme recognition as a professional teaching qualification was to be based on a specific analysis;

(ii) this analysis would be based on the set of subjects and respective workload that should be embodied in the programme study plan preparing for the same type of qualification.

A change in Government having in the meantime taken place, the legal document that consecrated these policy measures was suspended and another new project started which, however, maintained this new recognition system. Yet, the National Council of Education, where social stakeholders, including higher education institutions, are represented, came out against it because, in its opinion, it was based on the name of the subjects and did not, therefore, actually judge the substance of the qualification provided and consequently its suitability to the demands of teaching. The Council recommended that recognition should be based on the methodology of programmes' professional accreditation (CNE, 1996, 1999). It was in this context that, at the end of 1998, the Government set up the accreditation system of initial teacher education (Portugal, 1998). It should be noted that a system of in-service teacher education providers and activities accreditation has been in place, since the early nineties (Campos, 1999).

Therefore, the following factors, among others, contributed to the emergence of a system for the accreditation of initial teacher education:

(i) The rapid massification and privatisation of higher education, simultaneously with its greater autonomy in the decision to run and implement programmes, raised doubts as to the comparability of the qualifications provided by all the programmes intended to prepare for the same teaching area, and as to the evidence that the analysis of the names of programmes and their subjects, as well as of their respective workloads, would not(?) be enough for the purpose; do, for instance, all programmes qualifying to be a teacher of Maths in secondary education provide students with a similar qualification or are there significant differences among them?

(ii) In addition to these possible differences which it was urgent to avoid, a lack of a culture of professional qualification in teaching field in higher education institutions and the emergence of evidence of the graduates' insufficient professional preparation (for instance, not being able to teach children how to read and write, even though they had possibly learned a number of linguistic theories) began to raise suspicion as to the suitability of the qualifications provided by higher education institutions to the demands of teaching (Afonso & Canário, 2002; Estrela et al., 2002).; if it is true that, in the first case, comparison among programmes is at stake, it is also true that the issue here is comparison of programmes to the same external criteria.

(iii) These doubts as to the substance of the qualification provided by the programmes emerged in a moment when, on the one hand, there began to be a surplus in programme and graduate supply (it is an international constant that requirements for the quality of teaching qualifications are more or less rigorous depending on the mismatch of supply and demand of teachers) and, on the other hand, previous political concern about massification of access to school education began to be replaced by a concern about the quality of mass education, which implies new demands for the professional roles and qualifications of teachers.

So, there was a need for regulation of the total, or almost total, higher education autonomy in the certification of teaching qualifications for school education, thus putting an end to the situation of complete deregulation of the process of public recognition of teaching qualifications.

III. The Portuguese System For The Accreditation Of Teacher Education

Ensuring the correct balance between higher education autonomy and public quality assurance was therefore the framework for the Portuguese teacher education accreditation system to be designed. The challenge was to ensure appropriateness of teaching qualifications to the school education needs, safeguarding the scientific and pedagogical autonomy of higher education institutions.

1. Accreditation and the recognition of higher education institutions as entities certifying professional qualifications for teaching

Until recently, the process of recognition of Portuguese initial teacher education programmes as providing and awarding a professional teaching qualification, besides an academic degree, was merged in the general recognition process common to all higher education programmes, which, in turn, used to pay little or no attention to their professional dimension (Campos, 1996; 2000 a).

The accreditation system of teacher education programmes, set up in 1999, put an end to this situation (Portugal, 1999). From then onwards:

(i)   Previous accreditation (*ex ante*) of such programmes became a necessary condition, although not sufficient, to obtain the license to run it as a programme recognised as providing and awarding a professional teaching qualification;

(ii) moreover, to maintain their license to be run as programmes thus recognised, they must submit to periodically renewable accreditation *(ex post)*;

(iii) finally, for this same purpose, all teacher education programmes presently running must also submit to one first *ex post* accreditation process.

Thus, accreditation has become the process chosen to recognise higher education institutions as the entities that certify professional qualifications for teaching of graduates in their teacher education programmes (Note 6).

2. Features of the accreditation process

It is worth distinguishing the *process* of accreditation from its *effects* in terms of decisions arising from its results and taken by the different actors, including the State. Some of the effects attributed by the State have already been mentioned and we will return to this question later. We will now deal with the nature of the process itself.

The accreditation of a teacher education programme is "the recognition of this programme's suitability to the demands of the teaching performance at the level and education area it is aimed at"(Portugal, 1999).

Therefore, it consists of

(i)   a judgement of a scientific, pedagogical and professional nature, which is

(ii) conclusive as to the programme's suitability;

(iii) it includes criteria and standards set out from outside the higher education institutions

(iv) which are specific to teacher education programmes, and

(v)   drawn up by an independent public body, in which various social actors participate.

So, it is

(i)   a *professional* accreditation process, and not a merely academic one,

(ii) of *programmes* and not of institutions,

(iii) based on *criteria and standards externally defined* and not defined by the higher education institution itself,

(iv) which are based on *the demands of teaching* and not merely on the demands driven from the level of the academic degree it awards (as is the case of purely academic accreditation), and

(v)   of a purely *scientific, pedagogical and professional* nature, with no interference from political options, such as, for instance, the quantitative needs of the teacher employment market.

