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# HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION REVIEW

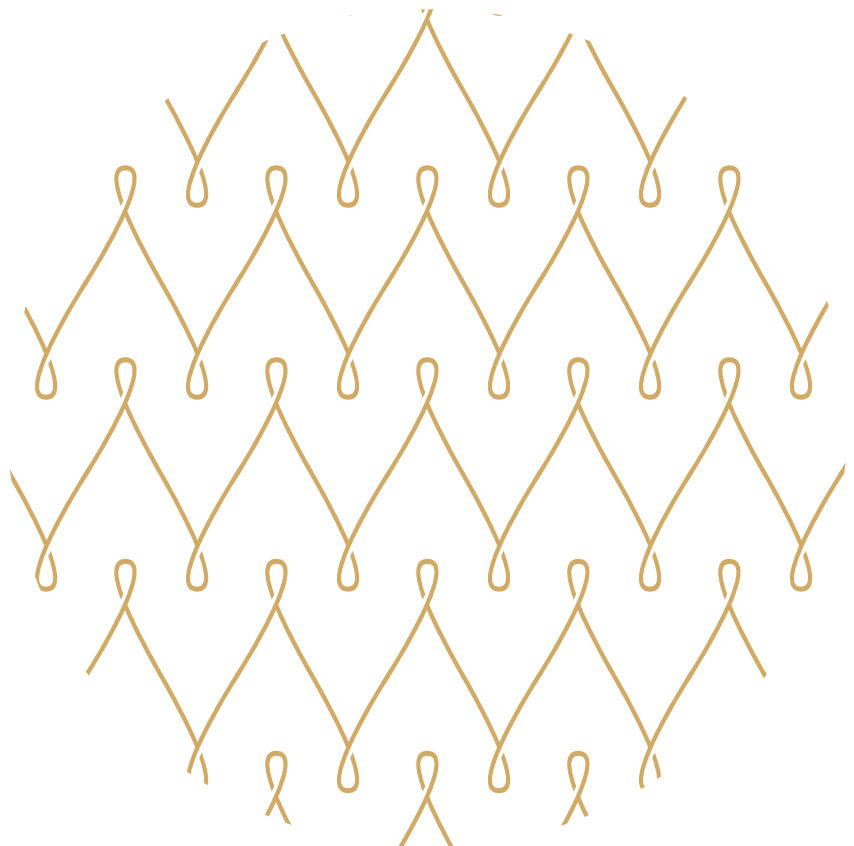
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Issue 1

November 2020

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# HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION REVIEW

Issue 1

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## INTRODUCING THE HAC

### About us

Structure;  
Activities;  
How we work;  
Institutional accreditation  
timeline

🌿 5-9 🌿

### Interview

with Dr Valéria Csépe,  
President of the HAC

🌿 10-12 🌿

### How the HAC works during the pandemic

Our digital workflow;  
Statistics

🌿 13-14 🌿

### Procedures

University professor  
applications;  
Accreditation  
of doctoral schools

🌿 15-17 🌿



## FOCUS

### European Outlook

The European Higher  
Education Area;  
History and structure  
of the EHEA;  
International quality  
assurance bodies

🌿 18-19 🌿

### ENQA20

Origins;  
Structure and operation;  
Plans and priorities

🌿 20-21 🌿

### HAC survey 2020

Research partner:  
PwC Hungary  
Comprehensive survey  
with 11,788 responders

🌿 22 🌿



## CONTACT US

### Contact details

### Publishing Information

🌿 23 🌿



### Dear Reader,

There is no doubt that recent events have turned our lives upside down. The same is true for higher education as well. The consequences of the COVID19 pandemic require us to adapt quickly and to be constantly on the lookout for new opportunities. The digital space has been given an immense role in learning, and digitalisation has become the most important word for the entire European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This poses important challenges to quality assurance agencies at both Community and national levels.

For this reason, in our first issue, we wish to present to our readers the changes brought about by the pandemic, the European quality assurance processes in general and, more specifically, the operations of the HAC. We also give an overview of our recently completed survey of Hungarian higher education. We describe the expanded organisation and operations of the HAC, as well as the deadlines and processes associated with the various procedures. In her interview, Dr Valéria Csépe, the president of the HAC talks about the significant organisational changes that have taken place in the HAC, as well as the need for ongoing learning. Our column on international affairs presents the history of the EHEA and commemorates the 20-year anniversary of ENQA. The article on the European Universities Initiative presents a new and ambitious Community project. In the first round of applications, 11 Hungarian universities emerged as winners and thus became members of European university consortia.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Editorial Board and the staff of the HAC Secretariat for the launch of the Hungarian Accreditation Review.

Prof László T. Kóczy,  
Chair of the Editorial Board

## I INTRODUCING THE HAC

# ABOUT US

**The predecessor of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee was established more than 25 years ago. Its structure and tasks are regulated by various laws, its Deed of Foundation and its Rules of Organisation and Operation. The information presented below has been collected to help institutions, partner organisations and students gain a better understanding of who we are and how we work.**

**Name of the organisation:**  
Hungarian Accreditation Committee, HAC.

### Foundation

The National Accreditation Committee, the predecessor to HAC was established by the government in 1993 by way of Act LXXX of 1993 on Higher Education to 'monitor and attest to the quality of learning and scientific activities in higher education'.

### Structure

1. The HAC includes the Body, the Secretariat and the independent Review Committee, as well as various decision preparation bodies (expert committees for disciplines, colleges, other committees). Its finances are monitored by the Supervisory Board.

2. The HAC Body has 20 members. Nine members are delegated by the minister, two by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, one by the Hungarian Academy of Arts, three by the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, two by religious legal entities maintaining higher education institutions, one by the Hungarian Chamber

of Commerce and Industry, one by the National Conference of Student Self-governments, and one by the National Association of Doctoral Students.

3. Members of the Body – with the exception of those delegated by the National Association of Doctoral Students or the National Conference of Student Self-governments – are required to hold a doctoral degree or equivalent. Members of the Higher Education Planning Committee, rectors, chancellors, public service officials, government officials and state officials are barred from membership. Members delegated by the National Association of Doctoral Students or the National Conference of Student Self-governments receive a mandate of one year, while the rest of the members have a six-year mandate.

4. The chairperson of the Body is the president of the HAC. The President of the HAC is therefore one of the delegated members of the Body, proposed jointly by the minister and the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

5. In addition to its operative, legal, financial and administrative functions, the HAC Secretariat also performs preparatory tasks for the cases processed by the HAC.

