

HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE
President's Report for the year 2019 to September 2020¹



Summarized for the 2020 Annual Meeting of the International Advisory Board

¹ Based on the HAC Annual Report for 2018 as adopted by the HAC Board on 21 February 2020, with updates until September 2020.

I. Introduction

In 2019, the HAC continued its operations with a stable budget. However, in the first half of 2020, the budget received was less than requested, with budgetary restriction extending to all government-supported areas due to the COVID-19 slowdown. The 2020 budget was allocated by the ministry in early summer.

The pandemic reached Hungary on 4 March 2020 and a state of emergency was instituted on March 11. From March, all meetings were cancelled and staff began to work from home.

Until summer, the HAC implemented online Board meetings, expert committee meetings and site visit interviews online via Microsoft Teams. All meeting participants were provided with data protection information that they must accept and return online. The change was facilitated by the fact that for several years, the HAC has used its TIR database for the monthly Board meetings, where all documents are uploaded and which enables voting. Meeting participants received access to their computers after they had submitted their IP codes to gain access to the [TIR](#) database from their home or office and received a guide with detailed technical instructions. Moreover, they were assisted by the HAC technical staff. 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 prepared the minutes of the meeting based on a template, which included technical information related to the online process, together with a 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 subsequent site visit, institutions or doctoral schools – the two units that are evaluated ex post every five years – were asked if they agreed to organize online interviews with the various interview groups. The students of doctoral schools were not interviewed online; rather they were sent an online questionnaire relating to their doctoral school's ESG compliance. There was ongoing contact by phone or e-mail between programme officers and institutions, doctoral schools, Board members and expert committee chairs and members.

At the end of summer 2020, the renovation of the HAC offices, begun in 2019, continued. While during the first wave of the pandemic, staff came to the office only when necessary and in limited numbers, at the end of August 2020 work at the office resumed under strict hygiene rules. At the same time, home office work was installed on a limited basis as what looks to be a regular feature in the future.

A new strategy covering 2019 to 2024 was passed at the first HAC Board meeting in 2019, on February 1st. A rolling activity plan was accepted on July 19th, focusing on the first two years and the actions planned in light of the recommendations of the ENQA review panel and the achieved actions to account on in the requested follow-up report in 2020.

The HAC continues to pursue its primary objective of acting as a partner to higher education institutions in their quality assurance activities. It works within the EHEA framework that assigns higher education institutions the responsibility for their quality. The HAC is not an authority but a national-level higher education organization of experts that validates quality procedures based on published criteria. Transparency and objectivity continued to be the guiding principles in 2019-2020.

The HAC's activities are increasingly complex while demanding more and more specialized approaches. The annual report, therefore, extends to operational and organizational changes underpinning the ongoing challenges.

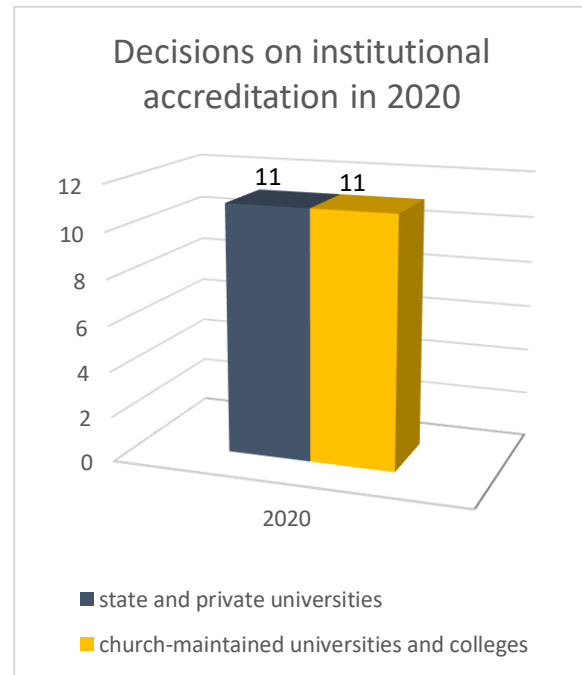
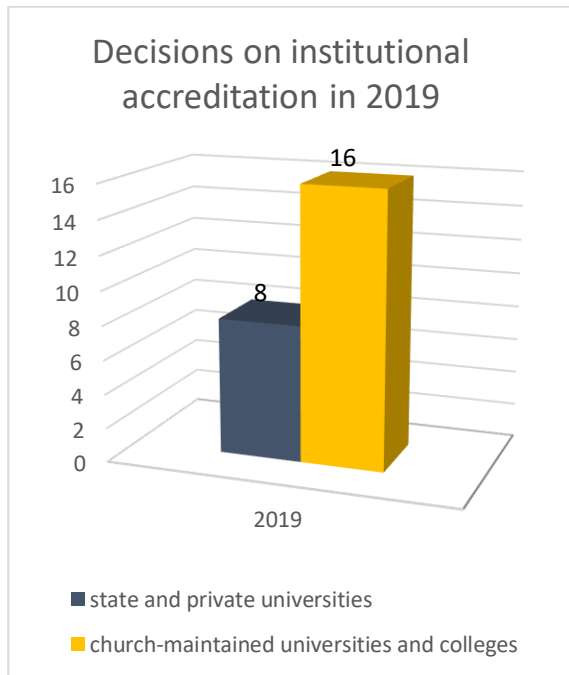
II. Expert activities

