

*The External Evaluation
of the
Hungarian Accreditation Committee*



Hungarian Accreditation Committee

Budapest, 2000

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Contents

Preface

I. Self-Evaluation Report of the HAC

Foreword	9
Executive summary	10
1. Introduction	12
1.1 The need and principles of accreditation.....	12
1.2 The establishing of the HAC	12
DESCRIPTIVE PART	13
2. The HAC: Functions, tasks, values, objectives.....	13
3. Organisational structure	15
4. Activities (What are we doing?).....	18
4.1 Institutional accreditation	18
4.2 Program accreditation	20
4.3 Special and other activities.....	21
5. Evaluation principles and requirements (What is the basis of our work?).....	22
6. Functioning (How do we work?)	23
6.1 The HAC Body.....	23
6.2 The Secretariat.....	23
6.3 Means and resources	24
6.4 Management	25
6.5 Documentation and information processing	26
6.6 External relations.....	26
6.7 Publications and publicity	27
7. Facts about our activities.....	28
8. How do others judge our work? (Feedback).....	31
ANALYTICAL PART	32
9. How do we judge our work? (SWOT analysis)	32
9.1 Constraints.....	32
9.2 Strengths.....	35
9.3 Weaknesses	37
9.4 Opportunities.....	45
9.5 Threats.....	47
10. Capacity for change (How do we prepare for the future?).....	49
Sources	52
List of abbreviations.....	53
List of appendices.....	54
Appendix E1: Evaluation of the HAC by institutions of higher education.....	55
Appendix E2: Letter by Ralph Enlow	59

II. Evaluation of the HAC and recommendations for a national quality assurance system

Executive Summary	65
Introduction	71
A. Terms of Reference	71
B. Composition of the CRE review Panel	72
C. Scope of this evaluation	73
D. Structure of the report	74
E. Acknowledgements	75
Chapter 1 The evaluation process: framework and activities	77
Introduction	77
A. Framework of the evaluation.....	77
B. The evaluation process: activities	81
C. Evaluation process: observations	82
Chapter 2 Review of the HAC	85
Introduction	85
A. The Hungarian higher education context	85
A1. Forty years of specialised institutions	85
A2. The development of a private sector of higher education	88
A3. A legal and regulatory structure to support innovation and diversity	89
A4. Normative financing and the position of Hungarian higher education institutions	90
A5. Economic constraints	90
A6. Other contextual factors	91
B. Objectives and tasks	92
B1. Introduction	92
B2. Objectives	92
B3. The tasks of the HAC	93
B4. Goals of accreditation.....	94
C. Procedures	95
C1. The accreditation process	95
C2. Institutional/faculty accreditation: the self-evaluation	95
C3. Programme accreditation.....	96
C4. Accreditation of doctoral programmes.....	98
C5. Visiting Committees.....	98
C6. Peer review: identification and selection of experts.....	99
C7. Reports	100
C8. The Committees	101
C9. International Advisory Board.....	102
C10. The Secretariat.....	102
C11. The role of the stakeholders	104
D. The impact of accreditation.....	105
E. Quality assurance within the HAC itself.....	106
F. Conclusions on the present state of HAC.....	107
G. Some recommendations for current operations.....	110

Chapter 3 International trends in higher education and quality assurance.....	113
Introduction	113
A. Higher Education: general trends	113
A1. Context	113
A2. General trends in Europe.....	115
A3. The Bologna Declaration	115
B. Developments in the quality assurance of higher education.....	116
B1. Initial steps towards European co-operation on quality assurance	116
B2. The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).....	117
B3. The aims of quality assurance: accountability and improvement	118
B4. Focus of evaluation: institution and/or programme	119
B5. National quality-assurance systems: actors, roles and responsibilities	119
B6. New accreditation initiatives in higher education in the European Union.....	120
C. Accreditation and quality in higher education in the US: an overview	121
D. Developments in European and US quality systems: relevant experiences for Hungary?	122
 Chapter 4 Options for the future: establishing a new framework for quality assurance.....	125
Introduction	125
A. Trends in higher education.....	125
B. The HAC and the changing higher education context	127
B1. Accreditation versus quality assurance	127
B2. Diversity and innovation	128
B3. Institutional quality assurance	129
C. Options for the future	130
 Annex Nr. 1A Sections to Act LXXX of 1993 and LII of 1999 on Higher Education Concerning the Hungarian Accreditation Committee	135
Annex Nr. 1B Government decree Nr. 66/1997. (IV. 18.) on the organization and operation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and the fundamental rules of the accreditation process	155
Annex Nr. 2 HAC Secretariat Staff as of February 2000.....	167
Annex Nr. 3 List of material consulted for documentary review.....	169

III. Statement of the HAC

Statement of the HAC concerning its external evaluation	171
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Preface

Preliminary work on the project of the external evaluation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee was started in February 1999. In June six organisations were invited to submit their proposal for the project financed from part of the World Bank loan for Hungary's Higher Education Reform Project. On evaluating the received proposals the task was awarded to an international panel of experts brought together by the *CRE – Association of European Universities*. After negotiations the contract for the project was signed in November 1999, and actual implementation began that month.

Work was thorough and very intensive on both sides. The Panel visited Hungary four times and there were additional meetings in Budapest and Geneva. Various documents were produced during the implementation of the project of which the three most important ones are published here:

- The final Self-Evaluation Report of the HAC (with two of the thirteen appendices),
- The Final Report of the CRE Review Panel (with three annexes),
- The Statement of the HAC on its external evaluation.

By making these documents public we offer on the one hand an opportunity to get a very deep insight into the operations of the HAC and the history, structure and functioning of the Hungarian accreditation system in general. On the other hand it is our sincere hope that together with earlier investigations of this type the Panel and the HAC can provide important and useful input and impetus for similar projects. The formal, methodological and substantive elements in these documents may be of use for future evaluations of evaluators.

Budapest, December 15, 2000

András Róna-Tas
President of HAC



SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

OF THE

HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

January 2000

Foreword

When an organisation like the HAC initiates its own external evaluation, the question obviously arises: why? Why does a nationally respected evaluator of higher education want to be itself evaluated? Well, there are plenty of reasons for it.

The intention has been prevalent for several years now. A major impetus came from the HAC's International Advisory Board when in its May 1998 meeting it made, among others, the following recommendation: *“Any system of quality assurance should periodically seek to be evaluated and should keep in touch with developments in other countries. The Board therefore proposes an external evaluation of the system and procedures of the HAC that would involve an international team using the experience of experts in similar bodies also from other countries.”*

Further reasons are that

- we would like to be convinced that our interpretation of the laws pertaining to us is correct and that our work is in fact based on them.
- We would like to be convinced that we are proceeding on the right course as far as quality assessment in HE is concerned, or if it turns out that we are wrong in our belief, we may be given an opportunity to stop, think it over and change our ways.
- We want to work better, and we want to serve better. We would like to see our strengths and weaknesses, we would like to improve the quality of our work just as we would like to improve the quality of Hungarian higher education.
- Next year the mandate of the current members of the HAC expires. The third term begins, a new Plenum will be set up, with new members nominated and, hopefully, several mandates renewed, a new president and vice-presidents elected. We would like to pass on the torch with our house in order. We would like to see the HAC as a nationally and internationally acknowledged, efficient and effective organisation.
- Independently of the coming changes in the membership of the HAC we have to administer changes in our procedures. In drafting them we would like to use as a possible input the report of the external evaluators.

We would like these matters to be investigated and judged by an independent, international panel of acknowledged experts with due reputation. We expect feasible suggestions for the solution of our problems and for improving our work. That is why we initiated the external evaluation.

This SER has been compiled with an extensive use of current and earlier materials written and accumulated by the HAC and its staff members. There was an ongoing communication with the President and HAC staff regarding details about their jobs and expertise. Moreover, various parts of the draft(s) were checked by the persons responsible for the given area, the draft and other input materials were discussed by the staff and checked and commented on by several full members of the HAC and, more than once, by the President. Thus, we can say that this SER is the product of a joint effort of everyone involved.

Executive summary

The HAC compiled this Self-Evaluation Report (SER) as part of the documents for the external evaluation. The **aim** of the Self-Evaluation is to put at the disposal of the Consultants all information, which they may deem necessary for carrying out the task. The HAC produced a **Draft SER**, which was discussed in detail during the Preliminary Visit by the Consultants. The **feedback** the HAC received from the Consultants, partly during the personal discussions and partly in the written Memo sent on the 28th December, 1999 by the Consultants, was very helpful. The HAC would like to offer its sincere thanks to the Consultants for their effective help in completing the Draft.

The HAC understands the role of the Consultants fixed in the contract (Contract App. A, 2-3) to be **an evaluation of the work of the HAC for the purpose of improving said work**.

The SER consists of a descriptive and an analytical part.

The **DESCRIPTIVE PART** describes the **legal framework** (App. B1, B2), the **changes** in the different levels of legislation and the HAC's consequent **adaptation** to these changes (chapter 2). This Part describes the main **principles of accreditation** (PA1-6, App. D1), it identifies the main **functions** of HAC (F1-F3) and presents its **tasks** as prescribed by the Higher Education Act (T1-T3). The HAC has no independent Mission Statement because its work and function are explicitly stated in the legal framework. It did, however, elaborate and does adhere to a set of **values** (V1-V12) based on which it seeks to achieve its **objectives** (O1-O3).

The SER describes

- ◆ the organisational structure of the HAC (chapter 3),
- ◆ the different activities of the HAC (chapter 4),
- ◆ the principles and the requirements according to which the HAC works (chapter 5),
- ◆ the mode of operation of the HAC (chapter 6).

The SER further

- ◆ provides **facts**, data and statistics pertaining to its work (chapter 7),
- ◆ summarises the **feedback**, solicited and spontaneous, received from various stakeholders (chapter 8),
- ◆ describes the external (C1-C15) and special (C16-C22) **constraints** among which HAC has to work (chapter 9, analytical part).

Given the very special historical and legal setting of Hungarian HE in the past decade, and the position of the HAC in this context, furthermore due to the TOR of the Contract, the SER offers a detailed description of the way the HAC functions.

The **ANALYTICAL PART**, based partly on the feedback from the stakeholders, provides a **SWOT analysis** of the work of the HAC and examines the **capacity for change** of the HAC.

The analytical part focuses on the perceived **weaknesses** in the HAC's work. The weaknesses have been grouped under six subtitles (WA-WE), in all cases *evidence, relevance, importance, weight, reason(s)* and *possible solutions* for the weak points were identified in connections with the *objectives* (O), *values* (V), *functions*(F), *principles*(PA, PE) and *tasks* (T) stated in the descriptive part.

In addition, we selected **six weaknesses** (WB1-2, WC1, WC4, WD2, WD5) which we consider to be of **major importance**. They are analysed in more detail, its causes, present measures for improvement, and intended future measures are mentioned.

In case of the **Opportunities** and **Threats**, we scaled *importance* and *potential*. The final chapter analyses how the HAC perceives its future tasks and how we prepare ourselves for coping with them. This signals the **responsiveness** of the HAC to new challenges.

In summary we note that the HAC is about to complete the first phase in its existence. It played a special role in safeguarding the quality standard of Hungarian HE, while simultaneously contributing to the introduction of necessary structural and functional changes in Hungarian HE. The HAC **achieved these aims by**

- ◆ raising the level of professionalism in tasks related to QA,
- ◆ remaining open and being sensitive toward new needs generated by the dramatic changes in Hungarian society and HE,
- ◆ working in close and constant co-operation with the main stakeholders,
- ◆ upholding the autonomy and independence of the HAC granted by the HEA, and being gradually accepted by the key players,
- ◆ building up a network of top experts in Hungary and abroad,
- ◆ organising a competent and dedicated staff,
- ◆ establishing clear and public rules of procedure and principles for evaluation,
- ◆ strengthening the HAC's international contacts to gain from good practice abroad and adapting suitable practices to the Hungarian cultural setting.

In the coming phase of the HAC's existence, **major changes must be procured** in the operation and functions of the HAC. They include the following.

- ◆ Internal quality assurance within the HEIs has to be built up, and the HAC has to move its focus from accreditation based on minimal requirements to the evaluation of the quality management of the HEIs. The supportive function of the HAC has to be strengthened.
- ◆ A more differentiated system of evaluation has to be worked out, taking into account the different demands in PhD, MA and BA and postgraduate training, the short vocational, the distant and the life-long learning modes, including the reorganisation of the system of the external examiners.
- ◆ A special system has to be introduced to evaluate the work of the Ph.D. schools.
- ◆ Common efforts must be undertaken with the Universities to ensure the quality of university habilitations.
- ◆ More effective evaluation mechanisms for program accreditation must be developed and implemented.
- ◆ New procedures must be worked out for to increase the involvement of students and employers.
- ◆ HAC has to take its share in ensuring that Hungarian HE integrates into the structure of HE of the European Union.
- ◆ HAC has to elaborate its own system of quality assurance.
- ◆ Legal, organisational and procedural changes are needed for complying with new demands in HE, which includes finding a solution to human resource problems.

1. Introduction

1.1 The need and principles of accreditation

While the Higher Education Act (hereinafter HEA) of 1993 was in preparation, some experts recognised with respect to the **reinstitution of the right** of universities to conduct **doctoral training** and confer Ph.D. degrees, that “*an opportunity of historic significance for introducing high standards without having to take away existing rights*” (András Róna-Tas) had emerged. The idea was reinforced by the growing **international trend** to stress **quality** and quality management in teaching and learning **in higher education**. Thus it was agreed, that there was a need for an independent body of highly qualified experts from various disciplines, who would be responsible for supervising the quality of higher education in Hungary.

The most important **principles of accreditation** in Hungary were agreed to be as follows (in detail see *Appendix D1*):

- PA1** It has to be examined whether or not the **requirements of the HEA** are fulfilled.
- PA2** It has to be determined whether or not a **certain level of quality** is met (a yes/no, or “threshold type” accreditation).
- PA3** The body performing the accreditation must be **independent**.
- PA4** Accreditation must be conducted **professionally** and **objectively**.
- PA5** The process of accreditation must be **ascertainable, accountable**, and its **principles** must be **public**.
- PA6** The processes and standards must be in accordance with **international practice**.

1.2 The establishing of the HAC

In order to prepare the institutions for implementing the enormous task of launching doctoral training, in **November 1992** a **Hungarian Accreditation Committee** was established on a **provisional** basis to function as a jury committee for evaluating proposals for Ph.D. programs that the universities submitted. With the 1993 Higher Education Act (in force from 1st September) the HAC was, in addition, given the legitimacy to accredit HEIs as institutions and, in general, it was established “*for the ongoing supervision of the standard of education and scientific activity in higher education, and for the perfecting of evaluation there*”. (HEA 1993, Section 80 (1).)

Upon the nomination of the HEIs, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and other organisations, in **January 1994** members of HAC received their mandates from the Prime Minister for three years. In its February meeting HAC adopted the principles of its functioning and agreed upon the system of its colleges and expert committees. (See below in *chapter 3*.)

DESCRIPTIVE PART

2. The HAC: Functions, tasks, values, objectives

The functions and tasks of the HAC are prescribed by the HEA, in sections 80-81. According to the 1999 Act, the main **functions** of the HAC are

- F1** the ongoing **supervision** of the standard of education and scientific activity in higher education (since 1993);
- F2** the **assessment** of the quality of higher education (since 1993);
- F3** the **supporting** of quality assurance in higher education (since 1996).

