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**Abstract**

The governance of higher education has been changing across Europe, most notably in response to the reform agenda that has been pervading many higher education systems. This wave of reforms has given enhanced visibility to external stakeholders, which has been often received with contrasting views. Some regarded it as a factor that would undermine institutions' mission, while others viewed it as a rhetorical change, which would hardly have an impact on institutional life. In this paper, we analyse the introduction of external stakeholders in governance and quality assessment processes by looking at the Portuguese experience, and more specifically at their contribution to the implementation of internal quality assurance systems. We use empirical data collected from four higher education institutions under the framework of the IBAR project, subsumed in the form of barriers to and good practices for the implementation of policies and procedures for quality assurance. The results suggest that although the presence of external stakeholders has become more visible, it is yet to be fully reflected in the way institutions are governed or the way in which they manage their

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internal quality assurance processes and mechanisms. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)