(vi) the accreditation entity is *independent* of the entities that can apply to the accreditation of their programmes, and

(vii) the Accreditation Committee includes *basic and secondary school teachers* besides *higher education teachers*.

3. An independent and socially participated accreditation body

The body responsible for the development of the accreditation process is INAFOP (National Institute for Accreditation of Teacher Education) (Portugal, 1998). It is an independent public body created by the Government. Its existence and mission rely upon a political governmental option. However, the process leading to a statement on the accreditation of a programme is completely independent and there is no possibility of appeal to the Government (only to administrative courts for formal process reasons). That is, the development of the accreditation system and the process of accrediting specific programmes were put into the hands of all entities interested in the appropriateness of teacher education to school education needs.

INAFOP is, in fact, governed by a *General Council*, including representatives nominated by a number of stakeholders:

(i) teacher education institutions,

(ii) primary and secondary education teachers unions and associations,
(iii) public and private employers of teachers
(iv) other stakeholders (departments of the Ministry of Education, student
teachers, parents of students from all education levels, and also companies).

Thus constituted on the basis of the social participation of the main stakeholders interested in the suitability of initial teacher education to the demands of teaching, the main duty of this General Council is strategic decision-making. It never passes judgement on the accreditation of a specific programme, but it approves the accreditation regulations and the standards that serve as a framework for accreditation; the General Council also appoints the members of the Accreditation Committee.

The *Accreditation Committee* is composed of experts chosen on an individual basis for their recognised competence. This Committee analyses and decides on the accreditation applications. It may include teachers from teacher education institutions, school education teachers and experts in organisation, development, evaluation or accreditation of curricula for the education of teachers or of other professionals. Whenever necessary, according to the teaching areas of the programmes applying for accreditation, temporary subcommittees are also constituted within the Accreditation Committee, composed of teachers from different education levels related to those areas; the inclusion of students is also possible. Whereas review of the accreditation applications and the decision proposal is the duty of these subcommittees, actual decisions on accreditation are taken by the permanent members of the Accreditation Committee to avoid the risk of heterogeneity in the interpretation of the accreditation criteria.

The accreditation body acts, therefore, in an independent way in relation to the Government and to the institutions that apply for accreditation. This independence is a condition for the credibility of the process. On the one hand, self-accreditation makes no sense; on the other hand, if submitted to political criteria or to the pressure of party and election politics, the exclusive scientific, pedagogic and professional character of the judgement underlying the decision regarding accreditation would not be assured.

The fact of being governed by a wide socially-participated structure allows for a process of collective bargaining between representatives of the providers and of the social demand. The cost of this wide social participation is the time it takes to get broad consensus; the risk comes from possible impasse situations or decisions driven from the coalition of interests hardly compatible with public interest. The benefits of social consensus justify the costs. Impasse has never occurred up to now and the minority position of the representation

of each interest, as well as the great diversity of interests represented, has prevented the risk of coalition. However, it should be stressed that within the accreditation entity there is a distinction between the body responsible for its strategic guidance and the body responsible for the accreditation of programmes; the former is constituted on a basis of social representation, whereas the latter is based on individual competence.

4. Criteria for accreditation

To analyse the suitability of programmes to the demands of teaching some criteria (*Teacher Education Standards* and *Professional Teaching Profiles)* have been set out (INAFOP, 2000 b; Portugal, 2001 a, 2001 b)

These criteria refer to

(i)   *objectives* and *outcomes* of programmes,
(ii) *processes* devised for the implementation of those objectives,
(iii) *actors* responsible for those processes and
(iv) *resources* needed.

Ideally, criteria related to the objectives/outcomes would be sufficient to judge whether the programme aims are suited to the social and school education demands of the expected role of teachers (in the case of the previous accreditation of new programmes) or whether they do, in fact, provide their graduates with a professional qualification that meets those demands (in the case of the full accreditation of ongoing programmes which have been completed by some students). Moreover, the international trend for accreditation systems is centred on evidence of outcomes, thus inverting previous practices exclusively focusing on actors, resources and processes and for this reason they are more institution than programme centred (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Eaton, 2003); by definition, the evidence about qualifications outcomes is more crucial in the case of professional accreditation of specific programme.

If it is true that this new orientation seems better suited to the aims of accreditation and should therefore be taken into consideration, it is also true that, so far at least, it has not been considered wise for there to be a complete withdrawal from criteria concerning actors, resources and processes. There are two main reasons for this: *(i)* on the one hand, teacher education institutions still need some more time to acquire experience in identifying the outcomes of programmes and in assessing their suitability to the qualifications and competences needed for teaching, in order to be able to provide the evidence when applying for accreditation, and, *(ii)* on the other hand, there are some outcomes which are not only difficult to identify but whose relevance for teaching is only latter manifested.

However, consideration of criteria related to actors, resources and processes is only justified if there are at least well-founded hypotheses that they are related to the attainment of results. And if it is true that the relationship between the satisfaction of these criteria and the assurance of outcome achievement will always be considered in terms of more or less plausible hypotheses, depending on their grounding in research or widespread sound practices, it is also true that lack of satisfaction of such criteria can, and often does, denounce lack of outcome achievement. However, when choosing these criteria there is the need to consider their probable relationship with the attainment of the outcomes expected in terms of the qualification to be acquired, thus contradicting the practice of attributing them value on their own, which is quite common in quality assurance systems which pay little attention to the outcomes.