At present the HAC has the following main **tasks**. It

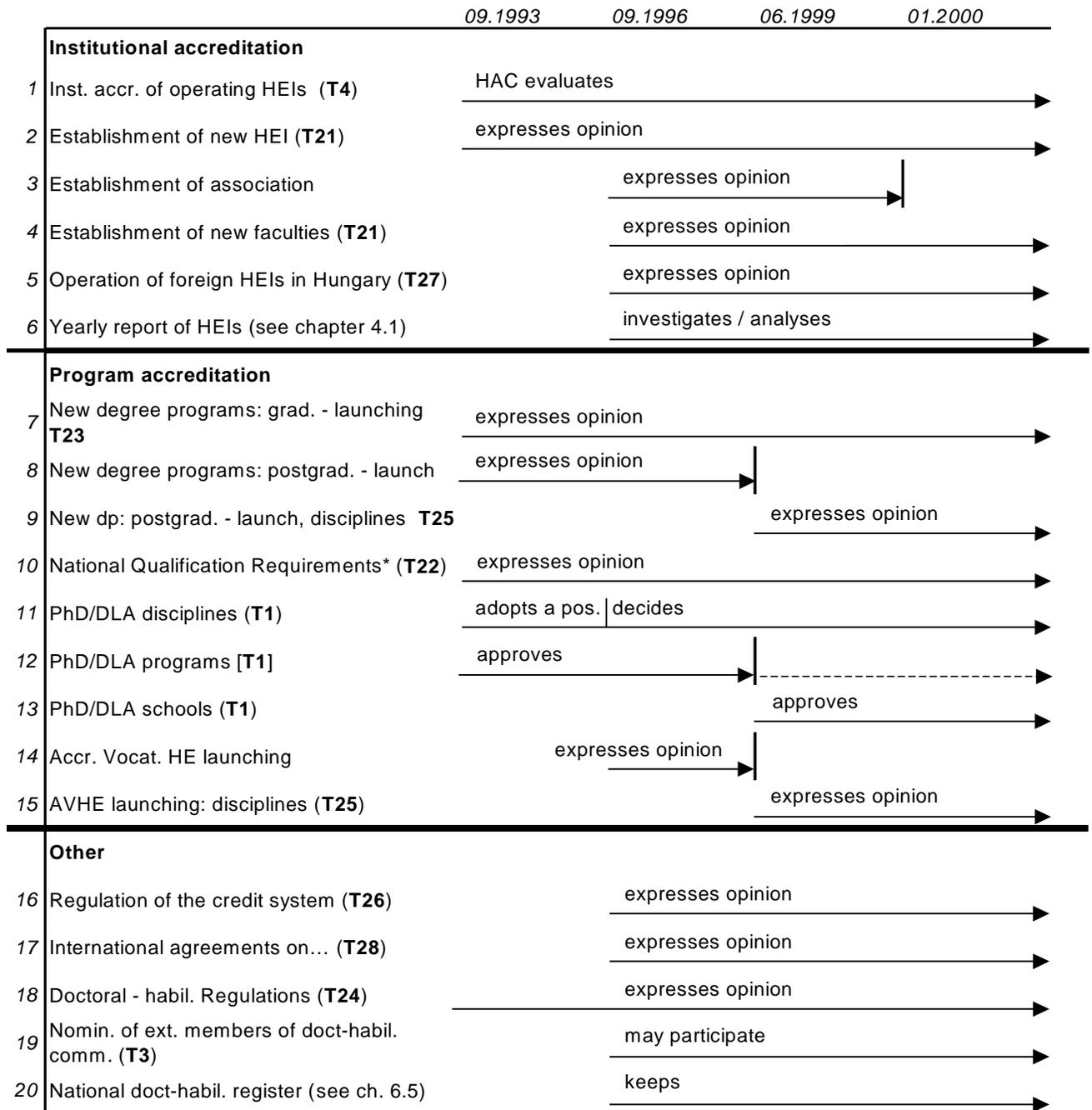
- T1)** **approves** the operation of doctoral (Ph.D./D.L.A.) schools (until new Gov. Decree: doctoral programs) and **decides** on the disciplines/branches of art in which a university may pursue doctoral training and may award doctoral degree;
- T2)** **expresses its opinion** (advises the Minister of Education) concerning:
 - 1 the establishment or recognition of institutions and faculties,
 - 2 national qualification requirements,
 - 3 launching graduate degree programs,
 - 4 the doctoral or habilitation regulations of a university,
 - 5 the disciplines and branches of art where the conditions required for launching and pursuing specialised postgraduate training and accredited vocational higher education exist at a HEI,
 - 6 the regulations of the application of the credit system,
 - 7 the operation of a foreign HEI in Hungary,
 - 8 the drafts of international agreements on the nostrification and equivalency of degrees;
- T3)** at the request of the higher education institution the HAC **may participate** in the nomination of the external members in doctoral examination and habilitation committees;
- T4)** **evaluates** the level of teaching and scientific activity in the individual HEIs on a regular basis but at least every eight-years.

It is important to note, however, that the tasks of the HAC **have changed** in several respects compared to the 1996 HEA. The most important changes are that with the passing of a new government decree on the operation of doctoral schools, the HAC will no longer approve **individual** Ph.D. or D.L.A. programs and will not express its opinion on the **launching** of individual specialised postgraduate degree programs and accredited vocational higher education programs.

The standpoints and opinions reached by the HAC **may be appealed** to the Minister only on formal-procedural grounds, not with respect to the HAC's judgement on quality. The Minister of Education must publish his/her reasons for deviating from the opinion of the HAC (or the Higher Education and Research Council).

Since up till now a new, amended government decree on the HAC has not been issued, there are certain discrepancies between the HEA of 1999 and the government decree on the HAC of 1997. In all such cases the HEA is decisive. Other sections and paragraphs of the government decree remain in force.

Changes in the HAC's tasks in response to the changing legislation are shown in the following chart.



* Establishing new graduate and postgraduate degree programs and accredited vocational HE programs.

Chart 2.1: The HAC's tasks in time

Since its functions and tasks are prescribed by law, the HAC does not have a Mission Statement. Nevertheless, the HAC adheres to its particular **set of values**,

- V1** independence
- V2** objectivity
- V3** impartiality
- V4** transparency
- V5** professional rigour
- V6** accountability
- V7** harmonisation of viewpoints of stakeholders
- V8** collaboration with HEIs
- V9** collaboration with the HE Conferences
- V10** collaboration with international professional organisations
- V11** assistance to HEIs
- V12** openness towards innovation.

Of course these values may not always predominate. Given that the members of the HAC are humans, they are subjective by nature. We are fairly certain, however, that we adhere to these values most of the time, and we certainly **strive to adhere to** them all the time

The means which contribute to **achieve these values** are

- clear minimum standards (see *chapter 5* below)
- broadly accepted guidelines for decision makers
- rigorous and transparent by-laws and procedures
- multi-level corporate decision making (see *chapter 3* below).

The main **objectives** of the accreditation system are

- O1** **public protection** of the “stakeholders” of HE, students, employers, society at large,
- O2** promoting **quality improvement**,
- O3** and to an increasing extent, **accountability** to the Government and the public about the quality of education.

3. Organisational structure

The HAC is a legal entity, and an **independent** professional body. **Decision making** is carried out on **three levels**. On the top level is the plenary session or Plenum; on the medium level are the colleges and the institutional and interdisciplinary committees; and on the lowest level are the expert committees for program accreditation, the special and ad hoc committees and the (ad hoc) visiting committees. Thus, final decisions are well prepared and these are always **corporate decisions**.

The HAC (Plenum) has **30 full members** including 15 representatives from higher education, 10 from research institutes and 5 from professional organisations. The HAC decided to invite some (at present 5) **non-voting members** from fields not represented by the full members. There is also one non-voting **student member**, representing *The National Union of Students in Hungary* (NUSH). Appointments are for three years, and may be

renewed once. The HAC elects its President from its own ranks. Decisions are made by majority vote.

On the medium level the HAC has **three Colleges** or Boards, for

- Humanities and social sciences
- Life sciences (including medicine and agriculture), and
- Physical sciences and technology.

Colleges are chaired by the vice-presidents of the HAC, their members are HAC members grouped according to their field of expertise. Other medium level decisions are those made by the **institutional committees** (for institutional accreditation) and **interdisciplinary committees** (for the accreditation of interdisciplinary programs).

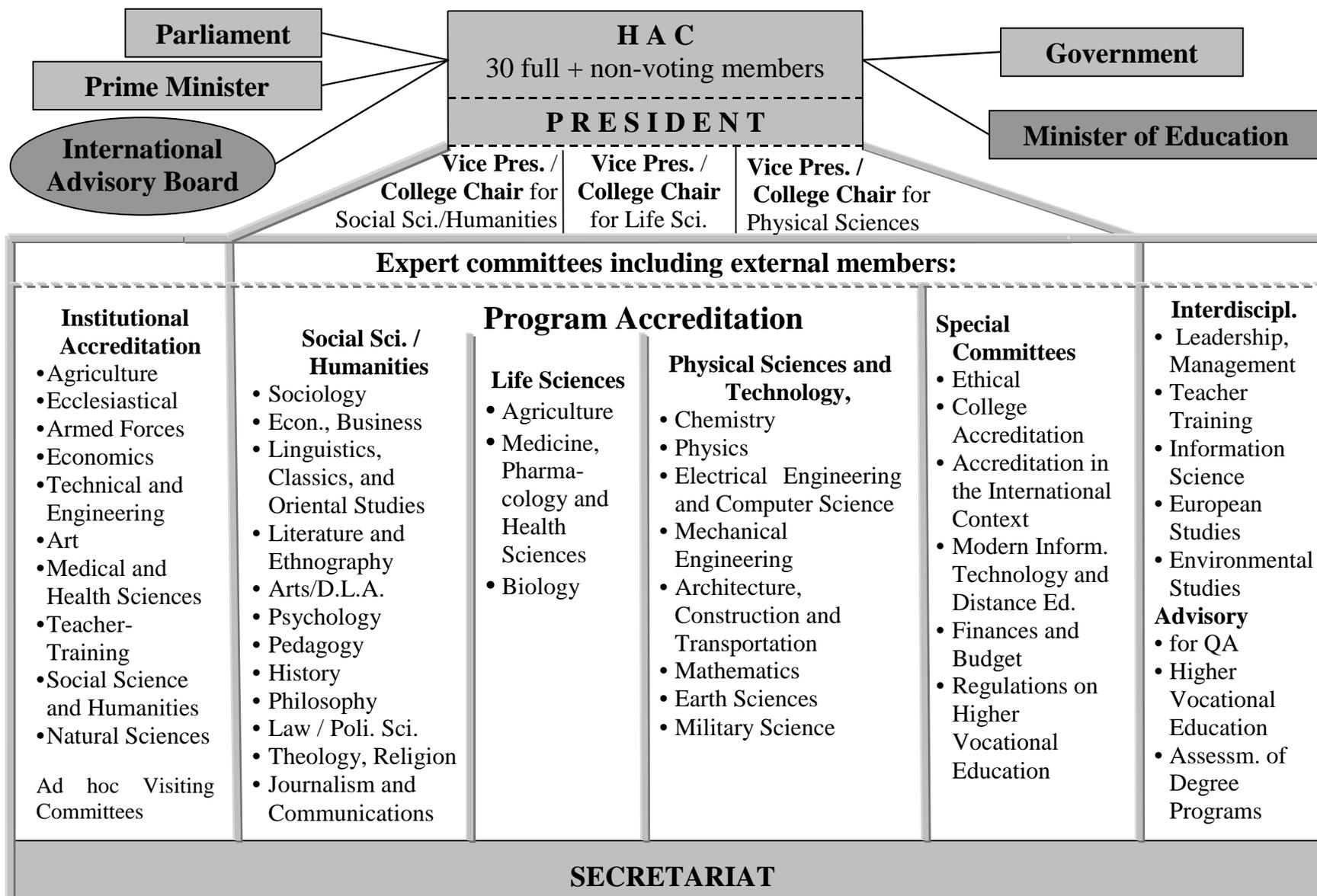
A network of about thirty **expert committees** or panels consisting of 10-15 specialists in their field accomplishes the bulk of the preparatory work for the decisions of the HAC. Their chairs are usually members of the Plenum. The **total number** of expert committee members (including HAC members) is **328** at present. Further, the HAC has a pool of Hungarian and foreign experts from which it recruits peer reviewers for evaluating program applications.

At its first session (December 1992) the HAC decided to set up an **International Advisory Board**. It consists presently of 9 (though by law there may be a maximum of 11) experts, leading scholars from academia in the EU and the US. They are in correspondence with the HAC, meet in Hungary yearly, discuss the HAC's annual report, and draw up recommendations.

The HAC has a **Secretariat**, with a staff of programme officers and administrators. They check program applications, organise meetings, take the minutes of them, carry out the necessary correspondence and preparations for the HAC's various activities, etc.

The **organisational chart** of the HAC follows.

THE HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE AND ITS EXPERT COMMITTEES



4. Activities (What are we doing?)

4.1 Institutional accreditation

The **main types** of institutional accreditation are the following:

- a) Operating HEIs **must be assessed** at least once **every eight years** or upon the request of the Minister of Education. All existing higher education institutions **must go through** the process of accreditation conducted by the HAC **before 30th June 2000**.
- b) There is a **compulsory preliminary accreditation** for
 - HEIs to be established;
 - faculties to be established;
 - branches of foreign universities. Foreign HEIs may operate in Hungary and may issue foreign degrees, provided that these are recognised by the State in their home country and/or are accredited, and that the degrees issued by them are also officially recognised.

Recognition of Hungarian institutions is granted by Parliament.

The quality assessment and accreditation process takes place by the **following steps**:

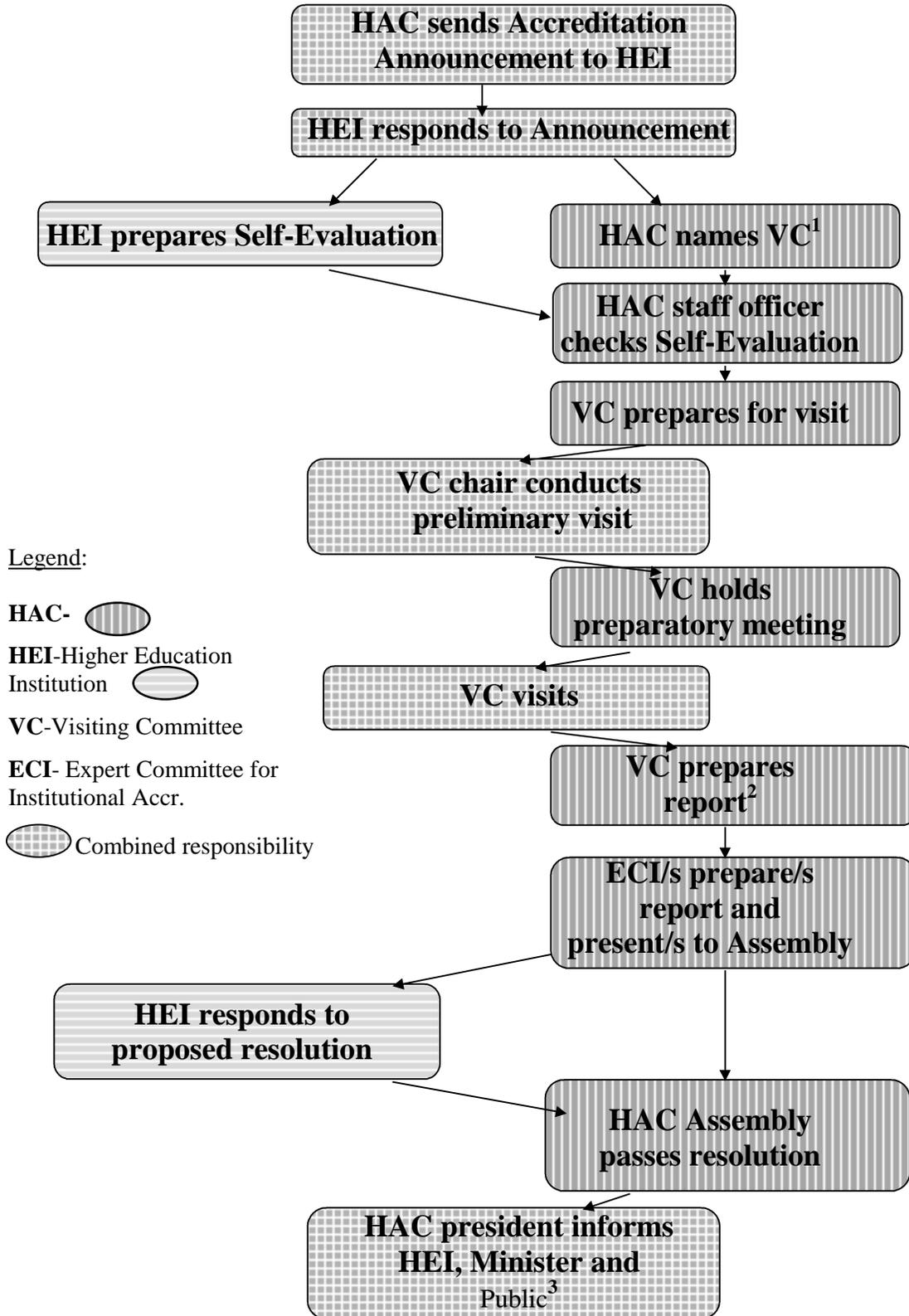
1. a self-evaluation within the institution, followed by a report,
2. a site visit by peer reviewers (VC) appointed by the HAC, followed by a report,
3. a resolution by the HAC in which it adopts a position,
4. the final decision by the Minister of Education.

The HAC provides guidance and training on **self-evaluation** and prescribes a list of performance indicators. An **Accreditation Guidebook** (*Appendix DI*) is used by higher education institutions to prepare the self-evaluation, and by peers to check off items to consider in their evaluation during the visit and their report. The guidebook contains '**factors of assessment**', including aims and objectives of the institution and programs, faculty or university policy, the structure of the degree program, student numbers and success rates, student's final research assignments and/or practical training, examination methods, qualifications of staff and staff numbers, facilities, internal quality assessment, and research.

With regard to **peer review visits**, the Chair for each team is selected by the HAC, who then selects 3-7 (sometimes more, depending on the number of degree programs) experts in the field. (The institution has a right on ample grounding to disagree with the composition of the panel and ask for other member/s.) A member of the HAC staff acts as secretary. The visit lasts three days on average and peers are provided with a check list. Foreign experts are included in case there are no disinterested experts available in Hungary, or the institution has a monopoly in teaching in the given field.

