

11.7.2026

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**Title**

Academics' perceptions on the purpose of quality assessment / Maria J. Rosa, Cláudia S. Sarrico and Alberto Amaral

**Publication year**

2012

**Source/Footnote**

In: Quality in higher education. - 18 (2012) 3, S. 349 - 366

**Inventory number**

33655

**Keywords**

Ausland : Portugal : Studenten, Studium, Lehre ; Ausland : Portugal : einzelne Hochschulen ; Qualitätssicherung ; Evaluation

**Abstract**

The accountability versus improvement debate is an old one. Although being traditionally considered dichotomous purposes of higher education quality assessment, some authors defend the need of balancing both in quality assessment systems. This article goes a step further and contends that not only they should be balanced but also that other purposes can be devised for assessing quality in higher education. Five different purposes are proposed: communication, motivation, control, improvement and innovation, derived both from the higher education and the organisational performance literatures. Then the answers given to a set of questions related to these five intended purposes are analysed. The answers were collected through a questionnaire designed to investigate Portuguese academics' perceptions on higher education quality assessment. Overall the analysis performed reveals a certain degree of support for all the purposes, albeit higher in the case of the improvement and communication purposes and lower for control and motivation. Since an adequate

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implementation of quality assessment systems needs the support of academics, this article can inform the design of systems integrating academics? views on the subject. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)