Moreover, analysing the criteria selected in this accreditation system, it is clear that the majority of them do not refer to specific situations or behaviours, whose presence, objectively observable and possibly quantifiable, would be an indicator of the suitability of the programme. On the contrary, they generally refer to principles of teacher education curriculum development, compatible with a wide range of concrete solutions developed by the education institutions; accreditation should judge to what extent these solutions fit the criteria devised in the principles. Generally speaking, the accreditation criteria are not therefore *indicators*, but rather broad *principles*; and the process of accreditation does not consist of *checking* the presence or absence of such indicators, but rather of *judging* how far the institutional solutions are suited to principles related to objectives/outcomes, actors, resources and processes. It should be highlighted that these criteria have been made public so that the framework on which analysis of suitability is based is public knowledge, thus minimising the possibility of depending on the implicit agenda of each member of the subcommittees and of the Accreditation Committee.

The fact that accreditation is *judging* rather than *checking* gives rise to important consequences concerning the competence of the members of both of these bodies. And the fact that the criteria are mostly *principles* rather than *indicators* and that they emphasise the outcomes (rather than the actors, resources and processes) is relevant for making accreditation compatible with higher education autonomy and innovation.

Let us exemplify what has been just said on accreditation criteria in relation to programmes' objectives/outcomes. Here, the Standards set out as a criterion:

"The programme develops in prospective teachers the qualifications and competences necessary for teaching and lifelong learning, based on a teacher education project which expressly takes into account:

(i)   the legally defined, general and specific professional profiles;
(ii) the curriculum for primary and secondary education;
(iii) scientific and technological development;
(iv) the relevant conclusions from research in field of education;
(v)   changes in society, schools and teacher profiles;
(vi) the guidelines of national education policy" (INAFOP, 2000 b).

Criteria would be indicators if they defined the specific qualifications (knowledge, methodologies, attitudes, skills…) prospective teachers should have acquired at the end of the programme ("what they should learn"); or else, if they defined the curriculum units that should be included in the study plans ("what they should be taught") as happens, in some European countries where there is still a governmental definition of teacher education curricula (Eurydice, 2002) .

In fact, professional teaching profiles are also among the externally defined parameters: a general profile, common to all school teachers, and specific profiles for each teaching area (Portugal, 2001 a;2001 b). Although they do not constitute a framework only directed to accreditation (as they also guide teacher education curriculum organisation to be undertaken by institutions), they do constitute an important framework to judge the suitability of the curriculum objectives selected by the institutions and their outcomes regarding the demands of teaching, that is, regarding social demand. These profiles are the outcome-focused teacher education criteria.

The philosophy underlying the profiles is the same as for standards. The definition of professional profiles frequently includes :
(i)   the *level* of professional qualification;
(ii) the professional performance *field*;

(iii) the characterisation of the expected *role* of the professional;

(iv) the *qualifications* needed for that performance; and

(v) the *learning opportunities* to promote those qualifications.

In our case, external definition of the professional profile is restricted to the first three aspects, with special attention to the third one, leaving the others up to higher education institutions. Focusing the definition of teaching profile only on the role of the teachers is not the common trend in other teacher education accreditation systems where the last two aspects are still taken into consideration which leads to criticism of these systems (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). The Portuguese option not to define a curriculum is due to the fact that teacher education has been increasingly supplied by more and more autonomous universities, on the one hand, and to the increasing consideration of teaching as a professional activity, rather than as a technical one, on the other hand (Campos, 2001 b; Edwards, 2001). And, of course, the vision of teaching as professional activity also applies to teachers educators.

Let us consider an example. In the general teaching profile, one of the characterisations of the role of the teacher is as follows:

> "Participates in the conception, development and evaluation of the school educational project and its curriculum projects, as well as in the school management activities, paying close attention to the link between the teaching levels"(Portugal, 2001 a).

In this way, no definition is given either of the qualifications to be acquired or of the curriculum units needed. The accreditation process will judge whether the qualifications and curriculum units set out and implemented by the autonomous teacher education institutions are able to ensure the preparation needed for teaching.

The assumption underlying the accreditation process is that teacher education should not only be supply-driven but also demand-driven. The criteria (standards and profiles) set out the external parameters to be considered in the analysis of the institutional solutions. When providers wish their programmes to be recognised as qualifying people to teach, their scientific and pedagogic autonomy does not exempt them from taking into consideration the aspects related to social demand in the organisation of their teacher education provision without ignoring the fact they can and should actively contribute to the formulation of this demand.

5. Steps in the accreditation process

The accreditation process begins with an application made by the institution responsible for the programme. This application means that the institution wishes the programme to be recognised as a professional teaching qualification, thus being recognised as qualified to certify its graduates.

The institution is mainly expected to present evidence in the application that the programme satisfies the demands of teaching for the level or teaching area it is aimed at (INAFOP, 2001 a). In this way, the onus of proof is on the teacher education institutions, which will face a difficult task if they do not rely on a permanent system for the monitoring and evaluation of programme development; in fact, besides contributing to programme improvement, this system also enables the institutions to become publicly accountable, namely when they apply for accreditation.

