Identifying barriers in promoting European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance at institutional level

Seminar, Prague 2nd-4th October 2011

Attendance list:

Czech Republic (CHES):
Josef Beneš, Jan Kohoutek, Vladimír Roskovec, Helena Šebková, Zuzana Šebková; Lucie Hündlová, Lenka Minksová
United Kingdom (University of Strathclyde):
Heather Eggins, Ray Land
Latvia (University of Latvia):
Albers Prikulis, Agnese Rusakova
Netherlands (CHEPS):
Marike Faber, Liudvika Leisyte
Poland (Warsaw School of Economics):
Jakub Brdulak, Ewa Chmielecka
Portugal (CIPES, A3ES):
Alberto Amaral, Sónia Cardoso, Orlanda Tavares
Slovakia (University in Nitra):
Alena Hašková, Lubica Lahká
EACEA – Brussels:
Erik Ballhausen, Aurélie De Wagheneire

Monday, 3rd October

9:00–10:30 Update on organizational and financial issues (EACEA + CZ)

Chair: Helena Šebková: Opening the 4th seminar of IBAR and introduction of participants from project partner teams. Special introduction of colleagues from the EACEA – Aurélie De Wagheneire and Erik Ballhausen.

Erik Ballhausen:
It is a good opportunity to see how the project works; to see the progression. Glad to share some comments about how we in the EACEA see the IBAR project. The EACEA adheres to the financial regulations of the Commission and is of assistance for clarification of expectations concerning financial matters. Aurélie De Wagheneire is a specialist on these issues.

Aurélie De Wagheneire: Presentation of financial aspects (see also the EACEA web page[1])
General characteristics of categories coming under eligible costs presented.
a) Staff costs consist of two parts: salary + social charges (concrete example of calculation in PPT presentation). Staff costs must be entered by all project participants and if there are costs for statutory and temporary staff, it is necessary to report both of them. It is also necessary to report actual costs, even if exceeding the corresponding calculations given in the project proposal. Maximum rates per country are applicable for the whole lifetime of the project.

b) Travel and subsistence cost must be applied for and reported based on beneficiaries' (project partners') internal regulations. At the same time the maximum daily rates per country should not be

1 PPT presentation available at <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/events/2010/documents/ka1_scr_coordinators_meeting/financial_aspects_2010.pdf>.

exceeded (maximum daily rates were published for the Call 2010 and must be adhered to for the whole duration of the project. Please, keep all originals (or copies signed by the person responsible for the financial management of the beneficiary) of the invoices and/or receipts separately for each beneficiary staff member receiving reimbursement/subsistence. If no overnight stay, subsistence costs maximum rates are reduced by 50%.

c) Equipment costs are limited to the maximum of 10% of total eligible direct costs.

d) Subcontracting cost have a limit of 30% of total eligible direct costs. Management of the project should not be subcontracted.

e) Other costs list as activities which are specific and necessary for achieving the goals of the project. The distinction between subcontracting and other costs should be kept (see the example in the PPT presentation).

f) Indirect costs are limited to the maximum of 7% of total eligible direct costs. Indirect costs typically include communication costs (postage, photocopies), and infrastructure costs (rent, electricity).

Ineligible costs are not linked to the undertaking of the project(for the list of ineligible costs see the Handbook.

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Transfers between individual costs categories are possible up to the maximum of 10%. A special request to the EACEA is needed for the transfer exceeding 10%.

Transfer costs charged by banks are eligible (this does not apply to the costs related to operating bank accounts). Conversion of actual costs into EUR is made one month before the end of the official reporting period, based on the exchange rate to that date, set by the EC.

11:00 – 12:30
WP 5: feedback and suggestions for future work (LT + others)
WP 6: comments and suggestions (for finalizing the WP6 (UK)

Chair: Jan Kohoutek: Opening the session. Brief characteristics of the course of work on the WP5.

