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Quality and Secondary Education
Cross-Country Comparative Study

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IBAR WP12: Quality and Secondary Education

Comparative study

Catherine Owen
School of Education, Durham University, 2013

Jan Kohoutek
Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague, 2013

Introduction

Studies into quality assurance processes at institutional level remain relatively limited among the quality assurance literature otherwise produced in large numbers since the late 1980s (Harvey and Newton 2007; D'Andrea 2007). As a result there are still unexplored links between the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), Part 1 (ENQA 2005) and their implementation at institutional level (Loukkola and Zhang 2010; Kristensen 2010).

This cross-country comparative report from the IBAR project explores how links between secondary and tertiary education providers support learner transition and how those links might relate to existing quality assurance policies, processes and activities in both sectors (IBAR WP 12). As Tinto (2005) and Longden (2006) have identified, student achievement in higher education is predicated on a number of conditions and expectations, some of which are created by universities, and some of which are already present in learners and highly influenced by their previous educational background and experiences. Secondary schools play a significant part in the creation of study commitment and expectations and in students' capacity to become involved learners. However, much of the focus of transition literature is on the first year experience and university efforts to retain and develop students and there is limited scholarly literature describing school/university relationships, except for that on specific issues of access and widening participation (a topic which is covered in an earlier report for the IBAR project).

ESG Part 1 makes no mention of secondary education and does not stipulate how, if at all, universities might act to support learners in transition. Our research explores national and pan-national efforts to integrate educational practice in both sectors and describes the activities undertaken by higher education institutions in collaboration with schools to minimize the challenges associated with mass intakes and diversity of educational backgrounds, including: preparatory liaison work with secondary schools, summer schools or pre-university education, curriculum design and specialist support. We also consider what other types of contact between the school and university sectors are common or may be desirable additions and ask if national quality assurance arrangements might be augmented with additional guidance on school/university collaboration.

Methodology

Research into the inter-sectoral alignment practices was undertaken in 28 higher education institutions (HEIs) of varying size and organizational profile in seven Bologna signatory countries (UK, PT, NL, PL, CZ, SK, LV; four institutions per country) and within secondary schools identified by participating universities.

A small number of qualitative research questions were identified and refined during project team seminars in 2012. Data collection activities, based on the set of research questions, included analysis of national and institutional policy documents and other relevant materials and focus groups, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted during 2013.

Aside from document review, as suggested, relevant information was elicited by several qualitative methods from several groups of actors. These included senior managers at universities and secondary schools; members of staff with particular responsibility and/or experience for school/university liaison (for example, careers officers or schools liaison team leaders); academic leaders (for example, school or university Deans or academic admissions officers); front-line academic staff and students.

Following data collection and processing, each national team created a report detailing practice in their own country. The reports also included identification of barriers and recommendations for quality enhancement, both relevant to the object of enquiry. These national reports form the basis of the comparative report for WP12.

Responses to the research questions

1. What national policies determine the relationship(s) between secondary and tertiary providers?

In most national contexts legislation or policy affecting the relationship between secondary and tertiary providers is broadly limited to the following main areas of activity (excluding widening participation/access, which is described in detail in the final report from work package 6 of the IBAR project):

1.1 National qualifications frameworks and national (secondary) curricula and examinations

Over the last twenty years, the countries participating in IBAR have undergone far-reaching programmes of curriculum renewal at all levels of their educational systems. In many systems there have been multiple changes, reflecting changes in political ideologies and self-determination. National curriculum reform may be driven by multiple change dynamics: interest groups both within and outside the education system may exert pressure in order that educational content reflects scientific developments, corresponds to structural changes in the education system or adapts to new theories or philosophies of teaching and learning. Politicians may feel unhappy with their country's performance in international achievement studies or a situation of social transformation or crisis may lead to feelings of inadequacy regarding what is taught in schools.

In the Netherlands, for example, significant changes to secondary education to ensure that students were better prepared for university study were made in 1998 in response to higher education's complaints about the deficient competencies of students entering higher education. The Ministry of Education emphasised that the success rate of students in Dutch higher education is unacceptably low and that improvements have to be made. For this reason, a strategic agreement between the national University Association (VSNU), the UAS Association¹ and the Ministry aimed, amongst other goals, to raise undergraduate success rates to above 70% and to increase the number of students who successfully complete their programme within the stated period. One of the key aims is to improve the match between students' interests and capabilities on the one hand and requirements of study programmes on the other. As in the UK, university funding is used as a lever to secure change.