6. The members of the decision preparation bodies (colleges, expert committees for disciplines and other committees) of the HAC are elected by the Body. Currently, there are 216 active members in these bodies.

7. Related bodies that are outside the HAC organisation proper are the Hungarian Advisory Body and the International Advisory Body. Both provide external assessment of the professional activities performed by the HAC. Both advisory bodies meet on an annual basis, and are composed of persons highly knowledgeable in the fields of education, research, science, business operations and business management. They rely on their knowledge and experience to make proposals regarding the professional activities of the HAC.

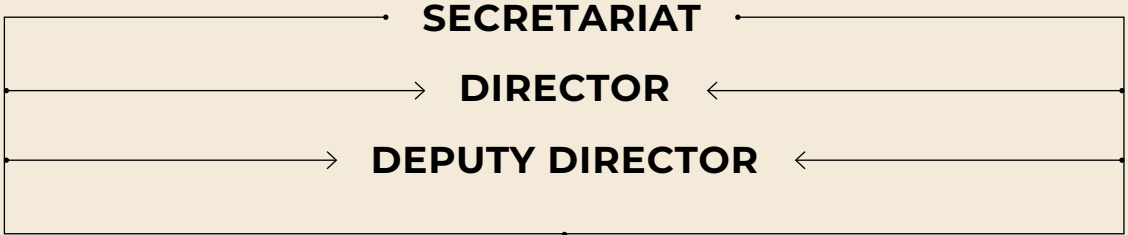
8. The HAC is registered in the EQAR, member of ENQA, CEENQA and DEQAR.



H A C

# ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

## OPERATIONS/ADMINISTRATION



### WORKING GROUPS

OPERATIONS	QUALITY ASSESSMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communications &amp; IT</li><li>• Finances &amp; Labour</li><li>• Administration</li><li>• Legal</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• International relations</li><li>• Programme establishment and programme launch</li><li>• Institutional accreditation</li><li>• University professor applications</li><li>• Doctoral schools</li></ul>

### DECISION-MAKING SUPPORT / ADVICE

- **HAB**  
Hungarian Advisory Board
- **IAB**  
International Advisory Board

### DECISION-MAKING

- **Body (20 members)**
- **President**
- **Vice presidents**  
(Elected from among the delegated members)
- **Secretary general**  
(Elected by the Body)

### DECISION PREPARATION

### DECISION PREPARATION

### STANDING COMMITTEES

#### Discipline-specific expert committees

Committee for Natural Sciences	Committee for Theology	Committee for Engineering and Technology
Committee for Sport Science	Committee for Economics	Committee for Humanities
Committee for Medical and Health Sciences	Committee for Social Sciences	Committee for Art

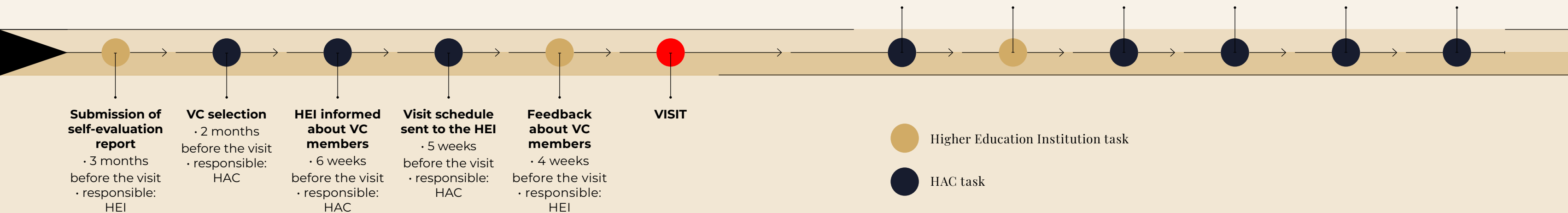
- Committee for Quality Assurance and Strategy**
- Committee for Strategy**
- ETK**  
College for University Professorship Affairs

- Committee for Teacher Training**
- Legal Committee**
- DOK**  
College for Doctoral Accreditation

### AD HOC COMMITTEES / WORKGROUPS

# INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION PROCESS

18 months



## Activities

1. The HAC is an independent national expert body established to perform external evaluation of the quality of education, scientific research and artistic activities in higher education, as well as of the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. In cases specified by law, it acts as an expert in procedures concerning higher education institutions.
2. To this end, the HAC conducts accreditation and evaluation processes.
3. It performs accreditation to attest the quality of higher education institutions and doctoral schools with the help of site visits by Visiting Committees appointed by the HAC. These processes are initiated by the institutions and doctoral schools with the HAC.
4. Its tasks related to the evaluation of university professor applications are specified in the Act on national higher education. These processes are also initiated by the institutions.
5. Evaluation as part of programme establishment procedures is also performed by the HAC at the request of the institutions. This assessment task is specified in Government Decree No 139/2015 of 9 June 2015 on the register of higher education qualifications and the inclusion of new qualifications in the register.
6. In the processes for the establishment of higher education institutions, for programme launch and the establishment of or adding a new branch of science to a doctoral school, the HAC is appointed by the Educational Authority as an expert to perform the relevant evaluation. In these cases there is no direct link between the HAC and the institution. The HAC works with the Educational Authority and follows its own evaluation guidelines in fulfilling the task specified in the decision of the Educational Authority.

## How we work

1. The HAC performs its duties without being instructed in any way regarding its operations or financial management. It adopts its own assessment guidelines and performs its expert activities in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) adopted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
2. The quality attestation and assessment work of the HAC is carried out with the help of external assessors who are invited by the relevant expert committee to evaluate programme establishment, programme launch and university professor applications. Visiting Committees participating in the accreditation of institutions and doctoral schools are also composed of external assessors. The HAC keeps over two thousand external assessors on file, of whom close to a thousand actively participate in the evaluation processes each year.
3. Only the HAC Body is authorised to adopt decisions in the cases processed by the HAC. All other colleges, expert and other committees (including the Visiting Committees) are preparatory bodies. These preparatory bodies formulate their opinion on the basis of the assessment processes that are part of the various procedures. The Body makes its decision on the basis of, but without being bound to these opinions.
4. A review of the decisions of the HAC Body regarding programme establishment, programme launch or university professor applications may be sought from the Review Committee. In addition to the opportunity for review required by law, any complaints received are also processed. The relevant procedure is described in the Complaint Management Policy.



