IBAR Seminar, University of Strathclyde
6th and 7th June 2011

Monday 6th June: Seminar chair: Professor Ray Land

In attendance: Helena Sebkova (HS), Jan Kohoutek (JK), Heather Eggins (HE), Ray Land (RL), Catherine Owen (CO), George Gordon (GG), Stuart Boon (SB), Alberts Prikulis (AP), Claudia Sarrico (CS), Alberto Amaral (AA), Ewa Chmielecka (EC), Jakob Brdulak (JB), Silvia Hrozenska (SH), Libor Vozar (LV), Peter Mederly (PM), Don Westerheijden (DW), and Liudvika Leisyste (LL)

Apologies: Agnese Rusakova

1. Update on project management (HS)

HS presented the answers from the European Commission to questions submitted by the project team about financial reporting matters since the last seminar in Latvia. Team members expressed concern about the level of documentation required by the European Commission. It was agreed that all partners would retain documentation to support any future audit and provide a letter to the project coordinator explaining local arrangements. This replaces the requirement for electronic versions of financial documents (e.g. receipts etc.) to be supplied to the project coordinator.

The next financial reporting deadline is the **end of June 2011**. Reporting documentation including timesheets, expenses sheets etc. should be uploaded to the CAPSA system and each project team has a password-protected area on the system. This is expected some time in the middle of July to allow for institutional data collection activities.

There are some challenges associated with the monthly and quarterly returns required by the project coordination team. At some institutions, the requirement for monthly financial returns to the project coordinator is problematic. The preferred model is a six-monthly reporting schedule, which fits the local requirements of institutional finance offices. **It was agreed that a six monthly schedule would be adopted in the first instance.**

There is some confusion about currency exchange calculation. During the August 2012 interim report, all rates will be adjusted to the European Commission's standard rate. There is some concern that this arrangement doesn't fit well with institutional financial management protocols and could create a situation in which the level of funds available to institutions are compromised. In this case, institutions might reasonably wish to ask for additional funds to cover any resulting shortfall. But it is necessary to take the Grant Agreement (contract), Article II.17.2 into consideration: *"The total amount paid to the beneficiaries by the Agency may not in any circumstances exceed the maximum amount of the grant laid down in Article I.4.3…"*

All projects need to supply some brief information about activities and progress on work-packages by the end of June. The CHEPS team will circulate a template that can be adapted to collect data in a standard format. Subsequent information will be collected quarterly to inform collation of evaluation reports.

2. Update on Work-Package 5 (AP)

AP suggests that all project partners "score" the answers to their questions, i.e. for the question *Is there a quality assurance system in place?* the answer is YES/NO. It would also be helpful if each report included a synthesis of national practice and some analysis of trends. It is recognized that, from a small sample of institutions, it might not be possible to make completely sound judgments about national practice, but the judgment of local teams is required to interpret the data.

There was some discussion about whether it might be necessary to re-visit the data from each work-package and whether there is a need to examine the national policies from each member state to discover the extent to which the ESG is influencing national agency practice. This might lead to a recommendation that national agencies have a role in promoting the ESG.

There was discussion about the extent to which it is possible to make judgments on practice based on the data provided. There is some concern about the need to supply additional data.

It was suggested that the Latvian team might usefully create a draft report for circulation to the rest of the project that would facilitate the identification of missing data. The draft will be completed by the end of June 2011, project teams will send any additional data by 15th July 2011.

Some general comments about the data collection for the work-package included:

- Some information is not readily available from documentation available on the internet
- Should we approach our national agencies for data? At present there is no work-package that includes this activity
- These are preliminary reports, but there is opportunity to include more data in the final report
- Speaking to quality agencies can be handled as part of the dissemination work-package
- Are there other important sources of information, e.g. relevant government ministries or other agencies?

3. Update on conceptual framework and data collection methodologies (DW & RL)

We might need to combine two things to create effective case studies:

- Questions for a small sample of senior managers (at the top)
- Further views from lower down the institution (vertically through the organisation

Which faculties we choose is a key question if we are going to undertake study further down the institution. CS & AA have decided to choose those faculties, like Engineering, that are common to all institutions they are surveying. The limitation of this approach is that it might not bring out the character of different institutions and of practice in different discipline areas. There might be no need to look at the same subject areas – all that is required is to establish whether the rhetoric of institutional policy is being recognised, operationalized etc. at lower levels and in different parts of the institution. However, there may be benefit in comparing the same subject areas.

There is a practical problem because there is no money in the project budget for fieldwork, which has created limitations on the methodology. There is no time or resource to survey every single faculty in each institution, but there is a need to consider the selection of the sample to control for bias.

Country reports are intended to make conclusions about practice in 1 country and about 4 institutions, with comparative analysis of commonalities/diversity within the country. Work-package analysis reports will consider commonalities/diversity across all the countries.

Kinds of data:

- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Stories, narratives, critical incidents
- Document analysis
- Observational data
- Visual data/mediating artefacts/diagrams
- Quantitative data
- Questionnaires/surveys

We can’t make broad statements about the totality of HE provision, only use particular stories to illuminate the picture at a given point in time. Our own position within the institution as researchers becomes relevant.

The role of drivers or motivators is important. For example, the lack of drivers can often be a barrier. In the case of Poland, EU money is an important driver and lack of money is a barrier. The word enabler might not quite be right in this context.

