Thematic review of activities (2017–2020)

Carried out for the

Hungarian Accreditation Committee

December 2020

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1.Executive summary

In accordance with standard 3.4 of the Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance of the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the **purpose of this report** is to

- prepare a midterm analysis for the leadership of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) on the key accreditation activities,
- establish a methodology, survey tools, key performances indicators (KPIs) and benchmarks for regular future analysis and
- identify opportunities for HAC to contribute in new ways to the development of quality within higher education in Hungary.

The scope of the review is to examine activities

- between September 2016 and July 2020,
- in three procedure types: (1) institutional accreditation, (2) establishing a new study programme, (3) launching a new study programme.

To realise the above purposes, the applied **methodology for analysis included**

- a European accreditation overview,
- a quantitative analysis of HAC administrative data, and
- a qualitative analysis of survey results on the perception of staff of higher education institutions (HEIs), HEI students, partner organisation staff, and HAC experts.

Based on the analysis carried out, the following **KPIs are identified** regarding the three types of procedures.

Indicator\Value	Institutional accreditation	Establishing a new study programme	Launching a new study programme
Average annual number of procedures (2017-2019 period)	14,3 procedures/year	18,75 procedures/year	102,8 procedures/year
Average duration of procedure	15,7 months	2,95 months	3,5 months
Average length of documents submitted	88,3 pages	17 pages	185 pages

Indicator\Value	Institutional accreditation	Establishing a new study programme	Launching a new study programme
Rate of correction requested to submitted documents	16%	9%	36%
Rate of success including conditional approval	100%	56%	53%
Mean satisfaction of HEI staff (1-not at all, 10-completely)	7,06	6,69	6,63
Workload for HAC (average annual number of procedures * average duration)	224,51	55,31	359,8

Based on the outcomes of the review the following **recommendations are made**

Short term:

1. **Strive for more in-depth and adapted communication with stakeholders** – All surveyed stakeholder groups indicated the need for more information on accreditation. However, the expressed needs are different in content and effective mode of transmission for each group. Therefore, we recommend targeted communication, the development of individual channels for the target groups under the website, the introduction of new communication formats, such as leading expert networks, workshops and trainings.

2. **Consider ways to involve different stakeholders more in evaluation to raise the independence of reviewers** – Based on the survey results, the major challenge in increasing client satisfaction is to assure the independence of reviewers during all accreditation procedures. Due to size, unique legal regulations and Hungarian language, further involvement of international reviewers in the procedures is not realistic in the short term. Therefore, we recommend the recruitment, training and certification of employment sector experts and assigning one employment sector and one academic reviewer in the two programme accreditation procedures.

3. **Consider ways to support HEIs in their preparation prior to the initiation of a procedure** – In order to (1) reduce workload from rejected and then resubmitted requests and (2) to provide continuing support to quality development initiatives within higher education institutions, we recommend that a small dedicated team is created within HAC. This team could provide support to the institutions during the preparation of their requests and also could lead a peer learning network of institutional quality developers.

Long term:

4. **Rethink, simplify and digitize procedures to decrease the administrative burden to both HEIs and HAC** – In order to raise client satisfaction and to reduce the administrative burden on HAC and higher education institutions, we recommend the redesign of accreditation procedures. Procedures could be redesigned in a way that information from the numerous available Hungarian education related databases is utilised by providing automated quantitative analysis for requests. The redesigned and digitised procedure should include an IT supported workflow that provides transparency for relevant stakeholders and monitoring and analytical modules to support HAC leadership in decision making.

5. **Renew the procedure of launching a new study programme** – Apart from the aspects mentioned in recommendation 4., a conceptual renewal of the procedure of launching a new study programme is needed. The pivotal reasons for this are the following: (1) this is the procedure with the lowest KPI scores, (2) it is a one-time, ex-ante procedure that does not influence the often decades-long implementation of a programme, (3) this procedure of HAC happens as part of the registration and licensing procedure of the Educational Authority. Therefore, we recommend the introduction of a cyclic procedure (meaning that programme accreditation has a validity date, after which it needs to be renewed) and the separation of programme accreditation from the registration and licensing procedure of the Education Authority. This recommendation involves the transformation of the current legal context therefore the support of the Ministry is needed for its implementation.

6. **Initiate stakeholder dialogue on rethinking the legal framework of establishing and launching a new programme** – The current practice of establishing and launching a new study programme, with the addition of the timeframe of the centralised higher education application procedure results in a situation that makes it impossible for higher education institutions to put a new programme in place in less than 3 years. Such a slow way of adaptation to technological and market advances puts Hungarian higher education at a disadvantage compared to international higher education or adult education. Therefore, we recommend starting a stakeholder dialogue on changing the overall legal context of programme accreditation, registration and licensing in Hungary.

2. Context of the analysis carried out

2.1. About the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC)

The HAC is an independent, national-level body of experts tasked with the external evaluation of the quality of educational and related research activities and the internal quality assurance (hereinafter QA) systems of higher education institutions (hereinafter HEI) in Hungary.[1] HAC operates according to the Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance of the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter ESG) and is a member of ENQA, CEENQA and EQAR.[2]

2.2. Purpose and scope of the review

According to standard **3.4 of ESG**, higher education quality assurance agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

By the ESG standard, **in the summer of 2020, HAC has commissioned an objective external analysis to be performed on key HAC activities of the last three years**. Based on this commission, the purpose of this report is to:

- prepare a midterm analysis for the leadership of HAC on the key accreditation activities and provide an objective and thorough analysis of stakeholder perception of HAC activities,
- establish a methodology, survey tools, KPIs and benchmarks for regular future analysis,
- identify opportunities for HAC to contribute in new ways to the development of quality within higher education in Hungary.

The analysis concentrates only on the following **3 accreditation procedures that HAC performs**:

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[1] Source: https://www.mab.hu/en/home-page/#about

[2] The legal base and operational framework of HAC is provided by the Act No. 204 of 2011. On national higher education and the Government decree No. 19/2012. on quality evaluation and development in higher education.

- institutional accreditation,
- evaluation of new education and learning outcome requirements (hereinafter referred to as establishing a new study programme) accreditation of new study programmes (hereinafter referred to as launching a new study programme).

Accreditation of doctoral schools and evaluation of university professor nominations is out of scope for this study.

The timeframe of the review is from September 2016 to July 2020. The timeframe was set to focus only on procedures that started after the new leadership of HAC has been appointed for 6 years in September 2016 and procedures that have already been fully accomplished, meaning that HAC has already reached a plenary decision before the analysis started.

2.3. International context

As part of the thematic review, we have examined the accreditation procedures of several countries. The characteristics of the international outlook performed are described *in Chapter 2.5.1.*

We found that procedural steps of the programme and institutional accreditation have strong common characteristics in the examined countries. These are shown in Figure 1 below.
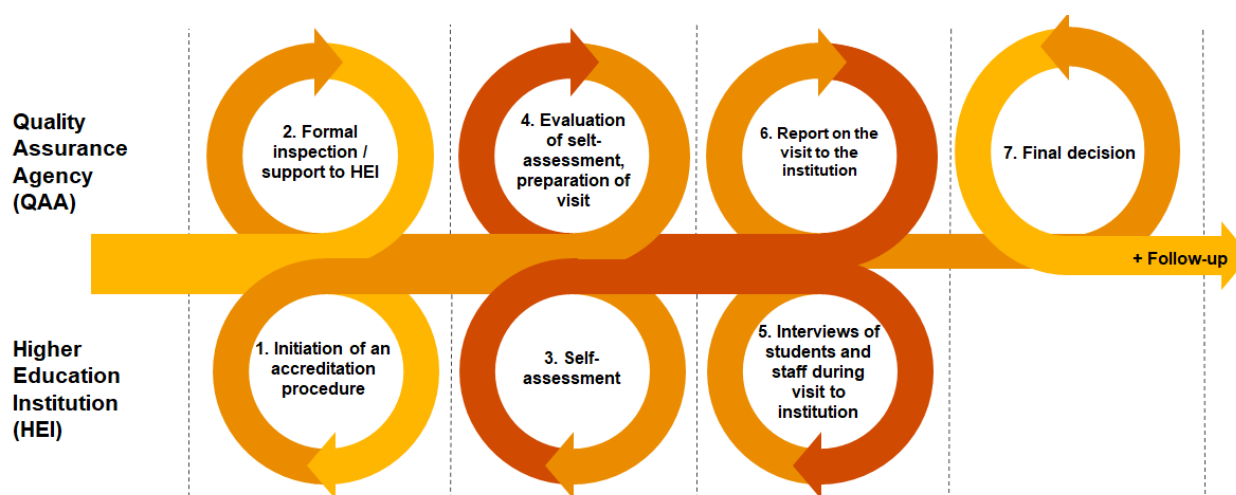
1. Figure: Common procedural steps of higher education accreditation in analysed EHEA countries

Accreditation procedures tend to begin with an initiation step by the HEI which is followed by the formal inspection of or in some countries the active support by the quality assurance agency (hereinafter QAA). By QAA standards and criteria HEIs then prepare the requested self-assessment report on the institution or on the programme to be accredited.

The following step is the evaluation of the self-assessment report by the QAA. The quality of the self-assessment report has a significant influence on the final decision of the QAAs in most countries.

Especially in the case of institutional accreditation, the following step is a 2-3 days long onsite visit to the HEI by the QAA reviewer team. The QAA reviews the operation of the HEI and/or the conditions of launching or running the programme. The members of the committee include students and other stakeholders. A report is prepared by the visiting committee on the results of the visit.

At the end of the process, the QAA makes a final decision based on its published set of criteria. According to the most common practices, two main factors play an important role in the final decision: the HEI self-assessment report and the report made by the visiting committee.

Concerning the consequences of the decision taken by QAA, the most frequent are (1) full accreditation for a definite period, (2) conditional accreditation for a shorter definite period and (3) rejection. In case of the latter the programme cannot be launched, or the institution cannot further function as a HEI.

Further outcomes of the international outlook are found in Chapter 3.1.2 and 3.3.1.

2.4. Hungarian higher education context

Hungary is a small country (of 10 million inhabitants), with a proportionately small higher education ecosystem. At the time of the review, **it consists of 63 higher education institutions**[3] within the following categories:

- 14 state universities,
- 14 non-state[4] universities,
- 4 state universities of applied sciences,
- 6 non-state universities of applied sciences,
- 1 state college,
- 24 non-state colleges.

The total number of students in Hungary was 245 764, and that of teaching academic staff 22519 in 2018.[5]

Hungary - as one of the **European Higher Education Area** (EHEA) countries - started implementing the Bologna process with the introduction of bachelor's degrees in the school

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[3] Source: Appendix 1. of the Act no. 204. of 2011. on National Higher Education

[4] Non-state HEIs are maintained by private or religious organisations.

[5] Source: Table 1.1 of the statistics of higher education (OSAP) of 2018.
   https://www.oktatas.hu/felsooktatas/kozerdeku_adatok/felsooktatasi_adatok_kozzetetele/felsooktatasi_statisztikak

years of 2005/2006 and 2006/2007. Master's degrees were introduced in 2009/10 in all fields of studies.

The Hungarian Bologna process implementation resulted in a system, where the bachelor's and master's degree programme titles along with their total credit requirements, (along with higher education short cycle vocational programmes at EQF 5 level) are regulated and listed in a government decree.[6] The educational and learning outcome requirements of each bachelor's and master's degree programme (along with higher education short cycle vocational programmes at EQF 5 level) are also regulated by a ministerial decree.[7] The educational and learning outcome requirements of a degree programme consist of the description of the most important characteristics of the programme such as the aims, the major content elements, their credit value range, the expected learning outcomes (competences), the practicum requirements, the foreign language exam requirements and the entrance requirements for master's degrees.

This results in a system, where if a new need arises for tertiary qualified workforce, a series of steps need to be carried out for a HEI to be able to provide that qualification programme to students. These steps are the following.

1. **Establishment of a new programme (new qualification):**
   a. **HEI** (or group of HEIs or a stakeholder) initiates a new tertiary qualification by writing an education and learning outcome requirement proposal.
   b. **Stakeholders**, among them HAC, evaluate the proposed education and learning outcome requirement.
   c. When and if stakeholders approve the proposal, the modification of the government decree is initiated, and the new qualification is enlisted in the compendium government decree.
   d. The modification of the government decree is followed by the declaration of the new education and learning outcome requirement in the ministerial decree.

2. **Launching of a new programme:**
   a. HEI prepares a programme accreditation request document (self-evaluation report) based on HAC requirements for launching a new programme.
   b. HEI initiates registration and licencing of the new programme at the Educational Authority by a request, the annex of which is the self-evaluation report submitted to HAC.
   c. The Education Authority carries out formal checks and if the request is accepted it is delegated to HAC for expert evaluation.
   d. HAC performs the procedure of launching a new programme and informs the Educational Authority of its plenary decision.

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[6] Government decree No. 289/2005 on bachelors and master's degrees in higher education and the procedural regulations of launching a new programme, and Government decree No. 139/2015. on the compendium of higher education qualifications and on the procedure of entering the compendium

[7] Decree of the Educational Minister No. 15/2006. on the education and learning outcome requirements of bachelor's and master's degrees and Decree of the Minister of Human Capacities No. 18/2016 on the education and learning outcome requirements of higher education vocational, bachelors and master's degrees

e. Based on the decision of HAC the Educational Authority gives licence to the HEI and registers the new programme in the Higher Education Institutional Register (HEIR) or rejects the HEI's request.

f. HEI can launch the new programme in the centralised admission procedure for students only if the new programme is already registered in the HEIR.