1. Institutional accreditation

In line with the accreditation procedure set down in 2017, the HAC established the institutions for upcoming accreditations at the end of each year, including the deadlines by which HEIs are to submit their self-evaluation reports.

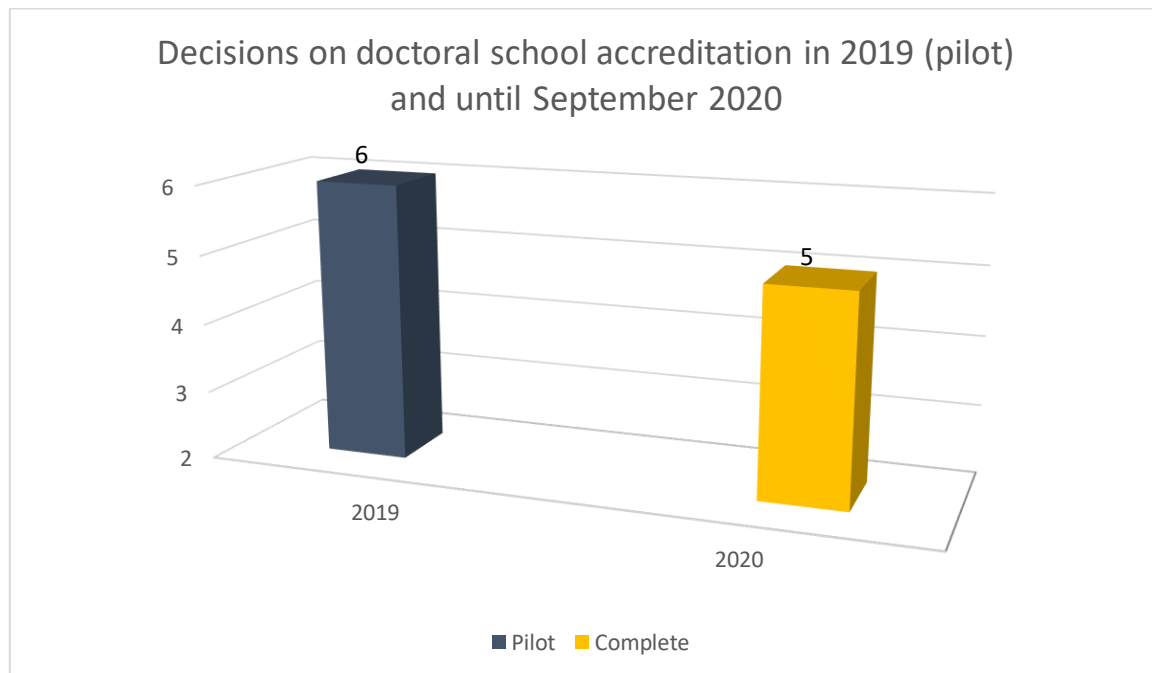
In 2019, altogether eight state and private universities and 16 church-maintained universities and colleges underwent accreditation procedures. Two universities approached the HAC to conduct evaluations of two educational areas in each, selected by the institution, as pilot procedures within the framework of institutional accreditation. The aim for the institutions was to receive quality evaluations beyond the institutional level, while for the HAC it was to see whether such a procedure could be carried out effectively.