# WE WILL COME OUT OF THIS STRONGER

Interview with Prof. Valéria Csépe, President of HAC

*Valéria CSÉPE is research professor at the Brain Imaging Centre at the Research Centre for Natural Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network. She is a professor of cognitive psychology and neuroscience, and a full member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Academia Europaea. Her research focuses on the behavioral and brain correlates of typical and atypical cognitive development. The professional impact of a significant number of her publications is indicated by outstanding citations and national and international research grants. Her work is recognized by a number of professional recognitions, including the honorary doctorate awarded by the University of Pécs, as well as by several awards and prizes.*

*She served as deputy secretary General of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, elected for two terms (2008–2014), being the first female in such a high position there. Between 2012 and 2018 she worked in the Committee on Review and Strategic Planning of the International Scientific Council (IGSU then ISC), and currently an expert of two OECD priority projects (Education 2030, Research Precariat). She is a member of the International Advisory Board of the University of Cyprus and of several national and international professional organizations. Her professional public and scientific activities engaged in training of talented and young professionals are widely known and recognized, she is an active member of several advisory boards.*

*She is the president of Board, appointed in June 2016 then in March 2018, of the Hungarian High Education Accreditation Committee.*

**Do you think that the current situation will fade to a bad memory in one or two years, or must we be prepared to live like this for an extended period of time?**

It is quite rare that something is all bad. In response to the urgent need to switch to a digital workflow, we have come up with creative solutions. We must bring these solutions with us to the future past the current situation, which is even scarier than the previous one. Higher education is just now learning to adapt to change. If there is one thing that is constant, it is change – and we must be prepared for it and be able to adapt to it. In two years' time I would like to see prominent results, rather than bad memories only.

**How do you see it as a practicing professor and researcher: what is the online space good for, and what is it not good for?**

Digital tools can certainly support learning. For students, active learning is something that awakens their ability to acquire new knowledge. Digital tools and methods are to provide support, however, rather than act as a replacement. They can simplify life when it comes to the administration and management of learning, offer quick access, clarify tasks, and function as self-learning platforms for those interested in learning and training.

Digital platforms should not be used to move one's 45-minute lectures to the digital space unchanged. The limits of human

attention are different in the digital space, which therefore requires different ways of teaching. We must learn to be skilled at using online platforms. The coronavirus pandemic brought about an emergency – now we must turn the solutions born of this emergency into solutions based on data and analysis. The ongoing fast-paced digital transformation in higher education is readily apparent. We cannot be satisfied with transplanting lectures and learning materials into the digital space, however. We must re-think our use of the various learning platforms and digital teaching methodologies, as well as the various forms in which teachers can be present and be effective.

**How can the current situation affect students?**

There is a group that gets left out or suffers a disadvantage in the course of the shift to digital workflows because of a lack of tools or skills. It is important to understand that the oft-used label of 'digital native' is just a myth, however. The ability to use the tools is not everything: not everyone is able to work well in the digital space, as digital competence is much more complex than that. Some people have acquired new skills and could profit from the situation, increasing their competences to a higher level. There is nothing that cannot be remedied, however: if we are able to apply the lessons learnt now, we

can trust that higher education as a whole and students alike will come out of this situation stronger. In terms of the acceptance of digitalisation, we have progressed five years' worth in six months. All we need to do now is apply what we have already learnt. The 'new normal' is a new challenge.

**What are the lessons from the current situation for the HAC?**

One of the most important lessons is that one must shape the organi-

ongoing institutional and doctoral accreditation processes switched to online interviews. The lesson therefore is that infrastructure and workflows need to be continuously improved, and our staff need training to be able to deliver great performance and to remain adaptable. The current adaptation process involves lots of organisational tasks. Working online does not mean that there is less work to do; the work is different, however, and strenuous in a different way. The

## The limits of human attention are different in the digital space, which therefore requires different ways of teaching. We must learn to be skilled at using online platforms.

sation's IT resources, general infrastructure and human resources in a way that allows fast and effective adaptation to any situation. The HAC switched to an all-digital workflow on 12 March 2020. We reorganised all workflows immediately to protect the Secretariat staff, the members of the HAC Body, as well as all the experts working in the various committees and colleges. We were able to reorganise our administrative processes, move all meetings to a digital platform, and improve the use of the Secretariat's Information System (TIR). We set up safe remote voting using IP-based voting authorisation, which now allows us to conduct voting in real time on all issues. Our accreditation processes did not suffer a setback, as the Visiting Committees in the

HAC Secretariat as well as most of the experts have done a great job adapting to the new situation. At the HAC, we have been putting an emphasis on infrastructural development since my appointment in 2016, and those efforts now paid off. Had the HAC faced the current challenge in the state it was in 2016, we would not have made the transition successfully and would not be among the ENQA member agencies whose work is cited as best practice by the European association. Neither would we be approached with such great interest in our experience in digital transition at various forums.

**You have been the president of the HAC since 2016. How would you describe the shape it was in**

**when you took over as a leader, how do you see its progress so far, and what are your goals for the agency?**

It is not my place to talk about the times before my appointment, as all former heads of the HAC had tried to make the most of the situation at hand. The state of affairs, however, was aptly characterised by a comment of one of the programme officers at the time, who said 'there is nothing to do, this is a small and poor organisation that nobody likes'. The latter is not such a big problem, as there are many who do not like the mirror that happens to reflect a weakness. It has been possible – and is in fact still possible – to do something about 'small and poor', however. My first mandate, then for a partial cycle, was presented to me in September 2016 at the national celebration for the start of the academic year in Pécs. The location had a beautiful personal message for me, as my professional career is linked closely to the physiology school in Pécs, the teachings of Endre Grastyán and his views about science. Without learning the basics in Pécs, I might not have become who I am today, and perhaps I would not hold an honorary doctorate from the University of Pécs.

What was the HAC like in 2016? It had many attributes, but based on my former experience as an academic manager, it wasn't really attractive. There were many things to straighten up, I have mentioned them at the beginning of the interview. Additionally, we needed to strengthen the international visibility of the agency. Improving the organisation's operations has been an ongoing effort, and while there are many things I'm still not satisfied with, I am happy to see the progress we have made. The HAC has been successfully accredited by ENQA and the NCFMEA, and has been registered with EQAR, the database of which (DEQAR) is being populated with support



from a Community project involving ten member organisations of the ENQA. We are currently preparing for the accreditation process before WFME, the international agency for medical training. We have established the internal quality assurance processes that cover the internal workings of the HAC. Whatever task I accept, I always have a vision to follow.

