

HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

# Annual Report 2018 to September 2019<sup>1</sup>



Summarized for the 2019 Annual Meeting of the International Advisory Board

<sup>1</sup> Based on the HAC Annual Report for 2018 as adopted by the HAC Board on 1 February 2019, with updates until September 2019.

In 2018 and the first half of 2019, the financial state of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) continued to be stable. The new HAC Board, appointed 1 March 2018, and the Secretariat operate on the basis of the strategic plans. The HAC Strategy 2019-2024, and the subsequently passed Activity Plan 2019-2021 govern the HAC's operations in the coming term. The HAC sees itself first of all as an impartial quality evaluation body that supports the quality assurance of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Hungary. The HAC quality criteria support HEIs in fulfilling their responsibility toward assuring their internal quality and translating the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) for their internal structures.

#### 1. HAC Board and committees

The new Board composition was published in the official Hungarian Gazette on 14 March 2018, with the six-year terms running until 29 February 2024. The inauguration meeting took place on 29 March with the participation of Zoltán Balogh, Minister for Human Capacities, who oversaw higher education at the time. Also attending were László Palkovics, then Secretary of State for Education and Zita Horváth, Deputy Secretary of State responsible for Higher Education.

With the establishment of a new Ministry for Innovation and Technology (MIT) in May 2018 headed by László Palkovics, the oversight of higher education has been transferred to this ministry in September 2019. The Board elected two vice presidents, László Hunyady, chair of the Medical and Health Education Committee, who also coordinated the quality assurance of medical education for the American organization NCFMEA and more recently WFME. The other is Gábor Hamza, chair of the Legislative Committee.

Gyula Bakacsi chairs the Quality Assurance and Development Committee and László L. Kiss the HAC's Committee on Strategic Planning. The latter, composed of Board and expert committee members, worked on the first draft of the new HAC strategy for 2019-2024 and contributed to the first three-year action plan. The Quality Assurance and Development Committee's task is to advise the internal and external quality evaluation based on thematic analyses, benchmarking and further analytic in order to contribute to the development and change management of HAC. The committee is composed of Board members and external stakeholders from higher education with expertise in quality assurance and evaluation.

The Legislative Committee, composed of experts in various legal specializations, is assigned to update and provide the legislative background for the HAC's operations, including the new Founding Charter and By-Laws such as the new Organizational and Operational Regulations. The former has been approved by the Ministry of Human Capacities while the latter one, accepted by the 11 October 2019 Plenary of the HAC Board waits for the MIT's endorsement.

Changes in the expert committee structure began with a new Committee for Sport Sciences and a new name for the Teachers' Training Committee to Committee on Pedagogical Studies expressing the broader expertise required. Further changes in the HAC's committee structure took place in 2019. A separate Committee for Economic Science split from the Committee for Social Sciences, since a large part of the applications had come from this field and required additional experts. The Committee on University Professorships and Doctoral Schools was divided into two second-instance committees; the Committee for Professorship Evaluations and the Committee for Doctoral Schools Accreditation.

The chairs of the expert committees produced reports at the end of the year about the work of their teams and also commented on HAC procedures related to their brief. On this basis, the documents for ex ante procedures for the accreditation of new programmes are being revised.

The HAC also has two statutory committees whose mandates ended in 2018. The Prime Minister appointed the new Board of Appeals in February 2019 and the Minister of Human Capacities the Board of Financial Supervisors in March 2019.

The positive financial situation of the HAC allowed a one-time honorarium to be paid at the end of the year to the 112 expert committee members, who otherwise work pro bono.

## 2. Activities

### 2. a. Institutional accreditation

With the initial five institutional accreditation procedures based on the new, ESG 2015 guidelines completed in early 2018, the guidelines were revised following extensive feedback from the pilot. The new, currently used guidelines were passed on 23 February 2019.

Following an amendment in the government decree that determines for which procedures the HAC may charge fees (Govt. Decree 19/2012. (II. 22.)), HEIs have to pay the accreditation agency for institutional accreditations. The HAC in March 2018 determined a varying fee scale in proportion to the size of the institution. It has adjusted the scale in 2019.

Along with the fees, the HAC has introduced contracts with the HEIs that set down their respective services, rights, and deadlines. Procedural guidelines for carrying out the evaluations were also issued, covering the submission of applications to the site visit, report and accreditation decision. The fees and procedural guidelines were revised at the end of 2018 to extend to evaluations until 2020.

In 2018, five state approved theological HEIs governed by the responsible Bishops' Conference were evaluated. In 2019, accreditation procedures of ten HEIs were conducted so far; three received positive decisions, two will be monitored in a follow-up review, and five have to submit an intermediate report.