The **institution** is given a **yes/no accreditation** with detailed justification. All **degree programs** are given an **evaluation** with of **one of four grades**, the last being inadequate. The peer visit report is screened by a HAC institutional subcommittee, sent to the HEI for checking factual errors or expressing disagreement, voted on at the plenary meeting. The accreditation decision is forwarded to the Minister, who may dissent from the HAC's decision only by publishing his/her reasons (the latter being applicable in case of program accreditation as well). The **decision** is published and the HEI has the right to publish its remarks in the same gazette. The **evaluation** is the **common property** of the HAC and the HEI. It can be published only with the consent of the HAC president and HEI head.

The flow chart of institutional accreditation is as follows (see *Supplement 3* of the *Accreditation Guidebook, Appendix D1* on the accreditation process for more details):



¹Deadline: 3 months

²Deadline: 1 month after visit

³Deadline: 18 months after mailing announcement to HEI

The HAC's **decision** (proposal for the Minister of Education) may be:

- to accredit the HEI and its degree programs,
- to accredit the HEI but not all degree programs,
- to accredit a degree program for a specified period of time, by which time specified requirements are to be met, and which the HAC will review at that time,
- not to accredit the HEI.

As to the **consequences** of quality assessment and accreditation: When a higher education institution does not meet legal and quality threshold requirements the HAC will make a proposal for:

1. the suspension of the right to conduct the final examination and to issue diplomas,
2. the closing down of an institution, faculty, or program, or the withdrawal of state recognition,
3. other measures to ensure the standard of education (ex. making of an Action Plan).

For students in discontinued programs, the Act provides them to attend another near-by institution to complete their studies.

From 30 June 2002, no university or college will be permitted to operate unless the legal and quality requirements are met.

So far, there is **no relation between accreditation and funding**.

Apart from compulsory evaluation for accreditation, a 1996 Amendment to the HEA requires each higher education institution to **evaluate annually** the effectiveness of the qualification requirements, personnel and material conditions, and the results of educational and research activities. The annual report of this evaluation, including proposals for actions, has to be sent to the HAC. It must be noted, however, that many institutions have not prepared such a report and those sent to the HAC have not yet been used for any assessment.

4.2 Program accreditation

As to program accreditation (approving individual Ph.D./D.L.A. programs; expressing opinion on national qualification requirements, establishing/launching of degree programs and accredited vocational higher education programs) it has/had to be considered that

- An application must include a proposal for national qualification requirements if the proposed degree program has not one already.
- The HAC must decide whether the proposed qualification requirements are warranted or are similar to already existing ones.
- If the degree program already has accepted qualification requirements the HAC must decide whether the proposed program meets these requirements.
- The HAC further considers whether the proposed program meets the professional requirements (*Appendices D2b-c*), whether the teaching staff is adequate, and whether the infrastructure is sufficient.
- For church-run HEIs the HAC may not examine the content of subjects connected with religious belief, and only secular subjects /degree programs are assessed.

- The church authority supervising the church-run HEI compiles its own qualification requirements for programs connected with religious belief.
- In case of a negative decision, a HEI may submit a new application at any time.

The **procedure** of program accreditation is the following,

- upon receiving an application the HAC secretariat (head of section for program accreditation in consultation with the chairmen of the respective committees, if needed) identifies its discipline and suggests the respective expert committee and its program officer,
 - the expert committee concerned gives its opinion:
 - Ø the chairperson of the committee invites two experts who remain anonymous to give their opinions (one of them is usually a member of the committee, the other is an external expert),
 - Ø experts formulate their opinions,
 - Ø the expert committee discusses and conveys its opinion to the respective College of the HAC,
 - the College concerned discusses and brings proposal for decision before plenary meeting,
 - the Plenum discusses and votes, passes resolution,
 - the HAC president informs the Minister and HEI about the resolution of the Plenum.
- (See *Appendix D2a* for case studies.)

4.3 *Special and other activities*

Special rules and procedures apply to the institutional accreditation of **church-run HEIs** and to the accreditation of **distance education** degree programs (see *Supplements 4* and *5* to the *Accreditation Guidebook, Appendix D1*, respectively). With **church-run HEIs** the HAC may not assess the content of degree programs involving religious belief. The HAC does assess secular subjects. The church authority proposes the visiting committee chair and the members of the visiting committee must be approved by the church authority in agreement with the HAC.

As listed in *chapter 2* (T24, T26, T28, T3), the HAC has other tasks besides institutional and program accreditation. For the time being we cannot say anything about task **T3**) since the HAC has not been requested to take part in the nomination of the external members of doctoral examination and habilitation committees.

As far as task **T28** is concerned, HAC has been requested by the Minister of education to **express its opinion on the draft of an international agreement** to be signed by Slovakia and Hungary on the equivalence and mutual recognition of diplomas. This task was performed by the President and Secretary General of the HAC.

As to task **T24**, the HAC has regularly expressed its opinion on **doctoral and habilitation regulations** of various HEIs. After receiving these regulations, they are checked by the President and Vice-presidents of the HAC, who discuss them in their monthly meeting (held usually two weeks before the plenary meeting of the HAC), draft a resolution, and finally, the HAC Plenum adopts a resolution which the President of the HAC sends to the HEI.

Much work has been devoted to task **T26** in 1998. The previous government had a strong intention to pass a decree on the **regulation of the credit system** in Hungary. The Ministry of Culture and Education sent the draft proposal to HAC for its opinion. All three decision making levels of the HAC were concerned. The various expert committees discussed the proposal, some of them dealt with it in more than one meeting, since they found the proposal not adequately elaborated. The Colleges also discussed the proposal extensively, and finally, the Plenum adopted a very critical opinion which was forwarded to the Minister. Then came the elections (in early summer 1998), the new government, and the issue was postponed.

5. Evaluation principles and requirements (What is the basis of our work?)

As noted above, the **main focus** of the accreditation system in Hungary is on **institutions** and **individual degree programs**, not on a comparison of degree programs in the same field in the country. (It must be noted, however, that according to the government decree on the HAC, **after the first round** of institutional accreditation a **comparative evaluation** of the **same degree programs** must be carried out **concurrently with** the institution's regular accreditation. *Appendix B2*, section 4 (7).)

We have mentioned the basic **principles of accreditation** in Hungary in *chapter 1*. As to the **principles of evaluation** we can add,

- PE1** Quality can be assessed on the basis of the **evaluation of the degree programs**.
- PE2** Evaluation by the HAC must be **based on the self-evaluation** of the HEI.
- PE3** Evaluation must be **“built up”** that is, the evaluation of an institution must be based on the evaluation of its faculties, while the evaluation of the faculties must be based on the evaluation of their degree programs respectively.
- PE4** Evaluation must be **uniform** in the sense that the same basic principles and standards must be applied for each HEI and each degree program. There is, however, ample space for local differences.
- PE5** Evaluation must be **impartial and unbiased**.

As to the **application** of these principles the following can be said.

As far as **institutional accreditation** is concerned a **product/process quality assessment method** is followed. To be able to evaluate training and scholarly activity in HEIs, the HAC examines the institutions from the point of view of the diplomas.

- The **quality of the diploma** is determined by the quality of the work going on at the institutions.
- The **quality of the work** is determined by the process of teaching (who, what, how, to whom) on the one hand, and by factors influencing the quality of teaching (competence, responsibility, scholarly activity, management, infrastructure) on the other.
 - Ø For the quality assessment of the **process of teaching** we assess the teaching staff, teaching material, teaching practice, postgraduate teaching and students.
 - Ø For the quality assessment of the **factors influencing the quality of teaching** the following topics are accounted: research work, institutional management, and infrastructure.

Data are collected and evaluated concerning **three levels**: the individual degree programs, the faculty, and the institution. (For detailed requirements see the *Accreditation Guidebook, Appendix D1.*)

As to **program accreditation** we have published the so-called **minimum requirements** (“evaluation criteria”) which have been enlarged and published in more detail according to disciplines (expert committees) as **detailed program requirements** (*Appendices D2b-c*). These contain the **standards of evaluation** in a unified structure giving:

- definitions;
- for establishing and launching degree programs, requirements concerning:
 - Ø national qualification requirements,
 - Ø staff,
 - Ø infrastructure;
- for Ph.D. programs, supplements to the earlier published minimum requirements.

6. Functioning (How do we work?)

6.1 The HAC Body

The **expert committees** hold **meetings according to need**, that is a committee meeting is usually organised when at least 2-3 program applications and/or other issues can be put on the agenda. (Expert committees have 2-4 meetings per year on average.) A meeting is chaired by the chairman of the committee. The chairman (or, in some cases the committee member who reviewed the given application) presents the opinions of the evaluators. The external expert(s) is(are) not invited. After debate the committee adopts a standpoint and states its reasons. The minutes of the meeting are taken by the program officer in charge.

Colleges hold **monthly meetings** which are held immediately before the HAC plenary session. They receive the opinions of the expert committees, discuss them and make proposals for resolutions for the plenary session.

The **President and the Vice-presidents** meet two weeks before the plenary session. They, together with the Secretary and Deputy Secretary General, survey and discuss the issues to be put on the agenda of the next plenary session. The material is then sent to the members of the Plenum by mail.

The **HAC Plenum** meets **monthly**, on the last Friday of the month. The meeting usually lasts for about 2-4 hours and there are 20-40 issues on the agenda. Though these are well prepared, and some may need only a minute or two for voting, there are others which may require more time and sometimes extensive discussion.

6.2 The Secretariat

The Secretariat (see *Appendix C2*) is headed by the **Secretary General** with a **Deputy Secretary General** and a **Financial Director**. At present there are 7 full time and 4 part time **program officers** helped by 9 **administrators** (every employee is a public sector employee,

but not a civil servant), and there are 2 colleagues employed full-time on a contract basis, managing the **World Bank project**.

The Secretariat has a **weekly meeting** on Wednesdays which is chaired by the President and/or the Secretary general. Current issues and tasks are discussed, and colleagues report on ongoing jobs, recent meetings and study trips, etc.

It is worth noting that the work of the **program officers** is quite complex, ranging from typing and copying to compiling and editing expert committee opinions and visiting committee reports. They have to observe deadlines and procedural rules, prepare meeting documents, urge peer reviewers, visiting and expert committee chairmen and members to submit their reports and to provide sufficient explanations for their standpoints and decisions. In fact, the quality and the usefulness of the preparatory work for decision making depends on their contribution as well, sometimes to a considerable extent.

Otherwise, all leaders and program officers hold university degrees(s), the Secretary General and two program officers have Ph.D. degrees, and their background represents a wide range of disciplines (chemistry, economics, engineering, English and German language and literature, geography, law, mathematics, medicine, sociology, library sciences). Most of them speak foreign language(s). Two of the administrators are studying for college degree.

The Secretariat has no elaborate staff for financial administration. The financial director and the chief administrator prepare the financial matters, and detailed work is carried out by contract by the Financial Department of the House of Professors, the building in which the Secretariat is located.

6.3 Means and resources

The functioning of the HAC is **financed** through the Secretariat from the state budget. From January 1st 1998 the HAC Secretariat appears as a separate chapter within the budget of the Ministry of Education (ME) which is determined yearly by the Parliament. The total operational costs were the following.

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
HUF (million)	29.1	33.1	41.3	82.5	130	160.4	144 planned
In USD, approx. (thousand)	263	237	250	405	604	668	576

Hungary has received a loan from the IBRD for its **Higher Education Reform Project**. As a sub-component, the HAC is part of this project, and from 1999 on has thus an **additional resource**. This amounts to **2.4 million USD** over five years.

As to **facilities**, at present the HAC leases permanently about 400 m² **office space** for the Secretariat and for expert committee meetings. For the plenary sessions it uses the large conference room in the House of Professors, which is included in the rent.

Each employee in the Secretariat has a (Pentium) **PC** with Internet and e-mail access and a printer for every 3-5 persons. The software in use is: MS Windows 95/98, MS Office 97, MS Internet Explorer, Pmail 3.0, Novell 4.11 network. We have an own server and homepage on the Internet.

6.4 Management

There is, of course, no general corporate “**management**” with respect to the **membership** of the HAC, since members work as independent experts on a voluntary basis. The principle of the management of the Committee is the following: competencies are identified and allocated “top → bottom”, decisions are built “bottom → top”.

Members of the Plenum are remunerated for their participation in the plenary sessions and peer reviewers are paid for their reviews, which has been the case ever since the HAC was established by law. Expert committee members, however, were paid a modest fee for their participation on committee meetings for the first time only in 1999. The HAC works, as mentioned, on a **multi-level corporate decision** basis. Nevertheless, to efficiently and effectively operate, such an organisation requires managerial (and diplomatic) skills from the part of the **leaders of the HAC**. Moreover, for a leader of an organisation consisting of acknowledged experts it is a requirement that he himself be an acknowledged expert in an academic field on the one hand, and an acknowledged expert in the field of the accreditation (quality assessment) on the other.

The **management of the Secretariat** consists of three persons: the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General, and the Financial Director. However, the work of the Secretariat is directed through the Secretary General by the President of the HAC. On the third level of management there are four section heads, who are responsible for a specific area of the HAC’s activities (institutional and program accreditation, development, and administration). At present, the Deputy Secretary General serves as head of the section for institutional accreditation. At the same time, there are no tangible “sections” within the Secretariat, rather these divisions run along sets of tasks for program officers and administrators, and each staff member is charged with several functions.

Owing to the increasing quantity of work, the size of the staff has grown year by year. The management applies a multi-level decision making mechanism for **selecting new staff members**. Like elsewhere, the heads of the Secretariat select applicants for and conduct the interviews. Unlike most places, however, the successful candidate is also interviewed by the entire staff. Only if they agree does the candidate meet the President of the HAC for the final interview. Employment begins with a three month probation period.

A possible **threat** concerning the composition of the Secretariat is that altogether 6 colleagues (3 full time, 3 part time) are pensioners. Finding suitable candidates with ample experience to **replace them may be a problem** in the future. (The average age of program officers is 55, while that of the whole Secretariat is 47.)

6.5 Documentation and information processing

Documentation is carried out by the HAC Secretariat. The basic **principle of documentation** is that **one copy** of every document received and/or produced by/in the HAC **must be stored centrally**. We keep at least one copy from the material of each institutional accreditation (self-evaluation report, VC report, minutes of the meetings, resolutions, correspondence) and program accreditation (application, expert opinions, etc.).

The **logic of the documentation** follows the **structure of the tasks** of the HAC, i.e. the former has been shaped according to the needs of the latter. The tasks of the HAC are not the same from its establishment, they have been broadening, and the same is true for the staff, administrators included. Moreover, the available storage space has been varying and limited, therefore **various types of documents are kept separately**. Ph.D. program applications, for example, are stored in one closet, degree program applications in another, while the relevant correspondence is archived separately. (For registering letters we apply a dual system, numbering incoming and outgoing letters separately.) Expert opinions are stored in another room, in closed iron cabinets. This system of documentation has certain weaknesses which need to be resolved.

More or less the same is true for the **information stored electronically**. Much information is saved on our server from correspondence to VC reports and HAC resolutions, etc. (The access to these for the staff is in most cases unlimited.) We have made various lists containing for example Ph.D. and other program accreditation applications. (It must be noted here, that the **national register** of persons having earned a Ph.D. and the other of those habilitated are kept electronically by the HAC Secretariat, as required by law.) The information is not really systematically stored and the **present practice is in need of improvement**, especially as far as connections and coherence, and information retrieval (ex. making of statistics) are concerned. In addition to the increase in staff and tasks, the **main reason** behind this weakness is the delay on the part of the ME in developing a unified system of information processing that we should also apply.

6.6 External relations

Domestic relations: We have good working contacts with the **Ministry of Education**. Applications for program accreditation are sent to the Minister by the HEIs, who then forwards them to the HAC for its opinion. HAC resolutions concerning institutional and program accreditation are sent to the Minister, and the two organisations conduct an ongoing **correspondence**. In addition, there are **personal contacts**. The President of the HAC meets the Minister several times a year and the Deputy Secretary of States responsible for higher education more frequently. The Secretary General of the HAC also pays regular visits to Ministry officials. Moreover, there is a **joint committee** (“The Committee of Three”) of representatives from the Ministry, the HAC and the *Higher Education and Research Council*⁴.

⁴ The HERC, or FTT in Hungarian, is an advisory body advising the Ministry with respect to national needs and state financing on such matters as the setting up of new faculties or degree programs, and other questions pertaining to the development of HE.

Members of this committee meet regularly and discuss current issues and adopt common procedures in order to co-ordinate joint tasks.