As its president, I want to see the HAC get as far ahead as the other ENQA agencies have gotten. My re-appointment in 2018 means that I can continue working towards this goal. Perhaps not many know that the president of the HAC is proposed jointly by the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the minister responsible for higher education. This means a kind of legitimacy as well as great responsibility, of course.

#### Has the situation of the HAC changed over the last four years?

Yes, policy-makers support our efforts to improve quality assessment and treat the HAC as an independent partner of equal rank. It is also important to see that we are not lagging behind any of the other accreditation agencies in the region, while upholding an additional mission that could help the accreditation of higher education institutions in the neighbouring countries.

The new institutional accreditation process, based on the ESC 2015, was introduced in 2017 and has since become well-established practice. We started developing a new procedure for the accreditation of doctoral schools in 2018, seeking input from all stakeholders in higher education. Having completed our pilot accreditation processes, we are now conducting 'live' ones.

The HAC is an independent expert body from an organisational, operational and financial standpoint. Our tasks are specified by law, while the processes and criteria for our evaluations are developed by the HAC itself. By 'the HAC', I refer to about

250 experts here, with many more contributing to our work as assessors. Many changes have taken place at the HAC over the recent years, but I am proud to say that as for our pool of experts, we are working with the best in Hungarian higher education and research.

#### Has the HAC itself undergone any change?

The greatest change, which by now is readily apparent to all stakeholders in higher education, concerns the role that the HAC wants to play: it is not interested in applying sanctions but in providing objective assessments to help higher education institutions improve their culture of quality assurance. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves, while the HAC is responsible for conducting independent assessments in an unbiased, objective and transparent manner, while continuously improving its processes.

We have developed and documented our procedures and created guides using input from stakeholders. We are continuously improving our criteria and offer consultation sessions. We have renewed our web site, not only to present a new image but also to make it easier to search for information and to establish a credible communication channel. The same purpose is served by the launching of our periodical titled Hungarian Accreditation Review.

#### Who are the people involved in the work carried out by the HAC?

There are very many contributors. As mentioned before, there are 250 to 300 experts participating in the work of the HAC Body and the various committees and colleges, and there are over 1000 experts contributing regularly as assessors. We are trying to ensure that all of them have the opportunity to be involved. Students play a prominent role, as every HAC process needs a member delegated by the National Conference of

Student Self-governments or the National Association of Doctoral Students. They do excellent work, their surveys and recommendations do much to facilitate the ongoing improvement of the operations of the HAC. The agency is also supported by representatives of the business sector, who are present in both the Hungarian and the International Advisory Bodies. These bodies keep the HAC aware of all the tasks that are still ahead, and give feedback on whether the changes made keep the agency on the right track. The most important thing, however, is that the prime stakeholders – i.e. the students – are involved in our processes, as they are whom higher education is all about. They have a role to play in all of our processes. Even university professor applications need to include student feedback. The focus is always on the students.

## HOW THE HAC WORKS DURING THE PANDEMIC

The COVID19 pandemic has had an impact on the operation of all parts of the HAC. Even when things had been going in the usual manner, the organisation of meetings, the preparation of visits, the administrative tasks related to decision-making, as well as the relevant managerial tasks had been enough for the staff of nearly 20 to have their hands full.

At the office of the HAC Secretariat in Krisztina körút, 10 to 12 preparatory committee meetings with 15 to 20 participants used to be held

each month in addition to the monthly meeting of the 20 members of the HAC Body. There were also institutional and doctoral accreditation processes with the requisite kick-off meetings and site visits.

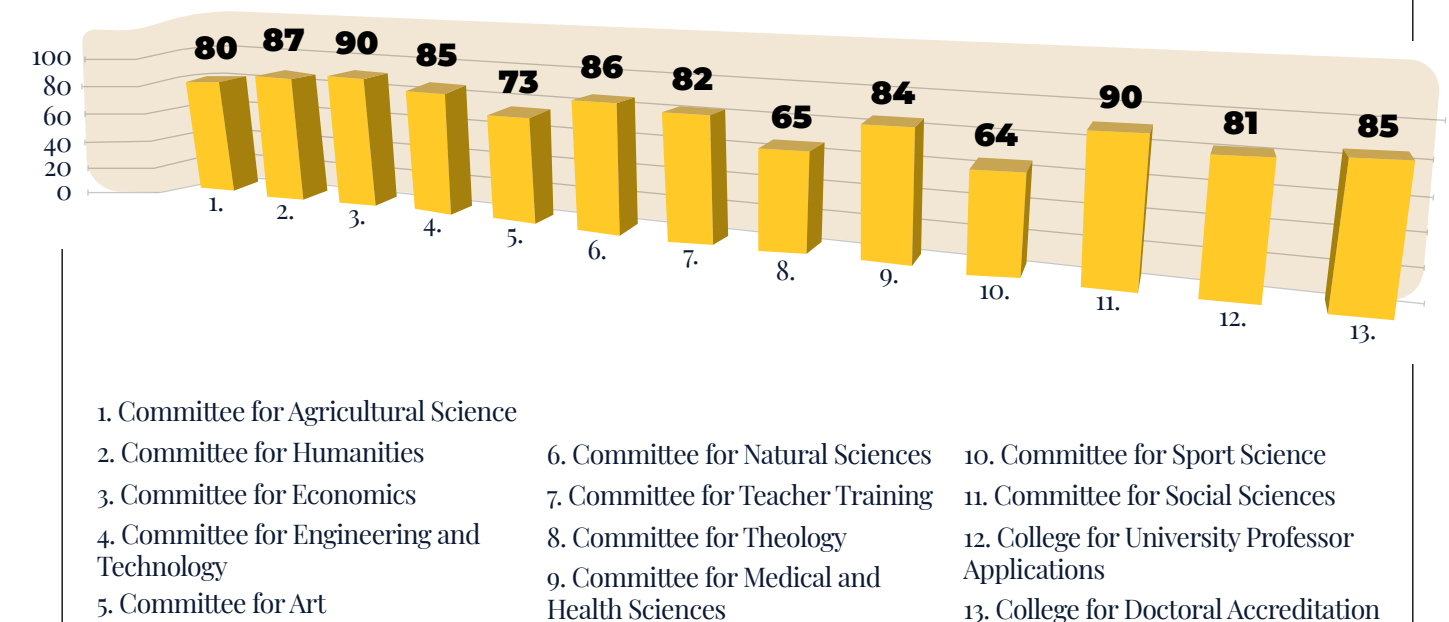
To protect all HAC staff, the president of the HAC decided to stop all in-person meetings and institutional visits on 11 March 2020 and instituted work-from-home processes. This necessitated moving all formerly in-person preparatory and decision-making meetings

and visits to online channels to take advantage of the safety of ones' homes. To do this, both a formal framework for conducting meetings and remote voting arrangements had to be established.