The institution is mainly expected to *demonstrate* that:

(i) the qualifications (knowledge, skills, methodologies, attitudes…) and competences (capacity to mobilise the qualifications acquired to solve problems arising from real context-based situations) provided by the programme are those needed to meet the demands of teaching, namely in relation to the respective professional teacher profiles;

(ii) all graduates acquire these qualifications and competences;

(iii) develops the programmes in appropriate partnership with schools;

(iv) in the institution and in the schools there are the actors and resources needed, in quantity and quality, to devise, develop and evaluate a process intending to provide students with the learning opportunities to acquire the qualifications and competences;

(v) in the institution there are leading and managing structures for the conception, development, monitoring and quality assurance of the teacher education process, both to ensure the qualification needed for teaching and to elicit evidence of the presence of expected outcomes in terms of qualification and performance in the short and medium term.

The fact that the onus of proof is on the institution applying represents an advantage for the institution and for the flexibility of the accreditation process as it fosters innovation in the teacher education project and contributes to contradicting the idea that accreditation inhibits innovation; in fact, it is enough that the institution shows the relevance of such innovation.

Application is followed by the analysis of this demonstration. The specific accreditation subcommittees are not supposed either to evaluate the programme or subsequently to demonstrate its suitability – both are the responsibility of the teacher education institution. For the analysis of the application (INAFOP, 2002 a), the subcommittee can call for

(i) the respective dossier and

(ii) a visit to the institution (which, in the case of new programmes, is replaced by a meeting session with people responsible for the programme) to take place after a preliminary analysis of the dossier.

This visit is intended to clarify any issues that might arise from this preliminary analysis and to allow for the institution to complement the demonstration provided with any elements difficult to include in the dossier. With this objective, there are:

(i) meeting sessions with the different actors (not only teachers, but also with prospective teachers, managers and teachers from partner schools and support personnel)

(ii) document analysis (for instance, tests – not only test given but also students' responses and their corresponding assessment);

(iii) observation of the existence, state of conservation and updating and conditions of use of the equipment and premises needed to accomplish the programme's professional objectives.

When the appreciation is over, the subcommittee prepares a report and sends it to the institution for possible feedback. After the given deadline for this feedback the subcommittee makes the final adjustments to their report, when justified.

Finally, the subcommittee prepares a well-founded decision proposal to be submitted to the scrutiny of the permanent Accreditation Committee. There are three possible decision statements (INAFOP, 2000 a):

(i)   *accreditation for a six-year period*, with or without recommendations;
(ii) *accreditation for a four-year period*, with renewal dependent on the attainment of certain objectives (the validity period of *ex ante* accreditation of new programmes is also a four- year period);
(iii) *accreditation withdrawal* (in this case, the decision only becomes effective if by the end of a defined period, not longer than one year, changes have not been made which make accreditation possible).

The decision on accreditation as well as its basis is publicised. It is also up to the accreditation body to promote and disseminate overall analyses of the applications and appreciations aiming to characterise the quality of teacher education in the country, identifying critical aspects or new challenges to be addressed.

6. Effects of accreditation decisions

The mission of the accreditation body can be summed up as the provision and communication of a conclusive statement on the programme's suitability or lack thereof to the demands of the teaching role, based on the analysis of an application dossier and an ensuing visit. *The definition of effects of such a judgement is not within the scope of competence of the accreditation body*. This depends on the subsequent decisions of the actors to whom it has been made known.

With regard to policy actors, the Government has already established some effects (Portugal, 1999):

(i)   accreditation is a necessary condition for a license to run a new programme, as a programme recognised as providing and awarding professional teaching qualification (however, it is not a sufficient condition and an accredited programme can be refused this license to function for other reasons);
(ii) accreditation withdrawal of an ongoing programme, as a result of the process of accreditation renewal, is a sufficient condition for the withdrawal of the licence to run as a programme recognised as providing and awarding a professional teaching qualification, even for the students who are still attending it.

It is inevitable that the accreditation of these programmes influences different actors' decisions and attitudes. To begin with, it can influence present and future students' demand for these programmes, as well as their mobility among teacher education institutions. Besides, teacher employers will certainly take them into account in their recruitment selection procedures which only happens in the private sector in Portugal; the fact that the public employer does not rely upon selection procedures, only trusting teacher education institution diplomas, increases the social relevance of accreditation and the need to be rigorous in its attribution, as it is the only guarantee external to the institutions that society can have in the certification of their graduates' professional qualification.

Among parents and employers accreditation can also influence the social credibility teacher education institutions enjoy. What is more it can influence the credibility of teachers whose qualification is provided and assured by them, of the schools where they teach and of the students attending those schools. Underlying the existence of the accreditation process is the assumption that the quality of teacher qualifications influences their professional performance and students' learning in a very significant way.

For teacher education institutions the accreditation can be external pressure for an agenda for change or innovation in their programmes. This can happen before applying for accreditation or after being accredited when recommendations are made or conditions for renewal are established. In fact, even if quality assurance is the first goal of accreditation, quality improvement is also an important one. The external pressure for improvement is more relevant when a cultural shift in teacher education models is needed, as is the case nowadays: from academic and technical models to professional ones.