Curriculum renewal at structural level explicitly supports the idea of national higher education *systems* in which articulation of educational aims relevant to providers at different levels is identified and refined. The most visible manifestation of this form of systems thinking is the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF) in each country, together with criteria and procedures to verify that each national framework is compatible with an overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). National qualifications frameworks show what learners may be expected to know, understand and be able to do on the basis of a

¹Early 2013 the former 'HBO-Raad' was renamed into Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (abbreviated to 'UAS Association' in this text).

given qualification (learning outcomes) as well as how qualifications within a system articulate. Their main aims are to:

- make qualifications more transparent to all users in terms of what they signify and what learners have to achieve;
- minimize barriers to progression, both vertical and horizontal;
- maximize access, flexibility and portability between different sectors of education and work and different sites of learning.

In Scotland, work on the new *Curriculum for Excellence*, (CfE) which started in 2009, has provided multiple opportunities for school/university collaboration. A 2010 Universities Scotland Report *Together at the Heart of Scottish Education*² identified the following university role(s) in developing the new curriculum:

- The continuing professional development of teachers;
- Research and evaluation of CfE developments;
- Developing subject specific curriculum content material;
- General engagement on national qualifications and assessment;
- Responses to national consultation documents;
- Representation on CfE management boards and other related committees;
- Recognition that natural links and potential continuity exists between CfE values and the graduate attributes being developed as part of universities learning, teaching and enhancement strategies;
- Promoting healthy critical debate about education policy in Scotland;
- Working with specific local authorities to develop CfE capacity.

Specific examples of practice noted also included university-led conferences and summer schools for teachers to consider pedagogic strategies for CfE implementation and university-led consultancies to help schools deal with particular implementation challenges.

In England, the current Secretary of State for Education has strongly stated his view that universities should be closely involved in the content of new A-level qualifications to be introduced in 2015. This would replace the current system under which the Department of Education sets out the core knowledge and structure of A-level courses, and exam boards design exam papers and coursework to fit around this content.

Although the universities participating in the IBAR study across Europe report curriculum renewal activities of their own (often to align with the credit weighting models in the relevant NQF as well as to satisfy subject innovation or other drivers, for example graduate employability), overall, there is little evidence that changes to school curricula in turn drive changes to university curricula. The statements published by Scottish universities in response to the new *Curriculum for Excellence*, for example, focus almost exclusively on changes to admissions procedures and do not describe any changes to their own educational offering. Only one university participating in IBAR reported changes to its own curriculum in response to

² See: <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/latest/TogetherattheheartofScottisheducation2010Oct.pdf>

secondary curriculum innovation and in partnership with secondary educators. This was the case of a department of art education in a higher education institution in Slovakia.

One straightforward reason for this lack of university activity seems to be the poor alignment between the relatively narrow range of subjects taught in secondary schools and the much broader curriculum offered in universities, either comprehensive or specialist. Evidence from the IBAR project suggests that NQF descriptors are commonly used to inform higher education programme design and the benchmarking outputs of the European Commission Life-Long Learning Tuning Programme³ enjoy a certain amount of recognition at institution level but changes in secondary curricula are unlikely to drive tertiary activity. In the UK, Subject Benchmark Statements⁴ offer a broad guide to programme designers but are not intended to act as a national curriculum for higher education and are not developed in concert with secondary level curricula. Indeed, the notion of a higher education curriculum, either nationally or across Europe is universally resisted, being antithetical to the principle of institutional diversity and autonomy. However, it could be argued that the compensatory or additional courses typically offered in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects across Europe could in some sense constitute strategic curricular response to secondary-level offerings. Regarding this issue, our IBAR data strongly suggests the widespread view that an important purpose of the first year of university study is to reinforce core knowledge that was introduced at secondary level and, where necessary, to reduce the differential attainment effects of diverse school experience before students enter second year of university study. In the Netherlands, the introduction of more stringent progression criteria for second year entry reinforces the idea that second year may in some senses be the start of higher study proper: this has also been a long-standing argument for the retention of four year undergraduate programmes in Scottish universities.

1.2 Allocation of tertiary places

In all systems under study in the IBAR project, national arrangements govern the allocation of places at university. In some cases (for example, the Netherlands, Portugal), *numerus fixus* models limit the extent to which universities are able to select candidates: these arrangements are perceived as limiters to school/university collaboration.

1.3 Provision of information

Although universities in all systems studied provide information to schools, the extent to which legislation or national policy levers mandate information varies. The IBAR enquiry shows that arrangements in the Netherlands and in the UK are currently the most formalized and structured. For example in the UK, Key Information Sets (KIS) are in place. KIS are comparable sets of information about full or part time undergraduate courses and are designed to meet the information needs of

³See: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

⁴See: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/subject-guidance/pages/subject-benchmark-statements.aspx>

prospective students. More particularly, in 2012, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) initiated publication of a subset of key indicators on both the Unistats website and via a small advert or widget on university course/programme webpages.