Alberts Prikulis: Reflections on the WP5 from the viewpoint of the workpackage coordinator:

- Optimal if the national studies were of the same pattern/structure, following a specific template.
- Studies should not be very long, bur more precise in judgement, including the concluding identification of barriers to implementation (for WP5 perhaps more difficult to achieve due to its more general focus on QA policies).
- Some reports are done well, some not quite, which makes it difficult to compare them.
- As a WP5 coordinator, he didn't get much feedback altogether.
- Most comments from the CZ partners, also from PT and SK teams. Overall comments on more general issues not much on the actual subject matter.
- Suggestion: the resulting WP5 cross-country comparative study is on the internet site of the project, available for additional comments and improvements.
- The roles and responsibilities of the WP coordinator should be clarified.

Discussion:
Comment: In social sciences, findings usually not clear-cut, often the matter of "to-some-extent" findings. As to the WP structure, the corresponding responsibility for setting the structure goes with the workpackage coordinator.

Comment: The nature of the project is the identification of barriers. Possibly this is about what needs to be changed in the future, as the WP 5 is slightly different in this respect.
Comment: Policy implementation takes time. Hence, for the WP5, centring on institutional QA policies, putting in barriers and example of good practice may be a bit premature.
Question: What template should be used at the national and international level? Without the template, it is difficult to compare something which is different.
Comment: This issue also relates to a subject matter – not only about templates.
Comment: Everything is very changeable and much more information is needed to prepare the national studies.

Ray Land: Feedback and thoughts on the WP6 (Quality and Access). Suggestion that the next (below listed) points should appear in the finalWP6 cross-country comparative study:

- The nature of access to HE. It should be one of the most complex WP;
- Context: what's going on in the national contexts;
- Priorities for implementation: what are the different priorities for every country
- Commonalties/differences – what are the commonalities and differences among the countries
- Recommendations.

It is difficult talking about barriers, as what is a barrier for one institution can be an opportunity for another institution even within the same country. Some further considerations of the points in question.

Nature of access:

- There are many different agendas. Where access starts? In a way, it starts at the time when you are born. What is the "life cycle" access? Is it just about getting people to the university or to get them possibility to have a progress?
- Snapshot or picture of access at a national level.

Context:

- What are the national priories and trends?
- Competing agendas.

Priorities for implementation

- Are the observable effects good or bad?
- What are the commonalities and differences?

Commonalities:

- We think that there are similarities across all the institutions involved in the project
- All systems make allowance for disability: different countries, however, take different measures for individual disabilities.

Differences:

- Our systems try to understand how the people get to the system. What kind of support should be there not only to the students in but also through the system (higher education)?

Issues:

- How broad the access should be?
- Social and cultural capital: to what extent the university reflect on it in access policies?
- Is access an overly politicised process?

Possible recommendations

- 2 or 3 recommendation per workpackage (or more?);
- Barriers should be reflected in making recommendations;

- Briefing report prepared, including the most salient findings for every country. All project participants asked to:
  a) check the report (respective national summaries) for content and verification
  b) discuss and formulate the barriers to access pertinent to their national situation

Question: What do the barriers refer to?
Answer: They refer to improving quality because of the access processes.

Presentation and discussion of barriers to access to HE concerning individual participating countries.

14.30 – 16.00

WP 7: planning (CZ), revision of time-schedule.
Other WPs: design and organization (PL + others).

Chair: Helena Šebková: Introduction to the session.

Ray Land: Presentation of relations between incentives vs. constraints and opportunities vs. barriers.

- ***Contextual perspectives are important.***
- ***Resulting recommendations should cover both the supranational and national level.***

Discussion:
Comment: In WP6, we are provoking higher politics. Access issues may make very different kinds of institutions.
Response: Different corresponding concerns – on research, teaching or regional development – it is about articulating policies.
Comment: there are also stakeholder-related differences - what is good in access terms for university and what for students.
Response: Yes, true.
Question: How many recommendations there should be for all workpackages? Should there be 20-30? They might be overlapping.
Comment: It is difficult to give more general recommendations. You can have priorities. The distinction should be what makes sense for national level and for EU level (financial matters).