We are in close communication with **other** leading HE **organisations** as well. Representatives of the HERC, the NDHC (*National Doctoral and Habilitation Council*), and the NUSH (*National Union of Students in Hungary*) are permanent participants of the HAC plenary sessions. Similarly, the HAC is always invited to (and receives the minutes of) the meetings of the HERC, NDHC, the *Hungarian Rectors' Conference*, HRC (MRK in Hungarian), the *Hungarian College Directors' Conference*, HCDC (FFK), and the *Chair of Art University Rectors*, CAUR (MERSZ). The President of the HAC is invited as an independent expert to the meetings of the *Parliamentary Committee of Education*, where he may be substituted by the Secretary General. We are in contact with the *National Credit Council* and the *Association of Hungarian Ph.D. Students* as well.

Last but not least we have good contacts with Hungarian **HEIs**, through our pool of experts the majority of whom work as university or college professors, on the one hand, and through the institutional accreditation visits and other accreditation activities on the other. Program officers of the Secretariat regularly consult with faculty heads and members of the HEIs in connection with current accreditation matters.

Regarding **international relations**, the HAC upholds a variety of links with foreign and international HE and QA organisations and projects like CHEEC, CHEPS, CRE, EAIR, ESMU, EURASHE, INQAAHE, IMHE, UNESCO/CEPES and others. The President of the HAC acts as Steering Committee member in various international organisations. He and other HAC and staff members have served in visiting committees assessing several European universities. The HAC organised the first meeting of representatives of QA agencies in Central and Eastern Europe, and continues to uphold relations with them. We take part in the Phare Multi-country program, we take part in and organise international conferences and meetings. For example the closing seminar of the first stage of the Phare Multi-country program was organised by the HAC, and the INQAAHE holds its next Board meeting and a QA workshop for its member agencies in Budapest in May 2000.

6.7 Publications and publicity

The most important publications of the HAC are the following.

In English:

- Annual reports beginning with 1994: *The Hungarian Accreditation Committee and its Work*.
- *Ph.D. Accreditation in Hungary*, Budapest, 1993.
- *Quality Assessment in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe*. Meeting of Agency Representatives in Budapest. Budapest, 1997.
- *The Advisory Board of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee*. Budapest, 1998.

In Hungarian:

- Annual reports beginning with 1994.

- *Akkreditációs Értesítő* (Quarterly Bulletin, from the second half of 1996, containing HAC resolutions, announcements, justifications of the Minister in case he decides oppositely to the HAC opinion).
- *Detailed program requirements* and *HAC By-laws* published jointly as a special issue of *Akkreditációs Értesítő*. Budapest, 1999.
- *The HAC members and staff of the Secretariat*. Budapest, 1999.

These publications are **distributed** by ourselves, we send them to HEIs and other organisations by mail. Many of them are available on our Internet homepage as well.

We have a **regular column** in the journal *Magyar Felsőoktatás* (*Hungarian Higher Education*, ten issues per year) and *Oktatási Közlöny* (the official Gazette of the Ministry of Education).

The President, members and staff of the HAC, moreover, regularly publish **articles** in various journals and books on QA in HE and other related topics.

The HAC is considered to be a respected organisation, its activity is acknowledged by both the Ministry and other organisations and the HEIs. Nevertheless, our **publicity** leaves room for improvement. The significance of the HAC is not evident to many **faculty members** at HEIs. Generally, though the **relevance** and actual acknowledgement **of accreditation** in Hungary is manifestly growing (several newspaper articles and other media reports have dealt with the accreditation case of a church-run college recently, for example), this is an area in need of improvement. (See more on this in *chapters 8-9*.)

7. Facts about our activities

The basic facts of our activities are presented in our annual reports. In this chapter we give only a brief overview and some statistics.

1993: The provisional HAC, adopting the basic assessment criteria of Ph.D. program applications, suggestions for the members of expert committees and International Advisory Board (IAB), provisional accreditation of Ph.D. programs.

1994: Mandate for the HAC for three years, provisional decisions finalised, first meeting of the IAB, adopting assessment criteria for establishing/launching new degree programs, preparation of the *Accreditation Guidelines*, starting pilot institutional accreditations.

1995: Pilot institutional accreditations finished, expressing opinion on doctoral and habilitation regulations, the major elements of the accreditation system are ready.

1996: Rules of procedures for the accreditation of church-run institutions, resolution on the equivalency of theological doctorates, starting the *Akkreditációs Értesítő*, fourth Hungarian edition of *Accreditation Guidelines*.

1997: Government decree on the HAC, new HAC Plenum formed, assessment of accredited vocational higher education programs, establishing the committee of distance education.

1998: Publishing the 'minimum requirements', establishing interdisciplinary and additional expert committees, finalisation of the HAC by-laws, seventh Hungarian edition of *Accreditation Guidelines*.

1999: Starting of the World Bank project, publishing the detailed program requirements, survey among HEIs about the HAC, intensive preparatory work for introducing ongoing quality assurance and assessment at HEIs.

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
218	237	283	252	416	372

Table 7.1: Number of HAC resolutions

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Incoming mail filed	2,160	3,076	3,963	4,593	5,361	4,319
Outgoing mail filed	4,368	3,435	3,528	4,931	4,790	3,624

Table 7.2: Number of letters filed (E-mails do not appear in this table!)

	Secretary General	Financial Director	Program officers		Administrators	Contract based	Total
			Full time	Part time			
1993	1		3	–	1		5
1994	1		3	3	4		11
1995	1		4	3	5		13
1996	1		4	3	5		13
1997	1		5	3	6		15
1998	1	1	6	3	9		20
1999	1	1	8	4	9	2 + 1	26

Table 7.3: Number of employees of the HAC Secretariat

	1994				1995				1996				1997				1998				1999				Total
	A	O	R	W	A	O	R	W	A	O	R	W	A	O	R	W	A	O	R	W	A	O	R	W	
Institutional accreditation					5				9				14				28				20				76
							0				0				0				1				0		1
Accr. of institutions to be established					1				2				2				0				2				7
							1	3			5				3	1			2	1			2		18
Accreditation of faculties to be established	8				4				2				1				1				0				16
			0				4				0				1				0				0		5
Accreditation of foreign institutions													1												1
															2										2
Establishing/launching new degree programs	2				36				60				57				91				45	3			294
			0				27	11			34	9			33	3			104	8			51	1	281
National qualification requirements	1				2				9				31				70				20				133
			0				4				13				2				11				2		32
PhD/DLA programs	255	4			44	11			37	7			36	9			19	11			20	10			463
			13	22			8	8			1	12			0	3			0	1			0	6	74
Accredited vocational HE programs													14				41				46				101
															1				7				5		13
Total	266	4	13	22	92	11	44	22	119	7	53	21	156	9	42	7	250	11	125	10	153	13	60	7	1517

Table 7.4: HAC activities in numbers (according to date of resolution)

A = accepted

O = other (changing of titles or program heads, etc.)

R = rejected

W = withdrawn

8. How do others judge our work? (Feedback)

1. Regular **feedback** concerning our work comes from the **ME**, when leaders of the two organisations meet, review past activities and discuss current and future tasks. Another similar forum is the mentioned “committee of three” (ME – HERC – HAC). A recent example of this type of feedback is the pioneering work by the HAC regarding the **introduction of the systematic, ongoing inner institutional quality assurance activities in HEIs**, which has been greatly appreciated and acknowledged by the ME.

2. A very important feedback comes, interestingly, **from the within HAC**, since most HAC and its expert committee **members** are university or college **professors** at the same time. Thus, they see the work of the HAC from the outside as well. Moreover, they receive many comments and remarks concerning the operation of the HAC from their colleagues at HEIs which they apply in their accreditation work.

3. As to the feedback coming **directly from HEIs** we have the following types of information:

A. As mentioned in *chapter 4.1* on institutional accreditation, the **report** of the VC discussed and finalised by the respective institutional committee is sent to the HEI for **checking and comments**.

- About **20%** of the institutions **did not send** any comments.
- About **30%** of the institutions sent a polite letter acknowledging the work of the HAC and **thanking for the overview and assessment** of the teaching and research at the given institution.
- About **20%** raised objections referring to the **application of sections 3-4 of the HEA of 1996** which prescribed to run degree programs and do research in at least two areas of science and at least two disciplines within them respectively for universities, and the same in at least two disciplines within one area of science for colleges. (With the 1999 amendment of the HEA Section 4 pertaining to colleges have changed, see *Appendix B1*.)
- Finally, about **30%** of the institutions requested the correcting of **factual errors** (many of them concerning changes in data) and/or **disputed evaluations** of individual degree programs.

B. The above letters are **enclosed** to the proposals made by institutional committees for the HAC plenary sessions and the Plenum takes them into account when it adopts the final resolution. HEIs, however, have an opportunity to express their opinion in connection with the HAC **resolutions** as well. When they (simultaneously with the Minister) receive the resolution, they may (within 30 days) **send a reply** which is published at the same time the HAC resolution appears. The **overwhelming majority** of these articles has commented the resolution in connection with the above mentioned **sections 3-4 of the HEA**. (See them in the annual reports of the HAC after the text of the respective resolutions.)

C. In order to attain systematic feedback, and **an overall assessment** of the accreditation and the work of the HAC, we have made a **survey involving all 89 HEIs** in Hungary. The results show an about **80% satisfaction** as opposed to approximately **10-20% of negative**

remarks and judgements on the average. (See the summary of the survey in *Appendix E1.*)

4. An important feedback comes from **foreign experts**. They are either involved in the work of the HAC in one way or another (International Advisory Board, foreign members of VCs) or make comments and suggestions in conferences and at other occasions when meeting HAC representatives personally. These, naturally, are mostly verbal communications, though there are a few exceptions. There are the yearly overview and **recommendations made by the IAB** which can be read in the pertaining HAC publication(s). Another set are the remarks such as made e.g. by *Ralph Enlow* who was member of two VCs assessing church-run colleges. (See his letter in *Appendix E2.*)

ANALYTICAL PART

9. How do we judge our work? (SWOT analysis)

This chapter is based on:

- extensive **discussions** by both the HAC Plenum and the Secretariat concerning the findings of the **survey** among HEIs mentioned in *chapter 8* (3.C);
- a **questionnaire** distributed on the October plenary session asking HAC members to answer the questions of a SWOT analysis (17 returned out of 24, plus the President's extensive input);
- **discussions** of, and **remarks** to, the input materials and **previous draft(s)** of this self-evaluation report (HAC and staff members).

9.1 Constraints

Before discussing our strengths and weaknesses it is necessary to point out the **external constraints** of the HAC's work and accreditation in general in Hungary.

C1 Higher education was under strict **state guidance** for decades after 1949. That meant heavy **centralisation** concerning enrolling, curricula, financing, the appointment of rectors and faculty, etc. The situation changed markedly in the nineties. HEIs are now autonomous, nevertheless, 'growing up' for the institutions is not an easy and quick process. Elements of old mechanisms and attitudes, paternalism and political connections can still be traced here and there.

C2 Hungary is "**centralised**" **geographically**, too. (That has to do with the Trianon Peace Treaty after WW1.) One fifth of the ten million population lives in the capital. There are serious regional differences concerning the economy and this characteristics has its effects on HE as well. (Budapest vs. countryside, East vs. West.) **Academia is especially heavily focused on Budapest**. The situation, however, is slowly improving in this respect.

- C3** The pro capita GDP is low, in 1998 it was USD 4,694. (After a sharp drop it has only recently caught up with the level of the late eighties.) The government expenditure on HE in **1998** was HUF **98** billion (USD 455 million), in 1999 (planned) 110.7 billion (USD 461.2 million), that meant **0.96 % of the GDP in 1998**. The state budget has a considerable deficit year by year (in 1998 it was HUF 554 billion [USD 2,572 million], that meant 4% of the GDP), and education is not a top priority. Consequently, HE is constantly **under-financed**. As far as the **low incomes** in HE are concerned, despite some recent efforts the situation is deteriorating (!) since the market and bank sectors offer considerably higher incomes and thus drain talented people from HE.
- C4** **More than 40%** of the budget of the HE sector comes from **non-governmental sources**.
- C5** Hungary is a small country. As the saying goes '**everybody knows everybody else** in this country'. This is obviously true for experts working in the same field.
- C6** The fact that the **Hungarian language** community is rather narrow constitutes a very effective constraint against inviting foreign experts to take part in accreditation.
- C7** **Quality culture** is not yet a dominant factor for a vast part of society.

From all this it follows that

- C8** Normative financing exercises some negative effects on the quality of teaching and learning. **Pro capita financing** induced HEIs to launch as many degree programs (including doctoral programs) as possible. The differentiation in financing for individual disciplines induced HEIs to launch programs with higher allocation factors. (If, for instance, agriculture was assigned a higher factor than economics, agricultural economics was grouped into agriculture.) In many cases, **quality requirements and the HEIs financial interests were diametrically opposed**.
- C9** **Mass education** exercises some negative effects on quality of teaching and learning.
- C10** Many **professors** have **more than one appointment** and teach at different HEIs at the same time.
- C11** Many **experts** in Hungary are **over-tasked**. Thus, we either stick to first class but busy experts or invite second class experts who, however, have more time for committee meetings, etc. We have chosen the first alternative (with weaknesses WC6-9 and strengths SB3-4, SC3-4).
- C12** The liberalisation of the right to establish HEIs caused serious problems, e.g. **great differences in size and quality** in many cases (church-run and private institutions).
- C13** The 1999 law on the **integration** of HEIs raises a new set of problems.

There may be additional constraints for HE in Hungary:

- C14** Absence of clear and feasible national HE policy and strategy. (**Instability** because of changing the government and educational policy makers every four years.)

C15 Lack of financial resources for **implementation** of the above.

Special constraints in the work of the HAC

C16 Quality assessment in HE was a radically new concept in Hungary in the early nineties. A number of historical reasons made it necessary to focus initially on accreditation. Though there was no direct financial connection between accreditation and budgeting, higher education institutions were eager for a favourable evaluation and did not want to be confronted with their weaknesses. The threat to the very existence of institutions and academic staff also contributed to a **low level of co-operation** in some cases.

C17 In a few instances, institutions covered up their weakest courses or distorted staff lists. Direct cheating, though rare, nevertheless occurred. The HAC has **neither the means nor the authorisation to investigate the validity of the data** supplied by the higher education institutions. The HAC did not wish to secure such authorisation since we believed that investigative actions of this kind would, in the long run, induce a backlash from the higher education institutions and have a negative effect on Hungarian higher education. Quality assurance requires trust. To win the confidence of the higher education institutions and raise the level of co-operation was a key priority.

C18 Because of the HAC's key role in Hungarian higher education, a **conflict between the HAC** and various **pressure groups** was prevalent from the very beginning. While the Law ensured a balance in the membership (15 members from the higher education and 15 from other institutions), the subsequently passed Government Decree set down the procedure for the selection of members. With the implementation of the Decree, **chance** became a considerable factor in the selection and composition of the membership.

C19 Both because of the high interests at stake, and because the Higher Education Act permits appeal only in cases of the violation of the procedural regulations, **the HAC had to develop a highly elaborate procedural structure**. Over time the procedures came to be seen by some as overly complex.

C20 The 1996 Act **promoted the integration** of many of the 89 Hungarian HEIs . It defined universities (Section 3) as institutions in which teaching and research is conducted in at least two of the three areas of science (i.e. social sciences and humanities; life-sciences; physical and technical sciences), and colleges (Section 4) as institutions in which at least two disciplines are taught. The HAC was forced to adopt its criteria accordingly. Some higher education institutions began to launch degree programs for which they did not have the competence, while the HAC had to develop provisions for granting at least temporary accreditation for institutions of otherwise good quality. The 1999 Amendment to the Act modified Section 4, but left Section 3 unchanged. Colleges can now focus on a single discipline, which at universities is possible only for theological faculties, via a special clause in the law.

C21 With a new government taking office in mid-1998, tuition for a centrally allocated number of students was eliminated, though with certain restrictions HEIs may enrol additional students who pay to „defray expenses.” In this sector of the Hungarian educational market, **quality is not yet a dominant factor**. Many students strive for a diploma much more than for knowledge. Some higher education institutions launched

special programs for paying clients without guaranteeing either the quality or even the equivalency of the degree they sought to issue. In the course of their accreditation, the HAC got into **conflict with the managers of these institutions**. One institution considered to sue the HAC in court for its loss of income after its program was closed down, based on the HAC's resolution.

C22 Work overload for the HAC and Secretariat and the uneven distribution of work over time.

In summary, at this point in the history of Hungarian higher education, the HAC had and continues to face constraints for which it sought to find the best possible solutions. We believe that the HAC's weaknesses are in large part due to the constraints it faced and tackled.

With all this in mind, now the strengths and weaknesses of the HAC follow.

9.2 Strengths

Legend: IMPORTANCE: A > B > C (According to our own judgement.)

WEIGHT: 10 > 9 > > 1 (How characteristic is the given factor for the HAC's operation?)