For 2020, 15 HEIs applied for accreditation, with several in the field of arts. The HAC conducted dedicated briefings for them to focus on the special demands of the field. Altogether, in the first nine months of 2020, 11 state and private university and 11 church university procedures were completed. All institutional accreditation decisions were positive with recommendations.



2. Accreditation of doctoral schools

With the HAC Board having passed the new, fully ESG-based evaluation procedures for doctoral schools in 2018 (Resolution 2018/8/VII.), feedback on the self-evaluation and external guidelines was provided by the HAC's University Professor and Doctoral Committee, the expert committees, the Legal Committee, and the Quality Assurance and Development Committee. Subsequently, a revised draft was circulated among external stakeholders, specifically the doctoral schools, the National Doctoral Council, the National Union of Doctoral Students, the National Union of Students in Hungary, the Educational Authority, the HAC's Hungarian Advisory Board, the Doctoral Council of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the Secretariat of State for Higher Education at the Ministry of Human Capacities. In the second half of 2019, six pilot procedures were carried out, with all site visits completed by the end of 2019. Based on the analysis and feedback from the pilot, the procedure was revised and 5 complete procedures were carried out, 5 procedures are in progress (report writing phase). There are 10 more procedures planned for 2020, and 32 for 2021.



From January 2020, the HAC's University Professor and Doctoral Committee has been operating as two distinct expert committees to cope with the workload and procedural questions. The task of the Committee for the Accreditation of Doctoral Schools is to follow the criteria and procedures and evaluation guidelines and suggest changes as needed. They are also charged with preparing evaluations for decisions by the HAC Board, and preparing publications and analyses on the subject.

A dedicated working group within the staff is the first of its kind, presently with three staff members, two of whom work exclusively with doctoral school procedures.

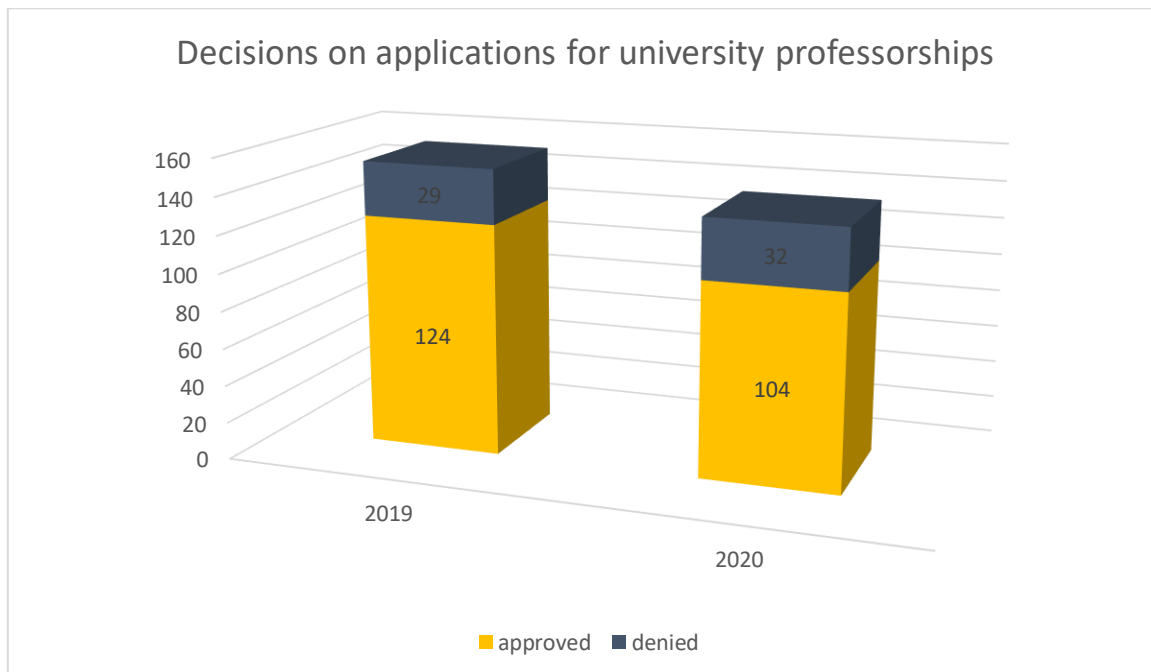
3. Evaluation of university professor applications

While not among the HAC's ESG-related tasks, the expert opinion requested by the Educational Authority on university professor applications is a considered by universities as a key function of HAC. It is the activity to which most comments come in from the institutions and individuals regarding the criteria and procedure.

