



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES UNIVERSITES

INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES BUREAU BUREAU INTERNATIONAL DES UNIVERSITES

IAU Task Force on Access to Higher Education
1st Meeting
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SUMMARY REPORT



CALOUSTE
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LIST OF ACCRONYMS

ACE	American Council on Education
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAU	International Association of Universities
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OU	The Open University
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TF	Task Force
UK	United Kingdom
US / USA	United States of America

I. BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION TO THE TASK FORCE

The Administrative Board of the International Association of Universities (IAU) agreed, in late 2005, that 'Access to Higher Education' is a policy issue of global importance and a topic of highest interest to members of the Association in all regions of the world. For this reason, the Executive Committee agreed to form an Access Task Force to examine the various access-related issues and help guide the reflection of the Association towards concrete proposals for activities to undertake over the next two years or so.

More specifically, the Task Force mandate is to:

- a) Establish the parameters/pose the primary and secondary questions that IAU may wish to address. *What is the critical access issue in each region? What are the obstacles for increasing access? What policies are being implemented to overcome them? To what extent is distance education addressing access issues? How is the equity challenge treated in various regions? What are the areas that are most susceptible to examination on a global basis? What role does private higher education play in terms of access? Where could IAU add value to what is already going on? Etc.*
- b) Point to overview information about the state of the debate, identifying few seminal reports or documents on the topic.
- c) Identify experts in various regions who could contribute to the discussion from a research and institutional policy perspective.
- d) Examine possible actions that IAU could undertake to advance research and policy development in this area but also to serve its membership.
- e) Contribute to development of the agenda for an international conference in 2007 on the topic of access (general or specific focus).
- f) Investigate the possibility of a moderated electronic discussion prior to the Conference or to share with a broader community the outcomes of the work of the Task Force.
- g) Possibly draft an IAU Policy Statement related to issues of Access for discussion at the 2007 Board Meeting and International Conference and final approval by 2008 General conference.

The Task Force is chaired by Prof. José Ferreira Gomes, Vice-Rector of the University of Porto, Portugal (Deputy Board member of IAU) and its members are renowned experts from Brazil, India, Africa, Europe and North America. For a list of Task Force members and meeting participants see Annex 1.

The main objective of the initial Task Force meeting in Porto, Portugal on September 15 and 16, 2006 was two-fold: first, to identify those access issues that have the broadest international resonance and thus would be most relevant for the global membership of IAU and second, to determine how to turn the examination or exploration of such issues into a membership-useful activity or service.

PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE MEETING

As there were relatively specific expected outcomes for the meeting, a set of five questions were elaborated in order to structure the discussion accordingly. These questions also corresponded to the sequence of items proposed in the Draft Agenda (see Annex 2).

Prior to the meeting, the Task Force members were invited to reflect on and briefly answer the following questions:

1. In your country/region and/or institution, what is the most critical access issue for higher education institutions?
2. Have there been major policy reforms, government programs and/or major research initiatives or specific strategies to address access related issues in your country and region? Please identify further sources of information and bibliographic resources that may be of interest to IAU.
3. Higher education funding is a related, but an equally vast topic. How can we best link access and funding in a useful and feasible manner in our deliberations? Are there other public policy issues that are of direct importance to the access discussion?
4. Are there any 'universal' values or principles that should underpin access policy in all regions and that, might be helpful for all IAU members as they develop or advocate for access policy and initiatives?
5. Is there a place or need for an international discussion to stimulate, inform, and improve policies and initiatives that increase and broaden access to higher education? If so who should be engaged in such a discussion?

The replies received were collected in one document and distributed to all TF members before the meeting. These are available from the IAU.

II. PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

OPENING SESSION

Eva Egron-Polak thanked Prof. Gomes for accepting to chair the Task Force and for acting as host for the first meeting which would allow IAU to draw on expertise on access from around the world. She briefly presented the IAU to the Task Force members stressing the expectation that the work on access would fit within IAU's mission and functions, which include:

- 1) Offering a global higher education forum for sharing perspectives, experiences and needs from HEIs in all regions;
- 2) Undertaking analysis of trends and disseminating research results; and
- 3) Advocating positions or statements of principles based on IAU values.

The goals of the meeting were reiterated. The objective of the first day was to map and identify key access, success and retention issues. The second day would serve to determine what added value IAU could bring in this area.

