



Hungarian Accreditation Committee operations during the COVID-19 lockdown

The pandemic reached Hungary on 4 March 2020, when the first cases in the country were announced. The first Coronavirus (COVID-19)-related deaths were reported on the government's official website on 15 March, 2020. Already on March 7, the government announced the cancellation of all public events including the ceremonies of Hungary's national holiday on March 15 and a state of emergency was instituted on March 11. Already some ten days prior to that, the president of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) asked all Board and staff members who had travelled in the past two weeks not to come to the HAC offices. From March on, all meetings were cancelled and staff began to work from home on March 12. On March 18 2020, the surgeon general announced that the virus had spread to every part of the country.

Since then, the HAC has implemented online Board meetings, expert committee meetings and site visit interviews online via Microsoft Teams. All meeting participants are provided with data protection information that they have to accept and return online. The HAC has for many years conducted its monthly Board meetings via its TIR (HAC's Information System) database, where all documents are uploaded and a secure platform enables voting. Meeting participants have received access to TIR after they had submitted their IP codes to the system manager who enabled personal access to the meeting-related documents and the actual voting platform of TIR available from the member's home or office. Every meeting was assisted by the HAC technical staff and went surprisingly smoothly from the start on.

All participants of the online meetings received a guide with very detailed technical instructions, not only for how to use the online tool but also how to access documents, how to vote, how persons with conflicts of interest with the case being discussed would be excluded from access and vote during discussions of that case, and similar information, prior to the meetings. The relevant section in the HAC procedural regulations was amended to include online meeting and voting procedures. For site visit interviews the programme officer in charge prepares the minutes of the meeting based on a template, which includes technical information related to the online process, including the legal disclaimer concerning audio recordings of the meetings.

Addressing higher education institutions and the public, the HAC president published a [Statement on procedures carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) on 31 March in both Hungarian and English. For upcoming site visits of institutions or doctoral schools – the two important ex post evaluations performed in every fifth year – were asked about their availability for online “site visits” with the various groups to be interviewed. The students of doctoral schools were not interviewed online; rather they were sent an online questionnaire with questions touching all important issues related to doctoral school's ESG compliance. Furthermore, all traditional contact options (e.g. phone, e-mail), are available in order to secure the information change and consultations between the programme officers and institutions, doctoral schools, Board members and expert committee chairs and members.