

## CODE OF ETHICS

As members of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and its Secretariat, we deem it important to lay down and publicly state our guiding principles of ethics. By doing so, we wish to provide guidance to our members regarding voluntary rules over and above legal regulations, on the one hand, and we aim to describe how an “ideal” HAC member would behave on the other. Thus, we wish to outline an *ethos* that distinguishes HAC as an ethical organisation and reflects its true intended role and mission to improve the quality of Hungary’s higher education.

This Code of Ethics describes the **values, principles and rules of conduct** that the Hungarian Accreditation Committee considers appropriate and **recommends** to its **Secretariat**, as well as its **members** (those sitting on the Plenum and expert committees). (Separate ethics guidelines should be developed for experts – visiting committee members and external evaluators – providing occasional contribution to HAC’s work.) Commitment to and unflinching compliance with these rules and values can ensure that HAC can perform its tasks (both the statutory ones and those specified by the organisation itself) to the satisfaction and appreciation of its stakeholders, as well as the legislators and the entire Hungarian society.

### I. VALUES, PRINCIPLES, RULES

#### 1. Values

In their work performed on behalf of HAC, all members of HAC and its Secretariat (hereinafter referred to as the Members) shall always honour the following **values**:

- lawfulness,
- independence,
- objectivity,
- impartiality,
- transparency,
- accountability (personal responsibility),
- well-preparedness and high professional standards,
- openness to innovation,
- harmonisation of the points of view of those involved.

In detail, commitment to the above values means the following.

In their work performed on behalf of HAC, Members shall

- 1.1. fully observe and comply with pertinent **laws and other legal regulations**, with special respect to the Higher Education Act and the Government Decree regulating the operation of HAC.
- 1.2. not “represent” their employer. If a Member is employed by a higher education institution or another organisation, he/she shall fully disassociate himself/herself from such a relationship(s), and shall formulate his/her statements **independently** of any such commitment.

- 1.3. strive for **objectivity** when making statements and expressing opinions, i.e. shall formulate their opinion and make decisions based on available factual data and precise information. Members shall make statements only in possession of the necessary facts, data and information.
- 1.4. make **impartial** statements and express **neutral** opinion; they shall not be biased in favour of or against any higher education institution or any other organisation or person involved, and shall not discriminate.
- 1.5. strive for utmost **transparency**, i.e. work pursuant to HAC's effective by-laws, relevant rules of procedure, professional requirements and detailed guidelines, evaluation principles, as well as HAC's other internal rules and resolutions. Members shall always be able to **provide the reasons for their opinions**.
- 1.6. bear **personal responsibility** for their statements and opinions and can **attest to** their compliance with applicable legal regulations, HAC's internal rules and this Code of Ethics.
- 1.7. give expert opinion and make statements based on purely **professional considerations**. Membership in HAC endows members with undoubted professional prestige; however, this prestige shall not be based on power and position but on **professional expertise**. Members shall be successful in their discipline or field (or, in the case of members working in a non-scientific area, in their profession), and their expertise shall also include the knowledge of **(higher education) quality assurance and evaluation** issues. Obviously, Members shall also know the cases falling within their competence, as well as accreditation materials related to those cases.
- 1.8. **be open to new initiatives** (without, of course, being lenient on quality) responding to changes in social, regional and users' needs. If possible, members shall facilitate **sound competition** between institutions and degree programmes.
- 1.9. adequately assess the often differing points of view of the parties involved (higher education institutions, students, employers etc.) and strives to **harmonise** them as much as possible.

## 2. **Incompatibility**

The rules of incompatibility regarding members of HAC and its expert committees are laid down in the Government Decree on HAC. Furthermore, civil servants may not be ad hoc committee members, evaluators or external experts.

HAC experts (includes everyone from HAC members to external evaluators), who are employed or work on contract for a higher education institution with more than one faculty are considered incompatible with respect to working for HAC

- when personal matters are discussed, relating to any of the institution's faculties, or
- when professional matters are discussed, relating to the faculty at which s/he is employed or works for (**HAC resolution 2001/9/II/2**)

For decisions (standpoints or resolutions) to be passed on running issues by the plenum or expert committees, the member shall refrain from expressing her/his opinion prior to the

decision. As regards tenders for the position of university or college professors, s/he may not take a position (with the exception of secret voting) (**HAC resolution 2002/1/V66**).