There was some discussion about whether there is any need to “re-visit” the theoretical model for data collection. There is concern that we can’t keep re-visiting work-packages as we invent new models or approaches. However, there is a good chance that some interesting ways of thinking about the data, or new lenses through which to view data may emerge throughout the life of the project and we might consider the value of “keeping our antennae up” as we work.

We should evaluate both external and internal barriers. Might it be useful to think about diagrammatic or other types of diagnostic representation of institutions and/or country contexts to make some useful comparisons?

We have to consider the level of analysis carefully. Systems? Institutions? Different types of institutions?

A task was completed in which country teams discussed the types of data they would expect to collect in support of their work-packages.

There is some concern over summer deadlines for data collection and some discussion about the possibility of moving deadlines for the submission of data. The submission of the 17th of August for national reports for WP6 might cause problems because of national holidays. WP6 has to be submitted by the end of October.

4. Planning for Work-Packages 6,7 and 8 (CO, SB, JK, CS)

Can we agree that if individual teams wish to limit the number of visits to institutions, that is acceptable, but there is no requirement to collect data for multiple work-packages at the same time? Yes, this was agreed in Riga.

The Portuguese team will also want to do 9,10,11 together. Other teams acknowledged the difficulties presented by the Portugese team and some discussion was had in relation to timetabling around holidays and other work-related timings. Can we agree a protocol for these work-packages at the meeting in October 2011 or would it be better in January 2012? **An agreement on protocol for work-packages 9,10 and 11 in October 2011 would be acceptable.**

Do we need to adjust our dates for data submission to reflect constraints due to holidays?

For WP6 the idea of critical incidents might be very important. We are looking for trends and illuminating stories, information about what kind of data is collected and how it is used

In different country contexts, the methodologies will change because of the very different national arrangements for access legislation. In Portugal, there is a national approach for access, but institutions can set their own local conditions. There are some classes of students e.g. adult learners that can be selected by the institution.

Are we just looking at undergraduate or postgraduate education? We have decided undergraduate only.

In the Netherlands there is a national policy of open access. This may mean that there is no data for some questions. This may also be true for other countries and it may be a very relevant finding that there is no policy or supporting activities

There is no section in the ESG dealing with access. Our framework for developing a report needs to consider how to make future recommendations to a revised ESG.

The definition and research context of access in some countries is different. For example, the concern about the impact of massification on the “quality” of education. The view of the UK team manager is that WP6 is essentially about the effective management of access policies. But where do we see access ending? We need to define the boundaries of access, because this has methodological implications (e.g. whether we need to speak to students etc). There is considerable challenge in organising panels of students and, in the UK at least, a proliferation of interest groups that would need to be involved.

There are different levels of awareness of access issues in different country contexts and different understandings of what “access” might mean.

Work-package 7 should retain the questions on student education. Should this work-package be only about student assessment or about broader aspects of student

Tuesday 7th June: Seminar chair: Professor Ray Land

1. Planning for Work-Packages 9 and 10 (LL, EC and JB)

There was discussion about the anonymity of data from participating national institutions.

Teams were reminded that comparative reports should be produced both in English and in the national language of participating countries.

The team discussed challenges associated with delivery dates for work-packages It was decided that the national teams would submit their reports for WP6 on 23rd September. The Prague meeting is on the 3rd of October 2011 and the focus of the discussion will merely distill some early findings from national teams that will help the WP6 co-ordinators to create a draft for 30th November and a final submission for 31st November 2011.

Further WP deadlines may be subject to similar revision.

HS agreed to send a revised list of submission dates and meeting dates.

Liudvika Leisyte presented plans for WP9. There was some useful discussion about the relationship between collection of data about practice and data about policy.

EC presented plans for WP10. There was discussion about whether the word “learning” as well as “teaching” might usefully appear in the questions. In some institutions, teaching is carried out by a wide variety of people (e.g, postdocs, teaching assistants etc). In some institutions, teaching is seen as a “lower order” activity when compared with research. There is some difficulty in addressing the role of the ESG in institutional contexts. Academic staff are very unlikely to be aware of the ESG. A useful addition might be to look at the management of teaching/research/administration load. Another dimension is the centrality of the discipline to the individual teacher. A particularly controversial topic might be that of academic freedom or academic identity in opposition to quality assurance procedures, which might be seen as “killing” trust in academic cultures. Is there a perceived threat to trust and do guidelines encourage people to play safe instead of innovating? The term “multi-employment” might be better replaced by “casualisation”.

2. Dissemination and project book (HE)

Should the book title include a reference to Europe? This might be a decision for Sense as it has marketing implications. One possibility is: **Overcoming Barriers to Achieving Quality in Higher Education: a European Perspective.**

Chapter titles to date should be seen as working titles and individual authors should decide on the final title as work progresses. We might encourage chapter authors to consider using the word quality in each chapter title. Thinking about keywords to facilitate searching might also be sensible. Each chapter should be about 6,000 words.

Will the chapters in section two be presented through the conceptual lenses introduced in section one? Authors might be encouraged to refer to the project theory, but the book is not the final report and authors are free to develop their own conceptual models. Authors are free to develop their chapters as separate pieces of writing.

Should access and secondary education be handled together? The project is funded under the heading of transversal bids and there was a requirement to look at two levels of education and we therefore need to make this explicit in the book. Although, from a commercial perspective this chapter looks a little odd and the title might be better if it included reference to transition between secondary and higher education.

The final deadline is April 2013. More details will be sent by the end of July 2011.

3. Summing-up (RL & HS)

On behalf of the UK team, Ray thanked all of the participants for their contribution to the seminar.