SA. Scope of work

- 1 The HAC is the only national organisation in Hungary assessing quality in HE.
IMPORTANCE: B
WEIGHT: 10

SB. Structure, composition

- 1 Independence from government and HEIs.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 9
- 2 Well-structured, proficient organisation of work.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 8-9
- 3 HAC members' acknowledgement and reputation.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 8-9
- 4 National network of experts, their preparedness and competence.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 8-9
- 5 Entire range of disciplines covered.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 10

- 6 Involvement of foreign experts in peer-reviews and visiting committees.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 1
- 7 International Advisory Board.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 6

SC. Methodology, operation

- 1 Transparency of procedures:
 - Ø Organisational by-laws and explicit, published rules of procedures.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 9
 - Ø Decisions are based on explicit, published evaluation criteria.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 8
- 2 Multi-level corporate decision making.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 10
- 3 Striving for objectivity and impartiality in decisions.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 8-9
- 4 Striving for thoroughness, accuracy, and professional rigour.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 8-9
- 5 Accreditation experience accumulated.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 9-10
- 6 The efficiency of the work of the Secretariat.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 9
- 7 Excellent interpersonal relations with clients.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 9
- 8 Good working conditions, excellent atmosphere (Secretariat).
IMPORTANCE: B
WEIGHT: 10

SD. Relations

- 1 Broad international relations.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 8

- 2 Involvement in international organisations and trends.
IMPORTANCE: A
WEIGHT: 3

9.3 Weaknesses

Legend: O = Objectives (See chapter 2.)
V = Values (See chapter 2.)
PA = Principles of accreditation (See chapter 1.)
F = Functions (See chapter 2.)
T = Tasks (See chapter 2.)
PE = Principles of evaluation (See chapter 5.)
C = Constraints (See this chapter, above.)
CC = Capacity for change (See chapter 10.)

WA. Scope of work

- 1 The HAC is not up to its tasks in several cases. (See WC4-5, WD1-3.)

WB. Structure, composition

- 1 Disproportionate representation of disciplines in the Plenum.
See detailed at the end of weaknesses.

- 2 Disproportionate representation of the different sectors in HE.
See detailed at the end of weaknesses.

- 3 Representation of stakeholders unsolved.
EVIDENCE: Most Plenum and expert committee members come from HEIs, there are no representatives of students, employers in expert committees.
RELEVANCE: O1, V7, C7.
IMPORTANCE: B
WEIGHT: 2
REASON(S): – It is difficult to identify real, interested stakeholders.
– Students, professional chambers, etc. are not yet aware of the significance in accreditation in Hungary.
SOLUTION: – OB1
– CCB2-3.
– It is hoped that the level of interest in accreditation and quality in general will rise in the near future.

- 4 Disproportionate representation of regions of Hungary in expert committees, dominance of Budapest.
EVIDENCE: 66 % of the HAC members are from Budapest, 34 % from the countryside. In expert committees the ratio is 64 – 36 %.
RELEVANCE: V8, C2. Additional constraint: travel (time, cost, logistics).
IMPORTANCE: C
WEIGHT: 3
REASON(S): – C2
– Expert committee members are chosen by committee chairmen (HAC members) who prefer to choose from among experts living in Budapest.
SOLUTION: We shall draw the attention of committee chairmen to this problem and ask them to invite more members from the countryside (see OB2).

WC. Methodology, operation

- 1 Over-complexity, sometimes rigidity of procedures and evaluation criteria.
See detailed at the end of weaknesses.
- 2 Multi-level decision making causes delay in some cases.
EVIDENCE: About 15 % of institutional accreditation and 20 % of program accreditation have been delayed since the present deadlines are in effect.
RELEVANCE: V8, V11, F1-2, T1, T21-23, T27, T4, C11.
IMPORTANCE: B
WEIGHT: 2
REASON(S): – Multi-level decision making is time consuming.
– Expert committees wait for at least 2-3 applications arriving to be discussed together.
– Some experts are slow in preparing expert opinion (see C11).
SOLUTION: – We have drawn the attention of program officers to stress the necessity of strictly observing deadlines to experts on all levels (OC3, CCC6).
– CCC3
- 3 Insufficient co-operation of expert committees.
EVIDENCE: There is no regular, organised communication among expert committees concerning various program applications on the lowest level of decision making.
RELEVANCE: O2, V11-12, PA2, F1, T1, T22-23, T25-6, C11.
IMPORTANCE: C
WEIGHT: 4
REASON(S): Lack of experts' time, see C11.
SOLUTION: CCC1?, CCC5?
- 4 Decisions do not always adhere to principles and evaluation criteria.
See detailed at the end of weaknesses.
- 5 Decisions are not always objective, conflict of interests of experts.
EVIDENCE: Feedback from HEIs, see *Appendix E1*.
RELEVANCE: As above at WC4.
IMPORTANCE: B *WEIGHT:* 2

REASON(S): Hidden interests, ever present subjective elements in decisions.

SOLUTION: CCC2 ↔ C6 + financial constraints = ???

- 6 Poor attendance at expert committee meetings in several cases.

EVIDENCE: There has been no quorum in several committee meetings because of absence of experts.

RELEVANCE: T1, T21-23, C11

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 1

REASON(S): C11

SOLUTION: – Experts have the opportunity to vote by mail or fax as well.

– OC2

– CCC3

- 7 Expert committee members sometimes do not study applications.

EVIDENCE: Only a few experts come to the Secretariat and study applications *before* committee meetings, though everybody has the opportunity to do so. Most committee members study the expert opinions of reviewers, and debate the issue at the meeting based on them, and look up unclear issues in the application during the meeting.

RELEVANCE: O1-3, V5-6, PA1-2, PA4, F1, T1, T21-23, C11.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 7

REASON(S): Lack of time, see C11.

SOLUTION: – OC2

– CCC3

- 8 Expert reports on program applications are not always detailed enough.

EVIDENCE: Experience of program officers.

RELEVANCE: O2-3, V5-6, PA5, F1, T1, T21-23, C5, C10-11.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 2 – 3

REASON(S): – Negligence, sloppy work of some experts.

– Lack of time, see C11.

SOLUTION: – CCC3 (partial).

– CCC2? (↔ C6 + financial constraints = ???)

- 9 Reasons given for expert committee decisions are not always explicit and detailed.

EVIDENCE: Feedback from HEIs, see *Appendix E1*.

RELEVANCE: O2-3, V4, V6, V11, PA5, F1, T1, T21-23, C5.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 1 – 2

REASON(S): – WB7

– WB8

– C5

SOLUTION: – OC2

– Program officers should lay even more stress on this problem in expert committee meetings (CCC6).

– CCC3

WD. Assessment of HEIs and program applications

- 1 Accreditation is based more on formal requirements, the balance of counting and weighing is still not sufficient.

EVIDENCE: We require many data in the SER of the institutions and do not ask for a SWOT analysis (though elements of it occur since the institution is required to evaluate its degree programs and justify the evaluation).

RELEVANCE: O1-3, V6, V8, V11-12, PA2, PA6, F1-3, T1, T21-23, T27, T4, PE1-3, C8-10, C12-13, C17, C21.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 6

REASON(S): – Evaluation based on data is regarded by clients as more exact than evaluation based on “text/words”.
– Sensitivity of HEIs.
– Justifiability of resolutions.
– This approach seemed appropriate in the introductory phase of QA in HE in Hungary (first round of institutional accreditation).

SOLUTION: – OD1
– CCA2
– CCD1-4

- 2 The assessment of pioneering and interdisciplinary programs may be rigid.
See detailed at the end of weaknesses.

- 3 Formal requirements may be circumvented by HEIs, and the HAC is not authorised to verify the data.

EVIDENCE: It has indirectly come to our knowledge that there are cases when the institutions are “cheating”, they report on faculty who are actually not teaching in the given institution or program, or change the respective faculty after permission has been given to establish/launch a certain degree program.

RELEVANCE: O1-3, V8, V11, PA1-2, F1-2, T1, T23, T4, PE1, PE3, C3, C8-10, C17, C21.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 1

REASON(S): – HEIs interest in increasing enrolment and number of students (normative financing, see C8) even in case of scarcity of acknowledged professors in the given field.
– Existent demand on the part of students for a degree program in the given region.
– Willingness on the part of several professors to lend their names to a program without actually teaching or teaching only some classes (see C3, C10).

SOLUTION: ???

- 4 The assessment is unable to sufficiently take processes into account.

EVIDENCE: Institutional accreditation focuses on a certain period, and also program applications present a given state of affairs.

RELEVANCE: O1-3, V6, V8, V11, PA1-2, F1-2, T1, T21, T23, T27, T4, PE1-3, C16.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 5

REASON(S): – Manageability of the accreditation process.
– This approach seemed appropriate in the introductory phase of QA in HE in Hungary (first round of institutional accreditation).

SOLUTION: – OD2
– CCA2
– CCD1-4

- 5 Assessment is more university and research than vocational and practical oriented.
See detailed at the end of weaknesses.

- 6 Language and style of reports are sometimes too polite, gloss over quality problems.

EVIDENCE: On the basis of the remarks to HAC resolutions by HEIs we conclude that they sometimes do not “get the message”.

RELEVANCE: O1-3, V5-6, V8, V11, PA2, F1-2, T4, C5.

IMPORTANCE: C

WEIGHT: 2

REASON(S): C5

SOLUTION: OA1

WE Relations, publicity

- 1 Feedback to HEIs is not sufficient, not regular.

EVIDENCE: Beyond our accreditation quarterly there is no organised, regular information supplied for HEIs on accreditation experience. Up till now we have sent only one copy of the *Akkreditációs Értesítő* to each HEI.

RELEVANCE: O2-3, V4, V6, V8, V11, PA5, F3, C22.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 6

REASON(S): C22 + financial constraints.

SOLUTION: – OE1-2
– CCE2-3

- 2 Publicity of the HAC’s work is still not sufficient.

EVIDENCE: WE1, WE3.

RELEVANCE: O2-3, V4, V6, V8-11, PA5, F3, C22.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 5

REASON(S): There has been no separate staff for the HAC’s PR (C22).

SOLUTION: – OE3-4
– CCC7 + Head of section for development.
– CCE1-5

- 3 The public awareness of the functions of the HAC is not sufficient.

EVIDENCE: The HAC and its work is not sufficiently known among faculty members, students, professional chambers, and the public at large in Hungary.

RELEVANCE: O1, O3, V4, V7-9, V11, PA5, F3, C7, C22.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 6

REASON(S): – WE1-2
– C7

SOLUTION: – OE1-5
– CCA2
– CCB2-3
– CCE3-5

Analysis of some weak points in the work of the HAC

The historical factors explaining the main causes for some of the HAC's weaknesses have been described above. In the following, specific weaknesses are pinpointed, their causes noted, and the HAC's present and intended future measures to remedy them are described. The six items selected represent what we believe are the key issues we have to, and can, remedy.

WB1 Disproportionate representation of disciplines in the Plenum.

EVIDENCE: Overrepresentation of medicine (4 members), no voting members for e.g. sociology, political sciences, philosophy, theology, fine arts.

RELEVANCE: (O1), V3, V7, (T1-4), PE5, C18.

IMPORTANCE: B

WEIGHT: 4

REASON(S): Method of selection of full members (legal constraint), as well as the numerical imbalance between the types the disciplines. While social sciences and humanities are divided into 13 disciplines, life sciences only in four, and physical sciences and technology in eight. The overrepresentation of humanities and social sciences must be avoided.

Measures at present: According to the by-laws of the HAC, the Plenum invited non-voting members to represent those disciplines which are not represented by full members.

Additional measures: CCB1-2.

Measures in the future: The current set of disciplines accepted by law follows that of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It must be replaced by a list of branches of training. The mechanism for members selection must be changed via a legal amendment after careful negotiation with the key stakeholders.

WB2 Disproportionate representation of the different sectors of HE.

EVIDENCE: Under-representation of the college and private sectors in the Plenum and expert committees.

RELEVANCE: (O1), V3, V7, V8, V11, PE5, C12-13.

IMPORTANCE: A

WEIGHT: 4

REASON(S): As to the Plenum, the cause is that the Rectors' Conference and the College Directors' Conference conducted a gentlemen's agreement around the time of the HAC's conception. The former organisation got ten the latter five places in the Plenum, in compensation for the colleges being more favourably represented in the Higher Education and Research

Council. With the integration of HEIs going into effect on 1st January 2000, many universities will have several college faculties, which will effect the status quo in the ensuing election process. As to the expert committees, the explanation lies in the fact that expert committee members are chosen by committee chairmen (HAC members) who prefer to choose from their own sector.

Measures at present: the HAC installed a committee with the five members who represent colleges and asked further representatives of the college sector to revise the procedures and requirements and advise the Plenum about changes.

Additional measures: CCB1-2.

Measures in the future: The agreement on the representation of the sectors must be renegotiated. The HAC intends to take the initiative in the negotiations prior to the following term.

WC1 Over-complexity, sometimes rigidity of procedures and evaluation criteria.

EVIDENCE: See *Appendices C1, D2b-c.*

RELEVANCE: O2, V4, V6, V8, PA5-6, T1, T21-23, C5, C8-9, C12, C17, C19.

IMPORTANCE: A

WEIGHT: 4

REASON(S): On a wider scale, the collective mentality of Hungarian society, which tends to have a fear of the law as well a need for wide-ranging codification; and with the HAC specifically, the fact that its decisions may be appealed only on procedural grounds. The Government Decree on the HAC requires it to supply „sufficient evidence” for its decisions. The charge of the lack of sufficient evidence was used in a few cases when the HAC’s negative decision was overruled by the Minister. In other cases the Minister approached the HAC for additional evidence before issuing his final decision.

Measures at present: one of the HAC’s key principles is the transparency of its evaluation criteria and procedures. Further, it is conducting a running discussion with the higher education institutions to reach a consensus in the process of evaluation, to allow for improvement at an institution, and to seek alternative solutions where possible (e.g. monitoring procedure, Institutional Development Plan).

Additional measures: CCC1, CCC5.

Measures in the future: Reciprocal influence of society at large (maturing democracy), the higher education institutions and the HAC. Focusing on the evaluation and quality enhancement function of the HAC vs. accreditation.

WC4 Decisions do not always adhere to principles and evaluation criteria.

EVIDENCE: Feedback from clients, analysis of decisions in Secretariat meetings.

RELEVANCE: O1-3, V2-3, V5-6, V11-12, PA2, PA4-5, F1-2, T1, T21-23, T4, PE4-5, C1, C5, C16, C20.

IMPORTANCE: A

WEIGHT: 2

REASON(S): The HAC has undergone an evolution, both as an organisation and within the changing context of higher education and changing legislation. Sometimes the rules could not be applied in a given situation. Inconsistency may also be ascribed to the lack of experience and training of experts/members and staff. Different voting majorities in various subcommittees may have been a factor, as also pressure from different interest groups. The causes are not mutually exclusive.

Measures at present: Refining the documentation system of former decisions (see CCC4). Shift from memory-based to computer-based retrieval of decisions.

Measures in the future: The revision of the procedures and criteria with the involvement of the interested HEIs and foreign experts. Greater involvement of external experts in the elaboration of procedures and criteria. Setting up a „Board of Seniors” consisting of retired scholars. Increasing the involvement of foreign experts, mainly in program evaluation. Increasing the publicity of the decisions.

WD2 The assessment of pioneering and interdisciplinary programs may be rigid.

EVIDENCE: Such kinds of new programs have sometimes been rejected at least partially because of perhaps too rigid disciplinary thinking and requirements.

RELEVANCE: O2, V11-12, PA2, PA6, F1, T1, T22-23, C5.

IMPORTANCE: A

WEIGHT: 2

REASON(S): The structure and composition of the HAC’s expert committees, which sometimes gave rise to a conflict of interest between those running established programs and those who seek to launch new ones.

Measures at present: the HAC has established interdisciplinary expert committees for Management, Education, Information Science, European Studies and Environmental Studies. The by-laws make provision for installing ad-hoc committees for other new initiatives. The interdisciplinary committees are lead by a member of the Plenum, and have the right to submit a decision directly to the Plenum, bypassing the HAC College.

Measures in the future: The solution of the problem needs more sensitivity and a change in the way of thinking. The procedural side seems to be solved. A long-term change can only occur with the adoption of a list of branches of training to replace the currently accepted set of disciplines.

WD5 Assessment is more university and research than vocational and practical oriented.

EVIDENCE: Feedback from the clients (colleges, HCDC), see *Appendix E1*.

RELEVANCE: O1-2, V7, V11, PA2, F2, T21-23, T4, PE4.

IMPORTANCE: A

WEIGHT: 4

REASON(S): The HAC began as a provisional committee for the evaluation of the Ph.D. programs. In developing its procedures and criteria for program accreditation, the HAC decided to focus on the input of the training

procedure. One of the most important inputs is the scientific and scholarly background of the academic staff, and its evaluation is relatively easy to formalise. On the other hand, the fundamental economic and social changes in Hungary stood in the way of assessing the practical needs of higher education institutions. A further cause for the HAC's university-orientation is the dominant influence of universities, mentioned in WB2 above. The responsibility for vocational training was only recently moved to the Ministry of Education. The inner structure of vocational education is being debated, and overspecialisation is a danger. A correct balance of transmitting basic knowledge and developing skills on the one side, and market-oriented specialisation on the other, is difficult to achieve. There were practical problems during the introduction of post-secondary training (i.e. accredited vocational higher education organised within the school system), two year programs which award certificates.