Based on the legal framework described above, **HAC performs two types of accreditation procedures that are linked to programme accreditation**:

- **The evaluation of education and learning outcome requirement** (for establishing a new qualification programme)
- **The ex-ante programme accreditation** (for launching a new programme)

Current legal regulations don't require any regular accreditation for running programmes.

Also, it needs to be emphasised that the programme accreditation procedure of HAC is not a standalone procedure, but a built-in evaluation within the licencing and registration procedure of the Educational Authority. This means that the client HEI is that of the Educational Authority primarily and not the HAC, the Educational Authority communicates officially with the HEI, though HAC can and does communicate with institutions on clarifying programme accreditation request content issues.

As for the institutional accreditation, HAC provides this as a fee-based service to HEIs. Institutional accreditation is not obligatory according to the act on national higher education, yet HEIs use this service to obtain the external quality certification, a proof of operating by ESG standards. According to the act on national higher education, HEIs need to renew their operational licence as institutions every 5 years. One aspect of this renewal is providing proof of operating by ESG standards.

Operational licence renewal is also carried out by the Educational Authority, yet institutional accreditation is done separately, as an independent HAC procedure between the HEI and HAC.

2.5. Methodology of the performed review

The thematic analysis focuses on the following three aspects of HAC's activity:

- perception of the procedures of establishing and launching new study programmes,
- perceptions of institutional accreditation procedures and
- perceptions of the internal operation of HAC.

The sources of the analysis are threefold:

- A benchmark analysis of international accreditation practices has been carried out based on available online resources to provide a comparative overview.
- Quantitative analysis has been performed on data and documents provided by the HAC, prominently sources of information from HAC's administrative database.

- Qualitative analysis has been carried out on the results of a questionnaire survey conducted with the following target groups:
  - Academic and administrative staff of HEIs,
  - Staff of organisations that have a partnership with the HAC,
  - Staff and experts of the HAC,
  - Students of HEIs.

The combined analysis of the international benchmark analysis, the quantitative data obtained from the HAC database and the qualitative data obtained from the questionnaires provided sufficient input in quantity and quality to formulate suggestions for more efficient and effective operation.

2.5.1. International accreditation overview

As part of the thematic review, we have examined the accreditation procedures of several accreditation agencies in 20 countries, including Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and The Netherlands. In-depth analysis of institutional and programme accreditation was performed on QAAs in the following countries: Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

The scope of our outlook focused on programme accreditation and institutional accreditation procedures including the re-accreditation of already running programmes and/or institutions. During the research, our goal was to identify a common, general process of accreditation procedure applicable in the EHEA context, since these countries all consider the criteria and standards defined by ESG.

For institutional accreditation procedures the examined dimensions were:

- the validity period of accreditation decision,
- the duration of the procedure
- the administrative burden on the HEI and
- the legal consequence of the rejection.

Though the administrative burden of accreditation procedures on HEIs was examined, there were no such KPIs published. QAAs tend to publish maximum length (page or characters) of self-evaluation report, but no actual average length of submitted documents (self-evaluation report + annexes) was available.

Establishing a new study programme procedure is unique to Hungary, therefore no benchmark data was searched for, instead, programme accreditation procedures in some of the aforementioned countries have been examined.

The focus areas included:

- whether programme accreditation is ex-ante or cyclic and accreditation takes place in progress,
- the duration of the procedures and

˗ the legal consequence of the decision.

2.5.2. Quantitative analysis of HAC administrative data

During the analysis HAC administrative data stored in its online information system (referred to as Secretariat Information Database, hereinafter SID) was used as a source of primary quantitative data. In order to perform the analysis, access the data, learn about the operation of the information system, HAC provided temporary access to the database. The access was used solely to perform the analysis, examine trends and draw conclusions; the access itself and the documents accessed through the system is deleted upon completion of this analysis. All data accessed through HAC's information system is treated in a purposeful way in accordance with current data protection regulations.

Administrative data on the procedures in question was analysed in two clusters: a thorough analysis has been performed on procedures starting between September 2016 and July 2020; while procedures starting between 2014 and August 2016 were analysed in bulk only, for comparison purposes.

A total of 575 procedures have been analysed, according to the below distribution based on the outcome:

˗ 50 procedures in progress,
˗ 131 conditionally approved cases,
˗ 164 approved cases,
˗ 230 rejected cases.

The thorough analysis of administrative data on procedures starting between September 2016 and July 2020 included the following aspects (not all the analysed information is displayed in the final report):

˗ **Numerosity** – the annual number of procedures, by procedure type and outcome (accepted, conditionally accepted, rejected)
˗ **Duration of procedures** – in months, by procedure type and institution and on average
˗ **The time between decision and information on decision sent to HEI** – in days, by procedure type, by institution and on average
˗ **The administrative burden on HEI** - length of documentation and professional materials submitted by the institutions, in pages, by procedure type, by institution and on average
˗ **Distribution of evaluation outcomes** – the percentage of approved, conditionally approved and rejected cases
˗ **Decision texts in rejected cases** – to identify the most common reasons for rejection

The aim of the quantitative analysis was (1) to gain an objective perspective of the examined procedures independent of institutional perception and (2) to provide indicators on HAC's operation with current values for future reference.

2.5.3. Qualitative analysis of target group surveys

During the creation of the questionnaires, our goal was – besides collecting high-quality data for the current analysis – to create a sample for similar surveys in the future that allow the collection of comparable data over time. The created questionnaires ensure the possibility of regular, structured feedback at the end of a given period, the long-term usability of the questionnaires and the traceability of the results and changes over time.

Theoretical background

According to Ho and Wearn's HETQMEX model, the quality of higher education institutions can be measured along 8 dimensions, which are: leadership, commitment, total customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, total involvement, training and education, ownership of problems, reward and recognition, error prevention, and teamwork.[8]

2. Figure: The HETQMEX model (Ho, Wearn, 1996)

The questions formulated in the survey were developed using the HETQMEX model as a source of input and inspiration. **It is important to note that, although** all 8 categories were covered during the formulation of the questionnaires, each category was developed in a unique way by PwC after consultation with HAC and building in their input and expectations. In this

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[8] Ho, S. K., Wearn, K. (1996): A higher education TQM excellence model: HETQMEX. Quality assurance in education.

sense, the classification used in the thematic analysis may differ from the system developed by Ho and Wearn.

In the thematic review, each category was related to the analysis as follows:

1. **Leadership** - HAC and its management (perceived changes, developments),
2. **Commitment** - Commitment of the HEI to improve its quality; commitment to using HAC's services; commitment of HAC to quality development – the purpose of the analysis,
3. **Total beneficiary satisfaction** - Satisfaction of the partner institutions and HEIs with the 3 procedures and overall HAC performance,
4. **Involvement** - Involvement of experts; Involvement of HEIs,
5. **Training and education -** Information provided/needed for experts, partner organizations, students,
6. **Ownership of problems** - The whole analysis – Responsibility,
7. **Reward and recognition** - Experts; HEIs satisfaction with HAC,
8. **Teamwork** - Partner organizations; experts.

Tool and access

For the preparation, distribution, recording and partial processing of the questionnaires Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool, has been used. The questionnaires created in the tool were accessed by respondents through a link that was sent out to them. The link provided general and anonymous access, so neither the respondent's organisation nor the respondent could be identified through it.

Questionnaire structure

To perform the analysis, five different, although in certain question groups identical, questionnaires were sent out to five different, clearly identifiable target groups.

Key information on target groups and questionnaires is summarized in the table below:

Target groups		Channels of communication	No. of respondents	Content of the survey				
				Generic knowledge and opinions about the HAC	Institutional accreditation related questions	Establishing a study programme related questions	Launching a new study programme related questions	Generic questions about accreditation
1) HEI staff	V1 - HEIs that **participated** in institutional accreditation after Jan. 2017	Questionnaire sent out by PwC to HEIs	724	■	■	■	■	
	V2 – HEIs that **did not participate** in institutional accreditation after Jan. 2017	Questionnaire sent out by PwC to HEIs	135	■		■	■	
2) Partner organisation staff		Questionnaire sent out by PwC	75	■				
3) HAC experts		Questionnaire sent out by the HAC	566	■	■	■	■	
4) HEI students		Questionnaire sent out by PwC to HEIs, by HEIs to students	10 299					■

The questionnaire targeted at HEIs was sent out to two different target groups:

- the staff of HEIs that participated in institutional accreditation during the examined period received questionnaire V1, while
- the staff of HEIs that participated only in establishing or launching a new study programme procedure received questionnaire V2.

Questionnaires V1 and V2 only contained questions that are relevant for the procedures that the respondents' HEI participated in. The reason for this segregation was to minimise errors in responses resulting from confusion about which exact institutional accreditation procedure the HEI participated in.

Each questionnaire is divided into two parts: a general and a target group specific unit.

In questionnaires 1) – 3) the general unit includes questions on the following topics:

- questions about the respondent and/or the organization they represent (care was taken during the design of the questionnaire to ensure that anonymity was not compromised during completion),
- questions related to the management of HAC, in particular, changes observed since 2017,
- questions related to respondents' knowledge on HAC and the services it provides,
- questions related to respondents' satisfaction with the quality of HAC services,
- questions related to respondents' perception on the impact of HAC activities.

Besides the above dimensions, the questionnaire targeted at HAC experts contains questions on respondents' perception regarding the organisational culture of HAC.

The questionnaires targeted at HEI and HAC staff contain target group specific questions regarding the three examined procedures (institutional accreditation, establishing a new study programme, launching a new study programme).

The questionnaire for HE students asks about their general perceptions of quality assurance in higher education, their knowledge on accreditation, on the HAC, its activities and the accreditation process. The primary consideration in this questionnaire was brevity and comprehensibility, so this questionnaire is limited to the most basic questions.

During the analysis, the results of the questionnaire surveys prepared for the 5 target groups provide an objective picture of the perception of the procedures by each actor. Based on the results of the qualitative study, it was possible to identify how well the services and standards provided by the HAC meet the expectations of the actors and identify the direction of service development to increase their satisfaction.

Students stand out of the surveyed target groups as they are only indirectly involved in the quality of HAC quality assurance services. By summarizing and analysing the results of the student questionnaires, we examine the depth of knowledge about HAC among higher education students

and how well they are aware of the function and significance of accreditation. The obtained results are utilised, primarily, in the formulation of development proposals.

Question types

Question types in the survey included:

- binary,
- single,
- multiple choice and
- Likert-style rating questions on a scale from 1 to 10.

Our goal was to create a questionnaire that provides numerical data, which can be used to provide comparable results in similar surveys repeated in the future.

Besides, several open-ended questions were also included in the questionnaires to allow the expression of individual opinions and map multiple choices for future surveys. Based on the answers received, for future use, we suggest the consolidation of some of the open-ended questions, building in the most frequently received answers as choices thus reducing the volume of answers. In the report, responses to the open-ended questions are displayed in a consolidated form, with focus given to the most frequently mentioned answers.

2.5.4. Considerations and limitations of the analysis

Although we tried to minimise errors and limitations in the survey as much as possible, the below considerations need to be noted about the analysis.

Quantitative analysis:

- The purpose of the HAC database is not to support analysis.
- Though the official timeframe of the review is from September 1. 2016 to July 31. 2020, in the case of institutional accreditation and establishing a new study programme no procedures were launched in 2016. Also, In the first half of the year 2020 few procedures have been launched and decided on. For reasons of comparability the annual averages were calculated only for full years, 2017-2019 for all three examined procedures.

Qualitative analysis:

- The total number of respondents indicate the number of respondents who answered at least one question within a survey. Since respondents could skip any number of answers, the actual number of respondents is indicated in the case of each question as "n" in the report. In case of open-ended questions and those with a possibility of multiple answers the total number of responses does not equal "n".
- Concerning the previous point, the survey did not contain mandatory answers, partial filling was accepted.

- It cannot be stated for sure that respondents were aware of the procedures their institution participated in. Hence, some of the answers may contain wrong information.
- Participation in the survey was voluntary, it seems that those tended to participate in the survey more who took part in successful accreditation procedures.

3.   Outcomes of the analysis

3.1.   Institutional Accreditation Procedure

3.1.1. Institutional accreditation – the renewed procedure of HAC

In the summer of 2016, a new leadership was appointed to HAC for a 6-year period. The first major change introduced by the new leadership was the renewal of the institutional accreditation procedure, which was launched in 2017. The institutional accreditation procedure is thus the only procedure renewed within the three examined ones.

During this analysis we have taken this into account. On one hand, we have only examined the administrative data on institutional accreditation procedures that were launched after January 2017, and on the other, we have separated HEIs based on the last time they underwent institutional accreditation within the surveys. The HEIs that took part in institutional accreditation since 2017 became the V1 group that had survey questions on this procedure, while the V2 group, the institutions that took part in institutional accreditation before 2017 didn't receive questions on institutional accreditation in the survey in order not to mix perception of the previous and the present procedures.

3.1.2. International outlook

As part of the international outlook, institutional accreditation practices of **8 countries** (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland) and **10 quality assurance agencies**[9] were examined. The **average length of the procedure**, the **average validity of the institutional accreditation decision** and the **legal consequences of rejection** were in the focus of the outlook.