It is the first procedure in which the HAC seeks to involve a broad range of foreign experts, and is expanding its expert pool in this direction. The aim is to invite at least one of the two expert evaluators who is from, or works extensively in, academia abroad.

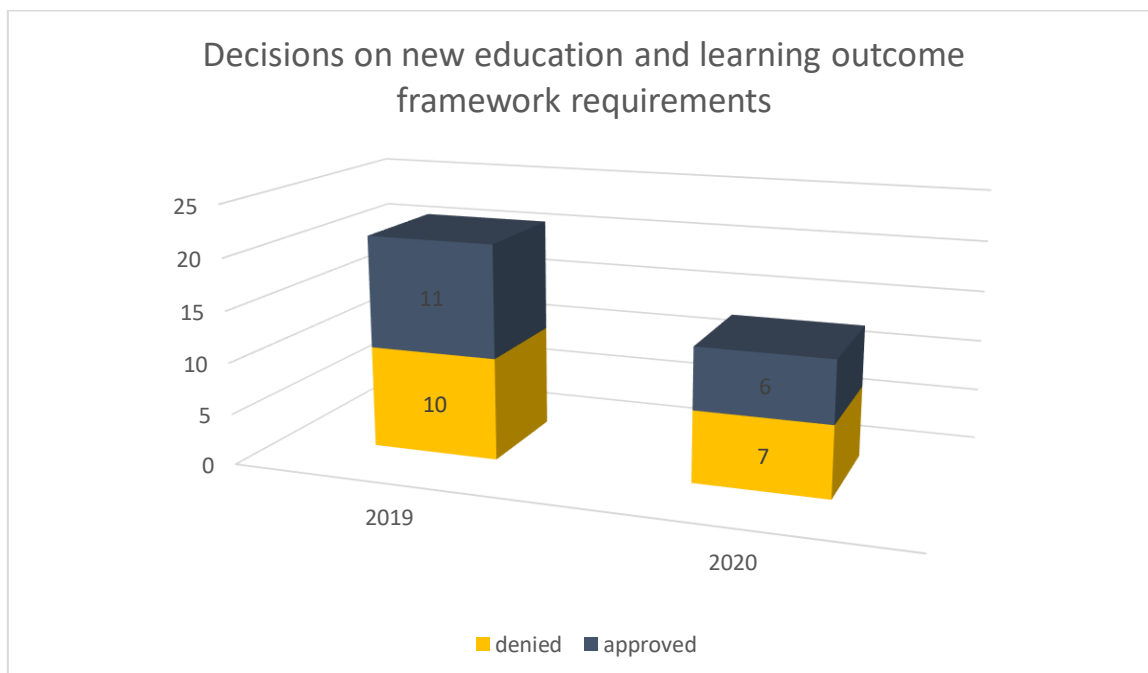


A revised, uniform set of evaluation criteria was developed, which, following feedback on the draft by the expert committees, went into effect 1 September 2019 (Resolution 2019/V/7/4). The revision of the earlier criteria aimed at clarifying earlier ambiguities and ensuring consistency for applicants and evaluators. The main set of criteria is common to all fields, while expert committees added special considerations, based on common rules, for particular scientific or art fields. Moreover, the point system for evaluators that are divided into different categories, from research and teaching to scientific activities, and with qualitative and quantitative standards, was revised and a minimum threshold of points was set. In 2019, the HAC passed 153 decisions on university professor applications with 124 approved. In 2020, until September, that number is 136 decisions in total with 104 approved.