Finally, in the context of the increasing internationalisation of higher education and the labour market, accreditation can contribute to enhancing recognition in other countries on account of the assurance it provides of the professional teaching qualification

IV. Strategy of Implementation of the Accreditation System

The development of a new system for the recognition of teacher qualification programmes is not a mere technical and rational process, but rather one of cultural and political change. This new system, that of accreditation, does, in fact, mean a significant change for higher education institutions: it implies new practices and comes into conflict with some of their values and with power sharing within and among institutions and with society (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Morley, 2003).

Besides the fact that the governance of the accreditation body belongs to a socially participated consortium, a strategy of *wide social participation* in the setting out and implementation of its structuring features and of *promotion of public debate on the culture of professional teacher education in higher education* was chosen for the development of the system. This strategy was intended to contribute, among teacher educators, *(i)* to allay the understandable initial caution towards the accreditation system, *(ii)* to help them to perceive its added value, creating positive expectations, *(iii)* to promote their active participation in its implementation and *(iv)* to promote awareness of the relevance of the dialogue with school teachers in order to have privileged input regarding teacher education curriculum development and evaluation.

1. Wide social participation

The participation of the main social actors in the context of teacher education has, by political option, been a constant in the development of the system both in the phase of *preparation* of policy decision-making that culminated in the setting up of the accreditation body and of the accreditation system as well as in the phase of its *implementation*.

In the first phase, the Government created a Task Force to prepare a proposal on the accreditation body and system. In the preparation of their proposals, approved by consensus, this Task Force disseminated preliminary versions and organised public debates with the participation of representatives from teacher education institutions (teacher educators and students) and teacher associations (Grupo de Missão, 1998). In turn, after having transformed these proposals into a project for legal decree, the Government submitted them to the appreciation of higher education representatives.

In the implementation phase, preliminary versions of all the main documents of the accreditation system (Programme Standards, Teaching Qualifications Profiles, Application and Review Guidelines) were also widely disseminated, with hundreds of appreciation reports being received; these documents were also the subject of a great debate in numerous well attended seminars organised for this purpose all over the country. Final versions were approved by wide consensus in the General Council of the accreditation body;

the Profiles were also approved by Government Decree-Law, without changing the proposals presented by the accreditation body (INAFOP, 2000 c; 2001 b; 2002 b).

2. Public debate on the culture of professional teaching qualifications in higher education

Higher education has no tradition in *professional* teacher education. Therefore, for this purpose, it merely added the *academic tradition* of the university programmes (that ensure preparation in a certain subject) to the *craft/technical tradition* of class teacher education programmes in former non-higher vocational education and training schools. The fact is that this *adding* solution is not suitable for quality mass education demands for the preparation of teachers as highly-qualified professionals (Andersson, 2002; Buchberger, 2000; Buchberger et al., 2000; Campos, 2001, 2002; Edwards, 2001). Consequently, the challenge basic and secondary education implies for higher education is that of the construction of a teacher education culture as highly-qualified professionals, and no longer as mere technicians (Note 7). Portuguese higher education institutions are committed to this task; namely a greater investment was made in the upgrading of many teacher educators (Campos, 2001 a). However, it is fair to recognise that there is still a long way to go and that each institution's experience in this process is different (Afonso & Canário, 2002; Formosinho, 2002).

Although the core mission of the accreditation body is to judge the suitability of programmes to give a guarantee to society, it was considered important to foster interchange of ideas and practices and debate on a teacher education culture in higher education, viewing teachers as professionals (Alarcão, 2001; Canário, 2001; Roldão, 2001; Stuart & Tatto, 2000). This interchange and debate is intended to promote awareness of the changes to be made, as well as of the resistance arising from the current logic of organisation and functioning in higher education institutions — thus contributing to the perception and acceptance of the meaning of accreditation and of its added value for such a change.

In this context, without ignoring the contribution public debate brought to the preliminary versions of the main documents, several widely participated seminars were also organised on some aspects of the above-mentioned culture, which have also been disseminated through the web page of the accreditation body and through commercial publication of their resulting texts. With the same purpose, some further texts on teacher education produced in other countries were also disseminated through the web page (INAFOP, 2001 b; 2002 b).

V. The Power Exerted by Social Actors on the Development of the System

By the end of the first quarter of 2001, 21 months after the setting up of the system, all the conditions that depended on the accreditation body had already been created to allow for accreditation application; the lengthy duration of this period of preparation was due to the widely socially participated basis of the system. It was also necessary to wait for the Government to define professional profiles for teachers. In August 2001, the general profile common to all teachers and the specific profiles for pre-school and primary education teachers were published. This made it possible to announce the acceptance of accreditation applications for training programmes for preschool and primary school teachers, the teacher education institutions having been given a seven month preparation period. By the end of April 2002, the accreditation body had recorded 66 application

dossiers corresponding to all the existing ongoing programmes: 33 preparing pre-school teachers and the 33 preparing primary education teachers. The analysis subcommittees were also formed and, after having participated in several preparation workshops, they started work.

In the meanwhile elections for Parliament took place, from which resulted a new Government which, on May 2002, extinguished the accreditation body and the ongoing analysis process of the accreditation applications from 66 initial teacher education programmes was cancelled (Note 8). The official reasons for this political decision were to save money; in fact, dozens of public institutes were extinguished at the same time. A political analysis of the development of the system could perhaps highlight some other reasons.

