

# **IBAR Closing Conference, Prague, 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> November**

## **Minutes of the conference**

### 10th November: Closed session

- IBAR book: chapter proofs send to authors this week, corrections need to be finalised by November 22th at the latest. The proof of Chapter 8 did not arrive in time and has incorrect authorship. This can be fixed on the spot or via e-mail. Time of book publication: approx. late December. Each author gets one free copy. Will there be a correct (new) EU logo in the book? Yes, it will – the publisher will see to it.
- A. Rauhvargers (PPT): presentation of the first draft of the ESG revision including up-to-date information: Revision under a responsibility of the E4-Group plus Business Europe, Education International and EQAR representatives. In practical terms, the steering committee and the drafting group formed, the former to oversee the revision process. The revision is indented for policy-making purposes, more prescriptive in nature (changes in ESG1 numbering and content). Timeline: the beginning of March for submission of the ESG draft proposal to the BFUG.
- Discussion on revised ESG: Not much of life-long learning in the draft, but focus on recognition of prior learning plus learning outcomes. Not much reflection of the EU documents on (higher) education but this may be rather difficult to achieve in reality. Does the draft contain any specific discussion on international students and disabled students? Yes, under student diversity. Observation: the draft contains just four guiding ESG principles (the current ESG contain ten such principles).
- H. Šebková (PPT): Presentation and reflection of major points on the project funding rules, plus also of a new EU logo and accompanying text for 2013. Twenty percent of the overall amount expected to be received in 05-06 2014. What are the project assessment criteria? They are in the EACEA instructional handbook.
- Possibilities of IBAR follow-up: R. Land: UK suggestions: data for each IBAR WPs can feed into the process of ESG revision. However, there are wider issues – the European and national levels seem to be in control of educational organisational and procedural structures ... this not really applies to the institutional level. The institutional level shows particular institutional dynamics and, in relation to the ESG, different handling of the document (from ignorance to consideration). What seems to be needed is the realistic compound between bottom-up and top-down quality cultures (middle territory). A new project might focus on how such a compound should look like and operate. This as a major concluding point for the IBAR synthesis report? D. Westerheijden offers help – making of a diagram for higher clarity and understanding of the compound. Multidisciplinary approaches to institutional quality cultures (managerial, psychological ...) can be reflected in such a compound. The same applies for different approaches to lifelong-learning and education as such (private good in the UK vs. public, social good in Europe elsewhere). Sources of project funding can be found e.g. in the programme ‘Horizon 2020’.

11th November:

Opening by H. Šebková (director of the Centre for Higher Education Studies)

Introduction of invited experts by H. Šebková

Welcome speeches by: T. Hruďa (Vice-Minister for Higher Education and Research)

: V. Havlíček (Rector of Czech Technical University)

- H. Šebková (PPT): Presentation of general IBAR introduction. Discussion: none
- D. Westerheijden (PPT): Presentation of IBAR theory and methodology incl. drivers. Discussion: How to accommodate differences in interpretation of IBAR results? No one unifying approach, sensitiveness to national specifics, what most transferable put into the comparative reports. There have been efforts to use inter-cultural consensus. How did the IBAR research deal with difference organisational levels? Eight topics (thematic areas) were predefined, a lot of interviews were conducted with different members of academic community, this meaning that topics were leading, levels followed. No use of (small/large)-n surveys? No, there were just semi-structured interviews. How willing were HEIs to participate? Mostly willing, but differences in every country and also dependent on (current) institutional developments.
- H. Eggins: Presentation of IBAR dissemination overview incl. book (authors from all IBAR countries involved) and conference presentations. A complete list of IBAR dissemination activities is available on the IBAR website. No discussion.
- A. Prikulis (PPT): Presentation of WP5 major findings (internal quality assurance systems). Discussion: What were the types of higher education institutions (HEIs) involved in the IBAR project? Mostly public HEIs, either large or small, there were 28 HEIs involved in total. In the Czech Republic, the same body (Accreditation Commission) makes and enacts the quality standards. Who formulates the quality standards at national level and how is the process managed in other countries? There are differences in country approaches as to who defines, owns and checks up on quality. To make an example, in the UK, the process usually starts with the White Paper as an input conceptual document, then it continues with a period of consultation (views in writing, sessions) incl. stakeholder representatives, leading to redrafting of the document to the final shape; the extent of consultation varies by government. The ESG are intended only as a framework, hence the talk about procedures and translation into national or institutional realities is necessary. IBAR WP5 findings are similar to those obtained within the related EUA projects (e.g. Examining Quality Cultures). The issue how to further elaborate links between quality assurance of teaching and research may be somewhat controversial; it is quite institution-specific (professional vs. research oriented); presently there seem to be loopholes in national legislation concerning teaching and research linkages. There could be a scope in the newly revised ESG to address this issue. Was there any specific research into the impact of internal quality assurance measures? Not in this WP which was conceived as largely a document study.