Other rules of incompatibility shall be applicable in adherence to the rules of individual procedures.

- With respect to the application of the regulation on incompatibility following HAC resolution 2003/4/VII/3: at the debate or vote at a committee or plenum meeting on matters requiring a decision that refers to a given institution or given area of science, a plenum or committee member who is employed or on contract with that institution and who works in the given area of science shall not be present. The HAC program officers have the authority to inform the chair of the meeting as to limiting the presence of the member of the committee who is incompatible in the particular matter.

3. **Conflict of interests**

Members shall notify HAC of any case in which a **conflict of interests** exists or arises from their existing other commitment(s). Members with a conflict of interests shall refrain from expressing their opinions, and shall in no way participate in any procedures related to the case.

4. **Gains and advantages**

Members shall under no circumstances use their function in HAC to secure personal or institutional **gain of material nature or any other advantage**, and shall reject any such offer.

5. **Confidentiality**

Members shall reveal information about HAC's cases to third parties (non-Members or organisations) only **after the approval of HAC's pertaining official position statement** (a resolution or, in the case of other procedures, a statement by the Presidium or a college). Even then, the information disclosed shall be the public part of the statement.

6. **Intellectual freedom**

Members shall **respect and encourage the freedom of thought and freedom of speech**, and shall not influence the opinion of other Members and those involved in HAC's cases through other than rational arguments.

7. **Intellectual property**

Members shall always respect others' intellectual property. The applications submitted to HAC are, either in full or in part, exclusive **intellectual property** of the applicants (individuals or institutions).

8. **Professional development**

Members shall **continuously improve** their higher education quality assurance and evaluation skills; monitor related domestic and international developments; share their knowledge and experience with other Members and interested colleagues if possible; do their best to **develop** a culture of quality in higher education, and to increase its awareness and **acceptance** in society; support all activities and events that promote these objectives.

9. **Quality of work**

Members shall strive for **excellence** in their work performed on behalf of HAC. They shall pay particular attention to ensure the following: the thoroughness, reliability and unbiased nature of evaluations; the efficiency of committee work; the well-founded nature of statements and their explanations; compliance with the deadlines specified in rules of procedures.

10. **Co-operation**

Members shall respect and consider the opinion of other Members as colleagues, and shall **co-operate** with them in order to achieve common objectives.

11. **Trust**

Trust in HAC's activities is both a proof and an expression of the satisfaction of those affected. For this reason, Members shall do their utmost to develop and maintain such trust. Compliance with and observation of the above values, principles and rules can contribute to the reinforcement of such trust.

## **II. ETHICS VIOLATIONS**

The following acts and attitudes shall be considered as ethics violations:

1. Non-compliance with effective laws and legal regulations applicable to HAC. (This, of course, also constitutes a violation of law.)
2. Non-compliance with HAC's by-laws, rules of procedure, professional principles and detailed guidelines, evaluation principles and other pertaining internal rules and resolutions.
3. Failure to report to HAC one's own incompatibility or conflict of interests; expressing one's opinion or making a statement in such cases; any participation in procedures related to such cases.
4. Use of one's membership or function in HAC to secure personal or institutional gain of material nature, or any other advantage.
5. Disclosing information about a case to third parties (individuals or organisations) before the publication of HAC's official position statement (a resolution or, in the case of other procedures, a statement by the Presidium or a college), or revealing the non-public part of a statement any time.
6. Violation of intellectual property rights related to the applications submitted to HAC.
7. Failure to co-operate with other Members, or obstruction of co-operation between Members.

## **III. THE ETHICS COMMITTEE AND ITS PROCEDURES**

### **Rules of procedure**

The Ethics and Incompatibility Committee (hereinafter referred to as Committee) is a special committee of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee responsible for investigating cases of ethics violation and incompatibility upon the Plenum's request. The Committee shall submit a draft resolution to the Plenum. The Committee shall work in compliance with the following rules of procedure approved by the Plenum.

