



Lifelong
Learning
Programme

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union

**„Identifying Barriers in Promoting the European Standards and Guidelines
for Quality Assurance at Institutional Level“**

IBAR

Agreement number – 2010 – 4663/001 - 001

WP12

Quality and Secondary Education

National study – Slovakia

2013

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



IBAR

Quality and Secondary Education Slovak Comparative Study Work Package 12

Research team of UKF Nitra responsible for national comparative study:

prof. PaedDr. Alena Hašková, CSc.

PhDr. Ľubor Pilárik, PhD.

doc. PaedDr. Marcela Verešová, PhD.

doc. PhDr. Ružena Žilová, PhD.

Mgr. Ľubica Lachká

Mgr. Diana Kanášová

Research team responsible for institutional analysis:

doc. PaedDr. Marcela Verešová, PhD. - Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (UKF)

doc. PhDr. Ružena Žilová, PhD. - Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (UKF)

prof. Ing. Milota Vetráková, PhD. - Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (UMB)

PhDr. Renáta Švarcová - University of Žilina (ZU)

Mgr. Michaela Pašteková, PhD. - Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava (VSVU)



Introduction

The submitted national report addresses the issue of cooperation of secondary schools and HEIs in the context of the quality education. The report describes the results of the analysis realized based on the survey of 4 HEIs , while a main attention is devoted to the period of transition of students from secondary schools to HEIs. The aim of the analysis is to identify potential barriers in collaboration among secondary schools and HEIs regarding of the quality of university education.

The report is aimed at the following specific issues:

- In what way 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?
- To what extent are secondary school pupils (or other candidate students) prepared to take maximum advantage of the higher education opportunity offered to them?
- Are quality assurance requirements for secondary education at odds with those for higher education?
- Are there formal processes in which the secondary and higher education sectors communicate with each other, either at institutional level or national level?
- In what ways might more efficient alignment between secondary and higher education be achieved?

The issue of cooperation between secondary schools and HEIs is not explicitly defined in the ESG standards. However, data concerning the topic are appeared in the several ESG standards. ESG 1.1 specifies that the principles and practices of QA should "include the participation of students and other stakeholders" (p. 15). In this context, we can perceive the representatives/students of secondary schools as stakeholders. ESG 1.2 points to the involvement of stakeholders in the processes of approval, monitoring and periodic evaluation of programs. "Trust of students and other stakeholders in higher education are more easily created and maintained through effective quality assurance activities designed to ensure that programs are properly designed, regularly monitored and controlled, and thus



ensure their continued relevance and timeliness" (p.15). Attention is given to evaluation of learning outcomes, development of curricula, their regular evaluation and providing of feedback from stakeholders (p. 16).

Methodology

Four public HEIs representing the complete set of 20 public universities, three state universities and 13 private universities in Slovakia served as a source of the research data. Specifically, the following ones participated in:

- Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre (UKF),
- Univerzita Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici (UMB),
- Žilinská univerzita v Žiline (ZU),
- Vysoká škola výtvarných umení v Bratislave (VSVU)

Content analysis of documents and semi-structured interviews, as well as questionnaire interviews were used to obtain the data.

Content analysis of documents

The following documents became the object of content analysis:

a) level of national policy:

Law. 131/2002 Z.z. on HEIs as amended

b) institutional policy:

- Statutes; study schedules, long-term strategies, self - evaluation reports and annual reports; study guides, information systems, web sites of HEIs and secondary schools etc.



- Structured and semi-structured interview and questionnaire interview
81 respondents were interviewed within four surveyed HEIs.

Chart 1: Composition of surveyed sample

| <i>segment</i> | <i>UKF</i> | <i>UMB</i> | <i>ŽU</i> | <i>VŠVU</i> |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Rector , Vice-rectors | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Dean, Vice - deans | 6 | 6 | 7 | 0 |
| Heads/Officers of Study Departments | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| Representatives of secondary schools | 4 | 6 | 3 | 8 |
| HEIs pedagogues | 2 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Students | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| <i>Total:</i> | <i>15</i> | <i>24</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>30</i> |

Findings

1) In what way does institutional policy on quality take into account issues of progression from secondary education to HE?

Institutional policy of HEIs is not officially defined in regard of continuity of secondary education to higher one. HEIs primarily reflect to the national legislation which contain some regulations. The basic requirement asked by the national legislation is oriented in completing of secondary education which has to be finished to apply for the bachelor's study in higher education. Candidates who don't fulfil these conditions cannot be enrolled at HEI. National legislation also imposes HEIs an obligation to adapt conditions of the entrance exam to the content and extent of secondary education. HEIs has a legal duty to disclose information on the used selection criteria for undergraduate study programs by 20th of September of the year preceding the start of the next academic year.