1. The desired balance of power among the different actors

Although there are a number of social actors with interests in the definition of who is properly qualified to teach, it can be seen from the experience of several countries, that mainly three of them actually do exert power (Angus, 2001; Cameron, 1996):

(i) the State (responsible for school education policy and for its national curricula and, often, the greatest employer of teachers);

(ii) teacher education institutions (including students), and

(iii) school education teachers.

In Portugal, during recent decades, with the shifting of the responsibility for teacher education to higher education institutions, and with the simultaneous recognition of their scientific and pedagogical autonomy, the State ceased to exert power in the same way it traditionally did, without having built a new form of exerting some form of power in order to assure society on the suitability of the education programmes provided. Higher education institutions came to exert, almost exclusively, the power to define the qualifying programmes and to certify graduates. Unlike what happens in other professions, schoolteachers themselves have not exerted real power in this matter.

The situation where society is in the best position to obtain better guarantees concerning the qualification of their teachers is perhaps the one where there is an interdependent use of these three powers. This is surely not the case when only one of them is exerted, and much less so when the power exerted is that of the institutions which simultaneously have a double function: providing teacher education and exclusively assuring its suitability to the needs of social demand.

The development of the accreditation system aimed at building up a new configuration in the use of the power of these three social actors, departing from a situation of almost complete public deregulation of the process of defining teacher qualifications.

2. The expected behaviour of social actors

The initiative to change the system was taken by the State through the Government, the only one with real power for the purpose. The probabilities of its success would most likely depend on it being acknowledged by the Government that the policy was theirs and not only that of the minister who proposed it. It would also depend on the Government exerting its power throughout the first phase of the process of development, which would be increasingly difficult if the Minister or the Government changed. Indeed it would be necessary, during the implementation of the system, to manage the political

conditions which would guarantee the support of the councils of public higher education institutions.

From higher education institutions, opposition and support were simultaneously expected: opposition mainly from professors because they held the power almost exclusively; opposition from providing institutions, mainly those in fear that their programme supply could be questioned; support mainly from the institutions' governing boards, to the extent to which they would perceive the advantages of an potential decrease in the number of programmes to be supplied by other concurrent institutions (which would, anyway, be difficult under their double condition of professor and member of a governing board); support, once again, if they welcomed the reinforcement of the power of the institution over the power of the individual members of the academic corporation, organised around knowledge fields, who are generally a source of resistance to the pedagogical autonomy of the institution in developing programmes based on professional teaching profiles (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Morley, 2003).

Only a slow and progressive consolidation of the conditions that would allow primary and secondary education teachers to exert the power expected from them but not yet conquered was expected. There is no professional order representing them, moreover within the universe of teachers there are several divisions that make the exercise of power very difficult, among which two stand out: to this universe belong the "trainers" and "trainees", both teachers, with different interests in this matter; besides, for this universe there are several unions and pedagogical professional associations. On the other hand, although school teachers, together with the State, are the ones in the best position to know most about the demands of teaching, unfortunately, they do not yet enjoy social credibility enough for the purpose, namely among the supplying institutions, specially if they are universities.

3. The social actors' actual behaviour

The intention to rely on the system for professional accreditation of programmes in order to get public recognition for them as teaching qualification came from the Ministry of Education during a movement within higher education institutions, with a strong participation of students. Some of these institutions questioned the ability of others to ensure suitable teaching qualifications. The government wanted teacher education for lower secondary education (which in Portugal belongs to basic compulsory education) to be provided also by Teacher Education Colleges, which already ensured initial teacher education for pre- and primary school; the implicit idea was that these Colleges were better qualified to prepare *curriculum-centred* teachers for basic compulsory education (thus contributing to enhance success in a mass school) than universities, which mainly prepare *subject-centred* teachers.

This government initiative caused a reaction from universities and their students, which in order to avoid this concurrent opening up of supply, argued that Teacher Education Colleges were not able to provide quality teaching qualification for these teachers. Colleges and their students counter-argued they were better able to ensure teacher education for basic education as a whole. The Minister, then, proposed that all the programmes, whatever the institution wishing to supply them, should be submitted to an identical process of professional accreditation, to be carried out by an independent body, which would assure that only the programmes suited to the demands of teaching would run. This calmed the students down and also the institutions, at least apparently. Universities accepted the cost of accreditation, hoping that in this way proliferation of concurrent programmes would be

avoided; for Teacher Education Colleges, integrated in Vocational Higher Education institutions, this was the cost to be paid to increase their supply.

Although the professional accreditation system for initial teacher education has its justification in the above-mentioned reasons, the truth is its development was conditioned by the historical circumstances in which the political decision had been taken.

In the years that followed the setting up of the accreditation body and system, several facts happened which led to the feeling among education institutions that Government was not sticking to the conditions for this political pact — which partly came from the fact that in a few years three Ministers of Education followed the one who pushed this social pact forward, although the Prime Minister was the same.

In fact, the legal possibility for Teacher Education Colleges to provide teacher education programmes for lower secondary education has never been regulated (Note 9). As a consequence, Government-dependent conditions for the accreditation of subject teachers programmes have not been implemented either. Such conditions are the definition of teacher qualification areas and their respective teaching profiles.