#### **1. Committee members**

- 1.1. The Committee shall comprise a chairman and two members.
- 1.2. The Committee's chairman shall be a Plenum member representing the discipline of law.
- 1.3. The Committee's members shall be elected from Plenum members by the Plenum itself, in a secret ballot, based on the recommendation of the president of HAC. Members shall sit on the Committee only for the duration of the investigation of the given ethics or incompatibility case.
- 1.4. The following persons may not be the Committee's members or chairman: persons against whom the procedure was initiated; persons whose hearing may be necessary during the procedure; persons involved in the case in any other way. In case the chairman has a conflict of interest, the Plenum shall elect another chairman to investigate the issue, upon the recommendation of HAC's president.

#### **2. Ethics procedure**

- 2.1. Should the suspicion of an ethics violation arise, an ethics procedure may be initiated by any Plenum member. The decision on launching the procedure shall be made by the Plenum in a secret ballot.

2.2 The ethics procedure shall be conducted by the Committee. The Committee shall convene as many times as it is necessary to investigate the issue, but at least once. Committee meetings shall be convened by the chairman.

2.3 Having requested and received the opinion of HAC's Presidium, the Committee may, for the period of the investigation, suspend the work of the persons whose possible ethics violations are investigated.

2.4 The Committee may hear any person possessing any information necessary to fully clarify the case.

2.4.1 Persons suspected of ethics violation shall be allowed to verbally express their opinions before the Committee.

2.4.2. Persons suspected of ethics violation shall be notified of the hearing at least eight days before the Committee's meeting. The notification shall include the charge, and the documents underlying the charge shall be attached. If the person suspected of the ethics violation requests exemption from the obligation to appear before the Committee in writing, not later than three days prior to the hearing, the Committee shall set another date for the hearing. The person suspected of the ethics violation shall be warned of the consequences of failing to attend the hearing.

2.4.3 Hearings shall be minuted, and the minutes shall be countersigned by the chairman.

2.5. The Committee's proposal to the Plenum shall be formulated on the basis of the available documents and the hearings. The opinion of all committee members shall be considered upon decision-making with a majority of votes. The member (or chairman) who disagrees with the majority may add his/her opinion to the proposal. The Committee shall provide the reasons for its proposal.

2.6. The Committee shall make one of the following draft resolutions to the Plenum:

2.6.1. Establishment of an ethics violation and the related sanction.

2.6.2. Discontinuation of the ethics procedure, if no violation is deemed to have taken place, or if HAC is not competent to decide in the matter.

2.6.3. Discontinuation of the ethics procedure and calling the attention of HAC's president to the necessity of a disciplinary procedure, as stipulated by Act no. XXXIII of 1992 on the Legal Position of Public Employees, if a staff member of HAC's Secretariat is supposed to have committed a disciplinary offence.

2.7. The draft resolution shall be forwarded to the person suspected of the ethics violation. If he/she disagrees, he/she may submit his/her written opinion about the matter to the Committee within three days of the draft resolution's receipt. The opinion shall be filed with the Plenum along with the draft resolution.

### **3. Sanctions for ethics violations**

3.1. Verbal warning

3.2. Written warning

3.3. Recall of the committee member. Committee members may only be recalled upon a grievous or repeated violation of their duties.

### **4. Resolution**

4.1. The Committee's draft resolution shall be submitted to the Plenum by the chairman.

4.2. The Plenum shall discuss the draft resolution and decide about it in a secret ballot. Those involved in the case may not vote and may not be present at the discussion.

4.3. The Plenum shall make one of the following resolutions:

4.3.1. Establishment of an ethics violation, and the related sanction.

4.3.2. Discontinuation of the procedure.

4.3.3. Discontinuation of the procedure and calling the attention of HAC's president to the necessity of a disciplinary procedure.

4.4 The Plenum shall always provide the reasons for its resolution.

4.5. In case the sanction is a verbal or written warning, the Plenum shall ensure the publication of the warning within HAC, or, if necessary, outside HAC.

4.6. The Plenum's resolution shall be communicated by HAC's president to the person suspected of the ethics violation in writing.