### 2. b. Accreditation of education and learning outcome requirements

New study programmes in Hungary are granted license to operate in two stages. Initially, education and learning outcome requirements set down the name of the degree; the field; the length of studies; number of total ECTS credits and modules; the knowledge, competences, attitude, autonomy and responsibility to be attained in line with the Hungarian Qualifications Framework; and the entry requirements. If a HEI wishes to start a new programme where the framework requirement has already been accepted (issued as a ministerial decree), the HEI may file an application for a new programme, which will contain the specifics of that provision. In both procedures, the HAC is mandated by law to act as an expert in their licensing procedures for the Educational Authority

Of the 16 education and learning outcome requirements evaluated in 2018, the HAC passed positive decisions on ten while six decisions were negative. In the first nine months of 2019, 15 applications were discussed, with 9 positive and 6 negative decisions.

### 2. c. Accreditation of new programmes

As an expert activity for the Educational Authority, the procedure falls under the General Administrative Code, which went into effect in 2018, setting the deadline for administrative

procedures at five months. The HAC's internal procedure timeline was set at 90 days, since it encompasses the search and commissioning of experts as well as their evaluations, followed by the expert committee and then Board decisions. The five month deadline, which includes the internal administration of the Educational Authority, is thus pressing, especially when the application requires additional information to be submitted by the applicant. The HAC has initiated a discussion with the Deputy State Secretary for Higher Education to take this procedure, similar to that of the education and learning outcome requirements, out of the administrative code jurisdiction. With the change of the HAC to the new Innovation and Technology Ministry, these discussion will have to be resumed.

In 2018, the HAC passed positive decisions on 71 new programme applications, of which 37 were accepted with comments. Another 60 applications were not passed. For the first nine months of 2019, there were 103 applications for new programmes, 21 of them given positive decisions, 28 with comments, and 54 negative decisions.

#### 2. d. Monitoring procedures for the phased out cluster programme accreditations

Monitoring procedures were required for programmes in the health sciences, sports, economics, and public administration clusters, with 41 decisions passed. Some of them led to the revocation of accreditation.

Several HEIs turned to HAC to ask whether new ex post programme accreditation procedures were to be expected, since their accreditation terms were running out. The HAC informed the institutions that cluster accreditation was not a procedure initiated by the HAC, rather, the minister may request these in accordance with the relevant government decree (19/2012 (II.22.)). The last such procedure was completed in early 2017.

In 2018, 36 programmes monitored were given positive decisions, with 15 passed with comments. Five programmes were not accredited or withdrawn. In 2019 there were two monitoring procedures, both of them positive.

#### 2. e. Evaluations of university professorship applications

University professorship applications, which are not subject to ESG, go through two tiers of committees before being decided on by the Board. Following the preparation of the application by the assigned programme officer, it goes to the expert committee for the relevant discipline (or two committees in case of interdisciplinary areas), which discuss the external experts' evaluations according to general and discipline-specific criteria related to higher education activities and scientific achievements. With their conclusion, the application then goes to the Committee on University Professorships and Doctoral Training, and with their judgment on to the HAC Board.

In 2018, the Board passed 116 positive and 32 negative decisions on university professorship applications. In 2019, these figures were 122 and 37, respectively.

In order to ensure a harmonized procedure, in 2018 the HAC Board decided to request two external evaluators for all university professorship applications, where before only one was required if the applicant held the title of Doctor of the Academy of Sciences. University professorship applications constitute a large part of the HAC's time, and applications were submitted almost continuously. For sake of rationalizing resources, the HAC Board decided to accept applications between September 1 and March 1 of each year, which leaves time for the universities to nominate the candidates to the minister responsible for higher education and be appointed by the President of the Republic by September 1<sup>st</sup>.

## 2. f. Ex post evaluations of doctoral schools

Up until the first half of 2019, doctoral schools were evaluated based on a set of formal criteria every six months.

In the 2018 spring and autumn periods together, the HAC passed 51 positive and five negative decisions on doctoral schools. In 2019, the last decisions were to be passed at the September Board meeting but one monitoring process is still not completed. Altogether 143 positive and 11 negative decisions were passed this year.

The procedure has been phased out, following repeated recommendations by the HAC International Advisory Board and a specific recommendation by the ENQA review panel. The overarching reviews conducted every five years were redesigned based directly on the ESG. A dedicated working group in the Secretariat proposed the new criteria and guidelines, which were sent for comments to a range of external stakeholders. A pilot round with six doctoral school was launched with their site visits starting in October 2019.

## 2. g. Expert opinions for reviews of operating licenses on request of the Educational Authority

Within the scope of reviewing operating licenses, the Educational Authority requested the HAC to provide nine summary expert opinions. The request pertained to 300 heads of study programme at nine HEIs, and the procedure encompassed more than 600 external experts. These administrative tasks are disproportionately high in proportion to the results of the procedures, especially in light of the fact that it is subsequently up to the Educational Authority to impose sanctions or not.

The HAC has initiated discussions with the Educational Authority to review such procedures, and negotiations are ongoing.

## 3. HAC participation in other organizations

The HAC delegated István Greiner, nominated to the HAC Board by the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, to represent HAC in the Dual Training Council. It is a crucial step, since these programmes are not accredited by the HAC and do not comply with its criteria, while they may count toward higher education credits. The aim is, therefore, to harmonize the evaluation criteria with the HAC's and the ESG.