Jan Kohoutek: Presentation of content and organisation of the WP7.

- ***The WP7 (Quality and Students) is to focus on student assessment procedures only.***
- ***The template of the national study should include policy context, methodology, answering the research questions and summary of the major findings incl. identification of barriers and examples of good practice at different levels (supranational, national, local).***
- ***The deadline for submitting the national study to the Czech team is 16 December 2011.***

Discussion:
Comment: validation and evaluation of students is needed. But what are we going to describe? Some countries are in the time of transformation (new legislation to be passed), so it is difficult to know what to describe. SK + CZ – the same situation – new law is going the preparation
Response: The national policy is a process – it takes time to change university. It doesn’t change in one day.
Comment: The respective national teams may revisit the studies to catch up with the change processes.
Comment: It also possible to indicate the period for which the findings and recommendations are valid (e.g. in a footnote of the study)

Question: Are you happy with the deadline of the national report submission?

Response: It has been already agreed at the Glasgow seminar.
Comment: It is not just about a reporting period for the workpackage. It is necessary to consider not only the situation nowadays, but also the situation at the time of finishing the process.
Comment: Yes, change processes should be taken into account; it is the researcher's responsibility.
Response: We may not have a capacity to revisit each WP at the end, when the situation is changed.
Response: If you finish something now and your recommendations will be published in 18 months' time, it is hardly satisfactory. For this reason, policy changes have to be accounted for, but it is possible to state that the major focus is on this or that, though changes are to be expected. Closing comment: So, we are to keep track of changes.

Jakub Brdulak, Ewa Chmielecka: presentation of modified research questions for the WP10 (Quality and Teaching Staff).

Discussion:
Presentation of comments of the PT team on the draft WP10 research questions.
Comment: Question no. 8; no international common pattern what is a *good* teacher. It should be defined (reformulated). The corresponding standard exists only for Scotland.
Comment: Similarly, Question no. 5; it also has too much of normative orientation – what does *better* teaching suppose to mean? It should be rephrased.
Comment: Question no. 3 and 6 are similar. They can be merged.
Question: How detailed should the questions be?
Comment: We should give a somewhat general picture of the situation. Not to put every institution in for every answer. Preference should be given to generalised pictures.
Comment: If one wants to generalise, one needs to have enough detail on the institutional and national level.
Question: Which level of generalisation should be in the national study?
Response: We put together findings. We do not present four institutional cases in the national study. Hence, we do not have to refer to every institution when answering the research questions in the national study.
Comment: One general point which is relevant to the whole project. In Tate gallery, there is a giant spider, but he stands on many tiny legs. So, what we are doing now is amassing all the relevant tiny bits of information to produce the outputs. This is a lot of work and we have to acknowledge it.
Comment: Question no. 3 refers to teacher capabilities, which the researcher may not be qualified to evaluate.
Response: This question is from the original set of questions.
Response: Yes, but it is still very tricky and should be changed.
Comment: The WP10 may also refer to the students' assessments that have been held.
Response: In the UK, there is a commonly accepted distinction between the words assessment and evaluation. *Assessment* refers to *assessments of students' performance*, while *evaluation* actually refers to *evaluation of teachers by students*.
Comment: This is a very good point. All project participants should follow it when elaborating the national studies.
Comment: When we consider the policy, it is the crucial element. Is there any general understanding of policy culture?
Comment: Question no. 4 refers to the monitoring of the assessment procedure. It is about students, but it is also about students' satisfaction? Some teachers try to change the situation. We have differentiated students' satisfaction and a political agenda. One barrier, referring to the outreach of the government policy to the individual teacher in classroom, can be identified – clear-cut preference of research to teaching. In our department, teaching is punishment. They say, 'Don't spend much time on teaching'. As a university, if you decide to concentrate on teaching, it means you are a second-rate institution.
Closing comment: The viewpoints made in the discussion will be taken into consideration when modifying the WP10 research questions. *The modified version of the WP10 research questions will be sent over to all project participants by next week (by 16 October 2011).*

Alena Hašková and Lubica Lahká. Presentation of the WP11 research questions. The questions were divided into two major fields, i.e. process and subject matter (information retrieval) oriented. But there was also the effort to make open space for additional comments.
Agreement: Because of the limited time in this session. The current version of the WP11 research questions will be printed out to all participants so that it can be debated in the tomorrow's session focusing on research agenda.