Prof. Gomes welcomed the Task Force to Porto and introduced the University of Porto. The university was established in 1911 and is now the largest in Portugal with 22 000 undergraduate and 5000 graduate students enrolled. He explained that the Higher Education system in Portugal is two-tiered with both universities and polytechnics.

Members of the Task Force introduced themselves. All were present except Prof. John Ssebuwufu, who, due to visa problems, had not been able to attend.

Eva Egron-Polak underlined that the composition of the Task Force and the meeting agenda were constructed in order to enable IAU to bring to light the different and quite contrasting policy discussions and realities concerning access-related issues in all parts of the world both, developing and industrialized countries. The different needs and rationales related to increasing versus broadening participation or responding to minority needs and other inequities in different systems etc., were all important topics but needed careful contextualization. Also the TF was reminded to keep another important distinction in mind, namely the policy discussions taking place at the national/governmental level and at the institutional level. She concluded by emphasizing that 'access' should be read as a catch phrase for a whole set of related issues such as equity, retention, support, and success.

NATIONAL CONTEXTS PRESENTED BY TASK FORCE MEMBERS

SESSION 1

Mapping the Access Landscape

In response to the first questions (see page 4), Task Force Members reviewed and amplified the feedback that they had provided IAU, focusing on their own countries and experience in their region. The summaries below are based on their comments during the meeting. The Task Force members were particularly encouraged to concentrate on the rationale for increasing/widening access, in addition to identifying the barriers to access.

Portugal

Prof. José Gomes and Dr. Alberto Amaral explained that in Portugal, economic returns for higher education (HE) remain very high. Perhaps more than elsewhere in EU countries, HE is seen as good investment for social mobility. The gross participation rate in HE exceeds 50%. Although it is important to note that 80% of Portuguese workers have no HE and therefore second chances to enter HE is a key issue.

Dr. Amaral noted that the massification of HE does not necessarily mean equity in access. Access is often more related to family background (different life expectations), than to the availability of scholarships and funding. He stressed that 'cultural capital' is a better predictor of HE participation than many other variables.

Prof. José Gomes added that family background also influences performance at lower levels of education (ex: high drop-outs rates at age 15). Most of those who do succeed and graduate from high school do go on to HE.

The rationale for access policies in Portugal is the stagnating and even declining HE enrolment (due in part to an aging population and low birth rates). The decline in enrolment hit private institutions particularly hard. Moving away to attend a public HEI can cost the same as enrolling in a private HEI, while living at home.

The government wants to increase participation, but this policy appears driven more by international comparisons, than goals of increased equity, social cohesion, integration or social mobility. Equity of access to higher education, though, appears to be satisfactorily achieved through scholarships.

USA

Dr. Jacqueline King highlighted that access is mostly linked to discussion of competitiveness, both economic and academic, which in turn is linked to the concerns of low interest or enrolments in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). In the US, the problem of poverty and social inequity (and thus access to HE for social cohesion reasons) was brought to

light as rarely before by Hurricane Katrina. Also, a decline in foreign students after 9/11 (due to visa, immigration issues, etc.), has resulted in concern over enrolments in higher education.

The USA is unique in many ways, but the 'cultural capital' issue is very important as well. For pupils in 9th grade, college is a popular expectation, but as students go through high school, expectations decline (especially for low-income students). Information availability on funding opportunities for poorer and/or minority families is a problem.

The messages about HE that students receive throughout high school need to be explored. There is a need for special programs working on student services (both at governmental level and by NGOs). However, these initiatives require high levels of contact/mentoring between professionals and students, and thus are very labor intensive. At present they only exist on a small scale. For the industrialized world, the challenge is working on the social expectations or cultural capital issue on a much bigger scale to make an impact and to broaden the socio-economic and cultural base for HE participation in HE.

Dr. King also explained that needs-based financing has had slow growth in the USA and that under the pressure of competition and the search for prestige, institutions use merit financing more. Merit financing usually benefits the well-off students but is easier to explain and justify.

The US government does not reward HEIs for *widening* participation and broadening access. Rewards come from rankings and prestige. Over the past 30 years equity in HE has stagnated not improved (cf. the movement to ban affirmative action; and increasing tuition and focus on merit). Consequently, in elite schools there is more social stratification (with a small cadre of elite minorities).

UK

Dr. Christina Lloyd reported that in the last two years, universities in the UK have had more places/vacancies at entry level, causing the government to focus on increasing participation of 18-30 year olds to 50% by 2010. Currently the participation rate is around 43% in England and more for the UK as a whole.