National legislation defines the criteria for selection of applicants for higher education on a very general level, only. Establishment of particular criteria for applicants of the bachelor degree is in the responsibility of the faculty. They must be approved by the Faculty



Academic Senate. Criteria take the specific applicants' conditions and capabilities for the particular field of study into account. One of the surveyed HEI (UKF) has established an internal document regulating the admission procedure, which are approved by the College of Rector and are binding on all faculties of HEIs.

Curricula valid in area of the secondary education as well as higher education are approved by the central level of the Ministry of Education and its commissions. Secondary schools and HEIs have only a limited scope of modification of the established standards. Only one surveyed HEI (VSVU) has the experience in changing curricula in the art education based on cooperation with secondary schools, as well. HEIs very often provide the promotion activities aimed at students of secondary schools as potential applicants. They present their study programs within the HEI Open Day, educational fairs, dissemination of information and promotional brochures generally published as well as on their web site. One of the surveyed universities (ZU) motivate its PhD. students to organize the leisure activities and competitions for primary and secondary school students to encourage the personal contacts and interpose more information about HEIs to the secondary schools students. Personal contacts of representatives of HEIs with the teachers of secondary schools are partly developed and maintained through LLP education in which the pedagogues of secondary schools participate in.

1a) Are there any special institutional arrangements in place -- academic, personal, social, geographic or administrative -- to assist students in the first year of HE?

All the surveyed HEIs have developed the measures helping the students in their first year of study. They can be classified into the following types:

a) **Personnel support** - students have the available tutor (or academic adviser) as a contact person in the first year of their study to deal with different situations in regard of study. They can concern the study program organization, schedule of curriculum, orientation in the



HEI workplaces...The duty to establish tutors/academic advisors in the first year of study is identified in the internal policy documents. Dean of individual faculty is responsible to provide it. They were not identified any special courses for HEIs teachers aimed at the special preparatory activities for students in the first year of undergraduate study at any surveyed HEI. One surveyed university (UMB) has approved a standard requiring the completed special course in basic pedagogy of all teachers without a further specification concerning preparatory courses .

b) **Administrative support** – HEIs prepare for the students of the first year the brief trainings focused on key administrative requirements, mainly information concerning IT recording academic systems (recording of student assessment, required number of credits, login to electronic academic systems, schedule, exams, theses, library and book system, etc.)

c) **Professional /academic support** - some faculties (two of surveyed HEIs) offer the opportunity to students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in special preparatory courses to bridge a level of secondary school with level of high education. Trainings are realized before beginning of bachelor study (ZU) and / or during the first year of bachelor degree study (ZU, VSVU).

d) **Social support** – it was identified some umbrella student organizations at the surveyed HEIs (UMB, UKF, ZU) covering the students leisure activities. Representatives of the organizations contact the students of the first years e.g. within time of their enrolment to present them activities of the organizations. The common practice is focused on the organizing of the students matriculation in the first classes where the starting students can informally meet academic representatives as well as students from higher grades. Several activities focused on social support are not formally defined in official internal policy documents, they work mainly based on tradition and good practice.

Example of good practice (VSVU):

Study program in field of Fine Art:

During the first winter semester, the starting students attend two preparatory courses within the different Departments as they were adopted. The topics of the courses are chosen based on the students' own interest, taking into consideration that the knowledge achieved within



the courses should be used later in their official study programs. The courses last the six weeks and they are completed by the official assessment. In the second summer semester, students complete the preparatory courses in their own Department within their own study program. Students appreciate this kind of preparatory courses. They consider them as very effective ones in the terms of establishing contacts with other students and teachers from different departments. In addition, the preparatory courses are particularly aimed at acquiring of practical skills in work with different fine art media. Because of the specific nature of the first year, total term of study at the HEI is prolonged to the six years.

2) To what extent are secondary school pupils (or other candidate students) prepared to take maximum advantage of the higher education opportunity offered to them?

The benefits of the HEI study can be divided into 4 categories.

1. The first one concerns the social benefits as providing the **financially subsidized accommodation in dormitories and meals** – HEIs tend to continually expand opportunities to provide their students with an accommodation in the HEI dormitories. HEIs have the system of the dining rooms available to students and the HEI staff. The secondary school graduates very quickly become familiar with the systems and their conditions.
2. The second category is focused on the **support systems of the students' learning**. It concerns:
 - conditions of internet access at HEIs area
 - use of services of the university libraries

In this area it is not possible to clearly determine the ability of students in the first years of the service used. Working with the PC and the Internet creates an usual part of education at secondary schools and become an ordinary part of life of prospective students. As regards the use of the services of university libraries, universities don't collect the official data concerning the use of library services by the starting students. Some libraries offer preparatory courses for students focused on work with databases. Secondary schools don't take the use of the HEI library services into consideration within their educational programs.