2. In what ways does institutional policy on quality take into account issues of progression from secondary education to HE? Are there any special institutional arrangements in place – academic, personal, social, geographic or administrative – to assist students in the first year of HE?

The view that first year at university is special or distinctive varies across the IBAR higher education institutions. Some institutions (for example, in Poland) do not report any special arrangements for first year students with the exception of compulsory training in key skills (for example, use of the library). In most institutions surveyed, study guides, student support services, counseling and orientation support are common. In Portugal, special support is offered to distinct groups of learners: those over 23, foreign students and those with financial difficulties.

In some national contexts (notably the UK and the Netherlands), national focus on first year retention rates has been encouraged by government and higher education quality agencies and funding bodies and in these countries there has been considerable work at both national and institutional levels to test and implement strategies for support. In Scotland, for example, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA Scotland) supports and coordinates sector-wide Enhancement Themes, which provide modest funding for sector-wide research, publications and events to examine areas of common interest to higher education institutions. The 2006-2008 First Year Experience Enhancement Theme⁵ supported varied work on curriculum design, assessment, personal development planning and peer support as well as more generalized national discussions about learner transition needs. Two over-arching principles: *engagement* and *empowerment* were identified as key to the design of activities to support learners in the early years of study.

In the UK, the student “lifecycle” model adopted by the national funding body for higher education in 2001⁶ locates the student experience within a wider context of progression along a continuum of learning experiences, beginning before HE entry and continuing after graduation. Partly as a result, the rhetoric of “lifecycle” management has become widespread in UK universities and, typically, a senior committee will exercise oversight of a range of student-facing university activities including recruitment, admissions, registry, learner support, pastoral support, careers support and alumni liaison. The influence of the UK National Student Survey (NSS) has tended to move UK institutions towards an integrated model in which academic processes and interventions also fall under the same jurisdiction. Evidence from IBAR shows a proliferation of new senior posts at UK universities with responsibility for co-ordination of the student experience, over-seeing both administrative and certain academic and/or quality-related activities. Typically, annual monitoring of

⁵See: <http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resources/publications/first-year-experience>

⁶Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). (2001). The student lifecycle. Available at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2001/01_36.htm.

modules undertaken as part of internal quality assurance arrangements will consider issues related to transition, including retention/withdrawal rates, cohort performance and programme transfer requests.

3. To what extent are secondary school pupils prepared to take maximum advantage of the higher education opportunity offered to them?

3.1 In most IBAR institutions, diversity of school experience creates complexity for university admissions tutors and for academic staff designing early years study programmes. The majority of national secondary school systems offer state-funded binary pathways for students: for example, in the Netherlands two secondary routes, *havo* and *vwo* distinguish between general education and, broadly, preparation for university study. Similarly, in Poland, selective examinations determine entrance either to a *liceum* or *technikum*, the former being designed primarily for university entrants (although *technikum* students are also able to progress to university study). A similar organisational pattern, i.e. grammar schools (gymnasiums) and secondary professional schools, both allowing for university entry with the latter designed for entering HEIs of more specific orientation (economics, engineering), can also be found in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In Latvia, general secondary education has 2 types of schools: secondary school (*vidusskola*) and gymnasium (*ģimnāzija*).

Although there is no binary division in the UK secondary sector, considerable differences between schools are also tolerated. Most obviously, independent (privately-funded, fee-paying) secondary schools exist alongside state-funded provision. Since 2000, state-funded schools in England may apply for academy status and receive direct government grant aid rather than funding via local authorities. These secondary schools are able to apply (limited) selective admissions policies and adaptive curricula that differ from the national curriculum in non-core subjects.

In some systems boundaries are increasingly blurring between first cycle degree pathways that start at higher education institutions and those which start through the further education sector (often through partnerships with local higher education providers). In the UK, further education colleges are perceived as a crucial access point for both school leavers and for continuing learners in “low-participation” areas. UK universities are also very likely to have a large intake of overseas students (in 2011/12 over 435,000 students in UK universities were from overseas⁷). Universities in the Netherlands and, to some extent, Portugal display similar intake patterns and attract foreign learners. In other national contexts alternate domestic pathways are less well developed and universities are less likely to attract foreign students, although work is underway at institutions in the Czech Republic to grow numbers of mature students and foreign learners. The Czech HEIs studied, to some extent, also benefit from attracting a proportionate number of prospective foreign students from neighbouring Slovakia.