Paradoxically, all those who meet the entry requirements at 18 years *do* go on to HE (as in Portugal). The problem is that few pursue secondary school far enough to obtain these requirements. Thus focus is needed on younger children to ensure HE is perceived by them as a goal. Dr. Lloyd pointed out the program *Aim Higher* and stressed that it set aside funding to establish partnerships between schools and HEIs in order to increase access.

In the UK, the culture of the individual, familial and societal environment is also closely related to access to HE (link with social stratification and the 'cultural capital' as seen in other regions/countries).

Some funding to promote recruitment from state high schools is available (ex. at Oxford University) but like in the USA, this becomes the recruitment of a small elite of under-represented minorities, with the focus being again on merit rather than need. At the Open University, however, participation rates for under-represented students are good and have become stable and could improve.

Dr. Lloyd underlined the critical nature of information dissemination in ensuring that those who need financial support are aware of what is available. It should not be a barrier in the UK, as there are many loan schemes and other funding sources. Bursary programs have been in place for a while but all schemes will now be even more essential, as the UK has just introduced undergraduate tuition of up to £3,000.

Paradoxically, it seems to some that tuition fees could bring more equity into the system, as loans will be available for all. However cultural differences in regards to debt and debt aversion will persist and may worsen the situation with regard to equity.

Group Discussion

Discussion after these presentations, all from industrialized countries, raised the following general points:

- Gender remains an issue in widening participation, especially as women are often among the low-income HE students.
- The high cost to HEIs of widening access, coupled with the lack of rewards for doing so, and the fact that widening participation can lower scores on performance indicators.
- Choosing between widening participation at home to fill up spaces rather than recruiting from abroad - is it a choice between social cohesion and cost?
- The nature of the overall funding of universities also impacts on access as exemplified in the US where research universities are almost independent from state funding and receive much more federal funding. Thus the pressure from state legislators for widening access is targeted mostly at comprehensive universities and community colleges.
- The paradox that widening participation can sometimes legitimize tuition fee increases if consequently more funding is provided for low-income students.

Brazil

Prof. Marilia Morisini noted that the key access issue in Brazil is the low overall participation rate. Now there is universal access to elementary school, but secondary school participation rates are still only 44%. Net participation rate in HE is 10%. Only two-thirds of high school graduates enter HE.

The National Plan aims to reach a participation rate of 30% in HE by 2011 with 40% of enrolments in public HEIs, while also improving quality in private HEIs and increasing availability of distance and flexible courses.

Private HE as always played an important role in Brazil, but recently there has been a big expansion of private HEIs with low entry requirements. Enrolment in private HEIs represents 89% of total with great concentration in Management and Law.

Despite such low participation rates in HE, there are increasingly unfilled places due to financial barriers. Consequently, government policy is focusing on this aspect. To counter the financial barriers, there exist several public affirmative action programs such as PROUNI for example. Prof. Morisini stressed that though scholarships are needed, they must be available not only to facilitate entrance/access but also to accompany the learners for the duration of study programs in order to improve retention.

While a main barrier to HE access in Brazil is financial, others, such as cultural background, are also present.

Group Discussion

Main points raised in the discussion that followed the presentation about Brazil included:

- Quality of education, proper evaluation and stronger engagement of students are key issues with regard to access and success;
- The absence in Brazil of a dual higher education system with polytechnics and universities is a serious problem for increasing access;
- Retention and success in secondary school are key to increasing participation rates;
- The focus on ethnicity/race with respect to affirmative action programs in Brazil was noted;
- The problem of skewed expansion in HE which created discrepancies regarding Law and Business versus Science and Technology programs, as well as between long versus short programs.
- Employability issues and follow-up with graduates should be kept in mind.

India

Prof. Shyam Menon explained that Indian society, with a total population estimated to be nearing 1.1 billion, can be described as highly stratified with upper and middle classes of some 100-150 million and as many as about 300 million below the poverty line. About 90% of work force is in the unorganized sector which is characterized by large scale underemployment and poor employment quality.

Of the 9% of the age specific population who participate in some kind of post secondary education, only about 2% may be attending what could be called a marketable HEI, with less than 0.5% attending prestigious and internationally renowned HEIs.

One of the key issues in India is language. Although it is estimated that about 350 million in India 'use' English language, only about 40 million (4% of the population) use English virtually as their first language. No doubt, this class constitutes only a small minority. But, they hold controlling positions in professions, business and government. Children of this class and those who aspire entry into this class attend a highly vertically stratified private school system, leading to the elite higher education institutions. This phenomenon creates extremely rigid social barriers preventing social mobility and promotes persistent elitism. The language issue in India shows that access to HE is not only about merit/competencies of the individual student but also a whole set of other (cultural) issues.