The HAC's dedicated IT staff used Microsoft Teams and the Secretariat's Information System (TIR) to create the necessary technical background.

The meeting of the HAC Body originally scheduled for 29 March 2020 as an in-person meeting was held as an online meeting instead as early as on 9 April 2020. Voting at the meeting was also administered online in the TIR system. The transition to online operations coincided with the assessment phase of university professor applications, requiring the Secretariat to organise regular meetings of the expert committees and of the relevant college. The HAC's preparatory committees and colleges have a total of 215 members. This is the number of people we 'seated' at our virtual tables in our online meeting rooms each month over the last half year.

Rate of participation at college and committee meetings, %



On 7 April 2020 we were already conducting the online accreditation of the Hantos Elemér Doctoral School for Economic and Regional Studies. This was followed by an institutional accreditation monitoring process and then the institutional accreditation of Neumann János University. The HAC conducted six institutional accreditation processes, including that of the Eötvös Loránd University of Science, with a total of 48 visiting committee members. Over the last six months, we have conducted 13 doctoral accreditation processes with the help of nearly 80 visiting committee members. In these accreditation processes, almost 500 people were interviewed from the participating institutions and doctoral schools.

Based on the effectiveness of the online accreditation visits and in preparation for the new institutional and doctoral accreditation processes starting in September 2020, a large number of visiting committee members were appointed between March and September. The HAC Body adopted decisions in a total of 468 cases between March and September 2020. Everybody misses one another's company, the usual bustle at the office and the good atmosphere of the on-site visits. Still, it seemed safer to continue operations in September using the same arrangements as in the spring. Circumstances necessitate that our operations remain in the online space for the remainder of this year and for the first six months of the next year.

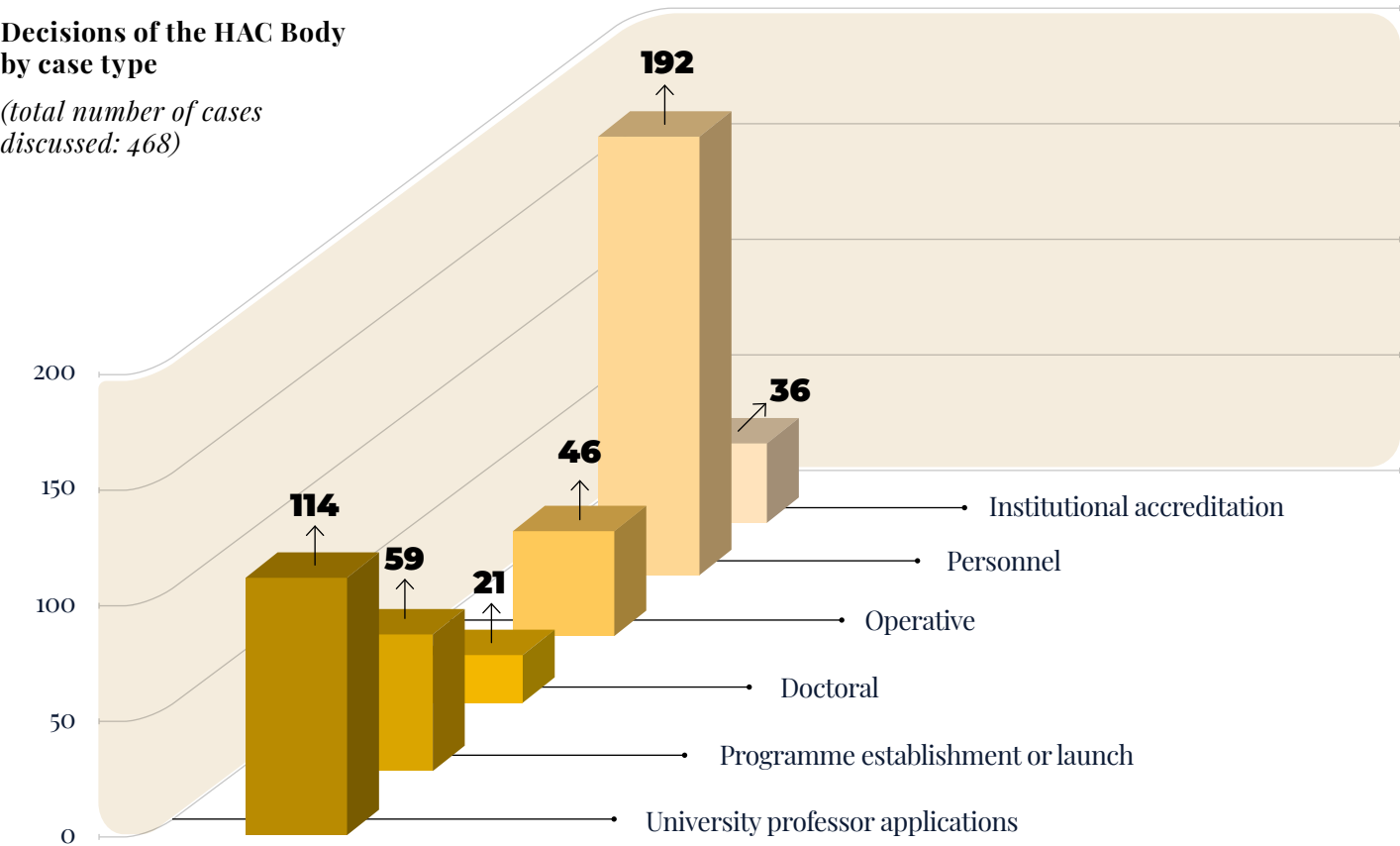
In addition to the effectiveness of the work performed in the virtual space, the advantages of these working arrangements cannot be ignored once the pandemic is resolved, either. We are applying the experience gathered to establishing 'smart office' operations at the HAC. Hybrid work arrangements consisting of both in-person meetings and online attendance will become an organic part of the HAC's operations in the future.