3. The third category is aimed at the **specific learning methods supporting the student learning autonomy** which are more used by HEIs comparing to the secondary schools (team work, individual consultancies....). One surveyed HEI (VSVU) expressed its experience that specific learning benefits of higher education (e.g. individual consultancies) are more often used by the students of higher grades of study than the first ones. It is also visible that applicants from foreign secondary schools are more familiar with them and have more experiences e.g. with the individual consultations with the teacher.

4. The fourth category considers the opportunity of **social activities for students**. The surveyed HEIs don't have official data enabling to evaluate a situation in this area with regard to the category of the first years students. The HEIs have multiple organizations, clubs ... offering socializing and leisure activities to the students. All organizations provide recruitment of starting students by themselves within the first semester. The students have the opportunity to find more information about the organizations within formal and informal events organizing at the beginning of the first semester.

3) Are quality assurance requirements for secondary education at odds with those for higher education?

The ISCED standards (The International Standard Classification of Education) define the content of learning outcomes at the national level. The standards are focused on the secondary education, only (ISCED 3). Continuity and connection of the standards valid for the secondary school education to the higher education is absent. Curricula of study programs in higher education are separately defined by the documents approved by the Accreditation Commission at the national level. Discussion on the standards sporadically happens based on informal communication among representatives of HEIs and secondary schools. One of the surveyed HEI (ZU) maintains the contact with the content of the secondary education based on participation of the HEI pedagogues in preparing of the secondary school textbooks. Satisfaction with the connection and continuity of standards



between secondary schools and university was observed in the case of one surveyed HEI (UKF) in the selected fields of study (fine arts, sports and educational ones). The lack of accordance between requirements on quality in education at secondary schools and HEIs can cause insufficient ability of the applicants for their study at HEIs. Two surveyed HEIs (ZU, UMB) expressed that an insufficient ability of applicants was reflected e.g. in their working with written text (such as processing and production, work with literature), in using of grammar and stylistics, in learning habits. It is important to note that type of the finished secondary school doesn't directly affect skills and abilities of the HEI candidates in individual study fields. Two surveyed HEIs (ZU, UMB) reported their long term experience that graduates of the high schools (secondary grammar schools) are better prepared in area of general subjects as mathematics, physics..... Graduates of vocational schools are better prepared in the field of special subjects. One surveyed HEI (ZU) reported a continuing improvement of communication skills, IT skills and skills in foreign languages within graduates of secondary schools attending the first year.

All HEIs support the student learning autonomy. All surveyed HEIs (UKF, ZU, VSVU, UMB) proclaimed development of the students autonomy based on their participation in establishment own study plan, schedule, as well as in the opportunity to select their appropriate study subjects, teachers and mobility. Two of surveyed HEIs (UKF, ZU) have published the criteria to fill the educational standards in official policy documents. Two surveyed HEIs (ZU, VSVU) link information concerning assessment of students in the first years with content of preparatory courses aimed at reducing inequalities among graduates of secondary schools.

It is registered the continuous decreasing of interests of prospective students in the field of natural sciences. Two surveyed HEIs react on this situation based on the increased activity aimed at the stronger promotion of degree courses in natural sciences (UMB) and special recruitment and additional courses in engineering and the natural sciences (ZU).

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

Representatives of HEIs as well as representatives of secondary schools don't have available an official platform for mutual communication. Contacts are maintained at e.g. conferences and symposia organized at regional level (UKF, VSVU) and the participation in the



common projects (UMB). Another form of contacts is based on realization of the practice of the HEI students of pedagogy at secondary schools (UMB, UKF). Several HEI teachers (UKF) are involved as experts in the process of assessment of students participating in their programs of professional secondary school activities.

Example of good practice

One surveyed HEI (ZU) can officially affect the policy focused the development of the Zilina region in the area of education. The regional government established the “Regional Board for Secondary School Education and Vocational Training in the Zilina Region” based on involvement of several social and economic partners to increase coordination and linking between secondary school education and the labour market in the Zilina Region. Vice-Rector for Education of ZU is a member of the Board. The Board also discusses the regional strategy for secondary school and vocational education in relation to economic and social needs of the region. The Zilina Regional Government approved the strategic document “Concept of Education in the Žilina Region for 2010 – 2013”.