The Indian government has a policy of affirmative action. About 22.5% of places in HE is earmarked for the marginalized social groups. There is new a policy initiative which is likely to be implemented through the next three years by which this quota will increase to about 50% and will include more social groups which are identified as 'backward' (socially marginalized). However, the difficulty is to ensure that these underrepresented social groups have the requisite skills, including language, to benefit from an increased quota in HE. Only a small proportion among such social groups complete schooling and become eligible for entry into HE. This problem illustrates that access initiatives should intervene at an earlier age (especially regarding language training).

The key target age with respect to improving access to and participation in HE is from Grade 9-12. During this time period, preparations for the board examination at coaching classes outside of regular schools are decisive for upper middle class families. In addition, English and Math are essential subjects during high school, but good quality teaching in these subjects is often lacking in the state-run schools.

HE in India, particularly that provided by public institutions, is highly subsidized. In fact, tuition fees in such HEIs are much lower than in many private secondary schools. This extent of subsidy for higher education seems somewhat misplaced. Those who most need funding do not get it when they most need it.

Group Discussion

Points raised during the discussion of the Indian context were:

- Access cannot be separated from quality and success: access to marketable and high quality education is what counts.
- In India, though, this also means that access to internationally recognized HEIs often prepares for exodus to the US and the UK.
- This relates to the issue of differentiated missions of HEIs and the stratification of the system with only some (few) HEIs concerned with world-class quality, others related to local and regional needs.
- There should be heterogeneity of provision within one university, not only across institutions.

SESSION 2 *Linking Access, Equity, Quality and Funding*

While continuing to present the national contexts of each Task Force member, the second session focused more on the essential connections between access and other issues, such as:

- The emergence of an increasingly diverse student body (part-time/employed students)
- Funding issues (institutional and public)
- Quality assurance and accreditation issues
- The nature and impact of the admissions process on access

Other aspects of the discussion were: the cost of increasing/broadening access and the initiatives underway at the institutional and government level offering promising solutions. A specific focus on institutional mission differentiation; technology and distance education, and other approaches that are being adopted around the world to expand access were also examined.

Part-time and/or Employed Students

In the **USA**, 50% of students are part-time, 80% of all students work. This creates a problem for retention and persistence; however, it is a response to the issue of costs and funding as work-study programs are based on need. It was also noted that credit card debt is a major problem in the US.

In the **UK**, there is less funding flexibility to shift from full-time to part-time study, although the difference between part-time and full-time is diminishing. At the Open University, an exception to this rule, 70% of students work and all are part-time. More and more UK students are starting HE as part-time students.

In **Portugal**, there exist no reliable data on the part-time or working student population. 20% is working at least 1 hour a week, compared to 49% in Spain; 47% in France; 91% in the Netherlands; 65% in Finland; 58% in the UK. Evening classes are very limited and costly. Recently, for admission purposes, the age for 'mature' students who enjoy more flexible access to HE, has been lowered from 25 to 23 in order to enlarge the pool of potential candidates for HE.

In **Brazil**, there is less flexibility in the labour market, therefore less students work. In the public HE system, night classes make up 30%. In the private HE sector, they represent 68% of all classes offered.

In **India**, even when fees are low, living expenses are high. Dormitories are provided to students, though not to those who work. Therefore, students do not declare that they work.

Funding: who gets what?

In the **UK**, there are premium incentives for HEIs committed to widening participation. Whereas, in the **US**, the distribution of public funding and the

incentives related to access and equity are not what they should be. Community colleges, with higher percentages of low-income and disadvantaged students, get less funding (per student) than prestigious research universities. There is a need for concrete access initiatives at all levels. For the most part, inequities are highlighted and addressed due to the practice of 'shaming'. Paradoxically, the US media usually attack institutions – not the government - for being elitist.

In **India**, the new 50% quota policy to enroll marginalized social groups has not been accompanied by real financial incentives to improve equity. In fact, student bursaries based on economic needs criteria are not looked at favourably; most are based on social categories. In order to take in the expected increase in students due to the increased quota, a corresponding increase in government funding is needed. Without such funding quality is most likely to suffer. Currently, 60-80% of government subsidies for HE go to staff salaries and pensions. Also, India will continue to see the 18-25-age population increase. Consequently, distance education enrolment will increase, but cost and funding remain a major problem. It is most likely that impact of the quota will be felt mostly in the upper strata of the targeted social groups.