- H. Eggins (PPT): Presentation of WP6 major findings (quality and access). Discussion: access seems to be a key dimension for the ESG but how broad should they be? If access is included, you can add also other dimensions but the ESG then become quite blurred. Access issues are politically important (typically widening access to higher education as a result of intervention from the government level). But there is also the importance of institutional policies, access might be difficult to implement as the ESG area, not least because there are no common cross-country definitions but strong links to the national government decision-making. In the UK, access issues are also nationally-oriented, with layering of national access policy measures as in opposition to tension and competition at institutional level which results in the institution's need for interpretation (risky but necessary). How to accommodate the social dimension into access policies? The revised ESG should perhaps reflect on the admission procedures of HEIs. It is also important not to lose sight of linking access measures to successful graduation.
- B. Stensaker (PPT): Presentation of IBAR project evaluation. Main point: 52 barriers to ESG1 institutional implementation identified in total – how they can be synthesised? Some kind of systematisation related to barriers might be useful, with some recourse to institutional logics as a way to reduce overall complexity. Discussion: Should one argue for ESG expansion or rely on other policy initiatives/instruments? Perhaps, a bolder approach to ESG is needed. This stands as a challenge with creative thinking needed also, in a wider sense, for engaging academics and students in institutional quality procedures. Also, there is the legacy of system traditions (Napolitanian, Anglo-Saxon ...) but we have not developed further on these, possibly a new set of models/typologies needed to capture the diversity of European higher education. Creation of hybrid models can be helpful here to come up with the conceptualisation of patterns beyond the generic German, French, etc. traditions. A starting point for modelling should probably be the national level. But observe the danger of becoming old-fashioned when sticking primarily to the national level as, for institutional-based investigations, there is a need to move away from hierarchical settings. Are there, in IBAR, possibilities for re-modelling the traditional concepts of European higher education? Not really, this may be a topic for a new project.
- J. Kohoutek (PPT): Presentation of WP7 major findings (quality and student assessment). Discussion: What are the institutionalised means of debating student assessment practices? These are mostly academic senates located at faculty level. The revised ESG should cover (indirect) arrangements for increasing awareness of the ESG among academic staff.
- C. Sarrico (PPT): Presentation of WP8 major findings (quality and governance). Discussion: Quality and governance – there are (normative) tensions in this relationship, is that good or bad? Tensions may not be necessarily essentially problematic but also useful – quality matters and gets discussed. A good governance approach can be a way to bypass/limit quality-governance tensions. There are limitations by national legislation; the ESG should be for external codification. Primarily top-down or also hybrid (combination of top-down and bottom-up) approaches to institutional governance identified. The signs of collegiality are present,

but there is no pure bottom-up governance model among IBAR HEIs ... and we can hardly get back to the 'old times of collegiality'. In this respect, it may be useful to move from consultation to co-decision in institutional governance.