3.2 Typically, universities and secondary schools collaborate to prepare learners in the following ways:

⁷Source: <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1897/239/>

3.2.1 Provision of university information to secondary schools, potential students and parents: In the UK, section C of the new Quality Code, made by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), is entirely dedicated to information provision, reflecting the increased interest in the UK in how information can empower stakeholders (particularly students) to make good choices about universities, programmes and about learning activities and styles. Requirements of the code relevant to university pre-entry include:

- to publish information that describes the mission, values and overall strategy;
- to describe the process for application and admission to the programme of study;
- to make available to prospective students information to help them select their programme with an understanding of the academic environment in which they will be studying and the support that will be made available to them.

Similar national guidelines inform practice at HEIs in a number of other IBAR countries. However, our data demonstrates that a lack of national guidelines is not a barrier to institutional efforts to provide information about their activities. Competition to attract students (particularly in countries like Portugal and Latvia that have experienced dwindling student populations) has driven institutional efforts to distribute marketing-oriented information materials to schools and to the broader population (for example, through newspaper advertising).

In the UK in particular, national surveys of student experience of higher education have become a highly visible source of data for prospective students and their parents. The UK National Student Survey (NSS) has been conducted annually since 2005. It gathers opinions from mostly final year undergraduates on the quality of their courses. NSS data are publically available on the UK Unistats⁸ website. Furthermore, as already mentioned (Section 1.3), Key Information Sets (KIS) are in place in the UK. Designed as comparable sets of information about full or part time undergraduate courses, KIS are intended to meet the information needs of prospective students. The KIS contains 17 items. Much of the KIS information already exists in a national and comparable form (for example, data drawn from the NSS or the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey, but there are several items of information that do not currently exist in that form and are being supplied by universities and colleges. Much of the focus of KIS data is on the economic benefits of university study: for example the KIS includes data about salaries of graduates from university programmes. KIS has been timed to coincide with the introduction of higher domestic undergraduate fees in England and Wales (2012 intake). In addition, in 2012, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has (via HESA) initiated publication of a subset of key indicators on both the Unistats website and via a small advert or widget on university course/programme webpages.

Despite the wealth of information provided by the above instruments, academic staff in the UK have expressed some concerns about them, especially about the reductive potential of the datasets and the impact that performance measures brought by them might have on university strategy and priorities. In particular, student satisfaction measures are perceived by many as controversial indicators of educational quality.

⁸<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>

3.2.2 Opening campuses to schools, potential students and parents: Open days, special events and school visits are common features of all the educational systems surveyed. Visits for school learners at different stages (for example, at 11 and again at 15) are increasingly common, alongside the more established practice of visits for final year school learners. Parents are also welcomed at many institutions. In the UK, Open Days and similar events are commonly run in collaboration with student unions or associations. In the Netherlands, a national website StudyChoice123⁹ informs pupils about taster and open day opportunities. A similar website in the UK [opendays.com](http://www.opendays.com)¹⁰ performs the same function.

3.2.3 Awareness-raising in secondary schools: All of the universities participating in the IBAR study maintain relationships with a number of secondary schools, although the scope and scale of these partnerships varies very significantly according to university size, location, funding and strategy. One university in Poland reported partnership agreements with 11 local schools, another in the same country has developed links with 100 schools. The experience of one university in the UK is typical of national activity: the university's schools and colleges engagement team organises collaborative events with approximately 150 schools in the local region (including approximately 40-50 special target widening participation partner schools, as part of the university's OFFA agreement with government). The main point of contact in schools for coordination of these activities is the head of the final year and/or school careers advisors. Financial support is offered by the university to cover transportation to the university and to special events for partner schools and colleges.

One limitation of existing school/university partnerships identified by a number of participants is the huge disparity in the number of schools and universities. Operational and financial constraints tend to limit school/university contact to local groupings or to strategic partnerships (for example, the tendency for elite universities to liaise with elite "feeder" schools described by participants in the Czech Republic).

3.2.3 Subject-specific activities: Typically, STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects are the focus of widespread subject-specific activities across Europe, designed at least in part to address perceived decline in interest (and subsequently recruitment) amongst school-level pupils in these disciplines but also in some countries as a result of targeted government funding. Funding for some science-based outreach activities is available from the EU Education for Competitiveness programme. Under this programme, within the scope of the IBAR enquiry, two large-scale projects are reported. These projects, located in the regions of Vysočina and South Moravia in the Czech Republic, supported in-class lectures, experiments and discussion of local universities' staff with students of selected secondary schools, with the overall aim of promoting study in and knowledge of STEM subjects.. Competitions run by universities or as collaborations between a number of universities and schools for school pupils in science subjects are also a common feature in many IBAR countries. In Poland, for example, school students participating in regional science competitions are given access to superior university equipment and laboratories. As far as these specific activities are concerned,

⁹<http://www.studiekeuze123.nl/>

¹⁰<http://www.opendays.com/>

universities participating in IBAR in a number of cases also reported summer schools, special initiatives and competitions in economics, entrepreneurship, citizenship and languages.