16:30 – 17:30
IBAR theory: Where do we go from here? Project dissemination: update. Overall discussion.
Chair: Josef Beneš: Introduction to the session.

IBAR theory
Jan Kohoutek: Briefing project participants on the current version of the conceptual framework for the IBAR enquiry.

- ***Due to contributions by the NL and GB teams, the framework combines different theoretical perspectives.***
- ***Question: Where to go next? Should we be finalising the framework right now?***

Discussion:
Response: The construction of the framework should be seen as an evolving process, not ended by now.
Comment: Towards the end of the project lifetime, we need to interpret your findings and make the decision what the complex conceptual framework should be like. Till then, the framework should be continuously evolved and updated.

Project dissemination
Heather Eggins: Information to project participants about:

- ***The presentation of the IBAR project at a CHER conference.***
- ***Meeting with people responsible for the EUA project "Mapping the implementation and application of the ESGs" (MAP-ESG).***
- ***The EUA MAP-ESG – outputs, dissemination, possible links to the IBAR project.***
- ***Other presentation and dissemination opportunities: Quality Forum (November 2011), Copenhagen meeting of the BFUG (January 2012).***

Discussion:
Question: Anybody who is going to participate in the upcoming events? Someone from IBAR participants (e.g. from the NL team) should be coming to take part in the Copenhagen meeting.
Response: This is still to be considered in light of the IBAR budget.
Comment: Members of the PT will be present at the Quality Forum.
Question: Are there any IBAR promotional materials (e.g. leaflets) available? They could help us in disseminating the basic information about the project.
Response: Not at the moment.
Comment: Once they are created, it is best to upload them on the project website, where they can be downloaded by anyone interested. People will see what you are doing in the project.
Comment: The IBAR project has perfect timing, with recommendations to ESG to be finalised by December 2013, as it is anticipated that Ministers may wish to propose that revisions to ESG would be considered at the following Ministerial meeting in 2015.
Comment: Some splendid connections for the IBAR promotion have been developed in Latvia.
Question: What should be in fact presented about the project when the opportunity arises?

Comment: This may turn out to be a very sensitive issue – we must be cautious about the level of detail in our presentations.
Response: The best way for now is to refer to the project website.
Comment: It is likely that awareness of the ESG exists at the very highest policy level, it does not filter down to the academic community (not even rectors often know); reaching out to these lower levels is therefore crucial.
Question: Will all participating HEIs be anonymised in the project outputs?
Comment: The final project report will include acknowledgments. It is possible to explicitly mention the participating HEIs in it.
Comment: If in some country selected HEI has some problems it can be anonymous. But we can explicitly attribute example of good practise.
Comment: Anonymity may be a problem, especially in smaller countries. When writing about technical university in Brno, everyone knows what it is.
Question: Should the same institutions be selected for all the WPs (5-12)? Important implication for data collection – consistency or change?
Response: It is very preferable to keep the same institutions. If agreement how to go about a certain project issue is reached, it must be valid for every participant. Stable methodology is preferred to fulfil project objectives. To keep methodological rigour, go for consistency. Do not do something just because of feeling pressed by some external actors.
Comment on the WP12: joint responsibility of the CZ and GB team, modification of the WP12 research questions should be first discussed between the two teams and presented only after. The WP12 is still two years ahead, tomorrow we can fix how we can go about it.