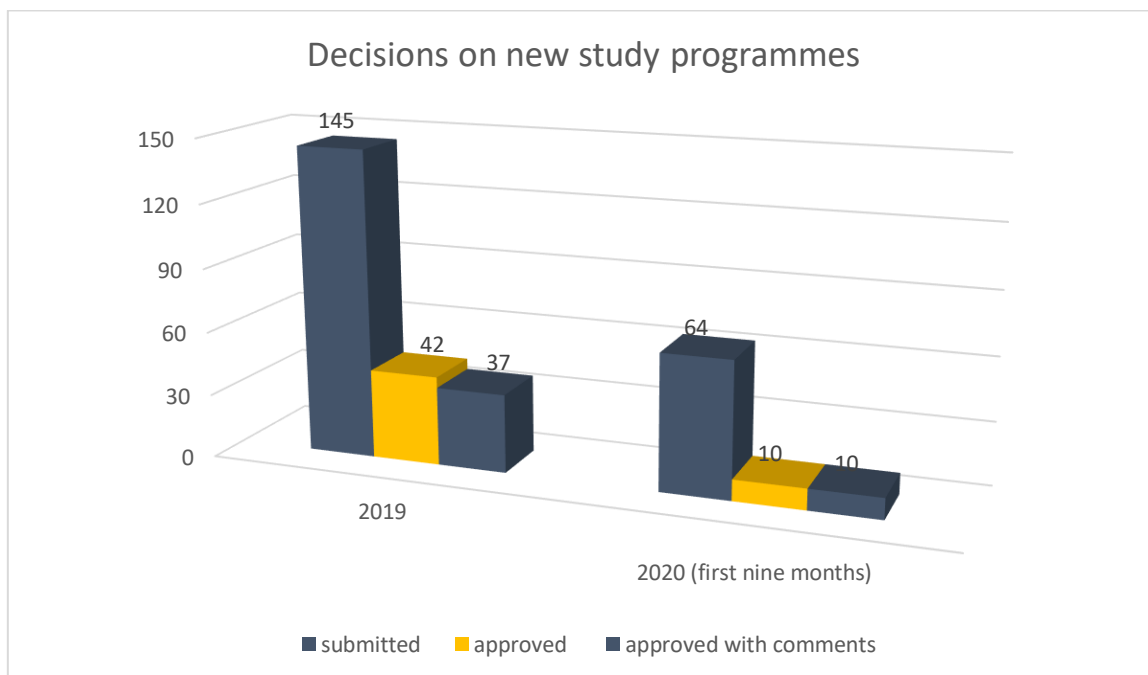
4. New study programmes

In 2019, 21 applications for new education and learning outcome framework requirements² were submitted, of which 11 were passed by the HAC Board. In 2020, 13 applications were submitted and 6 were passed.



Regarding the evaluation of new programme applications, the HAC Board decided to discontinue the anonymity of external evaluators (Resolution/2019/1/XII/3). Given that, as with the framework requirements, new programme applications are expert opinions provided for the Educational Authority for programme licensing, the HAC works under a stringent public administration deadline. With such evaluations, the HAC does not have the leeway to communicate with applicants in a supportive approach.

In 2019, HEIs submitted 145 new programme applications, of which the HAC supported 42 outright and another 37 with comments. For the first nine months of 2020 these figures are 64 applications, with 10 supported and 10 supported with comments.



Having phased out ex post programme accreditation, which was carried out earlier by subject groups, there were still some monitor procedures to be carried out in 2019 and 2020.

III. International activities

It is a long-term goal for the HAC that in addition to its expert activities within the country, the organization and its delegates take on international assignments as well. It is key that the HAC respond increasingly quickly to international calls. Conversely, it must adopt international best practices as they suit its own work.

5. ENQA

On 1-2 October 2019, deputy director Peter Lakatos and staff member Christina Rozsnyai (as ENQA Board member) participated in a seminar for recently reviewed agencies, where the use of standards in external reviews was discussed. On 17-18 October, the ENQA general assembly took place in Yerevan, Armenia, which President Valéria Csépe and Christina Rozsnyai attended.

The 2020 Members' Forum was to be held in Istanbul 29-30 April but was instead transferred to an online format, due to the COVID-19 lockdown. President Valéria Csépe and Deputy Director Péter Lakatos participated. Christina Rozsnyai took part as an ENQA Board member.