3.2.4 Mentoring and student-pupil contact schemes: Increasingly, universities are exploring the value of mentoring or “buddy” schemes, often delivered online, which match trained university students with individuals or groups of potential applicants. For example, schemes to “join a student” for a day on-campus are common in the Netherlands.

3.2.5 Co-delivery of teaching: for example, one university in the UK participating in IBAR described their contribution to a regional Centre for Further Maths which is active across four counties in Southern England. The Centre coordinates co-provision of teaching in Further Maths in schools and is supported by special government funding for STEM subjects. One university in Portugal offers bridging courses in mathematics and is planning future courses in chemistry, biology, physics and the Portuguese language (the disciplines where the majority of secondary students have final exams for access to higher education). These courses are offered to final year secondary school pupils but taught by higher education lecturers. In Slovakia, higher education academic staff offer advice and expertise in assessment of school pupils. In the Czech Republic, school and university staff commonly collaborate on delivery of summer schools for a variety of audiences. In Poland, one university described video and online courses provided to school-level learners by university staff.

3.2.5 “Fast track” programmes for gifted students: for example, some secondary schools in the Netherlands offer additional courses and projects for pupils who are performing above average, who are highly motivated and who have the capabilities to take part in such extra programmes in addition to the standard teaching.

3.2.6 Careers advice/study path counselling: for example, in the Czech Republic, counsellors recruited from secondary school teaching staff are responsible for advising students on programmes and study opportunities at universities.

3.3 Despite the proliferation of information-sharing and awareness-raising activities, research participants across the IBAR network reported low levels of awareness of the reality of higher education in secondary schools. Participants across the IBAR network (including students) also expressed various concerns about the readiness of students to enter higher education study. Three common issues emerged from the data:

3.3.1 School leaving examinations: in systems (Poland, Czech Republic; Slovakia) where national *matura* examinations determine entry to higher education participants in the IBAR study expressed concern that learners were not sufficiently prepared for higher study, particularly in STEM subjects. In Poland, an independent survey of *matura* candidates found high correlation between high performance in the *matura* examinations and subsequent tertiary-level performance. However, students participating in the IBAR study in Poland offered profoundly negative views of the *matura* as a preparation for higher education study, particularly in the design of *matura* assessment, which in their view discourages independent thinking. Secondary

school staff in Poland acknowledged a tendency to teach for matura success and for entry to higher education rather than to develop independent study skills in learners.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, although there are many commonalities in the types of activities pursued by universities and university/school partnerships to aid transition, the scope and scale of these activities varies enormously. In some IBAR countries (notably Latvia), there is a less well-developed understanding of the potential for school/university contact as a way of preparing school leavers for university study. In countries with *numerus fixus* or other national allocation models for university entry, there has generally been less incentive to market programmes or institutions, although this has not necessarily inhibited activities designed to smooth learner progression.

4. Are quality assurance requirements for secondary education in alignment with those for higher education?

4.1 Although in most European contexts responsibility for education planning and monitoring from primary to tertiary levels falls under the jurisdiction of a single ministerial body (exceptions are Poland and England, where responsibility is divided between two government departments), responsibility for quality assurance of secondary and tertiary education is usually undertaken by separate bodies. In this respect, data from the IBAR project reinforces the perception that national quality assurance arrangements for secondary and tertiary education in some countries increasingly resemble each other. For example, in Portugal both systems are based on a self-assessment report by the reviewed institution, a visit to the institution by a panel of external reviewers, and an external review report, which is made public. Fundamental to both systems is that they establish that institutions develop internal mechanisms to assure the quality of teaching and learning. Similar alignment of processes is reported in the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Poland.

In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and OFSTED, the schools inspectorate have signed a memorandum of understanding. The two agencies work together to:

- exchange information and expertise as appropriate;
- liaise over the planning of inspection and review activities;
- foster close working links between key staff at QAA and OFSTED;
- monitor progress with the commitments identified in the HERRG Concordat¹¹;
- monitor the effectiveness of joint working in reducing the burden on providers;
- monitor the impact of inspection on standards in both the higher and further education systems;
- assure the academic standards of education and promote the enhancement of the quality of learning provision.