In **Brazil**, there is both social and needs based criteria for funding. The main incentive program for increasing participation is entitled PROUNI. It is designed for the private HE system and uses federal tax breaks to increase student enrolment by 20%. It is a redirection of funding, rather than increase in funds available. No similar program is available for the public HE system, but quotas for under-represented minorities have been introduced.

In the **US and UK**, there has been a proliferation of bursaries and different funding options, which has made the overall student funding system far too complex. In the end, such proliferation of schemes and opportunities has a negative impact unless coupled with the availability of clear information and a major dissemination effort especially to those who need it most.

The question of whether there are cases of good practice or reliable models of funding was raised. Certainly, the American trend towards 'autonomizing' or privatizing funding by reducing dependence on state funding is seen as a model for HE in some parts of the world and public-private partnerships are being sought and investigated. Unfortunately, it also seems as if the American example of private non-profit HEIs, whose establishment began 200 years ago, is used to legitimize the push for increased privatization elsewhere and the rise of commercial for-profit private HEIs around the world even when the context is widely different.

It was noted that it would be interesting for HE systems to **combine** the *mission differentiation* which exists in the US with the *widening participation premium* of the UK.

Quality Assurance (Accreditation) Initiatives

As increased and broadened access to HE only makes sense if it opens access to quality education, the discussion turned to the different ways in

which quality assurance or accreditation mechanisms took into consideration a variety of access-related issues.

In **India**, the accreditation process does not take into consideration students and student profiles in any accurate manner. National accreditation is voluntary and certain professions accredit their own HEIs or programs.

In the **UK**, the quality assurance process accords a premium for policies and measures aiming to widening participation. Also, with the introduction of tuition fees, HEIs can choose to charge up to 3000£ but they must demonstrate to the government, in a transparent manner, the availability of a student-funding/support scheme. It is to the advantage of the HEIs to actively pursue the widening participation agenda.

There exists an *Access to learning fund*, offered by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), which also collects annual statistics from HEIs for publications. The *Office of Fair Access* also establishes generic criteria for HEIs to develop bursaries that are predominantly focused on need rather than on merit.

In the **US**, there is no specific link between access and the quality assurance system but, as mentioned above, a lot happens through the 'shaming' process (for example, when statistics about Pell grants¹ are published).

Disadvantaged students who receive government funding often choose private-for-profit HEIs over community colleges. For-profit HEIs, which represent 5% of total enrolment in the US, actually receive public financial support by educating low-income students as these can be completely funded by government loans.

In Europe, within the **European Union**, and related to the *Bologna Process* there is a lively debate about accreditation by type of institutions (research intensive universities; technical institutes; private HEIs, etc.). There are concerns regarding the creation of a highly stratified, rather than diversified system of HE. For example, in Germany, 2 billion Euros are being allocated in order to establish five elite universities. There is also a widespread problem of the academic drift or HEIs trying to all become graduate research/PhD granting institutions with little regard to quality. This phenomenon is also driven by the ranking processes, which are increasingly dictating the 'prestige' of various HEIs. However, if mass HE were of high quality in all institutions, the issue of access to elite HEIs would be of less importance.

The preoccupation of accessibility to top universities is universal and concentrates too much energy and attention on a very small number of institutions instead of focusing on improving the quality and access to other HEIs. The US example with its fixation about who has access to Ivy League schools is a case in point.

¹ The Pell Grant program plays a unique role in promoting economic and social mobility in the United States. It is the nation's largest single source of need-based grant assistance, serving one in four undergraduates, or more than 4 million students annually. The key indicators of the growth and distribution of Pell Grants over the program's history show how these grants fit into the overall college financing scheme of low-income students as well as how they address the larger goal of opening access to high-quality higher education.
Source: King, J. E., **2003 Status Report on the Pell Grant Program**, American Council on Education, Oct. 2003.
[http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2003_pell_grant.pdf]

The Admission Process and its Impact on Access

In **Portugal**, the high school leaving examination and an entrance examination are required for access to the public HE system, unless the candidate is over 23 years of age.

In the **UK**, to enter HE, an 18 year old needs A level exams. University admission offers are based on predicted results and confirmed after the examinations. For candidates who are more than 21 years old, there exist more options, such as open entry to the Open University; specialized Access courses; Open University credits as alternatives to A levels, etc. Other initiatives include creating new entrance examinations at Cambridge University to differentiate among the many candidates who have high scores at A levels.