5) In what ways might more efficient alignment between secondary and higher education be achieved?

More effective links have been developed among secondary schools and HEIs based on regional or professional accordance. Representatives of secondary schools perceive the following areas as positive achievements in alignment between HEIs and secondary schools:

- Realization of the practices of the HEI students, the oncoming pedagogues, in secondary schools (UKF, UMB)
- excursions of secondary school students at HEIs (ZU)
- realization of common projects (ZU, UMB)
- consultancies offered from side of HEI teachers to secondary school students (UKF, ZU)
- organizing of common conferences (UMB)
- cooperation in the development of secondary schools curriculum (ZU)
- mutual membership of representatives of HEIs/secondary schools in self - government bodies (UMB).



The challenges in improvement linking between secondary schools and HEIs are identified by representatives of secondary schools as follows:

- To improve the alignment of content of curricula and learning outcomes between secondary schools and HEIs (UMB, CPU)
- to increase awareness on professional activities realized by HEIs (UMB)
- to increase awareness and promoting of the HEI study fields (ZU).

Representatives of secondary schools evaluated the students ability for the HEI study. In generally, their assessment is a quite positive. The following specifications have been identified:

- Ability of secondary school graduates to study at HEI depends mainly on their own motivation and interest to study and it cannot be generalized (ZU)
- graduates of the secondary vocational schools are prepared primarily for practice and secondly for other university study (UMB)
- increasing number of changed study fields regarding of the study field studied at secondary schools and the chosen study field at HEI (UKF)

Secondary schools typically participate in preparing of their students for HE study, mainly in the following areas:

- Preparatory education for the HE entrance exams (UMB, CPU)
- offer of additional education in the selected study subjects and / or certified courses relating to the intended fields of HE study (UKF)
- available consultations with the study advisors at secondary school (UKF)
- different types of competitions for talented students and their individual support.

Secondary schools don't follow the further progress of their graduates on a regular base. Only a few secondary schools confirmed that they monitor their graduates admitted to the HEIs, mainly up to one year after graduating (ZU, CPU, UMB). It exists the informal level maintaining contacts between secondary schools and graduates based on realization of events, to which are the graduates invited.



Representatives of secondary schools propose the following measures for the more effective interaction between secondary schools and HEIs:

- to improve trainings in the area of mathematics for students at vocational secondary schools (ZU)
- to intensify activities for better adaptation of the students to their first grades at HEIs e.g. by form of changes in teaching methods used by secondary schools (UKF, ZU)
- to establish the position of tutors within all HEIs (UKF)
- to provide a higher acceptance of the results of a study at secondary schools in the admission procedure to the HEIs (UMB)

Barriers

Barriers in the cooperation secondary school and university were identified as follows:

a) National level

- lack of policy of the Ministry of Education in relation to alignment of higher education and secondary education mainly in the area of curricula and learning outcomes
- lack of official national platforms to discuss the issues of alignment of higher education and secondary education mainly in the area of curricula and learning outcomes

Examples of good practice:

- The establishment of IT portal of the Ministry of Education providing to students of secondary schools the comprehensive information about continuing their study at HEIs as well as some quantitative information relating to the quality of HEIs
- establishment of the national system of occupations, which has an ambition to increase the transparency of qualification requirements of the labour market

b) Institutional level

- Weak alignment between the HEIs and other regional institutions to solve the actual economic and social issues in education, particularly concerning an interconnection of practice with study program as well as the graduates' employment



- lack of internal systems of QA focused on evaluation of the students after finishing of their first year of HE study
- cooperation between secondary schools and HEIs is mainly informal and it is not reflected in the HEI institutional policy documents

- low attention paying to development of didactic skills of teachers working with graduates of secondary schools
- low level of promotion of professional events and training courses

- low participation of stakeholders from secondary schools in self - government bodies of HEIs (e.g. establishment and revision of curricula, study plans...)

Example of good practice:

- The offer of preparatory courses before beginning of HE study and / or specialized courses focused on study fields within HE study, in which students can supplement the necessary knowledge and skills not gained at the secondary school education

Conclusions

ESG specify respecting the interests of students and other stakeholders as one of the main principle of quality of education . The above mentioned statement identifies the need to enhance alignment between secondary schools and HEIs, which highly affects the input level of knowledge, skills and competencies for the HEI study as well as one of the key role of schools in preparing competent graduates for the labour market. The obtained results show that the actual situation in the cooperation in quality assurance in is not satisfactory and should be moved from informal „ad hoc“ position to the systematic one in regard of national as well as institutional level.