Based on the international outlook the following common trends and KPIs were identified:

  ‒   Higher education institutions **receive accreditation for an average 5,5 years**.
  ‒   The most common **consequence of a failed institutional accreditation procedure is the loss of HEI status** and the right to offer EQF 6-8 level study programmes.

The renewed institutional accreditation procedure in Hungary is similar to common European practices.

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[9] Quality assurance agencies examined: Czech Republic – NAB, Denmark – The Danish Accreditation Institution, Germany – ACQUIN, EVALAG, ZEVA, Poland – PKA, Portugal – A3ES, Slovenia – NAKVIS, Spain – DEVA, Switzerland – AAQ

3.1.3. Quantitative analysis – Review of HAC administrative data

Our quantitative analysis was targeted at the 2017 – 2020 period, with the only exception of the number of procedures that was analysed from 2014-2020.

According to **SID data,** the average annual number of institutional accreditation procedures (the number of procedures having been launched in a year) has been on the rise. In the 2014-2016 period the average number of yearly institutional accreditation procedures was 11,3 and between 2017 and 2019 it has risen to 18,3.
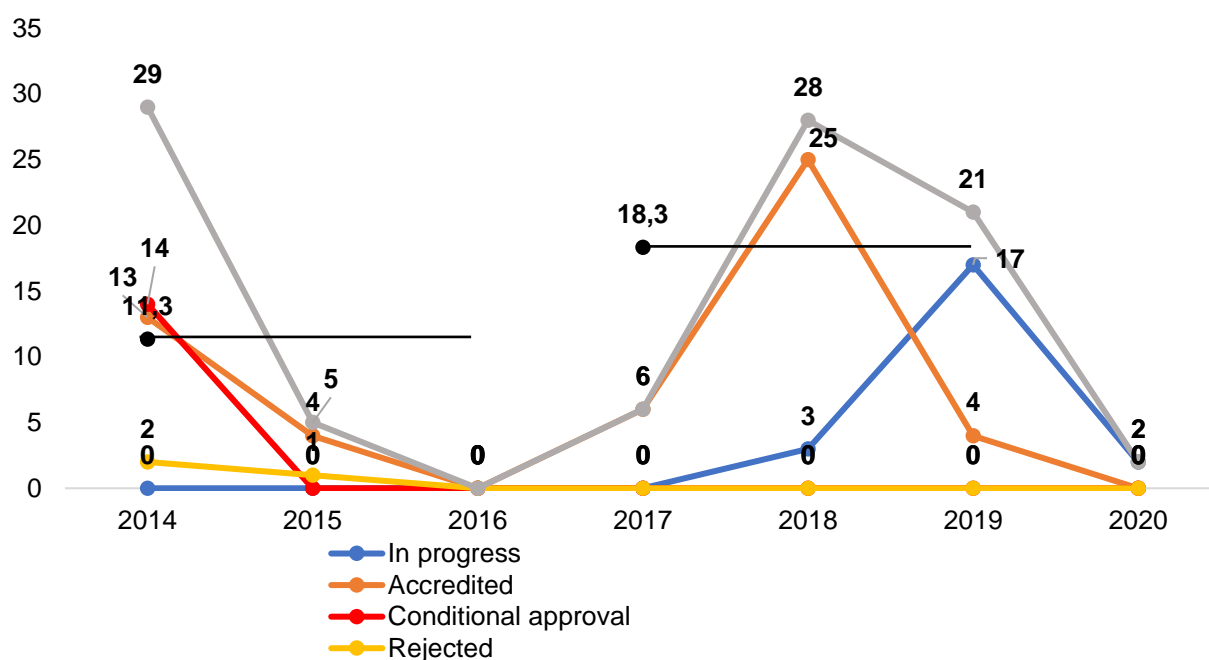

3. Figure: *Number of procedures between 2014 and 2020, by type of outcome and average number of procedures*

Based on SID data (see figures above and below) between 2017 and the summer of 2020, the **following KPI-s were identified**.

- the average annual number of procedures: 14,3 procedures/year
- the average duration of the procedure: 15,4 months
- the average length of the document submitted: 88,3 pages
- rate of corrections requested to submitted documents: 16%
- rate of success (including conditional approval): 100%
- mean satisfaction of HEI staff respondents (on a scale from 1-not at all, 10 completely): 7,06
- the workload for HAC (average annual procedure number x average duration of procedure): 224, 51 months
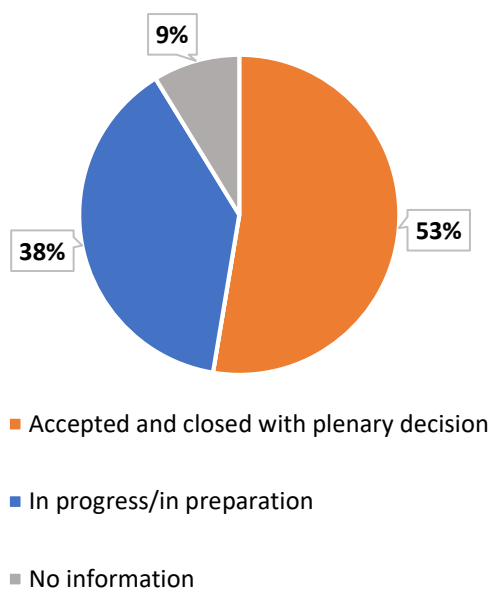
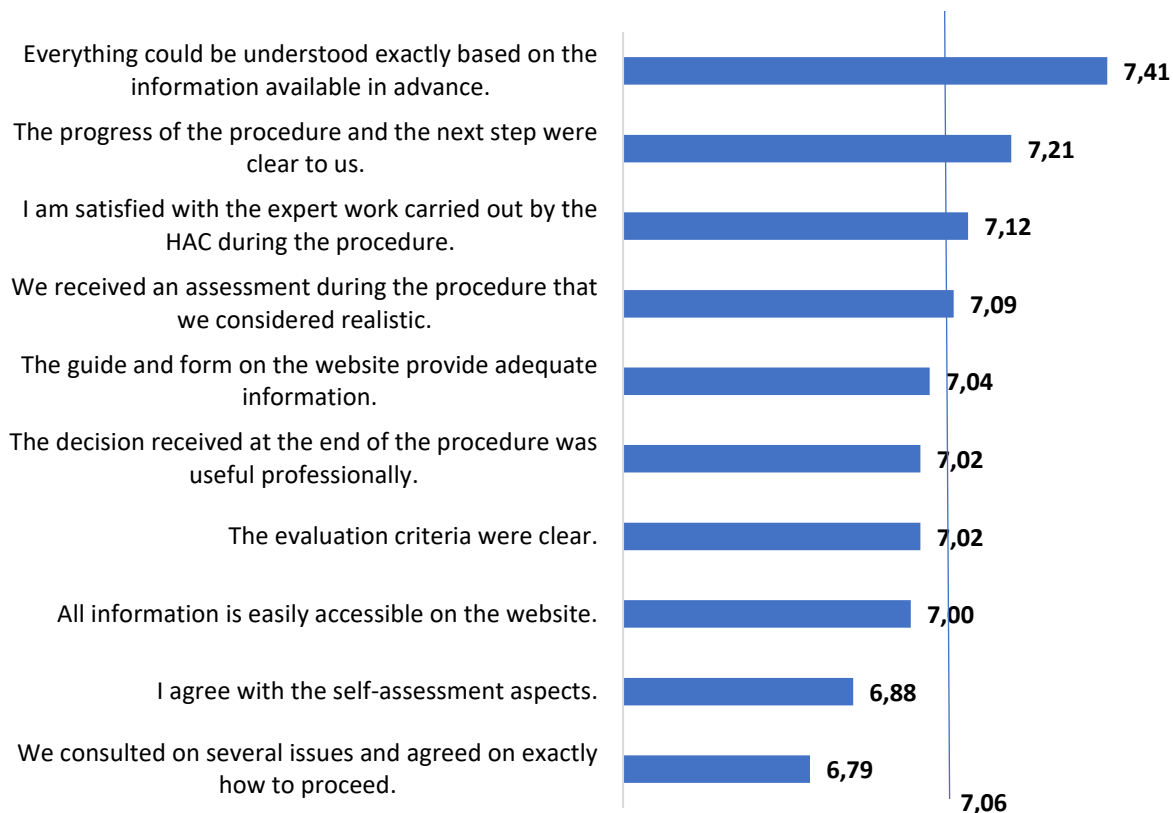*4. Figure:* Distribution of outcomes, 2017-2020 (total number: 57)
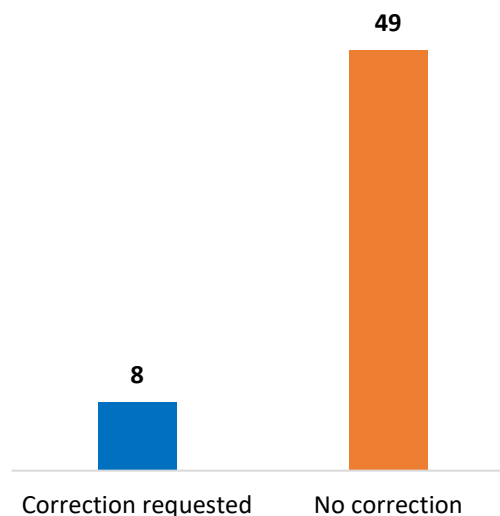
5. Figure: Number of clarification / supplementary document requests, 2017-2020

3.1.4. Institutional respondents' satisfaction with the procedure

Based on the performed survey analysis, client (HEI) satisfaction with institutional accreditation is higher than moderate 7,06 (on a 1-10 scale where 1-not at all, 10 completely satisfied), which is the highest regarding the three reviewed procedures. Overall client satisfaction was calculated as a weighted average of satisfactions with the below dimensions of the procedure, the weight being the number of respondents to express satisfaction with a given dimension. (Each respondent had the option not to rate any dimension, so the respondent number varies by dimension.)
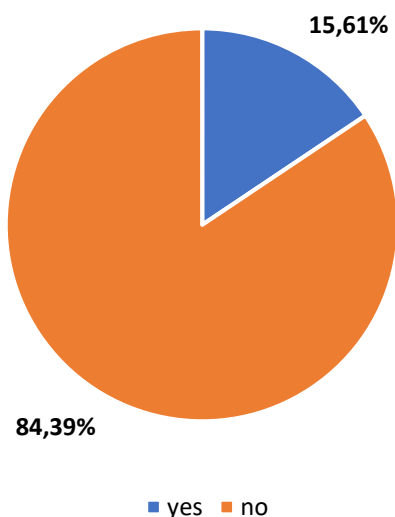
Respondents rated with the highest satisfaction the understandability of the procedure based on information available in advance (7,41) while consultation during the procedure the lowest (6,79) of the dimensions.

|	
Everything could be understood exactly based on the information available in advance.	7,41
The progress of the procedure and the next step were clear to us.	7,21
I am satisfied with the expert work carried out by the HAC during the procedure.	7,12
We received an assessment during the procedure that we considered realistic.	7,09
The guide and form on the website provide adequate information.	7,04
The decision received at the end of the procedure was useful professionally.	7,02
The evaluation criteria were clear.	7,02
All information is easily accessible on the website.	7,00
I agree with the self-assessment aspects.	6,88
We consulted on several issues and agreed on exactly how to proceed.	6,79
	7,06

6. Figure: Higher education institutional staff respondents' average satisfaction with the below dimensions of institutional accreditation on a scale from 1 to 10 (1-not satisfied at all, 10-fully satisfied), an average of 224-240 (V1) responses

3.1.5. Experiences during the procedure

The high level of satisfaction is demonstrated by the fact that only less than 16% of a total of 237 HEI staff respondents reported problem or difficulty during the institutional accreditation procedure. The most frequently mentioned problems were in connection with the neutrality of reviewers and contradictory communication.

15,61%

84,39%

■ yes ■ no

Neutrality of reviewers	7
Lack or contradictory communication	6
Short notice	3
Reviewing criteria	3
Overworked by HEIs	2

*7. Figure: Have you encountered any problem, or difficulty during the institutional accreditation procedure?*
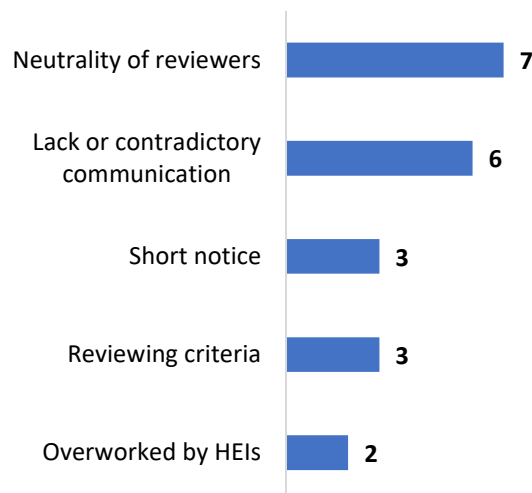
*8. Figure: What problem or difficulty have you encountered? (n =29)*

3.1.6. Attitudes following the procedure

69% of the total 232 institutional respondents were satisfied with the institutional accreditation procedure, 31% would suggest a modification. The suggestions were mainly related to transparency, simplicity of the administrative process and time available.

