

MINUTES of the meeting between EUA and members of IBAR

(Identifying barriers in promoting the European standards and guidelines of quality assurance at institutional level and making recommendations as to how these might be addressed)

19.9.2011, EUA HQ, Brussels

Present:

Tia Loukkola, Head of Quality Assurance Unit, Institutional Evaluation Programme
Helena Šebková, Coordinator, IBAR, Centre for Higher Education Studies, Prague, CZ
Heather Eggins, Associate Director, IBAR, University of Strathclyde, UK

I. Presentation of IBAR project and discussion

A short presentation on “Overcoming Barriers to Achieving Quality in Higher Education based on the paper presented at the CHER conference (July 2011) was made by a member of IBAR, followed by useful discussion about the IBAR project.

Among points of interest raised was the fact that almost no research had been done previously on the issue of quality in higher education and its link to secondary education. Neither had much been done on quality assurance at institutional level. Both topics would be of great interest to EUA.

It was mentioned that EURASHE was examining the possible implementation of ESG in the vocational sector. The outcome of this work would be of interest to IBAR.

II. Presentation of the project undertaken by EUA on “Mapping the application and implementation of the ESGs (MAP-ESG) and discussion.

Tia indicated that, following internal consultation with EAU members, four draft reports, one from each of the bodies involved (EUA, ESU, EURASHE and ENQA) had now been produced, and revision of the final joint report was underway. The first preliminary results would be presented at the meeting on October 13, and would be posted on line for consultation for one month, following that meeting. Anyone, including members of IBAR, would be welcome to respond.

The Quality Forum would be held in Antwerp in mid-November and one session would be taken up with reporting on the MAP-ESG project. The launch of the findings would take place in Copenhagen on 17 January 2012 when a presentation would be made to the Ministers responsible for higher education. It is anticipated that Ministers may wish to propose that revisions to ESG would be considered at the following Ministerial meeting in 2015.

If this is so, then the IBAR project is particularly timely, as our recommendations, to be made by December 2013, could be considered by and fed into the suggestions put forward by EUA to the Ministers.

It was agreed by both EUA and IBAR participants that institutions had not yet had sufficient time to implement ESG and to gain enough experience with their use. The longer timescale for potential ESG revision (or rather improvement) would therefore benefit all parties.

EUA was currently of the view that ESG was a valuable tool if considered as generic principles and guidelines (as suggested in the contemporary version). The context of higher education institutions in Europe is highly diverse, in a variety of ways, and so a single monolithic approach to quality and/or specific requirements would not be feasible.

III. Conclusions

It was agreed that the meeting had been very timely, with a useful exchange of information. The EUA had recently published two volumes relating to Quality which would be useful for IBAR teams:

“Examining Quality Culture: Part I – Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions” and, just on Friday 16 Sept 2011 published *“Examining Quality Culture: Part II Processes and Tools – Participation, Ownership and Bureaucracy”*. Tia kindly gave us sets for each of the IBAR research teams.

Following a discussion of quality in relation to access, Tia also gave us two copies of a relevant publication which come out last year: *“Engaging in Lifelong Learning: Shaping Inclusive and Responsive University Strategies”*. It was agreed that in recent years the topic of widening participation had moved to the fore in Europe, and clearly ESG now needed to contain guidelines relating to this.

The EUA would welcome someone from the IBAR teams to participate in both the Quality Forum and the January Launch of the EUA research. We indicated that we would make efforts to effect this.

The EUA also offered to comment and/or give input to different aspects of our research where we thought it may be of help (e.g. the questionnaires before they were distributed, draft recommendation which we may be considering at the end of each work package).

The EUA would be happy to receive any information from the perspective of the institutions. This would provide a wider evidence base.

Both parties welcomed the opportunity to exchange ideas and agreed to establish more frequent communications, including that with IBAR members who are involved in EUA work in other capacities.

The IBAR team thanked the EUA for a most positive and helpful discussion.