In the absence of the government's fulfilment of the conditions of the political pact that led the institution leaders to accept the accreditation system, it is no wonder that university leaders started to see no immediate interest in it and vocational higher education leaders started to attack it, hoping to lead the Government to stick to its promises. The latter found powerful allies in well-known figures in higher education who had never accepted accreditation or who would only accept it if it followed a methodology close to the aforementioned nominalistic one, instead of the internationally consensual parameters characterising it.

The two most common visible arguments were, firstly, the incompatibility of accreditation with higher education *autonomy* and, secondly, that of duplication of functions with higher education *evaluation* system.

This article shows that the development of the accreditation system was guided by the main principle of rebuilding the correct balance between higher education autonomy and public assurance teaching qualifications. Furthermore, it should be stressed that university autonomy refers to its own competences and that, nowhere in the world, do those include dealing with the regulation of access to a professional activity, whether it be for engineers, architects or teachers. Besides, critics themselves know, and have proclaimed, there is strong imbalance in the qualifications provided by the different teacher education institutions, which even taken together have no power to overcome this situation by themselves. And it is also clear that accreditation application is only necessary for the higher education institutions interested in their programmes becoming externally recognised as a teaching qualification and that they become themselves the qualification certifying entities (Campos, 2003).

As for the Portuguese system for higher education evaluation, it goes without saying that it does not possess the characteristics internationally considered as indispensable to be recognised as a *professional* accreditation system or even *external* quality control mechanism. This is because it has focused on the not less important mission to support internal evaluation of institutions. There would not be any sense in undertaking this mission and making people believe that the other is also carried out. Besides, it is generally considered impossible to simultaneously undertake both functions efficiently it is not possible to perform the function of *consultant* of institutions in supporting them to fulfil their responsibility to build up programme quality and to be publicly accountable, and simultaneously be the *auditor* of those accounts, assuring society of that same quality. It

should also be outlined that, in Europe, in the countries where the need for academic accreditation has arisen in the context of the implementation of the Bologna process, the higher education evaluation systems similar to the Portuguese are not being recognised as suitable for this purpose. This happened, for instance, with the Dutch evaluation system - - the inspiration for the Portuguese one (Committee Accreditation of Dutch Higher Education, 2001).

The real issue here is merely the exertion of power by the higher education sector. In fact, accreditation may constitute a threat to corporate, labour and economic interests, which are in this way protected under the pretext of defending public interest. The important thing is that the Government, responsible for the defence of public interest, namely that of the quality of basic and secondary education, does effectively exert its own power because, in this matter, the profession alone is not able to exert it in an efficient way. The new centre-right Government has until now exerted its power to stop the successful development of the accreditation system which all the interested entities were steering together. Social participation in policy development is not a strategy of choice by a centre-right government. Objectively, without creating an alternative, the political priority of the new Portuguese Government is putting " the interests of the providers above those of the users" (Rondall, 2002) or, at least, not challenging the former, namely private providers; the public interests or the interests of "users" are left behind.

VI. **Some Conclusions**

In this article the political context and the process of the development of the Portuguese system for teacher education accreditation, as well its final configuration, were described and analysed. The goal of the analysis was to show the path taken to ensure that the system developed could have an influence on the appropriateness of teacher education to school education needs while safeguarding the scientific and pedagogical autonomy of higher education institutions and of the teaching profession.

There are at least three main characteristics of this teacher education accreditation system that distinguish it from others and whose aims are to overcome some of the most frequent criticism of higher education accreditation systems, in general. They are:

(i)   the governance of the system is in the hands of a consortium including the representatives of a wide range of specific interests in the quality of teacher education, namely school teachers, teacher educators, employers of teachers, parents, students, education administrators, other employers …;

(ii)   the definition of accreditation criteria and methodology is made following consultation and debate widely participated by the teaching profession: teacher educators and school teachers associations and unions;

(iii) the professional profiles of teachers, which make clear the outcome criteria for accreditation, are defined by the socially expected role of the teachers and not by the curriculum deemed appropriate for preparing them for such a role.

As the development of the system was cancelled, it is not possible to refer to its impact on the quality of teacher education in Portugal. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn from this outline of the Portuguese accreditation system:

1. The social perception of the need for a more qualitatively demanding system for the recognition of teachers' qualifications is sharper when the State transfers direct

responsibility for teacher education to higher education institutions and they simultaneously become autonomous, massified and privatised.

2. The need for such a system becomes more obvious if there is also, on the one hand, a clear and socially supported political goal to achieve quality mass education and, on the other hand, the understanding that such a goal is not compatible with the role of teachers as mere technicians and that without external pressure higher education institutions are not able to ensure the qualification of teachers as professionals.

3. Apart from this, a more demanding policy tends to arise when there is a surplus of teacher education supply, either because it has boomed or because the number of school students has decreased.

4. The way in which each country in each historical moment deals with the problem of public recognition of teacher qualifications is in fact tightly related to two factors: on the one hand, to the policies of basic, secondary and higher education and, on the other hand, to teacher education supply and demand. Therefore, solutions should be context based, avoiding a critical imitation of systems and methodologies perhaps considered as good practices in other countries.