4.2 In most IBAR countries, external secondary school inspection and internal school

¹¹ The Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG) Concordat is available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/higher-education/shape-and-structure/better-regulation/herrg-background>

self-evaluation are increasingly seen as both interrelated and integral to school improvement and reform policies. However, the emphasis placed on each varies considerably depending on national contexts and particularly on national views of the optimal balance between school accountability and teacher empowerment. There is a perception that desirable outcomes may be best achieved if inspectorates provide guidelines, instructions and examples to schools rather than merely offering judgment: this focus on empowerment and improvement echoes the rhetoric of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG1), although our data suggests that effective use of self-evaluation in schools remains in its early stages in many contexts (particularly in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Latvia). One key reason for this diversity is widely varying governance arrangements for the schools sector and differing expectations about ministerial and/or inspectorate control. In some contexts (for example, in the Czech Republic), secondary schools enjoy high levels of autonomy and relatively low levels of national steering by the Ministry. In other contexts (for example in Latvia), the rhetoric of national steering is somewhat under-developed in terms of self-evaluation and/or teacher empowerment, which may be related to the perceived low status of teaching as profession and poor teacher remuneration. In some IBAR countries (for example, in the Czech Republic), the perception remains that school evaluation is often somewhat compliance-driven and requires reform to incorporate the notion of locally derived development or improvement.

4.3 Despite evidence of increasing alignment of ethos and processes, and enhanced communication between quality agencies for higher education and schools inspectorates in some countries, significant differences remain in the metrics used to judge quality in the two domains. Teachers in secondary schools are subject to different forms of scrutiny than those in higher education (where research output is very likely to be a greater determinant of career progression than teaching attainment). Secondary schools, unlike universities, are not judged by the destination(s) of their leavers, although they are judged more stringently on the leaving attainment of students. For universities, metrics such as student satisfaction data and employability statistics have become profoundly important in a context of increased national and international competition and may limit the extent to which quality evaluation arrangements for the two sectors can become more fully integrated, at least in the short term.

4.4 Overall our IBAR data strongly suggests that both sectors currently remain very largely ignorant of quality assurance mechanisms in each other's domains. The lack of national forums, joint policy/quality bodies and (in some cases) governance arrangements from different ministries are perceived as significant barriers to more intensive sectoral cooperation.

5. Are there formal processes in which the secondary and higher education sectors communicate with each other, either at institutional level or national level?

5.1 Nationally coordinated liaison, support and resources are relatively well developed in the UK and the Netherlands. Examples of national coordinated activities include:

- In the UK, a national body HELOA (Higher Education Liaison Officers Association) was established in 1990 and now has nearly 900 members from universities in all countries of the United Kingdom. HELOA members work in a wide range of functions within universities, covering areas of schools and colleges liaison, student recruitment, widening participation, external relations, marketing, publications and publicity and student services. The association offers training, conferences and regional networking groups and works in collaboration with UCAS, the UK management body for university admissions.
- Another UK national body, SPA (Supporting Professionalism in Admissions) was constituted in response to the 2004 Schwartz Report¹² and offers expertise and an online databank of good practice for admissions officers and other in higher education. National resources for prospective students include unitasterdays.com, a website that details university open days and taster events.
- At school level, FutureFirst¹³ collects contact details of school leavers, as well as re-establishing connections with more distant graduates with the aim of creating alumni partnerships to raise aspiration among secondary school pupils. FutureFirst works with schools to track the destinations and progressions of their alumni, keep alumni engaged through regular newsletters, emails and SMS messages, and encourage them to offer their support as career or higher education mentors or role models; as sources of work experience for current pupils, as a source of donations; and as school volunteers or governors.
- In the Netherlands, a national website StudyChoice123¹⁴ performs a similar role as FutureFirst in informing pupils about taster and open day opportunities. Bèta-Technology¹⁵ is a national initiative funded by the ministries of education and economic affairs to increase the number of enrolments in the sciences and technology areas, and to enhance the quality of science education at all levels. Both the Dutch University Association and Council for Secondary Education offer professional opportunities for university and school staff to collaborate on areas of mutual concern: for example, current work on admissions procedures and intake interviews.

¹²Schwartz Admissions to Higher Education Review Group, Fair admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for good practice. The 'Schwartz Report', 2004.

Available from: <http://www.admissions-review.org.uk/>

¹³<http://futurefirst.org.uk/>

¹⁴<http://www.studiekeuze123.nl/>

¹⁵www.platformbetatechniek.nl

- In Portugal, there are two national forums in place. These are the National Council of Education and the Council of Schools. Along with one regional platform, i.e. Municipal Council of Education, they offer similar opportunities for collaboration as in the UK case, but our data suggests that currently there is no mandate to work on enhanced articulation between Portuguese secondary and higher education and relatively poor levels of understanding between these two sectors.

In the post-Communist countries participating in the IBAR enquiry (i.e. Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia), national opportunities for collaboration remain somewhat less developed, although our data suggests examples of effective practice at regional level, such as the Regional Board for Secondary School Education and Vocational Training in Zilina in Slovakia. The board includes university partners and others from industry and regional economic bodies and recently (2013) developed a strategic education plan for the area. One barrier to nationally-organised collaboration in the Czech Republic which may be applicable in other Eastern European contexts is the high levels of operational autonomy enjoyed by schools and HEIs, although of course this same autonomy can offer opportunities for school or HEI-led collaborative initiatives.