- L. Leisite (PPT): Presentation of WP9 major findings (quality and stakeholders). Discussion: Any examples of good practice in stakeholders' involvement? Perhaps, the Dutch case with active involvement of students in social science & humanities. Importance of student training (how to represent, how to influence) and professionalisation should be observed. There are also differences in involvement of internal stakeholders (students) and students-as-alumni representing external stakeholders.
- J. Brdulak and E. Chmielecka (PPT): Presentation of WP10 major findings (quality and teaching staff). Discussion: What is a good teacher? The answer couched in the ESG language (to be prepared, to be honest ...). The notion of a good teacher can easily be discipline-specific (disciplinary cultures having a role), not universal. The issue of a good teacher is also organizational question concerning not only an individual, a recruitment concept is important. EUA should be a regulatory body for academics, regulation should come from the academic community itself. There seems to be a need for transformational approach to quality which empowers students, not quality structures and processes. Also, there seems to be little empirical evidence on higher education teaching staff (activities, profiles). Comparative studies on academic profession are rather hard to find. Perhaps, this is another theme for international research.
- L. Lachká (PPT): Presentation of WP11 major findings (quality and information). Discussion: What do we really mean by providing information? To do something with data to improve the (aspect of) institution. Institutions with good or not-so-good websites in France, sometimes data are collected but the point is if (and to what purpose and extent) they are analysed and used.
- R. Land (PPT): Presentation of WP12 major findings (quality and secondary education). Discussion: Guiding (counselling) students in transition from secondary to higher education establishments is of crucial importance. Plus there is the issue of (in-) formality and nature of inter-linkages between the two sectors

#### 12th November:

- R. Land (PPT): presentation of IBAR tentative conclusions: The role of organisational dynamics (vs.) institutional logics is of importance. Organisational context matters. Thus, there is the importance of disciplinary and organisational cultures with the strong and weak points. Cultures and contexts may work as explanatory variables for the barriers identified. There might be a space for high fidelity vs. low-fidelity models; plus there is always the issue of trust. Can a compact between bottom-up and top-down (middle territory, interpretive nexus) approaches be taken as a solution for ESG development? This compact is likely to be dependent on institutional leadership and good governance.

Discussion: High/low fidelity approaches: the whole idea of Bologna and the ESG is low-fidelity, but the situation may be different within the individual countries (and their translations to national contexts). However, the conceptual models should also take account of the institutional level(s). The ESG should stay low-fidelity but there will probably be continuous complications in the ESG translation process, with practical contradictions between how the ESG are written and used. Furthermore, there seems to be the issue of the range of instruments and players involved and that of focus – should one deal both with instruments and players and which players are the most relevant for the ESG? The ESG in principle do not deal with authorities/Ministries. Quality assurance has a great potential of taking differences seriously, tensions should be perceived as normal (effect of corporative cultures?) but things are getting more serious as we go global (academics ‘not on message’). The Finnish experience with the reconsideration of the HE funding model after the passage of new legislation is positive as far as academic cultures and disciplines are concerned. But there still may be different behaviour of actors across countries though they formally belong to the same category. In Portugal, academics are generally not satisfied with quality procedures ... are the academic tribes changing? There are documentable differences between academic staff in life-science and history (NL study) overall showing that low-credibility units are changing as a whole but, in terms of mid/high-performance units, senior scientist remain the same (collegial) whilst junior academics get socialised into different (corporate) environments, (publication machines etc). Who of the actors is actually involved in ESG modification? How is it possible to enhance actor involvement (and do some actors need to know?). A solution might be to leave room for interpretation as long as the ultimate goal of ESG is achieved (i.e. better education for European students). Insights from instrument theory beneficial to make sense of barriers – high impact vs. low impact instruments.

**Close:** H. Šebková: factual work will probably be ok, financial reporting might be more of a problem. After December 31st., all IBAR activities are ineligible for funding, pre-paid activities should also officially take place by the end of the year. Can the design of the final synthesis report be modified? Possibility to modify the report design, the important thing is that all results of the project should be sent in to the EACEA by the end of the year. The IBAR web page can be kept alive for the next year – all further dissemination activities are welcome to be sent in.