5. In its turn, the process of decision-making and implementation of the solutions chosen depends on the power that the social actors, at that precise moment, will be able to exert. The main social actor is the State and others are teacher education institutions, including both teachers and students, and the organisations representing school teachers. It does not seem desirable that the power to influence the recognition of teachers' qualification should reside exclusively, or is highly concentrated, in only one of these actors; moreover, with the aim of building up a balance of interdependent powers, public incentives seem to be necessary to increase the power to be exerted by school teachers.

6. To solve the policy issue outlined at the beginning of this case study, the option for a professional accreditation system of teacher education programmes supplied by autonomous higher education requires a change in practices, in values and in power shared among these institutions, which understandably gives rise to opposition. That is why one should bear in mind that, besides the vital power balance of actors (among which the State will probably be the only one having the possibility to contravene significant unbalanced situations), merely technical and rationalist strategies for the implementation of the system would surely be insufficient.

7. The option to accredit programmes, trusting in the certification of graduates' qualifications
carried out by the teacher education institutions, has limitations concerning the guarantee of the teaching competence of those who become teachers. The less the institutions are able to prove their graduates' teaching competence, the greater these limitations become. As they must be called to account for the competence of their graduates both at the end of the programme and during their future teaching, a suitable device for programme monitoring and internal evaluation in each institution is a *sine qua non* condition for trustworthy accreditation.

8. It is in the context of the limits to the guarantee given by the accreditation system and of the opposition this causes that the alternative arises to call for an external certification system of each teacher's professional competence. However, this also has well-known limitations, namely due to difficulties in building up reliable methodologies, mainly if they do not include the observation of teacher performance over a long period. This is why one of the alternatives might be to rely upon both systems in a complementary way. Or otherwise to focus on the system that in each historical context seems able to best solve the policy issue as it is seen at that particular moment.

Notes

1) Based on a invited communication presented at the Regional Conference "Teachers' Performance in Latin America and the Caribbean: New priorities" (Brasília, 10 to 12 July 2002) organised by the Inter-American Development Bank, in partnership with UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of Brazil

2) The author was, from late 1998 to 2002, the President of the National Institute for Accreditation of Teacher Education (INAFOP), the body created to develop the Portuguese system for the accreditation of initial teacher education.   Obviously, therefore, the description and analysis in this article could be considered one-sided..

3) *Universities* can and do supply education programmes for all preschool and school education, whereas *Teacher Education Colleges*, integrated in vocational higher education, supply teacher education programmes for class teachers (in pre-school and primary education). All programmes are "licenciatura" degree programmes lasting 4 years for class teachers and 5 years for secondary education subject teachers.

4) This is the only case where Portuguese higher education is supposed to organise programmes in such a way as to provide professional qualification and to certify it. In the case of other professions, such as engineers, doctors and lawyers, universities only provide programmes awarding an academic degree; it is the task of professional Orders to attribute the professional title that gives access to the license to perform the profession. Some of them, however, exempt graduates from certain requirements they usually ask for in the case of professional qualification certification when these graduates come from programmes accredited by those Orders (following application by the higher education institutions that provide those programmes) (Salgado-Barros, 2001). In Portugal, there is no professional Order for teachers, though there is a movement in favour of it, which has the opposition of teachers' unions. There are a number of difficulties to its creation by the State. Besides the traditional objections related to difficulties of Orders in harmonizing public interests and those of the corporation, maybe there is also the fact that teaching is not exclusively based on professional knowledge grounded in research and consolidated professional practice. In fact, teaching is still limited by the state policy for basic and secondary education that defines a curriculum, including the objectives, the organisational context and sometimes even the methods to be considered - a situation that does not happen in other professions.

 5) It is true that "universitisation" of teacher education has been accompanied by the definition of a governmental policy outlining the organisation of programmes; the existence of a specific policy for these programmes, besides the overall policy to be applied to all higher education, is unique in higher education in Portugal. The justification for this specific policy lies in the existence of a policy concerning the very content of basic and secondary education.   This specific teacher education policy is mainly made up of guidelines of a

qualitative nature, whose implementation, however, cannot be evaluated through classical checking methods characteristic of public administration.

6) Accreditation by Professional Orders is only meant, as aforementioned, to exempt graduates from some requirements of the professional certification process which is their responsibility.

7) Saying that it is a professional activity means here that teaching is not mere compliance with state guidance, external to the teacher and school, or the simple local execution of ready-made and
context-insensitive pedagogical practices disseminated among teachers. Rather, it demands the elaboration in each specific school context of classroom and school practices appropriate to the student achievement. The criteria for assessing teacher performance are neither compliance with external guidance nor adoption of good practices, but its suitability to the pursuit of learning by students in diverse concrete situations. The preparation of teachers for their professional activity, which has to be research-informed and, to some extent, school work-based, is therefore seen as *teacher education* rather than as *teacher training*. Underlying this distinction is the shift from vocationalisation to professionalisation of teacher qualifications.

8) The accreditation competence was later attributed to a department of education administration – the Directorate of Human Resources in Education. But until now – early 2004 – this department has done nothing in the field of teacher education accreditation.

9) And the new government clarified, in 2003, that only universities can prepare teachers for lower secondary education.

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