5.2 Participants in most IBAR countries described the lack of formal opportunities for inter-sectoral collaboration. As already suggested, in Portugal, two national forums were referred to as possible opportunities for collaboration: the National Council of Education (where there are representatives – counsellors – from the two sectors) and the Council of Schools (a forum which represents school heads). At regional level mention was made of the Municipal Council of Education, where representatives of different educational levels are also present and work together. Participants in the enquiry, however, reported that these three forums had their own agendas and no mandate to work on a better articulation between secondary and higher education.

5.3 Many participants noted the important role that universities play in preparing teachers and this form of contact is perceived as an on-going opportunity for dialogue between the two sectors in IBAR countries. Typically, activities include:

- Initial Teacher Education. Either as a postgraduate qualification for graduates or as a first degree: universities train both primary and secondary teachers: training placements offered as part of teacher education mean that universities and schools have continuous opportunities for communication
- Postgraduate opportunities. Universities also offer a range of postgraduate opportunities and qualifications for teachers who want to enhance their skills.
- Continuing professional development (CPD). The teaching profession never stops learning as teaching methods and curricula develop. This CPD is delivered by universities.
- Conferences and events. Universities also run conferences, seminars and other events which give teachers the opportunity to get together, hear from people with new approaches to teaching, discuss the issues they face and network with other teachers to expand their skills.

In the Czech Republic, universities undertake staff development activities focused on teaching staff of secondary schools. Summer schools and short courses are offered on widely varying topics including the use of learning technologies, designing education for democratic citizenship and language courses. In Portugal, an online forum developed by one university offers its own staff and schoolteachers the opportunity to discuss professional development issues relating to transition from secondary to higher education.

6. In what ways might more efficient alignment between secondary and higher education be achieved?

The data from IBAR strongly suggests a significant misalignment between systemic or national approaches to school-university liaison (which are limited in scope and rarely include legislative or policy dimensions) and local ground-level activity (which is numerous, varied and perceived as valuable by many of the participants in the project). However, we still know relatively little about the impact of these activities and what, if anything might be done to support more systematic engagement at national level. Where national initiatives are in place (particularly in the UK and the Netherlands), there remains the danger that they can often be substantially reliant on short-term funding or government whim (one notable and well-documented example is the AimHigher programme in the UK, which was cut in 2011). Evidence of increased professionalism and collegiality in key connecting roles (for example, HELOA, the Higher Education Liaison Officers Association in the UK) may offer a useful model for future work in those European countries where cross-sector collaboration remains somewhat under-developed.

Variations in the scope and scale of collaborative practice at institutional level in national contexts appear at least in part to reflect structural differences in the way(s) in which universities admit entrants. Student choice may or may not result in straightforward progression alignments between local “feeder” schools and nearby universities. In countries including Portugal where national competition determines university placement, universities have been less likely to develop local access policies and have historically been less motivated to cultivate relationships with schools, although this is now changing because of a shortage of potential students and increased competition between HEIs. In the UK, government interest in widening participation and fair access to higher education is a key driver for school/university contact but also threatens to overwhelm other types of contact, which are perceived as less politically urgent. Many participants noted that the extent of school/university collaborations depended a great deal on local enthusiasm and willingness to offer extra activities and experiences for young learners.

Secondary school leaving examinations (matura) are perceived as a limiting factor in most IBAR systems: participants report a tendency for teaching in secondary schools to focus on exam success rather than development of study skills. However, there is evidence from other systems (for example, the UK and the Netherlands) that alternative examination systems and teaching models are also subject to similar criticisms. Although there is movement in the UK to involve universities much more directly in the development of school curricula there are concerns about whether academics should be asked to devote scarce time to oversight of school qualifications.

Our IBAR data suggests that further and on-going work on alignment of curricula, learning outcomes, NQF and coherent educational experiences throughout the learning lifecycle is required across the EHEA to address the challenge of transition. The misalignment and lack of knowledge of each other's sector identified by many participants in IBAR remains a barrier for school pupils and for effective collaboration across national educational systems. However, the wealth of local practice identified during the project offers a glimpse of positive capacity-building potential.

The following core areas for development were identified across the IBAR network:

- Policy instruments and funding incentives to encourage formal collaboration.
- National forums or bodies to foster collaboration.
- Professionalism and organisation of key linking roles (for example, careers officers, schools liaison officers, admissions tutors).
- Reform of secondary quality systems to foster alignment with tertiary education needs.