In the **US**, community colleges have open admission, requiring a high school diploma or equivalent. Consequently, these institutions are relatively accessible, as high school leaving requirements are much lower than university entrance requirements. Admission to four-year HEIs is granted through a variety of ways but most often after consideration of a complex mix of aspects including high school grades, courses, SAT/ACT scores, rank in class, essays, extracurricular activities, and sometimes an interview. Private universities have a more holistic admission process, while public universities often have cut-off grades.

In **Brazil**, admission to public HEIs is based on a mix of the high school leaving examination scores and an HE entrance examination. The high school leaving examination tests knowledge acquired rather than aptitude. Private HEIs have open admission. Although, for a PROUNI scholarship, a minimum examination score is required in combination with a financial need assessment thus blending need and merit considerations.

In **India**, a Board Examination Certificate concludes twelve years of schooling. Certain undergraduate programs also require going through an entrance examination; others impose very high cut-off marks in the Board Examination. These cut off levels change every year depending on the number of applicants. Some programs have as many as 100 applications or more for every place. The highly selective process of admission to select HEIs can result in fierce competition among secondary schools and coaching classes, sometimes leading to unfair practices. Students prepare with mechanical memorization and often subvert the requirement of critical thinking to pass these examinations. This is also the case elsewhere, for example the SAT frenzy in the US. The Indian Open University has open admission, but very little by way of follow-up with regards to retention.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues covered during the country-specific and issue-specific presentations of the Task Force members demonstrated that **local** economic, demographic and social conditions and the **specific HE context** play a central role when determining the *key policy issues* related to access and/or retention, success etc.

In fact, the wide spectrum of realities presented, led the group to conclude that an international examination of the topic presents a continuum of issues and concerns with, at one end, *developing countries* concerned primarily (but not exclusively) with **increasing access** in **quantitative** terms to achieve higher, overall **participation rates** and, on the other end, the *industrialized countries* preoccupied more (but also not exclusively) with **broadening or widening participation** and especially improving **success and retention rates**, particularly for learners from under-represented groups.

For future discussions and activities, it was deemed essential that IAU recognize and integrate all aspects of this continuum in its reflections.

At the same time, all participants mentioned a number of issues as well as possible solutions and recommendations. These **RECURRENT THEMES** can be grouped into to three distinct areas/groups. First, focusing on the pre-HE social context, targeting high school age youth and the 'cultural capital' variables of their social, economic and family environment. Second, the institutional context which centres on how access is influenced or impacted on by such processes as admission, accreditation, funding, mission differentiation and the race for prestige and elitism, enhanced by rankings. Finally, the public policy context presents rationales, obstacles and solutions specifically of interest to policy makers working on access.

The recurrent themes along with the most salient comments or recommendations are presented in the table below:

PRE-HE SOCIAL CONTEXT

IMPORTANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL	<p>Access is a question of having access to choices and how to broaden these choices. In order to improve access to HE, there must be a focus on secondary education in order to <i>raise expectations, improve retention and increase interest</i> in HE among all students. In other words, making HE a realistic choice.</p> <p>Access to HE is intimately related to <i>preparation</i> for HE. Consequently, quality preparation at the secondary level is essential so that all (or more) students can be <i>admissible</i> for HE.</p>
CULTURAL CAPITAL AND FAMILY BACKGROUND	<p>Cultural capital and family background are key determinants of HE participation. Overcoming barriers based on cultural capital and outreach to under-represented groups is labour intensive and few incentives exist both for individuals and for HEIs.</p>

INFORMATION	The availability and relevance of information and its dissemination needs to improve.
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INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