In addition to the recommendations mentioned, institutional respondents suggested improving communication and raising transparency and consistency of institutional accreditation.
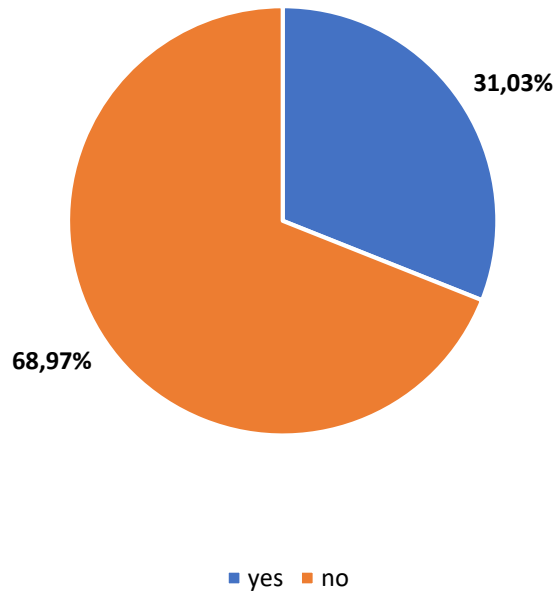
**9. Figure:** *Would you modify anything in the institutional accreditation procedure? (n=232)*
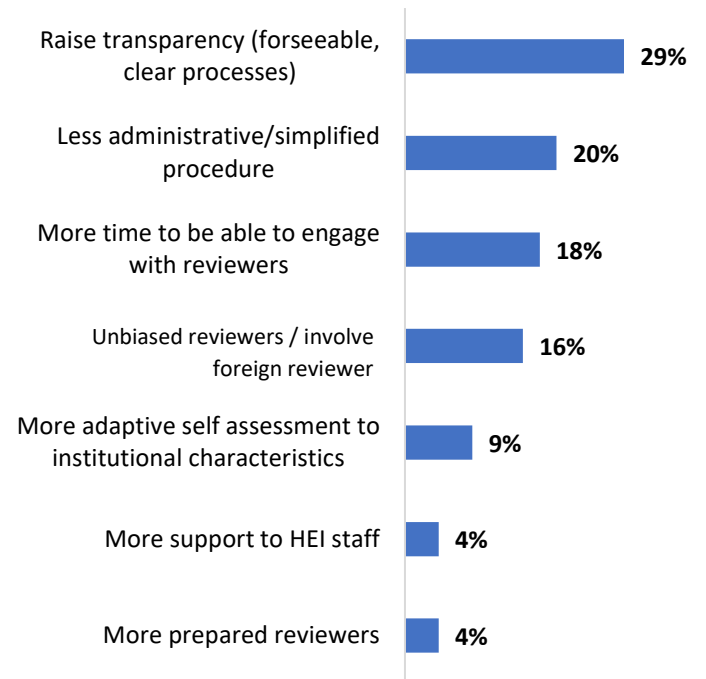
10. Figure: *What would that be? (n = 45)*

11. Figure: *How do you think HAC could improve the procedure? (n=111)*

3.1.7. Opinions and experiences of HAC visiting committee members

HAC visiting committee member respondents claimed that they are satisfied with the internal communication of HAC.
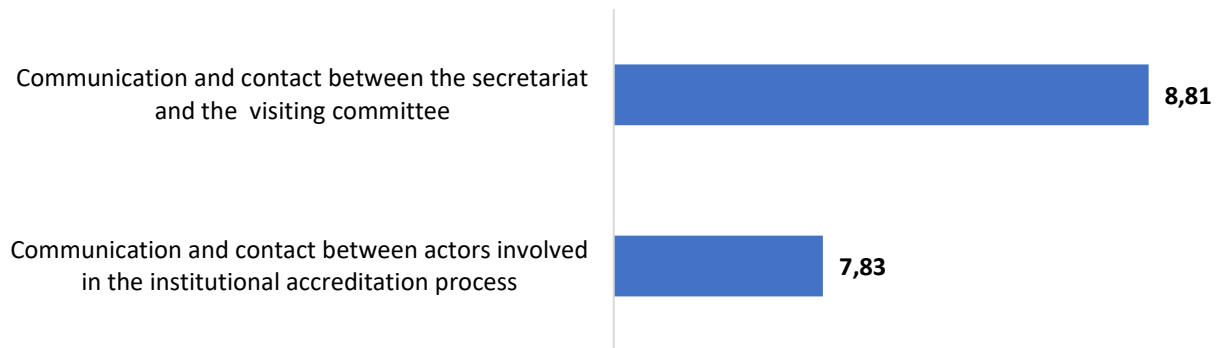

12. Figure: „Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 10 your satisfaction with the below statements?" (1-not satisfied at all, 10-fully satisfied) (n = 42)

At the same time, more than a third of visiting committee members felt they were not officially informed about the outcome of the procedure they were involved in, 19% didn't realise that the approved accreditation report is published and 33% of them didn't know where to find the approved reports.
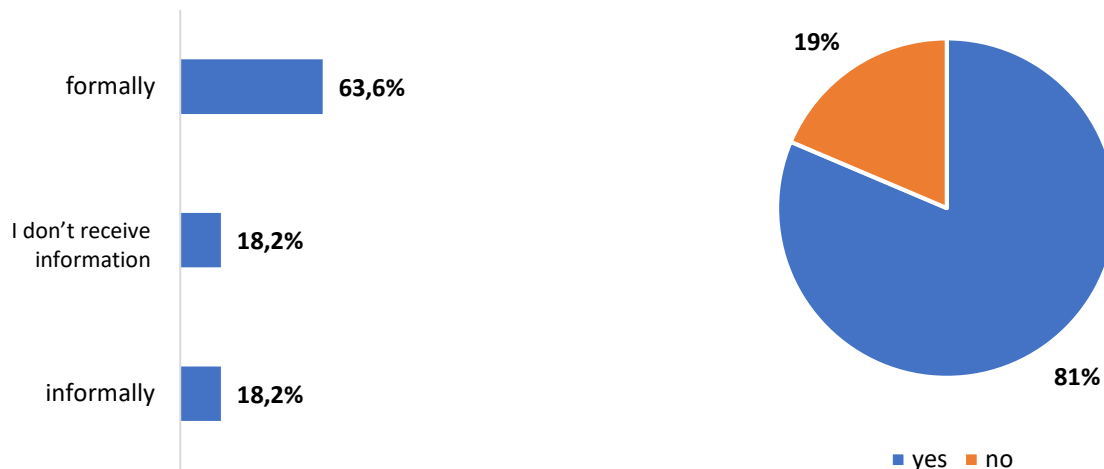
13. Figure: How are you informed about the outcome of the procedure? (n=33)

14. Figure: Do you think that the accreditation report approved by the HAC is public? (n=43)

33%

67%

■ yes ■ no
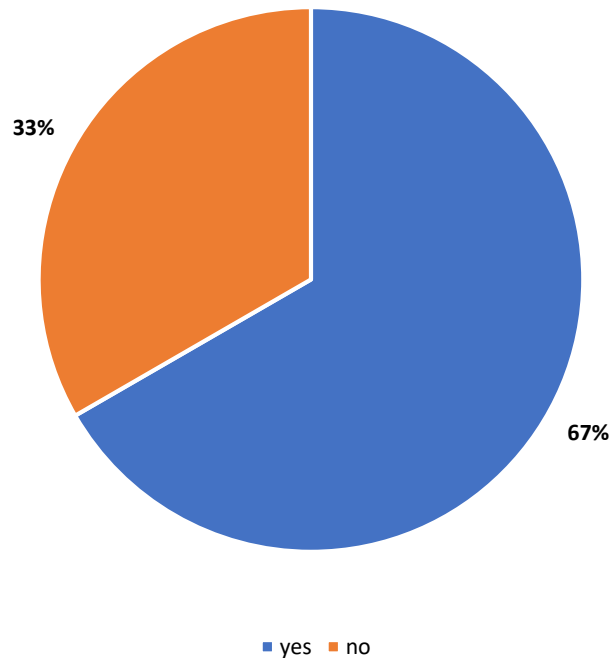
*15. **Figure**: Do you know where to get the report adopted by the Board? (n=42)*

3.1.8. Findings and conclusions regarding institutional accreditation procedure – recent renewal of procedure is visible from results

The identified main KPI-s of the procedure are:

- the average annual number of procedures: 14,3 procedures/year
- the average duration of the procedure: 15,4 months
- the average length of the document submitted: 88,3 pages
- rate of corrections requested to submitted documents: 16%
- rate of success (including conditional approval): 100%
- mean satisfaction of HEI staff respondents (on a scale from 1-not at all, 10 completely): 7,06
- the workload for HAC (average annual procedure number x average duration of procedure): 224, 51 months

The most important findings and results are the following:

- Institutional accreditation procedure has already been renewed and raised HEI satisfaction reflects that clients see the difference positively.

- Client satisfaction can be further raised by improving communication with HEIs (sharing best practices, providing more consultation) and by „training" HAC experts to provide coherent information to HEIs.

Based on the above KPIs and findings the following long-term improvement suggestions can be made.

- Further digitalization of the procedure, thus reducing the administrative burden on HEIs and HAC.
- Providing ongoing, formative support to quality development initiatives within HEIs would also contribute to raising HEI satisfaction.

## 3.2. Establishing a New Study Programme Procedure

3.2.1. Analysis

The quantitative analysis has been carried out based on HAC administrative data for two different period types: procedures starting between September 2016 and August 2020 were examined in detail, while procedures that started between 2014 and 2016 were examined in total numbers only and used for comparison purpose.

The qualitative analysis has been carried out on the responses submitted to our questionnaire by 859 HEI staff respondents, according to the survey outline described in chapter 2.5.3

No international outlook could be performed for this procedure since the establishment and launching of a new study programme are not two separated procedures in the European Higher Education Area but one unified procedure of programme accreditation. International outlook results on programme accreditation are presented in Chapter 3.3 Launching a New Study Programme.

### 3.2.2. Quantitative analysis – Review of HAC administrative data

According to the review of HAC administrative data, the average annual number of procedures for establishing a new study programme (the number of procedures having been launched in a year) has been increasing. In the 2014-2016 period the average annual number of procedures for establishing a new programme was 10 and during the period of 2017-2019 it rose to 19,7. The almost 9 cases per year rise in procedure numbers between 2014 and 2020 are partly due to the suspension of the procedure in 2015.
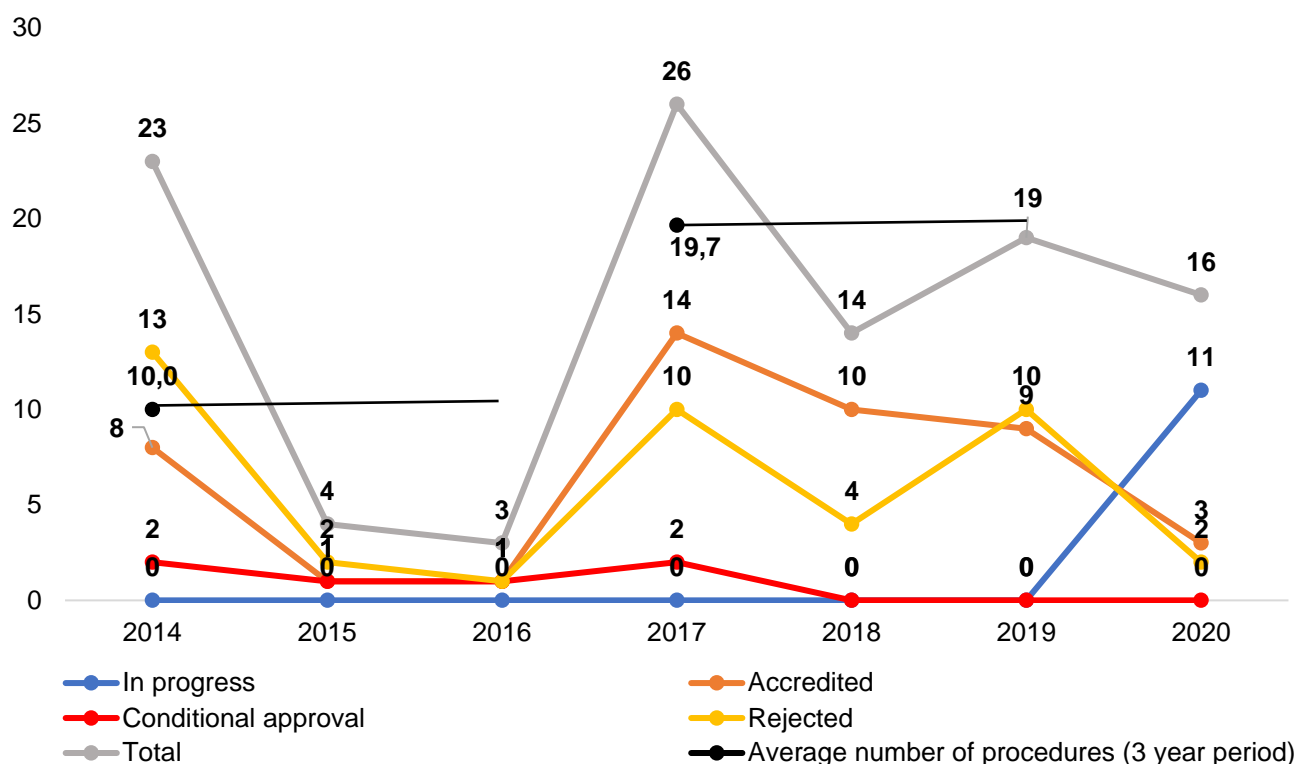
16. Figure: Number of procedures between 2014 and 2020, by type of outcome and average number

Based on HAC administrative data between 2017 and the summer of 2020 the **following KPIs were identified** for this procedure.