In line with its obligations for ENQA membership, the HAC wrote a follow-up report mid-term between two reviews. The report was drafted by staff and overseen by a follow-up committee made up of staff and board members. It was passed by the HAC Board on 25 September 2020 and subsequently submitted to ENQA by the 20 September deadline.

6. EQAR

In order to raise its transparency and the international acceptance of its accreditation, HAC applied for the first time for registration in EQAR, which was granted on 3 April 2019, effective until 30 September 2023. Its EQAR listing was announced at a press conference 8 May 2019, which the then secretary of state for higher education also attended.

In spring 2020, the HAC submitted an [update on its activities](#), first of all about its new approach for doctoral school accreditation, to the Register Committee.

The HAC has been in discussion with the ministry to promote Hungary's joining EQAR as a governmental member in order to increase the visibility of Hungarian higher education and the flow of information on international quality assurance developments.

7. DEQAR

Responding to a call from EQAR to join a project to facilitate connecting HAC accreditation reports to the DEQAR database, the HAC became a partner in the EU project "[DEQAR Connect](#)", approved 6 February 2020. Programme officer Beatrix Dányi took part in a kick-off seminar in Madrid on 7-8 October 2019. Beatrix Dányi and HAC IT officer Attila Borzi took part in a technical seminar on 14 May 2020, held online due to the pandemic. Deputy director Péter Lakatos is in charge with overseeing the progress of the project, while Attila Borzi, HAC's IT officer, work to facilitate uploading HAC reports to DEQAR continues until project completion in 2022.

8. CEENQA

The CEENQA annual workshop and general assembly, which was to be held in Prague, Czech Republic, was postponed and transferred to an online conference on 17 July 2020. President Valéria Csépe and the newly appointed HAC Secretary General, Ádám Kegler, participated.

The new CEENQA president has introduced regular bi-monthly online meetings for members, with the first one on 15 September 2020.

9. EQAF

For several years, various HAC programme officers have attended the largest European higher education quality assurance event EQAF. On 21-23 November 2019, Lelle Gulyás, programme officer and head of the doctoral schools working group participated at the EQAF conference in Berlin.

10. ECAQA

The Eurasian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Education and Healthcare, an officially registered accreditation agency for healthcare education in Kazakhstan, requested HAC to nominate an expert to some of its reviews. A medical doctor nominated by the HAC's expert committee for medical education participated. Subsequently, with its resolution 2019/10/X/1, the HAC Board passed the signing of a cooperation agreement with ECAQA, extending to sending experts and learning about the other agency's quality assurance practices as well as organizing joint events.

11. WFME

While accreditation by HAC has been recognized for over a decade by NCFMEA, the National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation operating under the U.S. Department of Education, from 2023, the U.S. Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates will take over this function. Therefore, in order to ensure that graduates from one of the four Hungarian medical universities are recognized in the U.S., the accreditation of HAC relating to the training of medical doctors will have to undergo a review by the World Federation for Medical Education, WFME. The WFME criteria coincide in part with the ESG standards used by HAC, additional criteria will have to be applied for medical programmes.

A working group has been set up, chaired by the chair of the HAC expert committee for medical accreditation László Hunyady, with representatives of all four medical universities in Hungary. In November 2019, two experts from NVAO, the first European agency to receive WFME recognition, came to Hungary to advise the working group.

12. European Universities

In the initial round of the call by the European Commission to establish "European Universities", five Hungarian universities were among the 17 selected with EC decision 27 June 2019. In 2020 a further six Hungarian universities were among the winners of the project.

The HAC has not been involved as closely as was the case with other national agencies in the project since it was not invited for consultations when the projects

were developed. The HAC did participate in two working meetings of one of the consortia in February and in July 2020. The accreditation of joint programmes being developed by the consortia partners will proceed in line with the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, which was ratified by the Hungarian Parliament in August 2020.

13. Staff mobility

Supported by and partnering with the ministry responsible for higher education, Deputy Director Peter Lakatos is participating in an international staff exchange for the purpose of staff training. A ministry delegate was to visit NVAO in The Hague, Netherlands, while the HAC deputy director was scheduled to go to the quality assurance agency ARACIS, Romania. The visits have been postponed due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions.