# PERIOD FOR THE SUBMISSION AND ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR APPLICATIONS

Applications may be submitted at any time between 1 September 2020 and 31 March 2021. The HAC undertakes to send the decisions and reasoning of the HAC Body by 5 June 2021 for all applications received between 1 September 2020 and 5 February 2021, in line with the rules for the appointment of university professors sent to the institutions by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

## Decisions of the HAC Body by case type

(total number of cases discussed: 468)



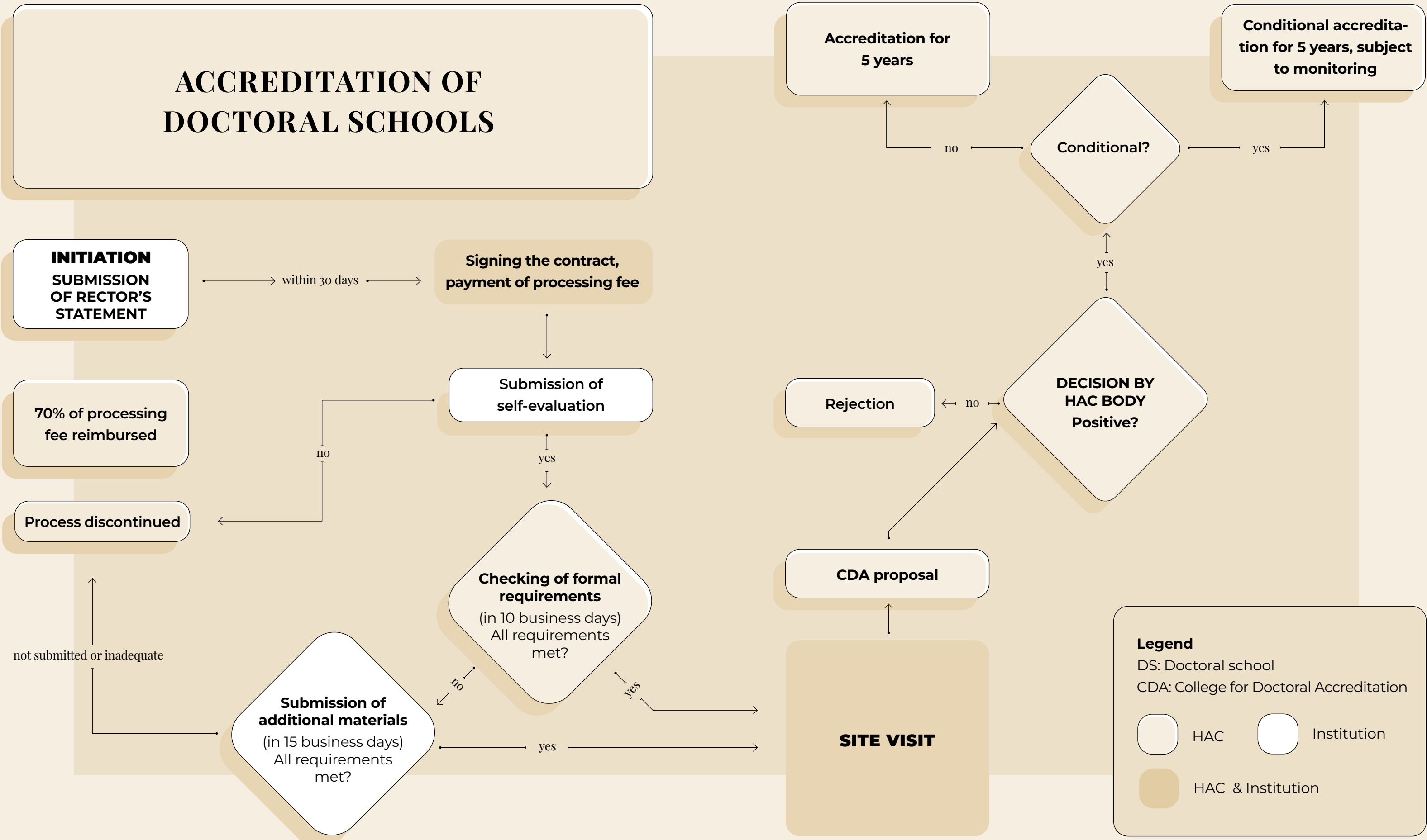
## 2020

## 2021

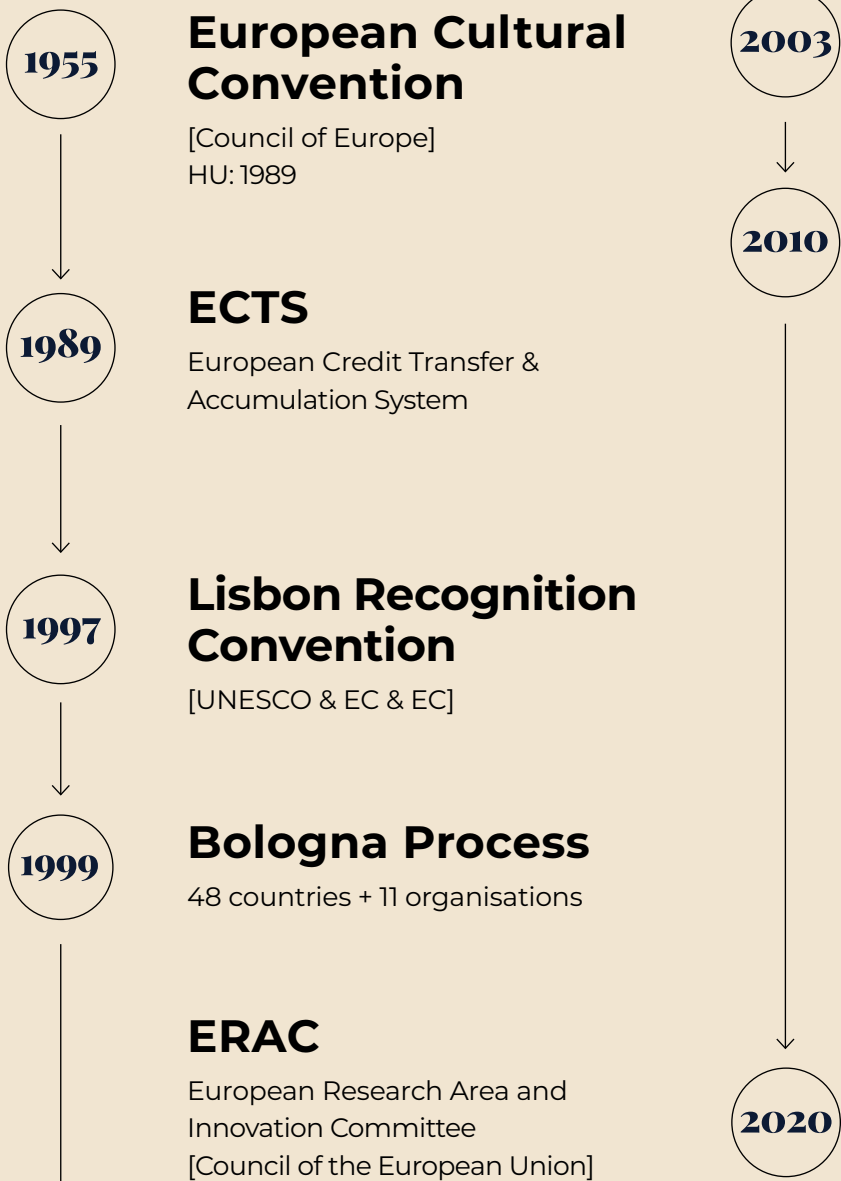




# ACCREDITATION OF DOCTORAL SCHOOLS



THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
QA SCENE



ENIC/NARIC

**ENIC:** European NetWork of Information Centres in the European Region

**NARIC:** National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the EU

HU: Educational Authority

ESG

European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA

[Currently effective: ESG 3.0 (2015)]

BFUC

Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) Secretariat; 2018-20 Italian presidency

The European  
Higher Education  
Area [EHEA]

European Approach for  
Quality Assurance of Joint  
Programmes

HAC: 2020

European Universities  
Initiative

11 Hungarian universities  
HAC: 2019

EQAR

European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education  
HAC: 2019

DEQAR

Database of External Quality Assurance Reports  
HAC: 2020

CEENQA

2001 Krakow  
1995 At the HAC's initiative  
26 countries, 41 members

ENQA

31 countries, 52 members  
HU: HAC

EURASHE

48 countries, 66 members  
HU: Hungarian Rectors' Conference, BGE

European Students' Union

40 countries, 46 members  
HU: National Conference of Student Self-governments (HÖÖK)

European Univ. Assoc.

850 members from 33 countries  
HU: 11 universities + Hungarian Rectors' Conference

European  
Overview

As part of the Bologna Process launched in 1999, the European ministers responsible for education first adopted a single quality assurance system for higher education (the ESG) in 2005, and then in March 2010 the same body established the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) at the Budapest-Vienna conference. The key goal of EHEA is to facilitate the renewal of higher education and to increase the mobility of students and teaching staff. The EHEA currently consists of 48 member countries and 11 institutional partners. Its official body is the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) Secretariat, the presidency of which is rotated among the member countries every two years. The most important umbrella organisation for accreditation and quality assurance in Europe is ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), which the HAC has been a member of since 2018. ENQA is present at all policy discussions started by the European Commission, has initiated various programmes, and has played a key role in creating the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) and the associated database (DEQAR). Of the various organisations that play an important role at the European level, the ones making up the group known as the E4 are the most prominent. In addition to ENQA, the E4 group includes the largest European student organisation (European Students' Union – ESU), EURASHE, the association of higher education institutions, and EUA, the European University Association. The E4 group is one of the most important industry partners of the European Union on issues of policy. The Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe (CEENQA) was established in 1995 at the HAC's initiative. It now represents 41 constituent institutions from 26 countries.

Other international  
quality assurance and  
accreditation bodies

- 
- INQAAHE**  
International NetWork of Quality Assurance Agencies in the Higher Education
- ECA**  
European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education