Measures at present: A special expert committee was set up for the two-year post-secondary vocational training programs. Representatives of the more practical oriented colleges participated in reshaping of the HAC's pertinent procedures and criteria. A brainstorming with representatives of Hungarian Chambers helped to clear some problems (CCB2). Both the HAC's Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General are former college professors.

Measures in the future: A constant dialogue is needed between the stakeholders and the HAC regarding vocational training. The effective form of this dialogue has not yet been found. The HAC intends to launch a study on vocational training and its assessment in other European countries.

9.4 Opportunities

Legend: POTENTIAL: 10 > 9> 1 (The potentiality, verisimilitude of the given opportunity or threat.)

OA. Scope and outcomes of work

- 1 Raising public awareness toward quality culture.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 7
- 2 Keeping the key role in QA in HE in Hungary, acquiring greater acknowledgement.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 7
- 3 Raising the level of HE in Hungary by insisting on quality requirements.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 8
- 4 Pointing out general trends in HE in Hungary for the policy makers.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 5

- 5 Assuring quality in the course of the further extensive development of HE (mass education, distance education, life-long learning).

IMPORTANCE: A

POTENTIAL: 6

- 6 Strengthening the consulting role of our QA work: consultancy and monitoring, follow-up services.

IMPORTANCE: B

POTENTIAL: 7

- 7 Ongoing quality control of doctoral schools.

IMPORTANCE: A

POTENTIAL: 9

OB. Structure, composition

- 1 Involving more stakeholders in the work of the HAC (representatives of chambers and professional societies).

IMPORTANCE: B

POTENTIAL: 4

- 2 Diversification of experts (college sphere, countryside).

IMPORTANCE: A and B

POTENTIAL: 7

OC. Methodology, operation

- 1 Rationalisation and simplification of procedures.

IMPORTANCE: A

POTENTIAL: 10

- 2 Motivation of experts (expert reports, presence and preparedness of members in committee meetings, justification of standpoints).

IMPORTANCE: B

POTENTIAL: 3

- 3 Keeping to deadlines.

IMPORTANCE: B

POTENTIAL: 6

- 4 Improving transparency (flow of information, see below in point E).

IMPORTANCE: A

POTENTIAL: 7

OD. Assessments

- 1 Substantive approach, more flexibility, receptivity towards new, original programs.

IMPORTANCE: A

POTENTIAL: 8

- 2 Devoting more attention to processes influencing quality at HEIs.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 3
- 3 Pinpointing the score indicators of quality in teaching and learning.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 4
- 4 Assessing the effectiveness of programs and institutions via output, alumni, etc.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 2
- 5 Assessing quality management.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 6

OE. Relations, publicity

- 1 Summarising and publishing the experience and lessons of the first round of institutional accreditation.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 9
- 2 Regular feedback to HEIs, supporting quality assurance work at institutions (literature, consultancy, meetings and training).
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 9
- 3 Improving the HAC's PR.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 6
- 4 Publishing the results of the external evaluation of the HAC.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 10
- 5 Raising confidence of HEIs in the HAC's work.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 5

9.5 *Threats*

TA. Scope and outcomes of work

- 1 Ever broadening of tasks, getting overtasked.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 5

- 2 Growing amount of work: keeping pace with international developments, accreditation of integrated institutions, monitoring procedures, too many applications for new degree programs.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 8 – 9
- 3 Potential decline of the quality of accreditation work as a consequence of the above.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 2 – 3
- 4 Only formal compliance of HEIs with quality requirements.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 4
- 5 Loss of interest of HEIs in quality improvement.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 3

TB. Structure, composition

- 1 Political intervention in the composition of the HAC.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 8
- 2 Lack of balance between continuity and renewal in the composition of the new HAC Plenum for the next term.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 4

TC. Methodology, operation

- 1 Loss of interest of qualified experts (over-tasking and under-financing).
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 5
- 2 University ambitions of colleges may lead to deterioration of higher level practical education on the one hand and decline of the quality of teaching and learning at university level.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 3

TD. Assessments

- 1 HEIs and program applicants and other interest groups try to influence assessments and decisions through lobbies.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 3

- 2 Individual interests of experts cannot be excluded.
IMPORTANCE: B
POTENTIAL: 5

TE. Political influence and intervention

- 1 Budget insecurity of the HAC.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 3
- 2 Political pressure on HAC decisions.
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 1
- 3 Disregard of the HAC's decisions (by the ME and HEIs).
IMPORTANCE: A
POTENTIAL: 1

10. Capacity for change (How do we prepare for the future?)

In this chapter we demonstrate our **responsiveness**, enumerating actual measures taken and planned in the near future as far as responses to challenges coming from the

- changing of our tasks prescribed by law,
- feedback from our stakeholders,
- national environment, and
- international environment of QA in HE are concerned.

CCA. Scope and outcomes of work

We try to react flexibly to the **changing of our tasks**:

- 1 Based on the respective teaching and research activities and previous approvals for establishing/launching degree programs and Ph.D. courses the HAC **determined the disciplines** for each HEI in which it can launch specialised postgraduate and accredited vocational higher education programs without asking for special approval. (Changing of section 81 (2) f) of the HEA.)
- 2 In the second round of institutional accreditation the **emphasis** will be laid on the **ongoing quality assurance** of institutions. ("Meta-evaluation" based on the yearly quality reports, section 59 of the HEA.)

In this respect we have done the following.

- ü In May 1998 we drew the attention of the HEIs to this section of the HEA in a circular letter, asking them to **begin work** on these reports and to **inform** us about their activities and the respective committees formed.

- ü We sent **questionnaires to the external chairmen of the state/final examination** boards asking for their assessment and suggestions concerning these exams and the graduates examined. The results, together with information on the new developments, were sent to each HEI and have been published as well.
- ü In September 1998 we ourselves **established an expert committee** of external experts for working out an introductory material containing the principles of quality assurance at HEIs.
- ü We initiated a **pilot project** with the voluntary participation of nine institutions to prepare materials elaborating special issues of QA in HE.
- ü In November 1999 we organised **meetings** for the **deans** of university faculties and **general directors** of colleges respectively, summarising the experience that has been gained and discussing plans for the future, and asked them to prepare an institutional plan of action, a '**quality plan**' which they would send to the HAC by March 16, 2000.

We plan to

- ∅ finalise our recommendations for the general structure and elements of content of the yearly quality report of the HEIs,
- ∅ work out the procedures and evaluation criteria for the assessment of these reports,
- ∅ organise training for persons working for the QA at HEIs,
- ∅ study and summarise the quality plans of the institutions with ample feedback,
- ∅ assess the quality reports due in October 2000 accordingly.

The final goal of these measures is **to base institutional accreditation on the yearly quality reports of HEIs.**

- 3 We have set up a **committee** asking for suggestions on **comparison and ranking of degree programs.**

CCB. Structure, composition

- 1 We are promoting discussions in the organisations delegating members to the HAC for the next term (HRC, CGDC, CAUR, HAS, Chambers) in order to achieve:
 - ∅ the proportionate representation of disciplines,
 - ∅ every sector of HE in Hungary be involved,
 - ∅ a balance between continuity and renewal be realised.
- 2 We organised a meeting with **representatives of the professional chambers** in order to draw their attention to the above question, to have their opinion on current questions of HE, and to facilitate more effective co-operation. We shall send them the respective national qualification requirements asking for their comments on them.
- 3 We shall try to **better identify representatives of stakeholders** of HE in Hungary and involve them to a greater extent in the process of accreditation and quality assessment.

CCC. Methodology, operation

- 1 We shall try to **utilise experience** gained by keeping pace with international developments and modify our procedures and evaluation criteria accordingly. An **expert committee** of five HAC members has been formed to keep an eye and report on foreign quality assessment practices in HE. Its first report was presented to the Plenum in September, 1999.
- 2 Minimising negative ‘small country’ effects **foreign experts** will be involved in accreditation in the future as well.
- 3 In spite of strong constraints we try to acquire **ample financial basis** for both inviting foreign experts and motivating expert committee members year by year.
- 4 We have begun the working out of a **new system of documentation and information processing**.
- 5 We have begun forming a small “**information centre**” from the available stock of materials coming from foreign organisations.
- 6 The self-reflective, **operation improving** focus of staff meetings will be maintained, their **staff development** character strengthened.
- 7 The Secretariat is keeping pace with the growing amount of work with **extensive development** as well, paying due attention to the employment of **younger professionals**. (The average age of those four persons employed full-time in 1999 is 31.) The introduction of a **trainee system** is under consideration.

CCD. Assessments

- 1 Beside input data the **focus of assessment** will be more on the actual **process** and the **outputs** of teaching and learning and research at HEIs in the future.
- 2 The **scope of assessment** will be widened (greater emphasis on the mission statement, management, environment, labour market trends and expectations).
- 3 The current *Accreditation Guidebook* is being rewritten, it will be **shorter and simplified**. The structure and content of the SER and the yearly quality report of the institutions have to be integrated.
- 4 A **SWOT analysis** may be included in the institutional self-evaluation reports.

CCE. Relations, publicity

- 1 We shall try to maintain our **international involvement** in QA in HE.
- 2 To further improve relations with HEIs a system of **liaison persons** is introduced in the Secretariat from 2000 on.
- 3 We plan to distribute our **publications in a wider circle**, if financial constraints allow it.
- 4 We have begun work on the **redesigning of our image**.
- 5 The **redesigning of our homepage** both in form and in content has begun.

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Other materials, texts, data, and charts made and provided by the President of the HAC and members of the HAC Secretariat.

List of abbreviations

AHPS	Association of Hungarian PhD Students [DOSZ, in Hungarian]
AVHE	Accredited vocational higher education [AIFSz]
CAUR	Chair of Art University Rectors [MERSZ]
CCA-CCE	Capacity for change (<i>Chapter 10</i> , pages 49-51.)
C1-C22	Constraints (<i>Chapter 9.1</i> , pages 32-35.)
CEPES	European Centre for Higher Education
CHEEC	Committee for Higher Education in the European Committee
CHEPS	Center for Higher Education Policy Studies
CRE	Association of European Universities
EAIR	European Association for Institutional Research
ECI	Expert committee for Institutional accreditation [ISzB]
ESMU	European Centre for the Strategic Management of Universities
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
F1-F3	Functions (<i>Chapter 2</i> , page 13.)
HAC	Hungarian Accreditation Committee [MAB]
HCDC	Hungarian College Directors' Conference [FFK]
HE	Higher education
HEA	Higher Education Act [FTv]
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HERC	Higher Education and Research Council [FTT]
HRC	Hungarian Rectors' Conference [MRK]
IAB	International Advisory Board of the HAC
IMHE	Institutional Management in Higher Education
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ME	Ministry of Education [OM]
NCC	National Credit Council [OKT]
NDHC	National Doctoral and Habilitation Council [ODHT]
NUSH	National Union of Students in Hungary [HÖÖK]
OA-OE	Opportunities (<i>Chapter 9.4</i> , pages 45-47.)
O1-O3	Objectives (<i>Chapter 2</i> , page 15.)
PA1-PA6	Principles of accreditation (<i>Chapter 1.1</i> , page 12.)
PE1-PE5	Principles of evaluation (<i>Chapter 5</i> , page 22.)
SA-SD	Strengths (<i>Chapter 9.2</i> , pages 35-37.)
TA-TE	Threats (<i>Chapter 9.5</i> , pages 47-49.)
T1-T4	Tasks (<i>Chapter 2</i> , page 13.)
V1-V12	Values (<i>Chapter 2</i> , page 15.)
VC	Visiting committee [LB]
WA-WE	Weaknesses (<i>Chapter 9.3</i> , pages 37-45.)

List of appendices

- Appendix A1:* The Hungarian Education System
- Appendix A2:* Doctorates in Hungary
- Appendix A3:* Integration of Hungarian Higher Education Institutions
- Appendix B1:* The Higher Education Act – Excerpts
- Appendix B2:* The Government decree on the HAC
- Appendix C1:* By-Laws of the HAC (See: *Akkreditációs Értesítő* 4(1999) No. 3)
- Appendix C2:* By-Laws of the HAC Secretariat (Contents and organisation chart)
- Appendix D1:* The Accreditation Guidebook
- Appendix D2a:* Case studies for program accreditation
- Appendix D2b:* Criteria for evaluating Ph.D. applications and applications for establishing/ launching degree programs (See: *Akkreditációs Értesítő* 3(1999) No. 4, 74.o.)
- Appendix D2c:* Quality requirements of the HAC (See: *Akkreditációs Értesítő* 4(1999) No. 3)
- Appendix E1:* Survey results (HEIs about HAC)
- Appendix E2:* Letter by Ralph Enlow

For reasons of economy we publish here only *Appendices E1* and *E2* while *Appendices B1* and *B2* can be found below in this volume as *Annex Nr. 1A* and *1B* to the CRE report. We are happy to send any other items on request.

Appendix E1: Evaluation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee by institutions of higher education

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) initiated a survey in the spring of 1999 to assess how institutions of higher education view the accreditation process and how they evaluate the work of the HAC. In the **exploratory phase** of the survey (March-May 1999), **intensive interviews** were prepared in 12 working and in 2 as yet rejected, nonaccredited institutions. The interviews aimed at revealing the most important problem groups. On the basis of these interviews, in the **second phase** (June-September) **questionnaires** were prepared and sent to all 89 Hungarian institutions of higher education.

Answering the **anonymous** questionnaires was **voluntary**, while the processing was completely **verifiable** (coded summary questionnaire).

The institutions received the survey **favourably**, the **proportion of responses** was exceptionally high, **85.4%** (74+2 institutions, the latter two responded without sending back questionnaires).

RESULTS

In summary, the survey had the following results: about **80%** of the institutions were **satisfied** with the accreditation and with the HAC's work (75-85% per question), while **negative judgements** were usually spread between **10–20%** (closed, multiple choice questions), and **1-10%** (open-ended questions).

1. THE ACCREDITATION

The accreditation of institutions of higher education were deemed by **most** respondents as **necessary** as pertaining to institutions (**94.6%**), faculties (**86.5%**), graduate degree programs (**93.2%**) and Ph.D programs (**83.3%**), only in the case of specialised postgraduate degree programs was there a negative response by 28 institutions (**37.8%**). [According to the June 1999 amendment of the Higher Education Act, from 2000 on HEIs are allowed to launch specialised postgraduate degree programs in their branches of teaching without a separate accreditation procedure.]

The work involved with the accreditation posed a serious **burden** for the institutions in many cases, but it was **worth the effort** for them, perhaps surprisingly not so much for any recognition from outside, but rather primarily from the point of view of their own internal organisation and order.

The impact of the accreditation on an overwhelming majority of the institutions was **positive** (65, **87.8%**). The answers can be summarised here in the categories of **internal conditions** (self-knowledge, survey, documentation); the various types of **motivation** (exploring deficiencies, raising the level of educational quality, improving scientific work, attaining academic degrees), and **development** (administrative, curricular, institutional, quality assurance).

Negative impact was also mentioned by 14 institutions (**18.9%**) (large burden, feeling of threat, rejected applications for launching new degree programs).

Comments and suggestions in connection with the accreditation (the objections listed here are within the 3-10% range):

- The Accreditation Guidebook (and so the self-evaluation report) needs **simplification**, and should take into account the **peculiarities** of the individual institutions (colleges, art schools).
- In institutional accreditation the visit of the Visiting Committee is **too short** (usually 2-3 days), at times superficial, the Visiting Committee members' **knowledge** of the self-evaluation report is not always sufficient, and there should be more professionals versed in the field (users) and more foreigners in the Visiting Committees.
- The evaluation should take the **characteristics of the colleges** (practical orientation) more into consideration (**8.1%**); it should be **more objective**, quantifiable, more differentiated, there should be a larger **spread**, i.e. in the case of lower quality institutions, we should not hesitate to have negative decisions. Nevertheless, the four-value scale used to assess the quality of the degree programs is good (**84%**).
- In institutional accreditation similar (equivalent) degree programs among the institutions **should be compared**, and the weaker ones should not receive a higher assessment.
- As to the program accreditation there were suggestions to both **strengthen** and **ease severity**.

2. THE WORK OF THE HAC

Responding HEIs said **almost unanimously** that the independence of the accreditation organisation from institutions of higher education (93.2%) and from state administration concerned with education (94.6%) was **necessary**. The function and organisation of the HAC **fulfil** the requirements according to 61 institutions (**80.3%**), 11 (**14.5%**) however **do not find them sufficient**, they find fault with the **independence** and the **representation**. (State and private; and large institutions.)

The HAC's adherence to regulations is **satisfactory** (**81%**), although the number answering „**do not know**” was significant at **13.5%** (smaller institutions; universities).