14. MICROBOL

The HAC deputy director is also participating in a thematic working group on quality assurance within the framework of a two-year project co-funded by Erasmus+ KA3 Support to Policy reform. “The [MICROBOL](#) project aims for ministries and stakeholders to explore, within the Bologna Process, whether and how the existing Bologna tools can be used for or adapted to micro-credentials.”

In addition, programme officer for foreign affairs Christina Rozsnyai continues her activities in the ENQA Board and some of its working groups, and as a Board member in AQ Austria.

IV. Professional forums

15. Conferences

The HAC organized a conference in Nyíregyháza on “Church-maintained higher education institutions within the European quality assurance structure” on 2-3 April 2019. One of the aims – and outcomes - was to disseminate ESG-based quality assurance practices among these institutions.

On 21 May 2019, a conference was held in the building of the Academic Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Pécs on the topic of quality assurance of doctoral schools. HAC wanted to present the new approach to evaluating doctoral schools to its relevant stakeholders.

16. Launching an online periodical

The HAC took the initial steps to launch its online *Accreditation Review*, to establish a forum for disseminating quality assurance issues and practices to a wide audience. The full title, *Akkreditációs Szemle – Hungarian Accreditation*

Review, indicates that the periodical will be in two languages and will solicit articles from Hungary and abroad. László T. Kóczy, member of the HAC Board, was named editor-in-chief. The first issue is expected for autumn 2020.

17. Internal training

Staff meetings held several times a month provide an opportunity for programme officers to exchange problems and best practices as well as update all of the staff on ongoing procedures. In spring 2019, a member of the HAC's standing committee on Quality Assurance and Development held a training session for staff on various international quality assurance approaches.

On 16 October 2019, staff participated in a one-day training for new office software. It allows for online group work, a common calendar, OneDrive file use, Outlook mails and automatic replies.

Several staff members took part in a number of webinars throughout 2019 and 2020 organized by ENQA, EUA, EQAR, and CHEA. Especially the lockdown in the first half of 2020 saw a marked increase in webinars, providing many of the staff to expand their participation in international events that were previously limited to one or two persons. Where relevant, one of the participating staff members disseminated a short report to all staff on the content and outcomes of such webinars.

V. HAC operations and organization

18. Strategy

As noted in the introduction, the HAC Board passed the *Strategy 2019-2024* at its meeting on 1 February 2019. It is based on the previous Strategy 2017-2018 and introduces additional tasks and foals while carrying on long-term or unfinished ones. The additional tasks focus in part on the recommendations of the ENQA review panel in their [report](#) from May 2018. A key aim is to ensure that the HAC's activities and criteria are transparent and coherent, that the HAC's service and developmental function is evident, as well as to ensure international visibility.

A rolling activity plan based on the strategy was passed on 19 July 2019.

19. Organizational changes

As of 1 September 2019, higher education, including the HAC, functions no longer under the Ministry of Human Capacities but the Ministry of Innovation and Technology. The arm of the Educational Authority that deals with higher education, the ENIC/NARIC office, and language examinations and their accreditation are also under the new ministry's supervision. The secretary of state

for higher education remains József Bódis, while the deputy secretary of state Zita Horváth also continued to hold this position in the MIT until August 2020. She is now succeeded by Balázs Hankó.

In order to streamline a range of tasks of the secretariat, the HAC Board set up the positions of director and deputy director. The director heads the professional and administrative work of the staff and organizes operations. The director is responsible for ensuring that the HAC adheres to its regulations and the legal requirements; coordinates internal quality assurance; manages legal duties; maintains contacts with the HAC's internal and external stakeholders and partners; oversees the preparation of and conducts meetings; exercises employer's rights to the degree authorized by the president; and if countersigned, may make remittances and payments. The position is filled by the previous acting director, Dr. Ágnes Gódné Mosolygó.

The deputy director executes as delegated the professional and administrative work and contributes to the operations of the secretariat. Additional tasks comprise issuing legal opinions and conclusions; checking the legal aspects of the HAC's administrative documents; organizing the work of the Expert Committee on Legal Issues and of the Board of Appeals; and contributing to the administration of the secretariat. Péter Lakatos, formerly programme officer, holds the position of deputy director.