- CHEA**  
Council for Higher Education Accreditation + CIQG
- WFME**  
World Federation of Medical Education
- IEP**  
Institutional Evaluation Program
- 
- + numerous bilateral cooperation exercises, mainly with accreditation agencies of Community member states.

# ENQA: 20 YEARS

## A brief review of higher education quality assurance in Europe and the establishment of ENQA



Christina Rozsnyai

The author is programme officer for foreign affairs at HAC, and a member of the ENQA Board and the Board of AQ Austria.

### References

ENQA: 10 years (2000-2010). A decade of European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education. Ed. Fiona Crozier et al. Helsinki 2010 <https://enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/ENQA%2010th%20Anniversary%20publication.pdf>

ENQA Work Plan 2021 and 2022 (draft), submitted to the general assembly on 22 October 2020

ENQA Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 (draft), submitted to the general assembly on 22 October 2020

<sup>1</sup> Following changes to the names of the founding organisations, the E4 is composed of ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (originally Network); EUA, the European University Association (originally Association of European Universities (CRE) and the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences); ESU, the European Students' Union (originally ESIB); and EURASHE, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education.

<sup>2</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

<sup>3</sup> The BFUG is a working group of members representing the governments of the states of the EHEA whose task is to oversee implementation of the last ministers' declarations and prepare issues for the next ministerial meeting.

### A brief review of higher education quality assurance in Europe and the establishment of ENQA

Quality assurance (QA) agencies began to proliferate in Europe in the early 1990's, with only a few operating prior to that, notably in France and the UK. The development coincided with regime changes in Central and Eastern Europe. With its establishment of the country's first higher education law in 1993, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) was one of the earliest QA organizations in Europe. Concurrently, the European Commission became interested in QA in member states in order to smooth the way for higher education mobility. The process proceeded in concert with the just started “Bologna process” with its own concern for QA in the Bologna Declaration in 1999. Following several years of the so-called European Pilot Projects, which explored quality assurance principles and practices, an initiative to establish a European Network of Quality Assurance (hence the acronym ENQA) came to fruition in 2000 by a recommendation of the European Council. Its Secretariat was in Helsinki, Finland until 2007, when it moved to Brussels and was registered as an association in Belgium. ENQA's mandate was to ensure transparency and comparability of the quality of higher education in Europe. Although the founding president of the HAC had been on the

Steering Committee of ENQA since soon after its founding, the agency became a member in 2004 upon accession of the country to the European Union.

Early on, the direction of ENQA was twofold, to provide services for its members and to represent them, and the QA of higher education, on the European stage. Under the latter call, ENQA became an active partner in various European-funded projects, an activity it is heavily involved in to this day. With the meeting of ministers responsible for higher education in Berlin in 2003, ENQA was mandated, together with what came to be known as the E4<sup>1</sup>,

“to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Follow-Up Group to Ministers in 2005.” The ESG<sup>2</sup> were first published in 2005. They were revised after ten years to the currently effective, 2015 version.