Tuesday, 4th October

9:00 – 10:30
Problems resulting from the Monday's agenda. Focus on financial and organisational issues.

Chair: Helena Šebková: opening the session.

Erik Ballhausen: Presentation of the current state of the LLP programme with outlook to the future.

- LLP finishes in 2013, new programme is under preparation .
- The next call under a new programme in 2014.
- The EURYDICE webpage to be overhauled soon.
- Open Method of Coordination (OMC) applied for the Bologna process – it is a very open approach, making a platform for a real dialogue between the actors involved. The EC agenda for 2020 called 'Europe 2020[2]'. The agenda also includes goals for higher education. Useful to take note of this when undertaking the IBAR project.

Discussion:
Comment: The IBAR website is very good. Under 'Events', there can be links to the relevant publications (cross-referencing to other websites useful). The website can also be more effectively used for dissemination by including the 'Forum section' as well as promotional materials (leaflets …).
Question: What level of specificity should the IBAR recommendations be?
Response: They should primarily address three levels: supranational, national and local (institutional).

11:00 – 12:30

2 Available at <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm>.

Other outstanding issues with primary focus on research agenda.

Chair: Jan Kohoutek: opening the session.

Heather Eggins, Ray Land: Presentation of tentative recommendations for the WP6

- Access to higher education should make a section in the revised ESG Part 1.
- Encourage HEIs to take 'ownership' of access embedding a culture of good practice in this area.
- Introduce a greater capacity for HEIs to choose their students directly.
- Encourage HEIs to track their students' access pathways.

Discussion:
Comment: Some data – such as on ethnicity – are not available in every country. Availability of data on disability typically dependent on the respective students' volition.
Comment: HEIs may have little control over the access of students (see recommendation no. 3). Some tension between institutional autonomy and state governance is likely to occur.
Comment: No problems like these in Latvia or Lithuania (vouchers introduced in the latter country).
Comment: Each recommendation should be followed by a paragraph or two, explaining it further, including the way of its implementation.
Closing comment: The UK team will make use of these viewpoints. All other additional comments should be sent to the UK team by next Monday (10 October 2011).

Jan Kohoutek: During the remaining time of the session, the filling in of evaluation sheets should be done.
Alberto Amaral: The PT team happy with the already modified version of the WP8 research questions. The preliminary programme of the next Porto seminar will be e-mailed in two weeks' time (suggestions of the project coordinator are welcome).
Liudvika Leisyte: The NL team also considers modification of the WP9 research questions as sufficient.

Comment: Please, send over the latest versions of the research questions for the WPs 7, 8,9.
Response: OK, it will be done in two weeks' time at the latest.

Lubica Lachká: The Slovak team are not the 'owner' of the WP11. Currently the WP11 questions are in two major parts oriented on process and methods. However, ideas and contributions from all project participants are welcome. In Porto, the prefinal version of the WP11 research questions will be discussed.

Discussion:
Question: What is the purpose of providing data?
Response: It is about accountability.
Question: Should we also refer to the financial issues in the WP11?
Comment: It can be done, financial issues often covered in institutional annual reports on finance and management.
Comment: There are different groups in higher education, preferring different content of information and for different purpose. The stakeholder perspective is important.
Comment: In the WP11 we should concentrate on the link between quality and information, which is crucial. In the current ESG Part 1 content, information seems to be split.
Comment: Also important to consider national legislation, in some countries, there may be the Freedom of Information Act in place. Under this Act, all e-mail communication at universities are stored, nothing one writes in e-mails to students, etc. is private.
Closing comment: All viewpoints are appreciated, the project participants should send their suggestions to the SK team by 15 January 2012.

Heather Eggins: The WP12 research questions should first be discussed more fully between the UKand CZ teams (joint coordinators of the WP12). The ideas that other teams have should be sent either to Heather or Helena. As to the book as the final output of the IBAR project, Leslie Wilson has agreed to write a preface to it.

Jan Kohoutek: seminar close, thanking all participants for their input.