

## **Preliminary considerations and questions about the project**

**(Amaral et. al.)**

As the work on the project is about to start I would suggest that some further clarification of the theoretical framework is necessary, as well as an effort for obtaining a better match between the work packages and the seven standards of Part 1 ESG. It is very important that from the very beginning there is good coordination of all the national teams and that what each team needs to do is clearly defined and understood. The project is very demanding and time consuming and it may easily run into disaster if not enough time and effort are dedicated to create a clear framework to guide and coordinate the work of the different national teams.

### ***The project's objectives***

The summary of the project mentions its objectives are (i) identifying barriers to the ESG implementation at institutional level and giving relevant recommendations for the ESG Part 1 modification; (2) identifying the extent to which the ESG Part 1 implementation impacts on the interrelationship between the secondary and higher education sectors.

The project declares it aims at applying the theory of the ***implementation deficit*** (the difference between the declared and the achieved) to provide evidence-based knowledge on the ESG Part 1 implementation, including the impact of the ESG Part 1 on secondary education. The evidence is to be based on indicating the extent of the implementation of the ESG Part 1 standards in the seven domains complemented with the survey of internal QA systems.

The stated aims and objectives of the project are identifying barriers to the ESG Part 1 implementation, and based on that, providing recommendations to modification of the ESG Part 1 standards and guidelines pertaining to them. In more detail the objectives include, amongst others:

- a) Identification of barriers of the ESG Part 1 implementation at institutional level in the following domains: access, student participation, institutional governance and management, employers including private sector, teaching staff, information systems, quality and secondary education;

- b) Analysis of the impact of the ESG Part 1 implementation on secondary education.

**Target groups** directly involved in the project: decision-making bodies of HEIs, the academic community (influenced by the possible changes of the internal QA systems), directors of secondary education schools and others identified by snowball sampling. Students? Administrative staff linked to QA activities?

### **The “Theoretical underpinnings of IBAR project”**

The IBAR project aims at identifying the implementation deficit of the ESG Part1. Institutional policies contain *some* Work package 5-12 related goals (more or less fuzzy). HEIs implement these goals through policy instruments. Policy implementation can be studied through instruments used for putting the policy into action within a specific institutional context. The ***instrument-context approach to policy implementation*** makes use of one typology of policy instruments or draws from several typologies. Basic types of policy instruments/tools are: authority tools (regulation and law); economic tools (incentives and disincentives), information tools (mediated and interpersonal transmission), capacity-building tools (education, training), learning tools and informal procedures. Each type of instrument has several categories.

The ***instrument-context approach to policy implementation*** enables to penetrate complexity of policy implementation, as it can be applied for various organizational settings and levels (micro (institutional level) – mezzo (national/system level) – macro (supranational level)) across individual countries.

The ***instrument-context approach to policy implementation*** further makes it possible to identify and compare implementation barriers and examples of good practice. While the barriers help towards the implementation deficit, the examples of good practice can be expected to reduce it. However, to identify and compare barriers and examples of good practice, the ***policy context-knowledge is essential*** – must be included in each national case study.

### **The conceptual framework for IBAR**

The conceptual framework for IBAR being developed by Don Westerheijden focuses mainly on the ***identification of implementation barriers***, both external and internal, to be investigated at every work package. External barriers include national legislation and regulation (authority instruments), other policy instruments (e.g. economic,

information, capacity-building, etc.), including qualification frameworks, external stakeholders and others. Internal barriers address the level of “street-level power” (academics), middle level management, senior management, administrators, the institutional decision-making culture and how the governance structure promotes or hinders the ESG Part 1 implementation. Areas for analysis include the organisation of internationalisation and quality functions of HEIs, curricula revision and the role of the quality function, the views of “street-level” academics and decision-makers on the impact of ESG on curricula.

**Comment 1:** the theoretical component is not yet well developed and participants are apparently supposed to initiate the project without a solid conceptual framework. It is fundamental to clarify the relationship between the approach of the theoretical underpinnings and the emergent conceptual framework.

**Comment 2:** As Part 1 ESG only provides guidelines or orientations, not specific implementation objectives, and as there is not a demand for total compliance but rather to substantial compliance, applying the theory of the implementation deficit may offer some difficulties. Are the guidelines to be assumed as the implementation objectives? Or are objectives defined by national policies/authorities? Or participants enquire at institutional level what is the gap between the objectives set by the institutional management and their implementation?

**Comment 3:** Apparently the roles of students are conspicuously absent from the concerns of the project despite the statement in ESG standard 1.1 that internal quality assurance “should also include a role for students and other stakeholders” and the relevance given in ESG to student participation in QA ESG standard 1.2, guidelines, even at the level of external assessment. Are they indifferent bystanders of the Bologna process and quality systems? Or do they have a fundamental role to play in the whole process? Are they just clients or an important component of the learning process?

**Comment 4:** Neither the theoretical underpinnings nor the theoretical framework seem to pay at least some attention to ESG Part 1 implementation impacts on the interrelationship between the secondary and higher education sectors. Secondary education apparently emerges as an instrument for project approval rather than a real component of the project.

### ***Matching Part 1 ESG standards with Work packages***

When the seven Part 1 European standards and guidelines are matched against the eight WP 5-12 some obvious difficulties emerge, even if WP 12 is just considered as a compliance device for improving the relevance of the proposal for the Lifelong Programme of Education and Training.

Part 1 European standard **1.1 - Policy procedures for quality assurance** is directly addressed by Work package 5 (Survey of internal quality assurance systems) and Work package 9 (Quality and employers including private sector) in what concerns the role of external stakeholders. Part 1 European standard **1.3 - Assessment of students** is directly connected with Work package 7 (Quality and students). Part 1 European standard **1.4 - Quality assurance of teaching staff** relates closely to Work package 10 (Quality and teaching staff). Part 1 European standard **1.7 - Public information** is directly addressed by Work package 11 (Quality and information).

However there are apparent mismatches in all the other cases. Part 1 European standard **1.2 - Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards**, Part 1 European standard **1.5 - Learning resources and student support** and Part 1 European standard **1.6 - Information systems** have no apparent matches in the proposed Work packages. And the role of students, as already referred in Comment 2 is completely absent from any of the Work packages. At the same time Work packages 6 (Quality and access), 8 (Quality and Management/Governance) and 12 (Quality and secondary education) have no direct correspondence in any of the Part 1 European standards.

A possibility for improving the desirable connections between standards and Work packages would be to address standard 1.6 under Work package 11 (linked to the provision of public information) or under Work package 5 (a fundamental tool for internal quality assessment); to address the role of students under Work package 5 (a fundamental actor in internal quality assessment) and under Work package 10 (feedback to and evaluation of teaching staff); to address 1.5 under Work package 6 (support for new enrolled students) and/or Work package 7 (relating student success to learning resources and student support) and/or Work package 8 (the original question 3 of WP 8); to address 1.2 under Work package 8 (authority for review of programmes and awards) and/or under Work package 5 (monitoring and review of programmes and quality assurance).