- the average yearly number of procedures: 18,75 procedures/year
- the average duration of the procedure: 2,95 months
- the average length of the document submitted: 17 pages
- rate of corrections requested to submitted documents: 9%
- rate of success (including conditional approval): 56%
- mean satisfaction of HEI staff respondents (on a scale from 1-not at all, 10 completely): 6,69
- the workload for HAC (average yearly number x average duration): 55,31 months.
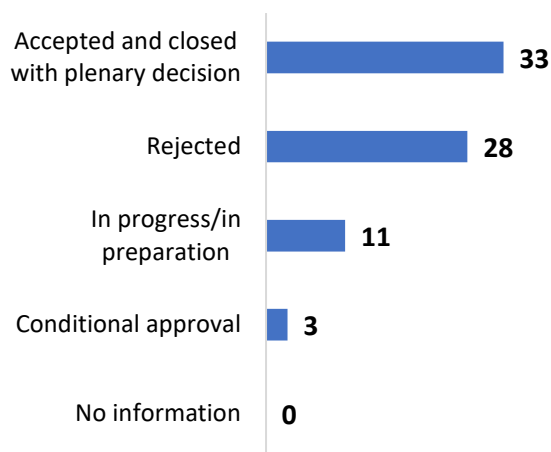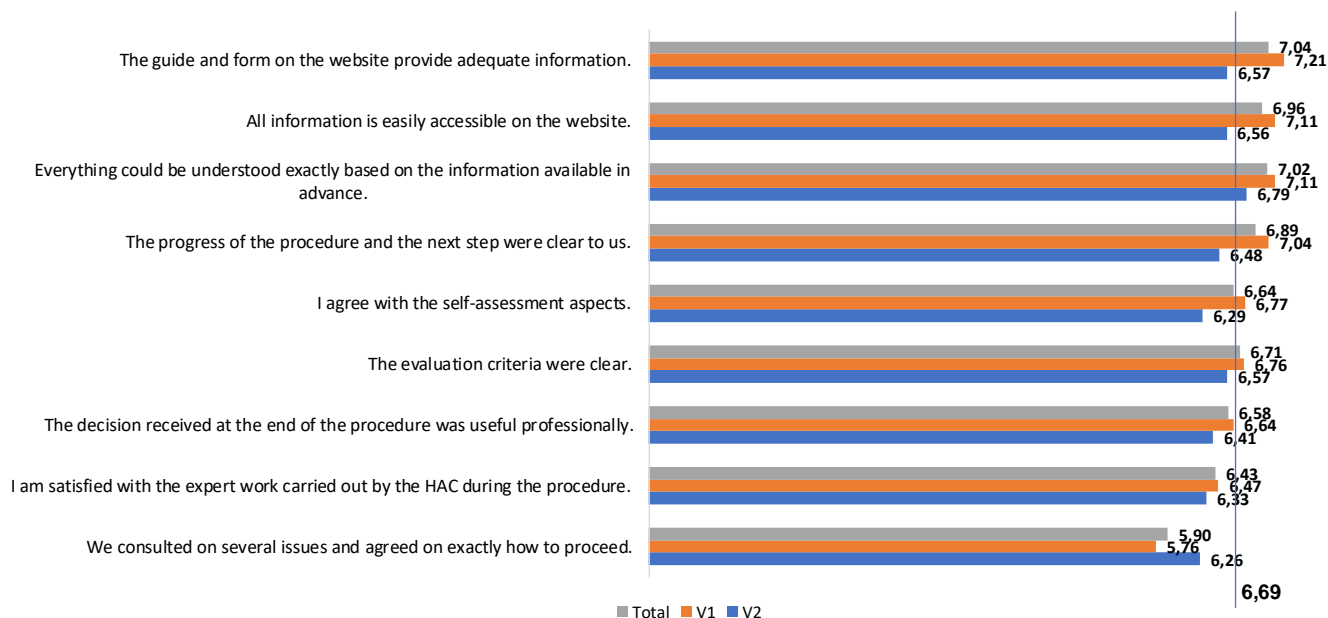
17. **Figure:** *Distribution of outcomes, 2017-2020 (total number: 75)*
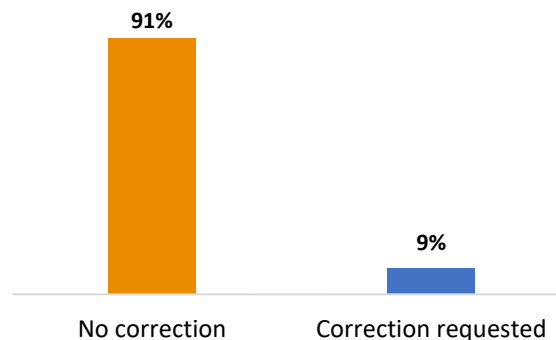
18. **Figure:** *Number of clarification / supplementary document requests, 2017-2020*

3.2.3. Institutional respondents' satisfaction with the procedure

Institutional respondents were requested to indicate their satisfaction with the procedure according to nine dimensions, based on a scale from 1 to 10, (1-not at all, 10-completely). The total number of responses received is between 99 and 104 depending on the dimension. (Each respondent had the option not to rate any dimension, so the respondent number varies by dimension.)

Chart data (scale 1–10):

Dimension	Total	V1	V2
The guide and form on the website provide adequate information.	7,04	7,21	6,57
All information is easily accessible on the website.	6,96	7,11	6,56
Everything could be understood exactly based on the information available in advance.	7,02	7,11	6,79
The progress of the procedure and the next step were clear to us.	6,89	7,04	6,48
I agree with the self-assessment aspects.	6,64	6,77	6,29
The evaluation criteria were clear.	6,71	6,76	6,57
The decision received at the end of the procedure was useful professionally.	6,58	6,64	6,41
I am satisfied with the expert work carried out by the HAC during the procedure.	6,43	6,47	6,33
We consulted on several issues and agreed on exactly how to proceed.	5,90	5,76	6,26

6,69

■ Total ■ V1 ■ V2

19. Figure: Respondents' average satisfaction with the examined dimensions on a scale from 1 to 10 (1-not satisfied at all, 10-fully satisfied), an average of 72-76 (V1) and 27-28 (V2), and a total of 99-104 responses

The responses indicate higher than moderate overall satisfaction with the procedure (6,69). Respondents seem to rate the availability of adequate information on the website the highest (7,04 in total) while consultation during the procedure the lowest (5,9 in total) of the dimensions.

A consistent gap prevails in almost every category – except for consultation during the procedure – between the satisfaction of respondents whose institution already participated in an institutional accreditation procedure (V1) and those whose has not (V2), with the former group showing generally higher satisfaction with the procedure.

3.2.4. Experiences during the procedure

24,5% of institutional respondents encountered problem or difficulty during the procedure of establishing a new study programme. Again, a gap prevails depending on whether the respondents' institution participated in an institutional accreditation procedure or not, those who did report lesser difficulty (21,6%) than those who did not (32,1%).
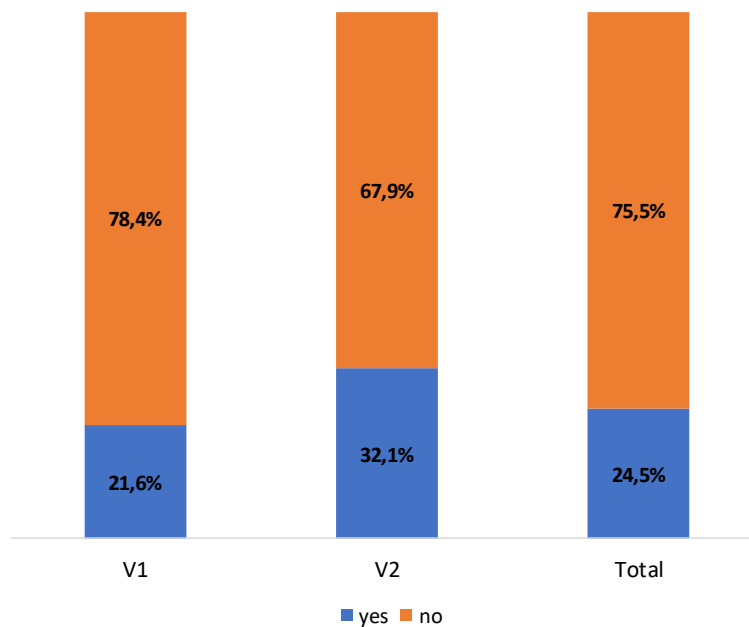
20. Figure: "Have you encountered any problem, or difficulty during the procedure of establishing a new study programme?" (n=102)

The most frequently mentioned problems encountered were:

- the conflicting interest of persons involved in the decision making (7 mentions),
- uncertainty, lack of transparency in the procedure (5 mentions) and
- unclear or unjustified rejection reasons (3 mentions).

Based on the analysis of HAC decision texts, **typical reasons for request rejection were the following:**

- The major to be established is not sufficiently distinguishable from existing programmes (majors)
- There are (minor) shortcomings in the justification for the establishment of the programme
- The expected knowledge cannot be acquired within the allocated timeframe of the programme (e.g. it is not possible to acquire all the knowledge necessary for the qualification within 2 years)
- The request does not provide enough, convincing information on the employability of future graduates and their contribution to the labour market
- The unity of the training is questionable
- The elaboration of training output requirements is inadequate
- The name of the programme is not appropriate (not by the depth and amount of knowledge that can be acquired)

- The wording of the competences to be acquired via the programme is inadequate or too general
- Prerequisite knowledge and skill requirements, enrolment criteria are not specified (for master's degrees)
- The content and the purpose of the programme contradict

3.2.5. Attitudes following the procedure

A total of 32% of institutional respondents indicated they would modify the establishing a new study programme procedure. In this case, a larger percentage of those respondents whose institution participated in an institutional accreditation procedure suggested modifications (34,2%) compared to those who did not (25%).
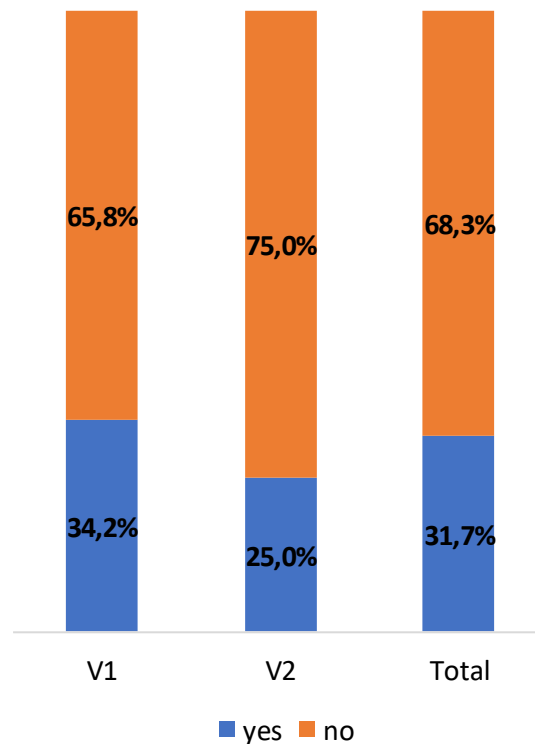
21. Figure: *"Would you modify anything in the establishing a new study programme procedure?" (n=101)*

The most frequently mentioned modification suggestions were:

- Assure that the process is unbiased, involve international experts (7 mentions)
- Raise the transparency of the procedure (6 mentions)
- Simplify and decrease the administrative burden of the procedure (5 mentions)
- Strengthen partnership with the HEIs (3 mentions)

A similar result was achieved when respondents were asked to enlist suggestions for HAC on improving establishing a new study programme procedure. **The most frequently mentioned suggestions included:**

- Assure that the process is unbiased, involve international experts (8 mentions)
- More communication and support to the HEIs (7 mentions)
- Raise the transparency and consistency of the procedure (6 mentions)
- Make the procedure less administrative, shorter and digitalised (6 mentions)

5 out of the 59 respondents indicated they are completely satisfied with the current setup of the procedure and would not suggest any change.

3.2.6. Findings and conclusions regarding establishing a new study programme procedure

Based on the analysis of HAC administrative data and outcomes of the questionnaire, the following KPIs, strengths and areas for improvement have been identified for the procedure.

The identified main KPI-s of the procedure are:

- the average yearly number of procedures: 18,75 procedures/year
- the average duration of the procedure: 2,95 months
- the average length of the document submitted: 17 pages
- rate of corrections requested to submitted documents: 9%
- rate of success (including conditional approval): 56%
- mean satisfaction of HEI staff respondents (on a scale from 1-not at all, 10 completely): 6,69
- the workload for HAC (average yearly number x average duration): 55,31 months

Strengths of the procedure include:

- It is the least administrative out of the 3 examined procedures; the average length of documents submitted by the HEIs is only 17 pages.
- The satisfaction of the respondents belonging to institutions having completed institutional accreditation (V1) is significantly higher.

The areas for improvement are identified as the following:

- Client (HEI) satisfaction (6,69) significantly lower than that of the institutional accreditation (7,06).
- 43% of requests are rejected.
- 32% of HEI respondents suggest a modification to the procedure.

Based on the findings, conclusions have been identified for implementation in both the short and long term.

Suggestions that could be implemented in the short term:

- Involvement of employer representatives/other HEI independent stakeholders in the evaluation.
- Providing support to HEIs before they submit their request to have well established and worked out requests.