Additionally, the HAC established the position and range of responsibilities of a secretary general, who is appointed for limited term. His or her duties are to uphold contacts with international higher education bodies and organizations; to represent the HAC at international events; to coordinate and supervise the activities that promote the international expertise of the HAC's experts and staff. The secretary general participates in the HAC Board meetings without voting rights, and has to report his or her activities to the Board.

There was an open call for the position in spring 2020, and following a shortlist of candidates by a selection committee, three candidates were interviewed by the HAC Board. Secretary General Ádám Kéglér was appointed as of 1 August 2020.

The HAC revised its founding document, which was approved by the ministry and went into effect 25 July 2019. Subsequently, the HAC revised its by-laws with the aim of defining the core in a document approved by the ministry, and addition procedural rules for specified tasks.

20. Secretariat

As of September 2020, the secretariat comprises 19 staff members, 10 of whom are programme officers. 70% of the staff is aged between 35 and 50 years, with 10% males. Next to the establishment of the positions of director and deputy

director, dedicated working groups were set up in order to handle the substantial workload. Programme officers and administrators are assigned to working groups that include the ones for doctoral school evaluations; institutional accreditation; programme accreditation; international issues.

Additional positions are being announced.

VI. Board and committees

21. Board

One member of the Board left on 1 July 2019 to take up the position of rector at Kaposvár University, which also required a new chair for the expert committee on agriculture. László Buday became the new Board member.

22. Board of Appeals

A new Board of Appeals, delegated by the minister, took up their position on 15 February 2019 for a six-year term. Deputy Director Péter Lakatos, a lawyer by training, is in charge of the committee from the staff side. The Board of Appeals dealt with 46 appeals in 2019, a higher number than in the last three years. Until August 2020 there were 54 appeals cases this year.

In its by-laws, the HAC regulated the formal procedure for complaints in line with the ESG 2015. Informally, the HAC has dealt with complaints earlier. While appeals are always discussed by the Board of Appeals, complaints may be handled by the HAC Secretariat, the HAC Board, the HAC president or the Board of Appeals, depending on the nature of the complaint.

23. Board of Financial Supervisors

From 1 March 2019 the new HAC Board of Financial Supervisors took up their positions. The three-member board is nominated by the secretary of state for higher education, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian Rectors' Conference and appointed by the minister for a six-year term.

24. University Professor and Doctoral Committee

As noted in Section 3, from January 2020, the HAC's University Professor and Doctoral Committee has been operating as two distinct expert committees. Each is charged with producing the criteria for evaluation and providing expert opinions for decision-making by the HAC Board. The Committee for the Evaluation of Professorships has been assigned its own programme officer for the operative work of the body. The Committee for the Accreditation of Doctoral Schools is additionally charged with producing publications and analyses on the

subject of doctoral school accreditation. It is supported by a three-member working group in the staff.

25. International and the Hungarian Advisory Boards

In 2019, the annual meeting of the IAB was held 24-25 October. While the second day is always a working meeting in which the IAB reviews the work of the HAC and makes [recommendations](#), the first afternoon is a discussion around a given theme. In 2019 the topic was stakeholder involvement in the work of the HAC. Given the topic, this meeting was held together with the Hungarian Advisory Board, made up of employers' representatives.

26. Expert Committee separation

In 2019 a separate Expert Committee on Economics was established with its splitting off from the Social Sciences Committee. The need for a separate Economics Committee was warranted by the large number of applications in this field.

27. Student participation

While at the time of the ENQA review in 2018, two expert committees had not appointed students, by 2019 all expert committees seat delegates from the National Union of Students in Hungary and National Union of Doctoral Students. Their representation in the HAC Board remains constant. The relationship with the two student organizations is excellent, and the HAC president participated in a range of events they organized.

28. Corporate identity, IT

In 2019 the HAC commissioned the design of a new corporate identity. It now has a new logo and a new website intended to increase the professional appearance of the HAC.

A Twitter account is being operated since mid-2020 at [@HAC88510916](#).

In 2019, the HAC installed Office365 and staff were trained in a workshop on its various uses. With the exclusively online presence during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the use of the joint calendar, sharing documents via OneDrive and other features became commonplace. For online meetings the staff and committees use the video conferencing service Microsoft Teams.