The publicity of the HAC procedures was deemed **satisfactory** (**86.5%**), 8 institutions (6 state, 2 private; 5 large) **objected** (**10.8%**) in this respect, while actual understanding of the HAC's procedures had a somewhat poorer ratio (**81.3% – 16%**, the latter included more state and smaller institutions).

The HAC's criteria for assessment are **satisfactorily accessible** according to 62 institutions (**83.8%**). In this case, the answer of 11 institutions (**14.9%**, small and large) was negative.

The *most important objections and suggestions* concerning the HAC's work were the following:

a) Structure, composition

- The composition of the expert committees is not satisfactory. (15 institutions, **20.3%**)
- The structure is not satisfactory (independence, representativity). (11, **14.5%**)
The representation of colleges in the HAC's body is not proportional.
The representation of the sphere of users is not satisfactory.

b) Publicity

- There is insufficient information about the composition of the expert committees. (24, **32.4%**) [It is published in the HAC yearbooks and available on our Internet homepage!]
- The flow of information from HAC to HEIs is unsatisfactory. (16, **21.6%**)
(20 institutions, **26.7%** has not visited our web page!)
- The familiarity with the HAC at the given institution is not satisfactory: 14, **18.9%**.
- Publicity of the evaluation criteria is not satisfactory. (11, **14.9%**)
- More effective advertisement, promotion of accreditation matters is necessary, while publicity could be improved (to the public).
- Contact with the institutions could be improved. There should be liaison persons at HAC for institutions and regular meetings with HEIs, as well as regular publishing of accreditation experiences.

c) Transparency

- Evaluation criteria are not unequivocal or clear enough. (21, **27.6%**, mostly colleges)
- The institution cannot judge how the HAC adheres to rules. (10, **13.5%**)
- The well-foundedness of specific decisions are partially (**9.3%**) or in the majority of cases (**2.7%**) not satisfactory.
- The justification for decisions are partially (**5.4%**) or in the majority of cases (**6.8%**) not satisfactory, moreover in some cases they are too short and not concrete enough.

d) Operation

- Discrimination (subjectivity) in the HAC's decisions:
Concerning the responding institution itself, discrimination exists:
no: **70.6%** yes: **24%** (negative discrimination)
According to the responding institution, discrimination exists generally:
no: **75%** yes: **22.4%** (mostly negative)
- Keeping to deadlines is partially (**9.5%**) or in the majority of cases (**5.4%**) not satisfactory (closed, multiple choice question).
- The HAC's operation is slow and bureaucratic. (14, **18.9%**, response to open question!)

The **work of the HAC** was **evaluated** by the institutions in the following way. The distributions here relate only to those institutions who **ranked** („we have insufficient information” and „no answer” were not taken into account here). The scale was the four-value scale used by the HAC for evaluating degree programs.

	Institutional accreditation	Eval. of new degree progr.	Eval. of PhD programs	All activities combined	Secretariat
Number of qualifiers (N)	71	51	30	56	73
Mode	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong (29) (Excellent 28)
Median (Approaches)	Strong (Excellent)	Satisfactory (Strong)	Strong (Excellent)	Strong (Satisfactory)	Strong (Excellent)
Excellent (%)	29.6	11.8	33.3	16.1	38.4
Strong	45.1	37.2	43.3	48.2	39.7
(E+S together)	(74.7)	(49.0)	(76.6)	(64.3)	(78.1)
Satisfactory	22.5	31.4	20.0	32.1	21.9
Not satisfactory	2.8 2 institutions	19.6 10 institutions	3.4 1 institution	3.6 2 institutions	0.0

Table 1: Distribution of evaluation responses in percentage of qualifiers (N).

The table shows that in the opinion of the institutions the strong points of the HAC’s functioning are the operation of the **secretariat**, the judgement of the **Ph.D.** programs, and the **institutional accreditation**. The weak point, however, is the judgement of the establishing/launching of degree programs – the „not satisfactory” **19.6%** can be seen as a rather high ratio –, and this effects the assessment of the HAC’s activities in general. (The latter is not an algebraic summation, but rather the institutions’ opinion on the work of the HAC in its totality.)

From the analysis of the codes of the responses it is ascertainable that most of the **colleges** evaluated the institutional accreditation more favourably than the universities. The program accreditation and the evaluation of the total of the activities were generally evaluated more strikingly (excellent, satisfactory or not satisfactory, respectively) by the **larger institutions**. In the excellent evaluations concerning the institutional accreditation, the total activities and the secretariat, the **church** and **smaller** institutions have a larger pro rata share (that is, they are more satisfied in these connections than the state or the medium and large institutions respectively).

Appendix E2: Letter by Ralph Enlow

(At that time: Executive Director of the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges, Orlando, FL., USA)

March 31, 1999

Christina Rozsnyai
Hungarian Accreditation Committee

Dear Christina:

Thank you again for the pleasure and privilege of working with you this past week in connection with the visits to the Pentecostal Theological College and Adventist Theological Seminary. As I suspected would be the case, I have doubtless gained more than I have contributed, but I am grateful for your assurances that I have made some contribution to the work of HAC through my service. As requested, I am happy to offer a few observations concerning the work of HAC.

I must say first of all that I am impressed with the foundations HAC has laid and the strides it has made since 1993 in elevating the excellence of higher education in Hungary. The HAC has an evident commitment to excellence and has exhibited great wisdom and humility in assembling an international advisory board from which to elicit ideas and an objective assessment of its status and progress. (It is hard to imagine Americans – arrogant as we are – assembling such an advisory board, but we would profit immeasurably from the exchange.) I enjoyed reading the history of the advisory board and noting the HAC's chronicle of progress in implementing recommendations and achieving substantial results. Perhaps it is difficult for you to appreciate the progress you have made as you are so immersed in the process, but I trust you will sometimes step back and view your achievements with satisfaction. Dr. Andras Rona-Tas and the entire HAC are greatly to be commended.

One huge advantage you have with a centralized approach to accreditation is that there is less likelihood of the unhealthy conflict and competition between programmatic and institutional accreditation which plagues the American scene. In our context, it is common to have department faculty members use the demands or recommendations of programmatic accreditors as leverage against other departments to the detriment of the university as a whole. By building institutional accreditation "from the program up" you are likely to avoid some of the abuses with which we have been forced to grapple in the American context.

Upon first reading the Accreditation Manual, I was impressed with the HAC's understanding of the historical development and current state of accreditation in various social and political arenas. I appreciate the HAC's embrace of the dual purposes of quality assurance and quality improvement which underlie the concept of accreditation as well as the commitment to principles of institutional self-study and peer review. I was also heartened to see the extent to which the HAC has placed the concept of ongoing quality assurance programs as a cornerstone of its accreditation processes. While accrediting standards do have significant impact upon educational quality, I firmly believe that excellence is more consistently

maintained where there is intrinsic commitment to continuing improvement and where systems have been developed for assessment of effectiveness.

By your own admission, the concept of institutional self-evaluation has been difficult to implant within Hungarian colleges and universities. Your experience is, I assure you, not uncommon. As the HAC's processes and policies mature, I believe that institutional quality assurance programs could be enhanced if the HAC were to develop special publications and professional development opportunities to help colleges devise and refine their individual systems of quality assurance. At present, the regulations require development of quality assurance mechanisms and give a bit of guidance as to their construction, but I did not discover substantial resources developed or offered by HAC which would plainly and thoroughly guide institutions struggling to grasp and implement these concepts.

In that same vein, I believe that HAC would be wise to guide institutions to differentiate between educational goals and administrative goals. The former asks the question, "How can we ensure educational effectiveness (or, more comprehensively, student development)?" The latter asks the question, "How can we ensure organizational efficiency?" I think you will agree with me that the former is more crucial. It is quite possible to have an efficient organization which is somewhat ineffective. (For that matter, I suppose it is also possible to have an effective organization which is somewhat inefficient.) It seems to me that your accreditation manual and any professional development publications or services you provide must emphasize the distinction between mere operational efficiency and true educational effectiveness. Finally in respect to quality assurance, you should emphasize the need for institutions to "close the loop" by linking assessment findings to planning and budgeting processes. When needs for improvement are identified, it is important that improvement measures actually make their way into formal plans and resource allocation.

In my opinion, the evaluation team visits in which I participated focused more upon the substance and quality of curricular content and academic discourse within each of the institutions than upon educational processes, policies, and outcomes. This is in rather significant contrast to the American context. While an American visiting team may spend a bit of time reviewing academic content and scholarly discourse, these are a much more peripheral concern and are cared for primarily by reviewing documents prior to the visit. Rather than relying primarily on interviews during the visit, American teams rely heavily upon institutional self-study documents in formulating opinions and conclusions. Interviews during the team visit are quite selective, focusing upon clarifying ambiguities and verifying claims in written documents.

Our evaluation teams tend to investigate matters like the process by which the curriculum is developed and revised in order to verify that collegial governance is practiced. They tend to look for evidence that admission, transfer credit, grading, examination, record keeping and other activities related to institutional integrity are governed by written policies and that the policies are actually followed. And they tend to ask questions which will reveal whether the institution engages in quality assurance activities in a thorough and systematic way. Your visiting committees devoted little attention to matters of institutional governance, financial records and financial stability, operations, and institutional support activities. These would have received significant attention in the American context. Team members with special qualifications as chief financial and operating officers would have been assigned to investigate these areas.

Unlike the American context, these visiting committees tended to conduct their work as a group (for example, we all sat together in interviewing the faculty, students, alumni, etc.), rather than dividing tasks, pursuing separate activities, then re-convening to compare and assimilate findings at the end of the day.

In my opinion, evaluation teams need to make a clear distinction between consultative professional guidance they offer to colleges and absolute requirements they impose upon colleges based upon the law. They should also seek carefully to differentiate between what needs to be improved and prescribing specific means or methods by which improvement might be made.

Christina, please understand that I don't mean to imply that any aspect of your approach is wrong or inferior. You will have to evaluate the suitability of your processes within your context and purposes. I am simply pointing out the contrasts.

Team chair selection and training is common problem. I found the two team chairs I worked with to be delightful and competent individuals. They seemed, however, to have somewhat different ideas concerning appropriate processes and priorities of the team visit. One way to improve the performance of team chairs is to develop a formal process for training and certification. In our conversation, you indicated that this may not be something to which eminent university faculty would be willing to submit. In improving the functioning of team chairs, you may simply have to rely primarily on careful selection (and de-selection) rather than formal training and certification processes. Would written evaluation of team members (by chairs & staff) and team chairs (by teams & staff) be a heretical concept? Could you "sell" the idea as an expression of HAC's commitment to apply principles of quality assurance to its own processes?

Again, Christina, I commend you for your stellar accomplishments and reiterate my appreciation for the privilege of knowing you and working with you and the HAC. If I may ever be of service to you in the future, I would give it my most favorable consideration. May God bless you and your family.

Your friend and colleague,

Ralph Enlow

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THE HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

Evaluation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) and recommendations for a national quality assurance system

FINAL REPORT OF THE CRE REVIEW PANEL

Geneva, October 2000

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Executive Summary

1 This report is the outcome of a general review and evaluation of the Hungarian higher education accreditation system, and notably the work of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC). The evaluation of the HAC was carried out by an international Panel of highly experienced experts, hereafter called the Panel, under the auspices of the Association of European Universities (CRE). It aimed at covering, insofar as possible, all aspects of the objectives and operations of the HAC in the fields of institutional and faculty accreditation, evaluation of new programmes of study and approval of doctoral programmes, as well as the more recent role of the HAC in the field of quality assurance. It also looks to the future, by suggesting ways in which the present system of accreditation and the existing modes of operation might not only be improved, but also evolve towards a national quality assurance system, taking into account the present context of Hungarian higher education as well as relevant international (especially European) trends in this field.

2 This report is based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) provided by the HAC (with substantial documentation in annex), a short preliminary visit and a one-week main review visit. The Panel had the opportunity to interview members of the HAC, the Hungarian academic community, and the authorities and stakeholders. This report reflects the Panel's perception of key issues and developments. Its comments and recommendations are confined to the major issues affecting accreditation and quality-assurance structures and procedures in Hungary, including the links to the higher education system and the policy context.

3 The report covers all key issues as specified in the Terms of Reference, although it does not follow the order of contents proposed therein. In numerous interviews, the Panel formed the impression that the HAC's SER had been widely distributed and was generally accepted as a key basis for the Panel's visits. However, it was viewed by the HAC's constituents as a Secretariat document, and it was not clear to what extent they shared the views expressed.

4 The Panel considers that, in its Self-Evaluation Report, the HAC assesses not only its strengths but also its limitations, and this is seen as very positive. In its SER, which was candid, even at times very self-critical, the HAC identified many of the issues which feature in this report, including the need for greater stakeholder involvement and for the elaboration of a system of internal quality assurance for the HAC itself.

5 Though the SER was rich in information, it was too cautious in addressing possible strategic options for accreditation, beyond those prevailing in the past. Although the report mentioned problems, such as those arising from overlapping mandates of the HAC and the HERC, and although it cited efforts made to reinforce accreditation by adding improvement-oriented quality assurance to minimum-standard assessment, it did not discuss possible future directions in this respect.

6 As specified in the Terms of Reference, the Panel made extensive use of interviews in formulating its opinions and conclusions. This is a well established practice in review processes. While isolated opinions should not be taken too seriously, especially if they contradict other evidence, the Panel had to take such opinions - when consistently voiced at many levels and by many different actors - into consideration, even if the factual basis could not be validated.

7 A review of the HAC needs to take account of the contextual and historical factors that have conditioned its development. These include fast and sweeping social and political change; the movement from an elite to a mass higher education system; the emergence of a private higher education system; economic constraints and changes in the rules for funding higher education; unstable higher education policies; and some special characteristics such as the 'small-country syndrome' and the 'capital-city phenomenon'. Other constraints have also influenced the work of the HAC, namely a low level of institutional and academic co-operation in some cases, conflicts and pressures linked to the fact that accreditation can represent a threat to the existence of institutions, the new process of institutional integration, the need to develop a highly elaborate procedural system in order to avoid appeals against negative decisions, continuous changes in legislation altering the tasks of the HAC, and work overload.

8 In the difficult circumstances referred to above, the HAC has established a firm foundation for the review of higher education in Hungary and has contributed to the introduction of a methodology for quality assessment. The HAC is to be congratulated for achieving a great deal with modest resources in a fast changing and complex environment. Over its relatively short existence, it has undertaken an increasingly diverse portfolio of tasks and functions, the management of which is complicated by the differing roles and responsibilities assigned to the HAC in respect of those tasks.

9 The HAC's achievements are reflected in the completion of a first round of institutional and faculty accreditation, the approval of doctoral programmes, the publication of the Accreditation Guidebook and the formulation of clear and public rules of procedure and principles of evaluation.

10 Considering the dramatic changes that have occurred in Hungarian higher education over the last ten years, the HAC has acted as a stabiliser and contributed to the development of the higher education system. The Panel commends the efforts of the HAC, its Secretariat and Committee members to promote the values and characteristics recognised internationally as essential to a quality assurance system – independence, transparency, self-evaluation, peer review and public reporting – within the Hungarian higher education community. It is important to recognise the independence of the HAC vis-à-vis the government and the higher education institutions.

11 Since its establishment, the HAC has devoted considerable energy and time to upholding minimum standards against a background of the rapid evolution of the Hungarian higher education system into a mass system and the emergence of a private sector of higher

education. The Panel considers that the HAC has been successful in containing an explosive development of this private sector, thus avoiding a situation that is rather frequent in other Eastern European countries, where a large network of private institutions with low academic standards has been established.

12 But this success has exacted its price. Paying this price may have been necessary at the time the HAC was founded, in order to ensure success, but over the years this has become more and more questionable. At the time of this review, it seems appropriate to reconsider the HAC's option.

13 First, the criteria employed to assess higher education institutions and programmes for accreditation have been narrow. The legal implications of not recommending or granting accreditation have been seen as dictating a relatively bureaucratic system, while the prevailing views on academic quality seem to have favoured a system that relies primarily on numerical standards. This has run counter to the encouragement of substantive diversity in higher education and to the recognition of the specific role of the non-university sector, even though the HAC has taken a broad range of measures to counteract this endemic thrust. This approach also made it difficult to address issues such as the high degree of specialisation in fields of study, the quality of teaching and learning practices, and the impact of management structures and practices on the quality of programmes.

14 Second, from the outset the HAC has adhered to an interpretation of academic quality that did not take into account considerations of utility, social relevance or feasibility (e.g. financial support). The most obvious manifestation of this is the division of labour between the HAC and the HERC, the former basing its recommendations on academic quality, the latter on relevance and feasibility. The Panel believes that this division might have been helpful in the early 1990s as a step towards emancipation from an over-politicised past, but over time it became more and more artificial and detrimental to a consistent and comprehensive review of quality. This issue is clearly intertwined with the role of academics and external representatives in the Hungarian accreditation system; it is widely assumed that the marginal role of external representatives in the various HAC activities has made it more difficult to extend quality criteria beyond completely internal academic rationales.