Suggestions that could be considered on a longer time scale:

- Further digitalisation of the procedure, thus reducing the administrative burden on HEIs and HAC in the procedure.
- Initiation of negotiations with relevant stakeholders to review the administrative, long, inflexible legal framework of programme establishment and launching.

3.3. Launching a New Study Programme Procedure

3.3.1. International outlook

To assess the procedure in the international context, similar procedures in 10 different agencies around 7 countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland) have been examined. We found that most countries use quality assessment cycles and the one-time, ex-ante program accreditation carried out in Hungary is different from the European practice.

The research found that the average validity of programme accreditation was 5,5 years. The legal consequence of rejection in all examined countries was that the programme could not be launched.

In the countries involved in the analysis, all examined programme accreditation procedures were ongoing quality assessment cycles.

3.3.2. Quantitative analysis – Review of HAC administrative data

According to the review of HAC administrative data, the annual average number of requests for launching a new study programme increased between 2014 and 2020. In the 2014-2016 period the average number of such procedures was 93,7 and between 2017 and 2019 it has risen to 123,0.
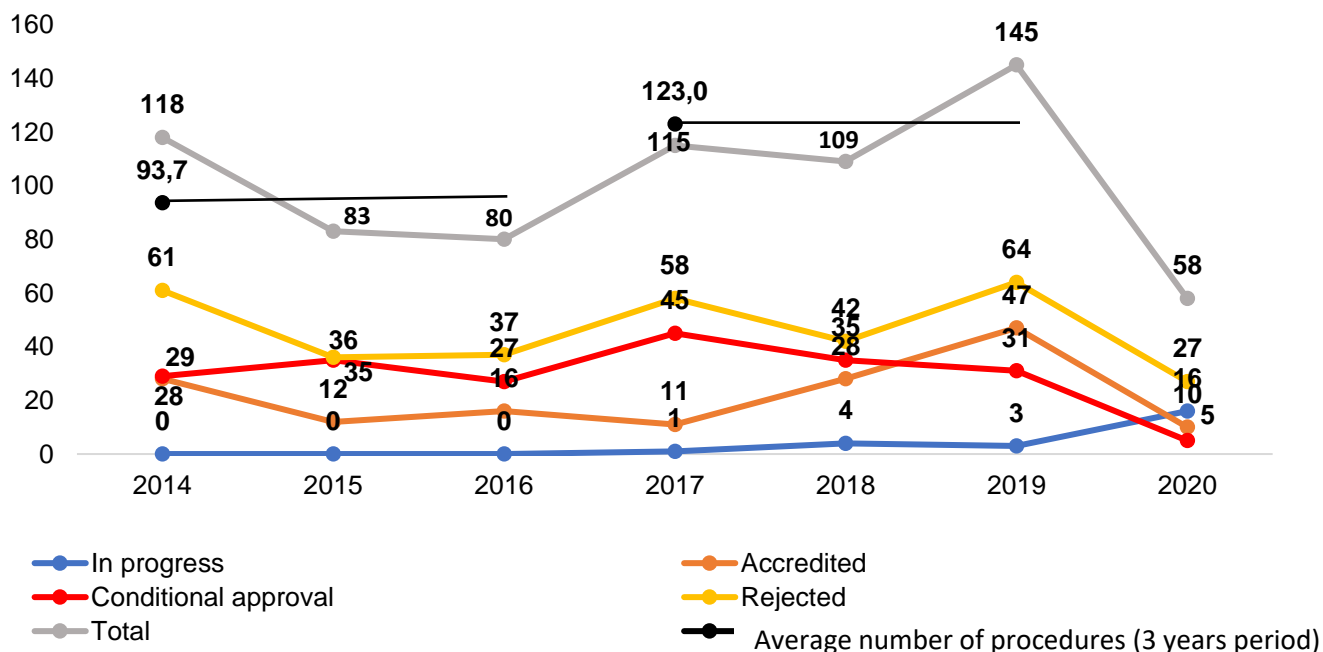
22. Figure: Number of procedures between 2014 and 2020, by type of outcome and average number

Based on HAC administrative data between 2017-2020 summer the **following KPI-s were identified** for this procedure.

- the average yearly number of procedures: 102,8 procedures/year
- the average duration of the procedure: 3,5 months
- the average length of the document submitted: 185 pages
- rate of corrections requested to submitted documents: 36%
- rate of success (including conditional approval): 53%
- mean satisfaction of HEI staff respondents (on a scale from 1-not at all, 10 completely): 6,63
- the workload for HAC (average yearly number x average duration): 359,8 months
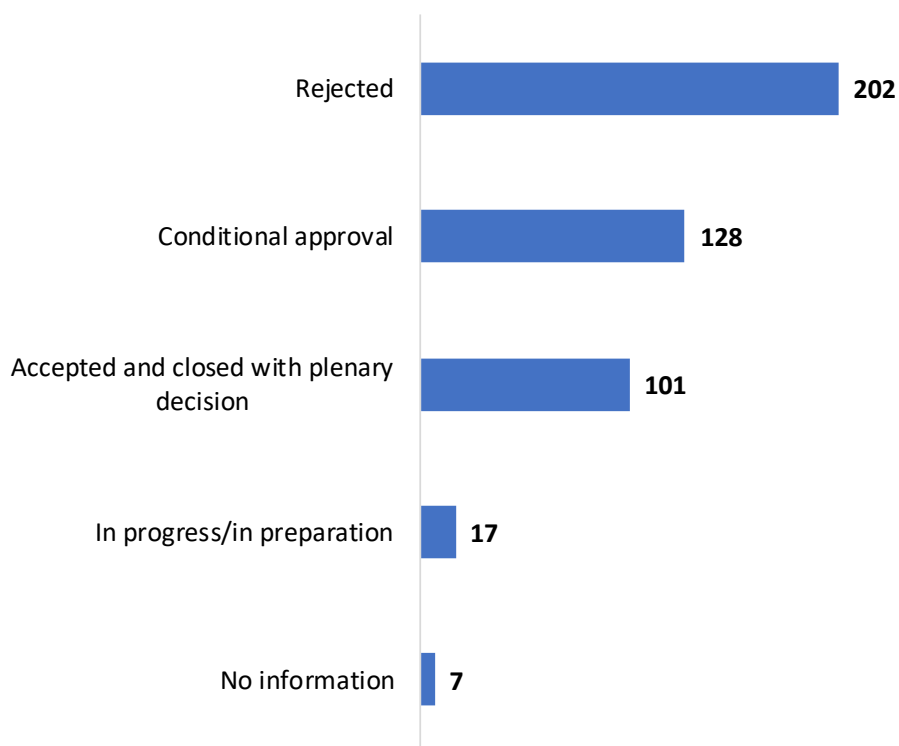
23. Figure: Distribution of outcomes, 2017-2020 (total number: 455)

3.3.3. Institutional respondents' satisfaction with the procedure

Institutional respondents were requested to indicate their satisfaction with the procedure according to nine dimensions, based on a scale from 1 to 10, (1-not at all, 10-completely). The total number

of responses received is between 176 and 185 depending on the dimension. (Each respondent had the option not to rate any dimension, so the respondent number varies by dimension.)
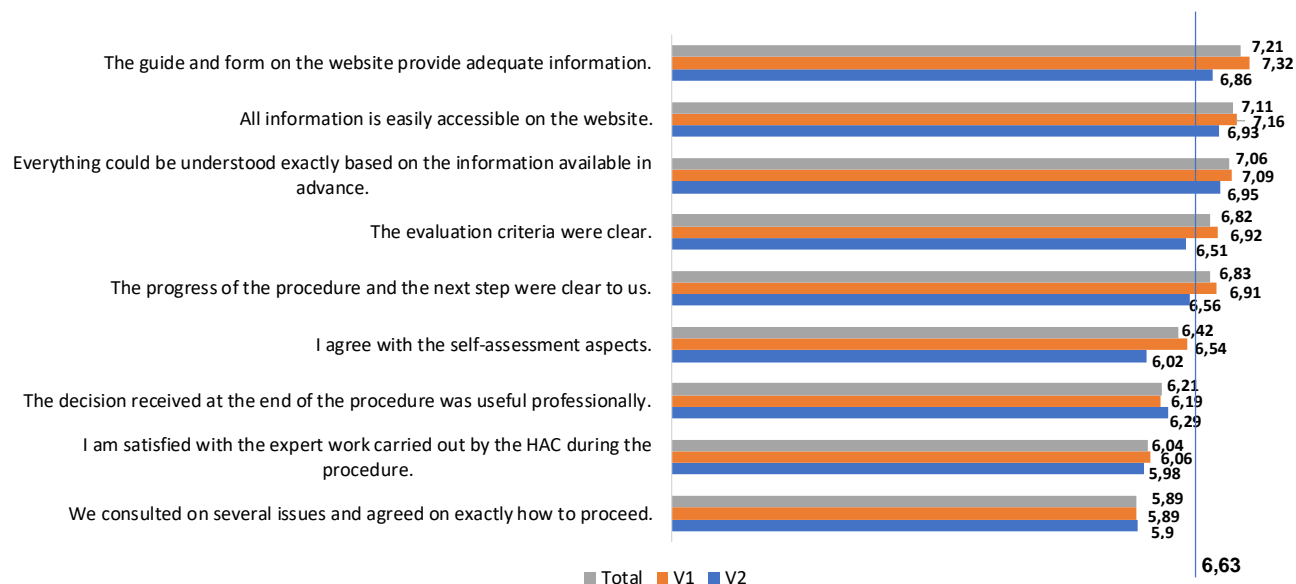
24. Figure: Respondents' average satisfaction with the examined dimensions on a scale from 1 to 10 (1-not satisfied at all, 10-fully satisfied), an average of 135-142 (V1) and 41-43 (V2), and a total of 176-185 responses

The responses indicate moderate overall satisfaction with the procedure (6,63), somewhat lower than in the case of establishing a new study programme (6,69). Respondents seem to rate the availability of adequate information on the website the highest (7,21 in total) while consultation during the procedure the lowest (5,89 in total) of the dimensions. These satisfaction results are very similar to the outcomes of the same questions related to establishing a new study programme procedure.

Like in the case of establishing a new study programme procedure, a consistent gap prevails in almost every category – with the exception of perceived professional usefulness of the decision received – between the satisfaction of respondents whose institution already participated in an institutional accreditation procedure (V1) and those whose has not (V2), with the former group showing generally higher satisfaction with the procedure.

3.3.4. Experiences during the procedure

26,1% of institutional respondents encountered problem or difficulty during the procedure of launching a new study programme. Again, a gap prevails depending on whether the respondents' institution participated in an institutional accreditation procedure or not, those who did report more

difficulty (29,3%) than those who did not (15,9%). This observation contradicts the findings of the same question from establishing a new study programme procedure.
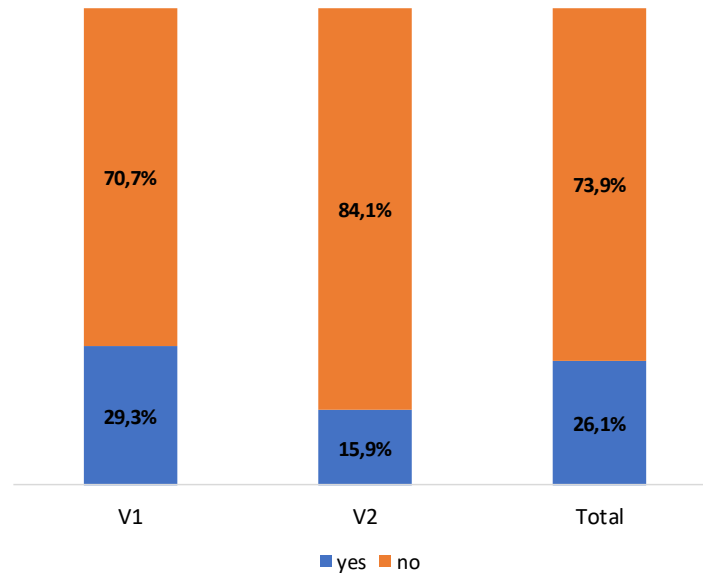
25. Figure: "Have you encountered any problem, or difficulty during the launching a new study programme procedure?" (n=184)

The most frequently mentioned problems encountered were:

- the conflicting interest of persons involved in the decision making, not keeping set criteria (17 mentions),
- inconsistency or lack of transparency of procedure, unclear criteria (7 mentions) and
- not enough or not user-friendly information (4 mentions).

Again, these outcomes also resemble thoroughly to those of establishing a new study programme procedure.

