



Report of Second Meeting of IAU Task Force

The second meeting took place in **February 2007 in Washington DC, USA**, in conjunction with the ACE annual meeting on the same theme. ACE is a member organization of IAU and focusing on the Access Imperative offered an opportune occasion for the Task Force members to participate actively in the conference – two were panellists, and to attend the sessions.

During this meeting, the TF examined the progress made so far in the data collection and to review the draft report. It was agreed as the next steps, IAU would

- Continue to collect data, particularly by filling in some geographical gaps in the current survey
- Improve some of the statistical information to be included as background for all 17 countries covered by 'snapshot' survey
- Reorganize the draft report according to the main themes as they emerge from the survey findings and the TF discussions.

In view of the TF, the most important themes that the IAU report will need to address include:

1. Increasing access (human capital development) versus (or and) Widening participation (social cohesion)
2. Funding issues (with disclaimer)
3. Policy measures and programs at the governmental level
4. Institutional change (with institutional programs and policies)
5. ICTs

Finally, the discussion during the second TF meeting focused mostly on these areas and can be summarized as follows. This by no means constitutes the 'findings' or conclusions reached, so far. Rather it is the reflection of the TF on the responses received to date from surveyed contacts and in some 17 countries.

- Funding issues

Governments often want more widening access than institutions can manage. Widening participation is more expensive than increasing access, a fact that is overlooked by governments. In addition, the funding needed for post-entry support of access students is often underestimated. *Personalization* is important for access/support policies, especially "personalizing" support in order to improve retention and success.

In the USA and elsewhere, funding is often spent on the most prepared students. The students who need the least support are the ones receiving it, as they are also the most proactive in the search for student funding. If it is to address the widening access objective,

criteria for student funding support should be multi-dimensional including merit, excellence, need and potential.

Funding also goes to the best institutions with the most developed student support services and resources and with the most per-student spending. There is a need for the creation of conditions and incentives that reward those institutions/programs that demonstrate successful widening of participation. It should go to ALL institutions, not giving less to elite HEIs, but giving more to all HEIs (ex. the widening participation premium in the UK.) Funds must be allotted to help institutions *implement* these access programs.

- Excellence and Equity: tensions between increasing access and maintaining quality

Widening and increasing access does not mean the lowering of standards, as quality and access (and equity and excellence) are not mutually exclusive, though often viewed as such. Quality, success and recognition should not be measured by entry standards and enrolment, but by exit standards or graduation (learning outcomes). Excellence criteria are too often based on who we keep out and must be shifted towards measuring success of those who get in despite difficulties and graduation rates. Excellence means helping ALL students graduate.

Institutions bear a huge responsibility in ensuring post-entry success (access is not just about opening doors.) Implementing a policy of access or one aiming to widen participation in HE is quite different. Each policy needs to be made explicit and distinct instruments and mechanisms put in place for each. Too often widening participation goals are subsumed or hidden in general increasing participation strategies

- Problems of meritocracy

Meritocracy is of course an objective to be pursued in principle (World Higher Education Conference of 1998). However, for it to be fair, the issue of a level playing field for all students needs to be addressed. This means finding a balance between ability, potential and performance when considering merit. As it is unlikely that secondary school education will improve and fully succeed in raising all students to the same level, there is a need for “remedial” education or “bridging programs” (ex South Africa.)

- Different pathways into and within HE

Entering HE should not be a decision taken at age 13 or 15. A National Qualifications Framework can help access by allowing and recognizing different pathways to HE entrance. The American CED exam is an example of a second chance or alternative route to HE. Efforts to recognize and assess experiential prior learning can also be helpful.

In some African countries, the HE entrance exam is knowledge-based, and has been called the “exclusion exam” because it is too standardized and a huge percentage fails. There is a need to move away from those standardized tests that create exclusion and instead develop tests or measures for assessing applicants’ potential, which can lead to more inclusion. A *range* of entrance criteria is needed and not one single exam. A balance between potential type exams and knowledge type exams is needed as well as an examination of which types can help improve access. Also, students need to be provided with the means and knowledge to prepare and succeed in these tests

In the USA, there are huge variations in entry requirements even though work has been done with high schools on the definition of state-level common college entry standards (modifying high school curricula, grade 11 measuring exam.) In theory the SAT was supposed to be more egalitarian, but in practice it has not helped access because inflexible cut-off grades fixed by HEIs (though SAT scores generally only count 20% in the admission process.)

- Quotas and affirmative action issues

This issue is extremely delicate and very context/country specific (cf. culture, history, minority groups...) Provision of affirmative action at the tertiary level is not enough, stratification and competition occurs already in early education levels.

Timelines for Next Steps for IAU and Task Force

During the 2 months or so following the second meeting, IAU would attempt to complete the data collection by adding a few contacts in China and Russia. As well at least two African nations would be added to the survey through the assistance of the AAU representative.

The Task Force members all committed themselves to identifying possible sources of information and commenting on the documents produced by IAU.

It was agreed that the 2007 IAU Conference – Global Forum on Higher Education 2007 Malaysia would serve as a milestone for the work on Access. A Plenary and Workshop session will be devoted to this theme. As well it is expected that the draft Report and Policy Statement would be prepared in time to be discussed and validated there during the Forum and with the Administrative Board of the Association which will be meeting in Penang just before.