HAC Board members Valéria Csépe, László T. Kóczy and Tamás Sterbenz are members of a Scientific Council of the Hungarian Scientific Publications Database run by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. External evaluations

### 3. a. ENQA and EQAR

Following the external evaluation of the HAC by an ENQA co-ordinated panel in spring 2018, the ENQA Board passed a decision on 13 September 2018 to renew the HAC's membership until September 2023.

Along with ENQA membership, the HAC requested to be listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). With the decision letter by the president of the EQAR Register Committee dated 10 April 2019, the HAC is now listed in EQAR until 30 September 2023.

The recommendations of the ENQA review panel are on the HAC website.

The conclusions of the Register Committee are on the EQAR website.

### 3. b. NCFMEA accreditation and WFME

The HAC continues to hold recognition of its medical education accreditation by the National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation (NCFMEA). With this, the medical programmes of the four Hungarian institutions of medical training (one medical school, three medical faculties) are recognized in the United States. The NCFMEA report, forwarded to the HAC by the Ministry of Human Capacities, requires the HAC to report within two years with special attention to standards and regulations that ensure that the aims of the medical programme are set by the teachers of the medical school and these aims are referred to in developing programme curricula, and are used in evaluating the success of the programme.

In addition to the four medical schools in Hungary, the HAC Expert Committee for Medicine, the assigned programme officer, and the HAC student member until last year, who is a medical student, contributed to the NCFMEA review.

With the accreditation by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) taking over the role of certifying medical accreditation for the US, the HAC has initiated the process, headed by HAC Vice-President László Hunyadi, professor at the Semmelweis University for Medicine. A one-day consultancy visit by two experts from the Dutch agency NVAO, the first European agency to receive WFME accreditation, is planned for the end of 2019.

### 3. c. Hungarian Advisory Board

On 22 June 2018, the HAC elected a five-member Hungarian Advisory Board (HAB) for a six year term, coinciding with that of the current HAC Board. Members of the HAC Board and expert committees as well as the Secretariat participated at the HAB inauguration meeting in November 2018. At the meeting they discussed higher education specialty training, dual training and the HAC strategy. Their recommendations included reconsidering the function, operational framework and training profiles as well as the usefulness of the diplomas for the labour market.

The HAB determined to explore the possibility for launching doctoral training in a dual framework and harmonizing the quality assurance of dual training between HAC and the Dual Training Council. A working group, headed by István Greiner, was established for this purpose.

### 3. d. International Advisory Board

The International Advisory Board held its annual meeting 26-27 October 2018. On the first day they discussed together with some HAC members who attended the meeting the ENQA recommendations and the main points of the HAC Strategy 2019-2024. On the second day, the IAB reviewed the work of the HAC in the past year and how it followed up on its 2017 recommendations.

The 2018 recommendations of the IAB are on the HAC website.

In 2019, the HAB and the IAB are holding a joint meeting together with HAC members to discuss the involvement of external stakeholders from business and industry in the work of the HAC.

## 4. Conferences

On 13 December 2018, the HAC held a conference for stakeholders to discuss the general trends in the work of the HAC and the new and planned accreditation procedures.

A workshop for a cluster of state recognized HEIs of religious affiliation was held on 2 April 2019 aiming at supporting their preparatory work for institutional accreditation based on the ESG 2015.

On 21 May 2019, the HAC held a workshop for all HEIs with doctoral schools to discuss the redesigned accreditation process and start with preparations for the upcoming round (beginning with a pilot procedure) of doctoral school accreditation under the new criteria.

Another conference on quality assurance, with the participation of HEIs within Hungary and in the ethnic minority areas in neighbouring countries, is planned for late spring 2020.

#### 5. Secretariat

In 2018 and 2019, new young staff members joined the Secretariat. Their experience in various areas of higher education, as well as the streamlining of work processes into dedicated working groups, contribute to the smooth running of operations, even under a continuously heavy workload and narrow timelines.

The Secretariat is headed by a Director, formerly the head of secretariat, and a new Deputy-Director responsible for day-to-day operations.

The facilities were refurbished in summer 2018 and again 2019, with additional offices for programme officers, administrators and administrative assistants.

In the course of 2019, the Secretariat upgraded its software to Office 365. With the coming into force of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, EU2016/679) the HAC passed a dedicated data protection regulation and assigned a person with responsibility for data protection.

The HAC database and information system, TIR, which, among other features, serves as a platform for ex ante evaluations, is being developed into a completely new system (TIR2) by an external contractor.

HAC has been invited by EQAR as a partner in a proposal for a DEQAR project, submitted to the European Commission in September 2019. If granted, the project will help the HAC to upload its accreditation reports to DEQAR, the database of EQAR, and thus to be more accessible to an international audience.

Last but not least, in autumn 2019 the HAC introduced its newly designed brand identity for all of its items and a new website was launched in mid-October that promises to be more user friendly.