Based on the analysis of HAC decision texts, **typical reasons for request rejection were the following:**

- Inaccuracies in relation to subjects – overlaps between subjects, inadequate content and classification of subjects, disproportionate credit values, overlap between subjects
- Literature – not relevant, incomplete, unavailable, obsolete, excessive, volume or content of compulsory literature is not enough
- Inadequacies of personnel (lecturers, supervisors, researchers) – inadequate expertise, insufficient number or quality of publications, a lecturer from a non-relevant field

- Education and learning outcome requirements – the proposed programme of the institution does not meet education and learning outcome requirements
- Expected student numbers – estimated student number on the proposed programme is not realistic
- Admission criteria to the programme not clearly specified – not outlined, not included in the submitted documents or not properly explained

3.3.5. Attitudes following the procedure

A total of 37,9% of institutional respondents indicated they would modify the launching a new study programme procedure. Contrary to the preceding procedure, a smaller percentage of those respondents whose institution participated in an institutional accreditation procedure suggested modifications (37,5%) compared to those who did not (39,1%).
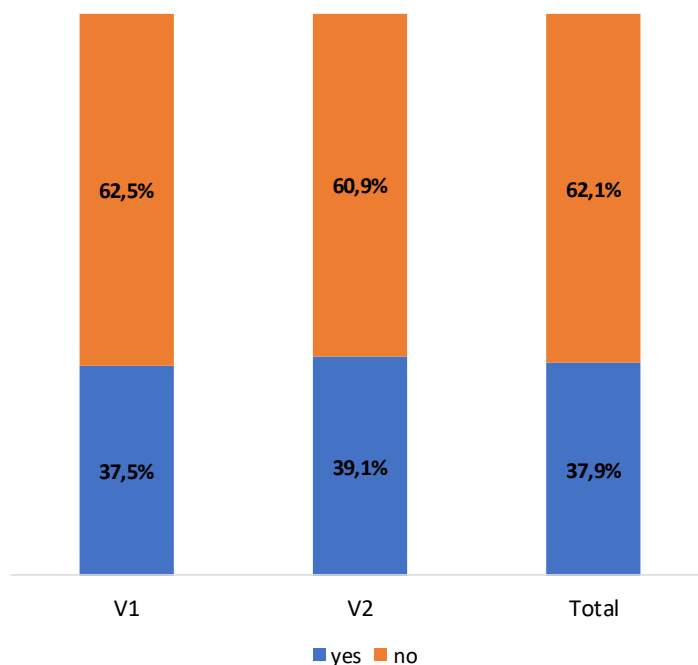
26. Figure: "Would you modify anything in the launching a new study programme procedure?" (n=182)

The most frequently mentioned modification suggestions were:

- Assure independence of reviewers (15 mentions)
- Raise transparency and consistency of procedure (9 mentions)
- Simplify and shorten procedure (7 mentions)

‒ More communication and partnership with HEIs (6 mentions)
‒ Adapt criteria more to national HE context and to international best practice (6 mentions)
‒ Provide training to HAC experts, reviewers (4 mentions)
‒ Provide support to HEIs before and during the procedure (3 mentions)

A similar result was achieved when respondents were asked to enlist suggestions for the HAC on improving the launching a new study programme procedure. **The most frequently mentioned suggestions included:**

‒ Independence of reviewers (17 mentions)
‒ More communication and support to HEIs (10 mentions)
‒ Shorter, simpler, digital procedures (9 mentions)
‒ Update of criteria (5 mentions)
‒ Adapt criteria to context (5 mentions)
‒ Training of reviewers (3 mentions)
‒ Involving employers more (3 mentions)
‒ Partnership with HEIs (2 mentions)

6 out of the 99 respondents indicated they are completely satisfied with the current setup of the procedure and would not suggest any change.

3.3.6. Separation of HAC procedure from registration and licensing

Institutional respondents were asked whether they support the separation of HAC procedure of launching a new study programme from the Educational Authority's registration and licensing procedure. A total of 414 answers were received with the below distribution:
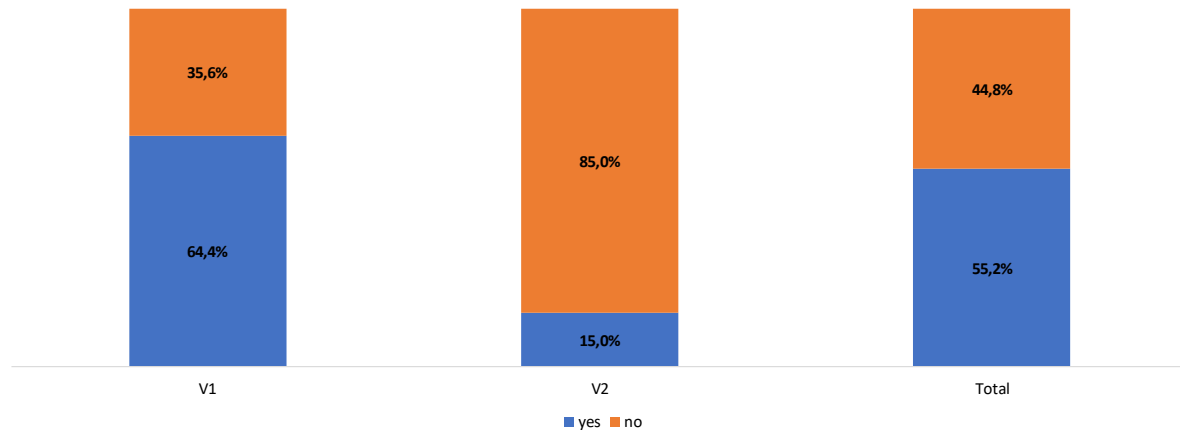
27. Figure: "Do you support the separation of HAC procedure of launching a new study programme from the Educational Authority's licensing and certification procedure?"

3.3.7. Findings and conclusions regarding the launching a new study programme procedure

Based on the analysis of HAC administrative data and outcomes of the questionnaire, the following KPIs and areas for improvement have been identified for the procedure.

The identified main KPI-s of the procedure are:

- the average yearly number of procedures: 102,8 procedures/year
- the average duration of the procedure: 3,5 months
- the average length of the document submitted: 185 pages
    - rate of corrections requested to submitted documents: 36%
    - rate of success (including conditional approval): 53%
    - mean satisfaction of HEI staff respondents (on a scale from 1-not at all, 10 completely): 6,63
    - workload for HAC (average yearly number x average duration): 359,8 months

The areas for improvement are identified as the following:

- lowest client (HEI) satisfaction (6,63);
- highest rejection rate (47%);
- the highest rate of corrections of request (36%);
- the highest rate of HEI respondents suggesting modification (38%).

Based on the findings, conclusions have been identified for implementation in both the short and long term.

Suggestions that could be implemented in the short term:

- Involvement of employer representatives/other HEI independent stakeholders in the evaluation
- Providing support to HEIs before they submit their request to have well established and worked out requests

Suggestions that could be considered on a longer time scale:

- Further digitalisation of the procedure, thus reducing the administrative burden on HEIs and HAC experts participating in the procedure
- Initiation of negotiations with relevant stakeholders to review the ex-ante nature of the procedure (consider cyclic approach)
- Initiation of negotiations with relevant stakeholders to separate programme accreditation from registration and licensing procedure (independent HAC accreditation followed by registration/licensing procedure)

4. Findings and conclusions

4.1. Summary of findings

One of the intended outcomes of the review is the **establishment of quantitative benchmarks**, which can serve for future reference. The table below indicates the identified KPIs and their value regarding the three types of procedures examined.

	Institutional accreditation	Establishing a new programme	Launching a new programme
Average yearly number of procedures (2017-2019)	14,3 procedures/year	18,75 procedures/year	102,8 procedures/year
Average duration of procedure	15,7 months	2,95 months	3,5 months
Average length of documents submitted	88,3 pages	17 pages	185 pages
Rate of corrections requested to submitted document	16%	9%	36%
Rate of success – including conditional approval (%)	100%	56%	53%
Mean satisfaction of HEI staff (1-not at all, 10 completely)	7,06	6,69	6,63
Workload for HAC (average yearly number x average duration)	224,51	55,31	359,8

28. Figure: KPIs and their values established for each examined procedure

These values indicate that launching a **new study programme is the procedure that needs the attention of HAC the most**. This procedure type presents the largest workload both for the HEIs (average length of documents submitted) and for HAC (workload calculated as the product of an average yearly number of procedures and average duration) while provides the lowest client success rate and satisfaction.

One of the major findings of our review is the **identified level of overall satisfaction** with HAC procedures by HEI staff (the actual client of these services) and the overall satisfaction of HAC experts with internal operations of HAC. These results show that clients and experts are all explicitly satisfied, all mean satisfaction are in the positive middle range of the spectrum.

Also, the results show clearly that the already renewed institutional accreditation was met with the highest satisfaction of HEI staff. Moreover, the satisfaction of respondents with the procedures of establishing and launching a new programme is higher in the V1 group, meaning that the perception of these programme accreditation procedures is positively affected by the institution having already taken part in the renewed institutional accreditation.

The table below wraps up the levels of satisfaction and the major challenges and recommendations identified by HEI staff concerning the 3 examined procedures and by HAC experts concerning general operations.

	Institutional accreditation	Establishing a new programme	Launching a new programme	General operation
Challenges identified by HEIs, HAC experts	• Independence of reviewers • Lack of or contradictory communication • Unclear reviewing criteria	• Independence of reviewers • Uncertainty in the procedure • Unclear, unjust rejection reasons	• Independence of reviewers • Inconsistency, lack of transparency in the procedure • Not enough/user friendly information	• In depth information on context, procedures • Inadequately perceived commission fees
Recommendations By HEIs	• Better communication • Raise transparency and consistency of procedures • Faster & simplified procedure	• Assure independent reviewers • More communication and support to HEIs • Raise transparency and consistency of procedures	• Assure independent reviewers • More communication and support to HEIs • Shorter, simpler, digital procedure	
Satisfaction	**HEI staff**: 7,06	**HEI staff**: 6,69	**HEI staff**: 6,63	**HAC experts**: 7,61

29. Figure: Summary of challenges and recommendations identified by HEI staff concerning the 3 procedures and by HAC expert concerning general operations. (satisfaction on scale 1 – not at all, 10 – completely)

The recommendations made by HEIs concerning the 3 examined procedures are quite similar, and are therefore generally addressed in our review:

- assure/raise the independence of reviewers,
- raise the transparency of procedures,
- provide more communication and support to HEIs
- introduce shorter, simpler and digitalized procedures.

4.2. Recommendations
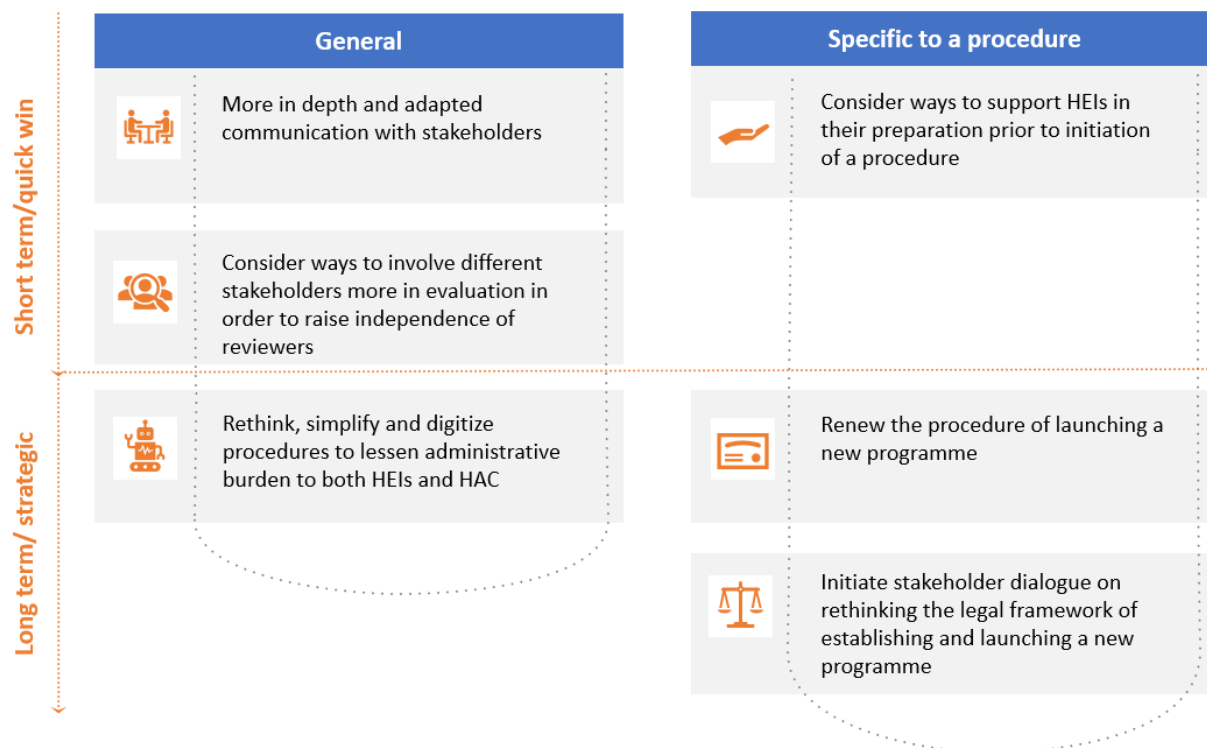
Based on the performed review 6 recommendations are made.

	General		Specific to a procedure
Short term/quick win	More in depth and adapted communication with stakeholders		Consider ways to support HEIs in their preparation prior to initiation of a procedure
	Consider ways to involve different stakeholders more in evaluation in order to raise independence of reviewers		
Long term/ strategic	Rethink, simplify and digitize procedures to lessen administrative burden to both HEIs and HAC		Renew the procedure of launching a new programme
			Initiate stakeholder dialogue on rethinking the legal framework of establishing and launching a new programme

Figure 30: Overview of recommendations

First, those recommendations will be presented that can be applied in short term and can result in quick wins for both HAC and HEI staff (recommendations 1-3), then the long term, strategic recommendations will follow (recommendation 4-6). The last two recommendations need the active contribution and leadership of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology since they involve rethinking and redesigning the present legal context.