With the introduction of the ESG, membership in ENQA became conditional on an agency's compliance with the standards, as decided by the ENQA Board following a review by an independent, international panel. The HAC underwent its first such review in 2008.

In a parallel development, discussions on a European regis-

ter for QA took place among the Commission, the E4 and other European players. While the original idea was to manage it at ENQA, opposition to that finally led to the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) as an autonomous organization, launched in 2008. QA agencies that are considered to comply with the ESG following an external review, in the great majority of cases coordinated by ENQA, of an international, independent panel, may be accepted into EQAR by decision of its Register Committee. EQAR is a European project financed by the Commission, and its members are European governments. The HAC first applied, and was admitted to EQAR in 2018.

### ENQA today

In its 20 years, ENQA has grown into an organization of 55 full members from 31 countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Together with its 57 affiliate members, 44 of the 48 EHEA countries are represented, in addition to six in other parts of the world and another six international ones. Foremost, ENQA is a forum for discussion on QA practices and the future of QA for its members, and as such the driver of good practices in QA in Europe.

ENQA defines itself in its Mission, as set down in its Strategic Plan 2021-2025, “As the designated stakeholder organisation of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA, ENQA represents their interests internationally, supports them nationally and provides them with comprehensive services and networking opportunities. Under ENQA's umbrella, the community of agencies explores the concept of quality, drives innovation in quality assurance and refines quality assurance processes.” Its services and activities, as affirmed in its Work Plan 2021-2022, embrace

- political representation, at the

Bologna Follow-up Group<sup>3</sup>; the E4 meetings; through statements to the ministers and others; and monitoring and providing feedback on international trends in QA in European higher education; as well as

- support for members through workshops expert trainings; international projects; publications on various QA issues, including thematic analyses; the general assembly meetings and webinars; and, importantly, coordinating agency reviews.

An overview of the work of ENQA appeared in the 20th anniversary publication, issued on the occasion of the ENQA general assembly on 22 October 2020, which is available on the website under “Occasional Papers”.

### ENQA in the coming years

In preparation for its Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025, the ENQA Board and several general assembly meetings have appraised the expected future trends in higher education and how QA can both respond to them and drive good practices. As stated in the introduction to the Strategic Plan, “Higher education itself is rapidly evolving. The boundaries of the traditional university are blurring; university networks in changing configurations are taking responsibility for research and teaching. At the same time, the traditional curriculum is under pressure from new forms of education. In the wake of the technological revolution, the employment landscape will change dramatically, and personal competences will need more frequent updating.”

Discussions will continue in the coming months and years on the European stage, among QA agencies, and with higher education institutional partners. In this respect, the COVID-19 pandemic and country lockdowns have accelerated a diversity of teaching and learning methodologies, but the evaluation of the strengths

and weaknesses of the hurriedly implemented procedures and their refinement must proceed in national and international discussions that ingrain not only the methodologies but also attitudes and the confidence of affected individuals. ENQA has been active in this area from supporting QA for European University Alliances and the engagement of a variety of stakeholders, including higher education institutions and external partners, to outlining the QA of micro-credentials and the quality of work-based learning.

A recent but fundamental change in ENQA procedures that was on the agenda of the 22 October 2020 general assembly concerns a matter that has always been frustrating for QA agencies: the double decision on their ESG compliance for ENQA membership by the ENQA Board, and for being listed in EQAR by the Register Committee – based on the same review panel report and findings. Once the procedure becomes final, being listed in EQAR will ipso facto be accepted as the criterion for membership in ENQA. The procedure for ENQA membership without EQAR listing will remain as before. A new Review Committee elected by the general assembly will oversee the agency review process and confirm the soundness of the panel review report that is sent to the EQAR Register Committee. The ENQA Board will be able to focus on strategic and other fundamental issues that concern the association, its members, and QA in Europe and beyond.



# HAC SURVEY 2020

## Thematic analysis in progress about the accreditation work of the last three years

The HAC has contracted PricewaterhouseCoopers Magyarország Kft. to prepare a comprehensive overview of the accreditation work carried out in the field of higher education between 2017 and 2020, including the results and perception of that work. The decision to prepare a thematic analysis was made during the summer. Information gathering began at the start of the academic year and the results are expected to be ready to be shared with the readers of the Review at the end of the year. The study is primarily of a fact-finding nature, designed to identify the initial level of perceivable indicators characterising the operations of the HAC, including the satisfaction of stakeholders. Its secondary goal is to develop an analytical methodology for regular application, to be used in the quality assurance and quality improvement processes concerning the activities of the HAC. The thematic analysis will focus on the following three areas when looking at the work and results of the last years: (1) institutional accreditation, (2) programme establishment and (3) programme launch. This means that the study will not cover the accreditation of doctoral schools, the HAC's contribution to the review of operating licences, parallel accreditation activities, or the HAC's work con-

cerning the appointment of university professors. The analysis, which is currently underway, will look at the results achieved over the last three years both from a quantitative and a qualitative standpoint. It includes an analysis of the information stored about the various processes in the TIR database supporting the work of the HAC, as well as a questionnaire based survey of the various target groups involved in the accreditation activities. The questionnaires are addressed to four target groups. The most detailed questionnaires were prepared for the teaching staff, institutional managers and administrative staff participating in the accreditation activities at the higher education institutions. They are designed to find information about these professionals' expectations from and satisfaction with the HAC and to collect their comments about the three types of procedures indicated above. A similarly detailed questionnaire was prepared for the HAC experts to arrive at useful lessons derived from their participation in the accreditation processes. Stakeholders in a wider sense include higher education students, whose opinion on accreditation and quality certification is also explored through a questionnaire. The fourth target group includes professional organisations in the field of higher education to find out about their awareness and opinion of the work performed by the HAC.

So far, the administrative data for the three types of processes has been processed, and the survey of three out of the four target groups using anonymous questionnaires has been completed. The questionnaire is currently being administered to the internal experts of the HAC. Due to the active participation of the stakeholders, a large number of responses were received, which are currently being processed and analysed. We would like to thank the 72 respondents from our partner organisations, 859 responders from higher education institutions, 10,299 students and 558 HAC internal experts so far for sharing their opinion with us. The final learnings from the analysis will be presented in a report in English, designed to be informative for the European accreditation associations (ENQA and EQAR) as well. The HAC 2021 expects to present this detailed report to the Hungarian higher education community at the beginning of 2021.



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