7. Major findings and policy recommendations

7.1 Identification of barriers to effective links between higher and secondary education with relevance to supranational level

ESG1 does not currently make any reference to specific activities related to transition or to the types of relationships between the school and university sectors that may support student attainment. Arrangements for school-level quality monitoring appear to be following a similar change trajectory to those of higher education, but progress differs according to national context. Our data suggests that both sectors remain broadly ignorant of arrangements in the opposite domain.

European funding models tend to perpetuate the division between secondary and tertiary sectors and offer only limited opportunities for cross-sector collaboration.

Although the implementation of national qualification frameworks (NQFs) in participating countries has focused attention on curricula and national examinations, there is evidence to suggest that alignment between secondary attainment and expectations of learners in early years tertiary study remains poor in many contexts. Of particular concern is the data collected from students in some countries who feel under-prepared for university study.

Whilst there is evidence of considerable local activity between universities and local feeder schools, there is limited data on the impact of such activities. For this reason, further research into these collaborative activities may be valuable.

Recommendations at European level:

- ENQA might wish to consider what opportunities exist to encourage collaboration between quality bodies operating in secondary and tertiary domains
- ENQA/EACEA may wish to consider whether new funding may encourage enhanced system-wide and/or regional collaboration between the two sectors.
- Further Europe-wide work to consider implementation of NQFs and their relationship to curriculum delivery models may be valuable.
- ENQA might wish to consider opportunities to encourage and/or incentivise benchmarking and/or comparisons of school/university liaison practice across the EHEA and consider support for evaluation of impact.

7.2 Identification of barriers to effective links between higher and secondary education with relevance to national level

Our data suggests that opportunities for national dialogue and shared policy development are under-developed in many national contexts. Even when national steering bodies are well established, there appears to be little incentive to engage in systematic discussion or collaboration. National arrangements for quality assurance also remain separate and indicators of quality reflecting the concerns of highly differentiated sectors. Even in the UK, where a memorandum of understanding exists between the two relevant quality agencies there is considerable divergence between the quality models operating in each domain. The professionalism and national organisation of key linking roles in the UK (for example, in university admissions and school careers guidance) offer possibilities for national dialogue and benchmarking and enhancement of practice and may be a model for implementation in other countries.

Opportunities for further discussion about the implementation of NQF and curriculum reform are likely to be valuable in all national contexts and may be particularly urgent in countries that have reported low levels of alignment between the secondary school leaving examination (matura) or equivalent examination attainment and the demands of early years university study. The purpose and status of first year university study has been widely debated in the educational literature and has been the focus of national funding and activity in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the USA but our data suggests that attention to first year curricula and learning support remains under-developed across the EHEA.

Recommendations:

- National ministries of education or relevant governance bodies may wish to consider what opportunities exist for systemic national-level dialogue between secondary and tertiary education.
- National ministries of education or relevant governance bodies may consider funding support for the establishment of national professional bodies in (for example) admissions, careers and school/university liaison.
- National quality agencies or ministerial bodies with responsibility for quality may wish to identify opportunities to work together to better align practice in both sectors. In particular, work to further develop quality arrangements in the schools sector may be highly beneficial in some contexts.
- Further collaborative work on NQF implementation and curriculum reform may be particularly valuable in countries that have identified low alignment between secondary and tertiary study.
- National discussion about approaches to first year curriculum design and learner support may benefit both sectors.

7.3 Identification of barriers to effective links between higher and secondary education with relevance to institutional level

Our IBAR data has uncovered considerable effort at institutional level to make active connections at institutional level and demonstrates the commitment of academic staff in both sectors, many contributing to special activities in their own time. Practice in some countries remains under-developed and there may be benefit in institution-led benchmarking or other sharing of ideas.

A number of participants reported that information sharing about the destination and attainment of school pupils once they entered higher education was almost never available. Although there may be data protection and other constraints on sharing personal information, there is evidence to suggest that universities could do more to actively engage schools in the student lifecycle. Institutions in both sectors (secondary education, higher education) have a role in lobbying national bodies and policy makers and should seek opportunities for their voice to be heard and to secure active involvement in key policy developments (for example, curriculum reform).

Recommendations:

- Universities should consider what kinds of information might help to effectively enhance activities relating to student transition (benchmarking, informal inter-institutional discussion, bespoke first year programmes).
- Universities and secondary schools may wish to consider whether different types of information (for example, on student destinations) may benefit learners and teachers.
- Universities and secondary schools may develop appropriate tools for monitoring the effectiveness of inter-sectoral cooperative activities.
- Universities and secondary schools should seek opportunities to influence national dialogue and activity (for example, in NQF implementation, quality assurance reform and curriculum renewal) in each other's domains.

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