Recommendation 1. – Strive for more in-depth and adapted communication with stakeholders

Since 2017, under the new leadership of HAC, communication with the higher education community has intensified, the HAC website (mab.hu) was completely reconstructed and numerous forums and events were held, unlike before. However, results in all surveyed target groups indicate the need for the continuation of such efforts.

Chapter 3.4 contains the detailed results of what information HAC experts, HEI staff and partner organization are missing according to the surveys. The below table also provides the summary of those needs and the relevant answers of the student survey to the question of „What information do you think should be available on the quality assurance of higher education institutions?"

	HAC Experts	Higher Education Institutions	Partner Organizations	Students
Content	• legal framework operation and organisation of HAC • in depth explanation of standards, criteria and their application • application of standards and criteria to specific fields of study (teacher education, arts, religious studies) • procedural information, admin. system usage, purpose, • HAC decisions, justifications, access • internal reviewer selection criteria and procedure	• in depth explanation of standards, criteria and their application with best practices • application of standards and criteria to specific fields of study (teacher education, arts, religious studies) • procedural information • HAC decisions • internal reviewer selection criteria and procedure	• general overview of procedures, standards, • HAC decisions • overall information about HE quality issues • how to receive further information on HAC related issues • how to become a HAC expert	• Purpose of quality evaluation in HE • General overview of procedures, their possible outcomes • Easy to understand information on institutional and programme accreditation results • Consciousness of importance of accreditation to certain employers
Channels/Forms	• dedicated channel on website with information • tutorial videos for evaluation tasks • specialised training for experts according to procedures and certification of HAC experts • regular workshops targeted at QA issues, legal framework, procedures, standards • online platform for peer learning between HAC experts	• dedicated channel on website with information • tutorial videos for each procedure • establishing and managing a network of HEI QA thought leaders – support to peer learning, with social media channel • regular workshops targeted at QA issues, legal framework, procedures, standards	• dedicated channel on website with information • establishment of stakeholder events, higher involvement of stakeholder within expert recruitment	• Dedicated channel on website with information • Establish social media presence of HE quality issues, awareness raising on available information

Figure 31: Recommended communication contents and channels for surveyed target groups

For HAC to raise its' impact on the quality of higher education more communication is needed, and the forms and content of communication need to be tailor-made to each target group.

At present, the HAC website serves all these target groups equally, therefore it is not adapted to any of the target group needs. We suggest addressing different target groups with adapted and dedicated channels and message on the website that are easy to understand and relevant for them in form of delivery and style.

Apart from an adaptive and more comprehensive website, target groups could be targeted in other ways. Experts could receive formal training and certification, certified experts could have a(n online) community with the aim of supporting peer learning, knowledge sharing and innovation. Another similar network could be developed from formal and informal institutional leaders of quality assurance and development promoting peer support in preparing self-evaluations or documents, in understanding and applying criteria. Institutional workshops could be made available for supporting the creation of expertise within institutions.

Students and partner organization are indirect target groups in accreditation so strengthening communication with them could be planned and implemented in a second phase. Both target groups need less information and in a way that is easy to both access and understand.

Recommendation 2. – Consider ways to involve more stakeholders in evaluation to raise the independence of reviewers

As seen from the outcome of the surveys, there is a challenge for HAC to raise the independence of evaluators in each of the procedures. This is a challenge due to three main reasons (1) Hungary is a small country and its academic community offers less opportunity to assure expertise and independence of the evaluator; (2) the legal setup of the two separate procedures of establishing and launching of new programmes and the fact that the entire procedure of launching is a sub-procedure within the overarching registration procedure of the Education Authority makes the involvement of foreign experts quite difficult and (3) the language of the procedure, of the submitted documents, websites, internal institutional documents is Hungarian, which practically eliminates the chance of engaging foreign experts.

In the given situation we recommend more extended involvement of employment sector experts primarily in the procedures of establishment and launching of new study programmes. We suggest raising the number of experts working outside higher education in various sectors of the economy engage in programme accreditation procedures to be able to assign one academic and one employment sector expert.

This solution would contribute to improving the partnership between HEIs and the economy, also would assure a stronger practice and employment orientation within the content and outcomes of programmes and their institutional implementations. Experts coming from outside of higher education and with well-established sectoral knowledge will likely provide new insights and innovation to the present criteria, methodology and procedural practices.

To gain such a new expert pool, we suggest mapping and designing relevant recruitment measures. Also, the establishment of an in-depth formal training programme on the legal framework of higher education, the procedures of HAC, standards and criteria applied. Regular (renewed) certification of trained experts would contribute to the trust and acceptance of their evaluation.

Recommendation 3. – Consider ways to support HEIs in their preparations prior to the initiation of a procedure

The purpose of this recommendation is twofold. For one, it aims at changing the summative character of traditional accreditation to a more formative one. (We have applied a pedagogical allegory of summative and formative assessment to quality evaluation. Summative assessment means a high-stake assessment at the end of a learning period that does not impact the learning process since it happens afterwards. On the contrary, formative assessment happens on a smaller scale, without stress and is carried out as part of the day to day activities to have an immediate impact on the learning process.) Introducing formative elements into accreditation could raise the sense of responsibility for their quality improvement within institutions and could effectively support internal institutional procedures.

The other purpose of this recommendation is more pragmatic. Support to HEIs before submitting their requests could lessen the workload of HEIs by reducing the need to correct their already submitted documents or redo an already rejected request, and also of HAC by only having to deal with well-prepared requests, and probably fewer requests resubmitted after rejection.

Support measures provided by a small dedicated HAC team could involve the following activities:

- Support in understanding the legal context of accreditation, which is often linked with the extensive higher education regulations in general.

- Support in understanding standards, criteria and their applications in special cases. Such support might be needed in the field of religious studies (special rules apply in accreditation), in arts (where scientific criteria are substituted by art criteria) and teacher education (which is the most complicated and regulated of all study areas in Hungary) or concerning "orchid" programmes (very small scale programmes where criteria need to be adapted due to scale).

- Provide examples of institutional best practices in submitted request content. Often seeing the structure and content of a concrete institutional self-evaluation or a request serves best for learning how to prepare such documents. This support measure seems valuable in the light of the high fluctuation of higher education administrative staff.

- Support internal quality assurance/development procedures within HEIs in a somewhat formative way. One possible way to provide such support can be through providing

consultancy services, though the solvent demand for such a service is probably lacking. Another possible way could be to create a network of institutional quality developers and lead thematic peer-learning, peer-support initiatives, and sharing of best practices to continuously support internal quality development initiatives within institutions.

- Support with the methodology of self-evaluations.

This recommendation does not mean that HEIs are released from the responsibility of self-evaluation and formulating requests. It is rather a service to which HEI staff can turn to when considering requesting accreditation or when they need advice.

Possible gains of such a support service would include better quality HEI requests, thus the decrease of rejection rate, improving partnership with HEIs and could also lead to increased client satisfaction.

Another gain could be the opportunity to learn from HEI questions and issues to develop available information on the website, tutorials for HEIs and HAC experts and ultimately could lead to the development of evaluation standards and criteria.

The realisation of Recommendations 4-6 could only be realised in a longer period and require either a more substantial investment or effort.

Recommendation 4. – Rethink, simplify and digitalise procedures to decrease the administrative burden to both HEIs and HAC

Since this review was done during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is the era of the general realisation of the elemental need for further digitalisation, this recommendation is self-evident. There are still opportunities for development in the digitalization of the accreditation procedures in Hungary. The requests are submitted in digital format and there is a HAC administrative database, but no integrated IT workflow has been put in place.

We recommend moving forward in digitalisation but not by simply digitising existing procedures but rather rethinking the steps and contents of procedures to make the most of already well-established Hungarian data sources. Such higher education data sources include FIR – higher education institutional and personal registry, MTMT – the registry of scientific research outputs and publications, DPR – higher education graduate tracking system, while KSH (Central Statistical Agency) can provide in-depth demographical and employment data and predictions. Based on already existing data sources some quantitative aspects of the HEI accreditation requests could be automated while qualitative aspects could be still prepared by the HEIs.

The digitalised accreditation service would also be the platform that HEIs use to initiate a procedure, where they can see the status of their requests, the timeframe, and steps of procedures, and plenary decisions.

The conceptual design of a digital accreditation procedure workflow could also incorporate a monitoring and analytics module to provide up-to-date data on the operations of HAC. This would support data-driven decision making within HAC and in higher education policymaking.

Potential gains of redesigned and digitalised accreditation procedures include the reduction of administration for both HAC and HEIs, which would create transparency of procedures, therefore could contribute to higher client satisfaction. For HAC it would also provide a "real-time", visualised analysis of ongoing and accomplished activities, therefore, make way to better-informed decision making.

A precondition to the realisation of this recommendation, however, is the availability of financial and human resources needed for design, development and implementation of the above tasks.

Recommendation 5. – Renew the procedure of launching a new programme

Apart from the aspects raised in Recommendation 4 on redesigning and digitalising all procedures, a conceptual renewal of the procedure of launching a new programme is recommended.

Apart from the fact that this procedure has the lowest rating on KPI-s out of the 3 examined procedures and at the same time represents the largest workload for HAC there are other challenges concerning the procedure that imply the need for a thorough review.

One of these challenges is the fact that according to the Hungarian legal setting this is a "once in a lifetime" and ex-ante form of accreditation. This means that once the launching of a new programme has been approved by HAC based on which the Educational Authority registers the programme for the institution there is no further review done to it later. Programmes can and do go on without updates for decades. Though HEIs have a responsibility in reviewing their programmes, there is no external evaluation, no cyclic programme accreditation in place.

This means that the present form of this procedure is not fit for programme accreditation (since it is based on an ex-ante promise without a follow-up of actual quality assurance) and is unique in its nature amongst the reviewed international programme accreditation practices.

The other present challenge of this procedure is that it is not an independent service provided to HEIs, but it is an expert review provided to the Educational Authority within the legal procedure of registration. This leads to HEIs being the clients of the Educational Authority, and official communication with HEIs happens through the Authority.

Based on these present characteristics we recommend the renewal of the procedure, with special consideration to the following aspects: (1) introduction of the European standard cyclic approach, meaning that programme accreditation has a validity date, after which it needs to be renewed, (2) separation of the programme accreditation procedure from registration and

licensing of the Educational Authority, meaning that HEIs initiate programme accreditation at HAC and once the approval has been obtained they initiate the registration and licensing at the Educational Authority.

Since the number of programmes is high and a cyclic approach would increase HAC and HEI workload, this recommendation is linked to the previous one. A digitalised, semi-automatized and therefore lighter programme accreditation can be performed in 5-7-year cycles. The administrative burden can further be reduced by applying the 3rd recommendation of providing a formative support service for HEIs.

Recommendation 5 requires a thorough stakeholder dialogue and regulatory changes, therefore a precondition to this recommendation is gaining the support of the Ministry.

Recommendation 6. – Initiate stakeholder dialogue on rethinking the legal framework of establishing and launching a new programme

This recommendation implies an action to promote a larger scale regulatory revision in higher education, therefore this recommendation also requires ministerial support.

As presented in the chapter on the Hungarian higher education context, HEIs need to take the following steps when they want students to enrol into a new programme once an idea or a new employment need is formed: (1) the title of the new degree needs to be entered into the government decree on the compendium of HE programmes, (2) the education and learning outcome requirements need to be published as a ministerial decree (3) the Education Authority needs to register the programme (4) based on the registry, HEIs can announce the new programme in the upcoming centralised application procedure. Even if all goes well, these steps take approximately 3 years altogether[10].

Having a legal framework that requires at least 3 years for the idea of a new programme before students can enrol puts Hungarian higher education at a disadvantage compared to international HEIs, any form of adult education or MOOCs. It also makes adaptivity to the fast-changing technological, social, industrial trends practically impossible.

For these reasons, we recommend initiating stakeholder dialogue on rethinking the legal framework of establishing and launching a new programme with the following main aspects for consideration:

- Shorten the overall time needed from an idea to the actual enrolment of students to raise adaptivity, flexibility and agility of higher education.
- Raise the responsibility and accountability of HEIs in deciding the content and learning outcomes of programmes, thus raise trust within higher education.

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[10] No official statistical data is available, based on experience of both HAC and PwC experts.

- Assure compatibility of the Hungarian legal context with international practices to promote internationalisation and joint programmes.
- Reconsider the relationship between accreditation and the revision of operational license of HEIs, since the latter is a cyclic review, into which a cyclic programme accreditation could feed.

Annex I. List of abbreviations

CEENQA - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

EHEA - European Higher Education Area

ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ESG - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

HAC - Hungarian Accreditation Committee

HEI - Higher education institution

HEIR - Higher Education Institutional Register (Felsőoktatási Információs Rendszer Intézményi Törzs)

HETQMEX - Higher Education TQM Excellence Model

QA - Quality Assurance

QAA - Quality assurance agency

SID - HAC Secretariat Information Database

V1 - The group of HEIs that participated in institutional accreditation after Jan. 2017

V2 - The group of HEIs that did not take part in institutional accreditation after Jan. 2017

Annex II. List of figures

Annex III. Used questionnaires

Since this was the first time such stakeholder surveys were executed, in a lot of cases open-ended questions were used to map probable answers. For further use, we suggest the usage of multiple-choice questions based on the outcomes of these survey.

In the original questionnaire within some cases the suggested modifications are found in the file below.

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