ADMISSION PROCESS	<p>Current admission practices are not ideal for enhancing <i>equitable</i> access because they tend to be rather inflexible and focused primarily, if not exclusively, on merit or demonstrated achievement rather than potential achievement or aptitude. Admission should be based on this potential, which is more difficult to measure and recognize. More flexibility is needed in the HE admission process with less focus on grades and a shift towards a more holistic method of assessing applications, although this approach is far more labour intensive.</p> <p>Broader criteria for excellence should be articulated. Excellence tends to be viewed as an individual quality, however life experience is more about social interaction, teamwork and <i>collective</i> learning.</p> <p>Admission based on a differentiated and more complex view of potential and excellence is linked to institutional differentiation of HEIs. HEIs must move beyond the admissions/entrance framework and adopt a more student-oriented perspective. Students should be viewed as a continuum and not as two distinct groups of those admitted and those rejected (the consequence of having cut-off grades).</p>
ACCREDITATION	<p>There should be a move towards more portability/flexibility in accreditation (credit transfer, work experience credits). This flexibility can increase access and also support lifelong learning. However, a balance must be created between a flexible HE system and a cohesive HE system (to avoid creating lower quality pick-and-choose degrees).</p> <p>With respect to <i>residency requirements</i> (usually a minimum of one year of study at the same HEI), full-time residency can be restrictive and therefore the terms of residency must be clearly defined in order determine the degree-awarding HEI.</p>
ELITISM	<p>There is persistent elitism in HE and social <i>stratification</i> rather than social <i>mobility</i> seems to be perpetuated.</p> <p>Access is about raising the educational capacity/capital of society; therefore, the focus on elites (top 20%) must be shifted to the base (other 80%).</p>
RANKINGS AND	<p>As the number of students attaining HE grows, the low success rate that was endemic in some regions becomes less tolerated. Consequently, tensions exist between the goal of widening access and broadening participation on the one hand, and maintaining rankings and prestige on the other hand.</p>

PRESTIGE	<p>maintaining rankings and prestige on the other hand.</p> <p>Strategies to retain 'access' students and improve their academic success should become a priority.</p> <p>Rakings need to include benchmarking for equity, accessibility and throughput improvement.</p>
DIFFERENTIATED MISSIONS	<p>With increasing participation in HE, the need for institutional differentiation becomes paramount. The differentiation of HEIs while also guaranteeing <i>quality education</i> and <i>employability/ marketability skills</i> is an effective tool for addressing access issues.</p> <p>The saturation and imbalances within the disciplinary streams in HE (for example, the popularity of management, law etc., and the declining interest in mathematics, science and technology fields) must be addressed.</p> <p>The pertinence of actual curricula should be re-examined in light of more student-based learning. For example, the UK Open University's "<i>Taster</i>" courses. These are short courses with only <u>optional</u> tutoring and assignments, which are useful for getting 'access' students interested without feeling obligated to succeed and continue on.</p> <p>The recognition and acceptance of value in all parts of the differentiated HE system rests on the quality of all parts, employer acceptance of graduates and credentials and strong public communications campaigns.</p>
FUNDING SCHEMES	<p>The frequent <i>mismatch</i> between funding availability and needs is problematic. Examples include: merit versus needs-based funding; support for HE rather than the secondary level; funding for exclusive/elitist public higher education, etc.</p>

PUBLIC POLICY CONTEXT

RATIONALES	<p>Rationales for national level policies vary, but those listed below were cited by the Task Force members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased participation - Broaden/widen participation (the diversity argument: HE should reflect society) - Institutional or disciplinary survival - Economic competitiveness - Social cohesion
OBSTACLES	<p>Obstacles standing in the way of policies targeting either increased access, wider participation or greater success and retention in HE were numerous and varied greatly. Here are those mentioned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural capital, including family background, language, and expectations;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial conditions, including availability of support, attitudes to debt, and disincentives at HEI level; - Quality of pre-HE preparation; - Insufficient or inappropriate information about HE, about support available etc.; - Poor understanding of certain blockages
SOLUTIONS	<p>Possible solutions that may address the themes and obstacles above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fitness for purpose (ex: UK access courses) - HEI mission differentiation - Affirmative actions - Improved linkages with secondary schools - Funding support for entry and for counseling <p><i>Possible steps to be taken:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raising awareness and aspirations at the high school level. 2. Getting students into HE (flexible admissions / identifying potential) 3. Helping students succeed in HE Governments need to be involved in the entire process instead of only concentrating on filling <i>admission</i> quotas and avoiding dealing with student-support <i>during</i> the course of their studies. 4. Inciting HEIs to make their educational experience better (diversifying missions, taking into account employability factors and the nature of the labor market). <p>An Example:</p> <p><u>Distance education</u> possibly used (i) to reach non-traditional students and (ii) to increase the supply of higher education or (iii) to make HE affordable to social groups or in geographical areas that would be otherwise left out, by allowing learners to earn a living.</p> <p><u>The Open University:</u> No entry requirements. Students assessed on results during the course of their studies. Therefore, student support <u>during</u> studies is essential for retention and success. Assessment during study is intensive. (Less than 50% of first course students continue on to take a second course).</p>

NEXT STEPS

Potential IAU Policy Statement on Access

An international Policy Statement on this issue would be a useful tool for policy advocacy around the world, especially in developing countries. It could also be linked with the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education +10 in 2008/9.

IAU to act as a platform for collaborative research

To start with the collection of data from official sources such as UNESCO and OECD, etc.)

Porto Meeting Follow-Up:

1. Improve Survey Questions
2. Prepare draft Summary Report of Porto Meeting, circulate to TF members for review and approval
3. Collect other experts and contacts to contact to broaden survey
4. Disseminate questions to broaden survey to other countries
5. Collect examples of good practices (examples of public policy, institutional support, transition mechanisms, etc.)

Important upcoming dates

October 2006: IAU Board meeting, Task Force Chair reports and solicits support for next steps

November 2006: send out questions to a maximum of 50 additional contacts and prepare basic statistics on the countries to be highlighted in survey. IAU will coordinate dissemination, however, Alberto Amaral agreed to circulate questionnaire to the network that he is working with on the same topic.

January 2007: deadline for replies from all experts asked to provide data

February 2007: First draft of policy statement prepared for discussion by TF at 2nd meeting in Washington DC, held in conjunction with ACE Annual Conference on the Access Imperative, February 10-12. The 2nd TF meeting will concentrate on Technology as it affects access, support and retention.

ANNEX 1

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Prof. José FERREIRA GOMES, Task Force Chair

Professor and Head of Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Sciences, University of Porto

Dr. Alberto AMARAL, Task Force Member

Director, Center for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES)

Dr. Jacqueline E. KING, Task Force Member

Director, Center for Policy Analysis, American Council on Education (ACE)

Dr. Christina LLOYD, Task Force Member

Head of Teaching and Learner Support, the Open University, UK

Prof. Shyam B. MENON, Task Force Member

Professor of Education, Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi

Prof. Marília MOROSINI, Task Force Member

Professor, Faculty of Education, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul

Eva Egron-Polak, IAU Representative

Secretary-General and Executive Director, International Association of Universities (IAU)

Dominique Garro-Strauss, IAU Representative

Project Assistant, International Association of Universities (IAU)

REGRETS

Prof. John SSEBUWUFU, Task Force Member

Director of Research & Programmes, Association of African Universities (AAU)

ANNEX 2

Access to Higher Education, Task Force Meeting
15 –16 September, 2006, Porto
MEETING AGENDA

Círculo Universitário
Rua do Campo Alegre, 877
Porto, Portugal

Friday, September 15, Day 1

9 am – 12:30 pm **Session 1**

Mapping the Landscape of Access and Access-related Issues

The goal of this session will be to ascertain what are the main questions and challenges in the broad ‘access to higher education’ debate; where national and regional preoccupations are similar and where they diverge; what major trends in reflection and policy making can be observed around the world and which institutions, governments and/or organizations may be leading the way in these discussions. [cf. *questions 1 and 2*]

12:30 - 1:30 pm Lunch

2 pm- 5:30 pm **Session 2**

Linking Access, Equity, Quality and Funding

This second session will focus on the essential linkages that need to be drawn between discussion of access and other issues, in order to find answers to questions such as ‘access to what?’ and ‘access for whom?’ The cost of growing participation and the strategies, policies and initiatives underway at institutional and government level that offer promising solutions will be discussed as will success rates after increased and/or broadened access has been secured. Institutional mission differentiation, technology and distance education, and other approaches that are being adopted around the world will be examined. [cf. *questions 3*]

8 pm **Dinner hosted by Rector of the University of Porto**

Saturday, September 16, Day 2

9 am - 12:30pm **Session 3**

International Collaboration to meet the Access Imperatives?

During this session participants will be asked to reflect on how international collaborative efforts may help address the challenges of access, what gaps and needs may exist in data gathering, in research or in the more general reflection underway on this topic. Are there common or universal values and principles that might be usefully articulated to help advocate for more access policies and initiatives might be identified? Who should be around the table when such articulation takes place? [cf. *questions 4 and 5*]

12:30 - 1:30 pm Lunch

2 pm- 3:30 **Session 4**

Next steps for the Task Force and for IAU

This last session will aim to draw up specific recommendations for the IAU Administrative Board concerning the topical focus that the Association’s work on the issue of access to higher education should take as well as suggestions about the nature of the work the association should undertake. In addition, Task Force members will deliberate on the structure, topics and possible speakers for an international conference to be organized on this topic in 2007.