15 Third, the HAC's emphasis on examining minimum standards and fulfilling a licensing function has been so overwhelming from the outset, that it has induced a culture of compliance. Only rudimentary efforts have been made to add elements of improvement-oriented quality assurance to the core of standards-based accreditation, and these have not seemed to take off in the dominant culture of compliance.

16 The Panel formulated recommendations designed to improve HAC activities within the framework of its own traditional philosophy. For example, it recommends that the HAC reduce the excessive burden on institutions imposed by self-reporting, that it give clear guidance on the composition of Visiting Committees and on a code of conduct for members and that it define a clear strategy for training. The HAC also needs to create an internal system of quality assurance, including the development of standards of performance other

than time schedules and adherence to the law. The Panel recommends that the HAC rely less exclusively on the use of experts holding a scientific degree and that the format, transparency and accessibility of accreditation reports be reviewed. Finally, the Panel suggests considering options to better address the problems of the more vocationally oriented college sector, and a concurrent review of the various fields of study, including related interdisciplinary fields, so as to address the issue of programme breadth and interdisciplinarity.

17 The Panel suggests that ensuring the strengths of the accreditation system in Hungary may no longer require a *quid pro quo*. In this context, the Panel considers it futile to debate whether the HAC could or should have been changed earlier, or whether the time is now ripe to shift strategic priorities. Prior recommendations by the International Advisory Board, as well as criticism frequently voiced by academics and especially by external stakeholders, suggest that strategic changes of the HAC could have been put on the agenda earlier, but this is not essential for the suggestions the Panel makes.

18 The Panel suggests reconsidering and possibly abolishing the system of dual assessment by the HAC and the HERC. Among the other recommendations are: establishing conditions that would allow external representatives to play a more successful minority role in the accreditation system, thereby contributing to a broader perspective on academic quality, and encouraging greater diversity in the Hungarian higher education system. Finally, the Panel suggests that improvement-oriented assessment should become the prime concern of quality assurance in the Hungarian higher education system, while licence-oriented, minimum-standard accreditation should play only a secondary role.

19 There is no one optimal model for quality-assurance systems. The choices that have to be made when designing a national quality assurance and/or accreditation system grow out of the broader policy framework for higher education and choices linked to the system's intrinsic culture. In the case of Hungary, the Panel would tend to recommend a combination of accreditation (with a licensing function) and quality assurance functions, with a very clear division of roles and focuses. Such a division does not imply any particular organisational pattern or other arrangements. A variety of scenarios can be envisaged when organising a system that combines quality assurance and accreditation/licensing. For this reason, the Panel does not recommend any single model for the future management of accreditation and improvement-oriented evaluation in Hungary.

20 Whatever the choices made by the Hungarian government and the other main actors in Hungarian higher education, the Panel, following its review of the HAC, offers the following reflections:

- a) Trust is an essential ingredient in the improvement of quality.
- b) Institutions are now responsible for the implementation of internal quality assurance systems. The role of an external agency should be mainly supportive. Periodic (though not annual) quality audits should serve mainly to help institutions

improve their internal systems. This new role is quite incompatible with imposing detailed external regulation or burdensome reporting.

- c) The Panel wonders whether the HAC can make the organisational and cultural changes necessary for this new role, particularly if it keeps the licensing function. The recent decision to give the HAC a role in the process of academic promotion may have a very negative impact on the development of trust in academe and the institutions.

Introduction

A. Terms of Reference

001 This report is the outcome of a general review and evaluation of the work of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC). The evaluation of the Hungarian higher education accreditation system, and notably of the work of the HAC, was carried out by an international Panel of highly experienced experts under the auspices of the Association of European Universities (CRE), hereafter named the Panel. It aimed at covering, as far as possible, all aspects of the objectives and operations of the HAC in the fields of institutional and faculty accreditation, the evaluation of new programmes of study, the approval of doctoral programmes and the more recent role of the HAC in the domain of quality assurance. It also looks to the future, suggesting ways in which the present system of accreditation and the existing modes of operation might not only be improved but also evolve towards a national quality assurance system, taking account of the present context of the Hungarian higher education system as well as relevant international (especially European) trends in this field.

002 The evaluation was commissioned by the HAC and funded by the World Bank, as a sub-component of the Higher Education Reform Project in Hungary. As set forth in the evaluation's terms of reference, the external evaluation team was expected to address, at a minimum, the issues set out below. Their mandate was not restricted to these issues. They were asked to investigate and report on any matter pertaining to the effective and efficient functioning of the HAC and its impact on the quality of education and research provided by higher education institutions in Hungary. Their mandate was:

- To explore how far the aims and functions – prescribed by legislation – of HAC are appropriate for the next decade, the process of integration of higher education institutions, the aims of the Ministry of Education and the higher education institutions;
- To examine the roles, functions and effectiveness of HAC and its sub-committees;
- To examine whether the structure, composition, terms of reference, the size and competence of the Secretariat are suitable for the aims and functions of HAC;
- To explore how effective the process for institutional and faculty evaluation have been, the impact on higher education institutions and other stakeholders and what improvements can be made;
- To examine the practice of appointing the visiting committees;
- To examine the role and assistance of HAC in preparing the self-evaluation of higher education institutions;
- To examine the practice of site visits of the visiting committees;
- To explore how effective are the reports of the visiting committees and what are the follow-up mechanisms;
- To investigate how, and how well HAC carries out its function of approving doctoral programs and expressing opinion on degree course requirements;

- To review and evaluate the practice of evaluation of the establishment/launching of degree programs and the practice of appointing and preparing the experts;
- To investigate how effectively are the tasks of HAC undertaken by reviewing the process used and obtaining the views of the stakeholders. The evaluation team should report to what extent HAC has made progress with these tasks, and make recommendations for improvements that HAC might make in respect to these tasks;
- To monitor the measures taken by HAC in response to the report of the consultant. (This latter task is to be implemented two years after delivery of the main evaluation report - in 2002.)

003 In this context, the Panel noted that the HAC sub-component of the Higher Education Reform Project was intended *inter alia*:

- to speed up the accreditation of newly-integrating higher education institutions;
- to develop and implement effective mechanisms for evaluating new degree programmes, especially those providing general rather than specialised education;
- to raise the international profile of the HAC;
- to enhance conformity with international requirements;
- to make its operations more transparent and increase stakeholder participation.

B. Composition of the CRE review Panel

004 The international review Panel set up by CRE was composed of the following persons:

Chair of the review Panel:

Prof. Dr. Alberto Amaral Former Rector of the University of Oporto, member of the CRE Board, vice-chair of the Steering Committee of the CRE Institutional Evaluation Programme, Director of the Portuguese Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CIPES), Oporto, Portugal.

Members of the review Panel:

Dr. Judith Eaton President, Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), Washington DC, United States of America.

Ms Marie-Odile Ottenwaelter Former Deputy Secretary General of the Comité National d'Evaluation, Paris, France.

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Teichler Professor at the University of Kassel, Director of the Centre for Research on Higher Education and Work, Kassel, Germany.

Dr. Christian Thune Executive Director of the Danish Evaluation Institute,
Copenhagen, Denmark.

Rapporteur of the review Panel:

Ms Carolyn Campbell Former Assistant Director at the Higher Education Quality
Council, International education development co-ordinator at
the University of Surrey Roehampton, London, United
Kingdom.

Project co-ordination:

Mr. Sami Kanaan Programme Manager in charge of the CRE Institutional
Evaluation Programme, Geneva, Switzerland.

C. Scope of this evaluation

005 The Terms of Reference for the HAC evaluation invited the Panel to range widely in its investigations and to report on any matters pertaining to the functioning of the HAC and its impact on the quality of education and research in Hungarian higher education institutions. The Panel's role was perceived differently by the various parties it met with, and the wide range of issues covered by the terms of reference appeared to raise different expectations about the outcomes of the evaluation.

006 As explained in the CRE proposal to the HAC (Summer 1999), the Panel interpreted the Terms of Reference as a wide mandate not only to review and assess the present and past activities of the HAC, within its existing legal and structural framework, but also to analyse the adequacy of its objectives in the context of a changing national higher education scene, which included the process of integrating higher education institutions. The Panel examined whether accreditation - seen as the formal outcome of a procedure to assess study programmes and/or institutions - was still the most appropriate approach or whether it should be replaced by other procedures. As part of this examination, the Panel drew on information about national and international trends in higher education policy and quality assurance summarised in the report. This placed the discussion about adapting the HAC's objectives and procedures to future needs in a wider context.

007 The Panel examined not only the proper functions of the HAC within a given framework, but also its purposes in a context of diverse expectations and experiences. Given this approach, it is appropriate to indicate at the outset that some key issues emanating from the evaluation are pitched at policy and conceptual levels rather than at operational level. This emphasises the fact that any future choices in respect of accreditation and quality assurance in Hungary cannot be separated from the wider policy framework of the higher education system and the corresponding present and future choices made by relevant actors.

008 This report is based on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) provided by the HAC (with substantial documentation in annex), a short preliminary visit and a one-week main review visit, as well as on intensive discussions between the HAC's leadership and the Panel on the latter's draft report. The Panel had the opportunity to interview members of the HAC, the Hungarian academic community, and the authorities and stakeholders. The Panel gathered many views about the past, present and future role and operations of the HAC and the development of the Hungarian higher education system. The Hungarian higher education system still appears to be in a transition phase, partly for reasons linked to the political changes of the early 1990s, partly for reasons common to most higher education systems in Europe. The Panel collected information and opinions from a wide range of sources and tried to understand as best they could the main issues in the national debate about accreditation. This report reflects the Panel's perception of key issues and developments. The Panel's comments and recommendations are confined to the major structural and procedural issues posed by accreditation and quality assurance in Hungary and their links to the higher education system and to overall policy.

D. Structure of the report

009 The report covers all key issues as set forth in the Terms of Reference, although it does not follow the order proposed. The report is organised as follows:

- *Chapter 1* describes the evaluation process adopted and implemented by the Panel, and outlines the reasons for the structure of the report.
- *Chapter 2* is divided into seven sections and describes the review of the HAC and its activities to date. It describes aspects of the higher education system within which the HAC operates and identifies pressures on and challenges to the accreditation and quality assessment system operated by the HAC. It examines the objectives, functions and tasks of the HAC as outlined in legislation and interpreted by the HAC and reviews the procedures, standards and values of the HAC. It examines the impact of the HAC and the quality assurance of its operations. The chapter ends with conclusions and recommendations.
- *Chapter 3* examines the changes in the global education environment that are relevant to the accreditation and evaluation activities of the HAC and to the development of quality assurance in Hungarian higher education. It describes and analyses trends in quality assurance and accreditation in Europe and the US and provides a wider context for the discussion of HAC's future objectives and procedures.
- *Chapter 4* takes into account international trends and the likely development of the Hungarian higher education system and analyses the extent to which the present framework of the HAC's operations will be suited to the new conditions. It lists

alternative solutions for the organisation of the Hungarian quality assurance system and includes comments about the HAC and its role in the new context.

E. Acknowledgements

010 The Panel thanks the HAC and the staff of its Secretariat for its openness and for the warm welcome given to the Panel during its visits. The review Panel expresses its appreciation to the President of the HAC, Professor András Róna-Tas, the Secretary General, Professor Gabriella Homonnay, and to Dr. Tibor Szántó, Mr. Balázs Hunya and Ms Beatrix Borza, who prepared and organised the two visits so effectively. The HAC Secretariat was very helpful in providing the Panel with information on all aspects of the evaluation and in organising meetings, visits to institutions and interviews.

1. The evaluation process: framework and activities

Introduction

100 This chapter describes the evaluation process adopted and implemented by the Panel. This comprises experts from six countries with experience in the evaluation, assessment, quality assurance and/or accreditation of higher education within various national and/or international contexts and in different roles. The methodological aspects of the evaluation were outlined in a note (dated 13 December 1999) requesting the HAC to provide further information about the approach the Panel intended to use in the evaluation. This chapter also explains how the Panel's original choices of analytical framework and methodology had to be reviewed and adapted in the course of its work.

A. Framework of the evaluation

101 From the initial Panel meeting (November 1999), it was apparent that a multiplicity of perspectives and experience as to the definition of objectives and processes of accreditation and other quality review systems was represented in the Panel. This was a strength, giving a comprehensive perspective on the issues. To properly complete its mandate, the Panel needed a common understanding on the following elements as a starting point:

- a clearly defined framework for the evaluation of the HAC;
- a range of key concepts, especially in the field of quality assurance and higher education policy;
- the implications of performing a meta-evaluation, e.g. "assessing the assessors";
- the national and international context and trends;
- a well-prepared Self-Evaluation Report (SER) from the HAC, which would include a well-developed SWOT self-analysis.

These matters were considered during the first Panel meeting (in Brussels) and the first visit to Budapest (December 1999).

102 The Panel based its review of the HAC primarily on a 'fitness for purpose' approach to quality. The HAC was familiar with this approach, as this was the one it had earlier adopted for the accreditation of institutions and doctoral programmes (Accreditation Guidebook, 1997, page 4). The HAC's aims and objectives (as defined in the legislation and other relevant documents such as the Accreditation Guidebook and the Self-Evaluation Report) were to be the starting points. The Panel focused its analysis on whether the HAC had achieved its stated objectives. The analysis was carried out by addressing four questions:

- What is the HAC trying to do?
- How has the HAC tried to do it?
- How does the HAC know that it worked – what evidence did it have?
- How did the HAC change in order to improve its effectiveness?

These questions were raised without detailed analysis of what had caused the HAC to act as it did, namely legislation, the government, the higher education community, the constituent bodies or the HAC staff itself.

103 An essential requirement of an evaluation process based on a criterion of ‘fitness for purpose’ is to be explicit about what is meant by ‘purpose’. In the case of the HAC evaluation, the purpose is two-fold:

- to implement a range of accreditation procedures within a given framework, as set forth in the law and other relevant documents;
- to serve Hungary’s broader higher educational policy objectives, as defined by the relevant actors, by fostering the quality and effectiveness of higher education provision.

Although the Panel’s initial mandate (Terms of Reference) and the self-evaluation prepared by the HAC paid greater attention to the first, the Panel visits, interviews and discussions made it very clear that both purposes were of equal concern to HAC constituents and to the Hungarian Ministry of Education. Accordingly, the Panel focused on both aspects.

104 Within the evaluation framework the Panel planned:

- to establish whether existing procedures were effectively implemented in relation to the stated formal functions and tasks of the HAC;
- to establish whether the HAC had attained the objectives of promoting high standards in the Hungarian higher education system, provided public assurance of the achievement of those standards and satisfied the stakeholders in higher education (SER, page 15);
- to consider whether the aims and procedures of the HAC were still appropriate to meeting the new needs and demands of the Hungarian higher education system, including the institutional integration process and support for the introduction of institutional quality assurance mechanisms.

105 The Panel acknowledged that quality is a multi-dimensional and political concept, dependent on the implicit or explicit objectives assigned to higher education in a given country (or institution), as well as on the organisational culture and tradition. The most popular operational definition at present is ‘fitness for purpose’ (oriented to improvement but also, indirectly, to accountability); however, many authorities also consider quality assurance as serving the purpose of checking whether the higher education system provides "value for money" (a strong dimension of accountability). Operational choices about a system of quality assurance or accreditation at national level depend on strategic choices made about higher

education policy in general and, more specifically, about the "culture" of quality assurance that is preferred. Quality may also be defined in terms of how far it goes towards meeting standards predefined by central authorities, by a Panel of experts and the like; for its part, the Panel has not wished to establish such standards.

106 For the definition of operational procedures for quality assurance, the Panel relied on the glossary of terms published in the final project report of the PHARE multi-country programme on quality assurance:

- Evaluation is a systematic, critical analysis of the quality of some object; in this case the object is higher education.
- Quality assurance is an all-embracing term which includes policies, processes and actions through which the quality of higher education is maintained and developed.
- Quality assessment is synonymous with evaluation, particularly if there is an external component.
- Quality audit is an evaluation of an institution's processes for quality assurance.

Accreditation represents one option for quality assurance in higher education, leading to some kind of formal statement (usually yes or no), based on some minimal academic or professional quality standards, whether implicit or explicit. Accreditation can be used for quality improvement as is intended to be the case in the US but, if its prime objective is licensing, there is the risk that it will be oriented towards compliance with law or pre-established standards to the detriment of its role in quality improvement. Accreditation may apply to single programmes/degrees (including post-graduate studies, continuing education activities, distance education) or to institutions or systems (e.g. meta-accreditation of national quality assurance systems).

107 "Assessing the assessors" is a particular kind of evaluation. As presented in the CRE proposal to the HAC for the purpose of the evaluation (Summer 1999), any quality assurance agency with a public mandate should not only pursue a strategy for improvement of its procedures but should also enhance its own credibility by developing a specific and thorough quality assurance system for its own activities, based on the same principles as those that the higher education institutions are supposed to follow. One of the most typical elements of a credible quality assurance strategy is external evaluation by independent experts. This is part of the accountability of an agency towards its stakeholders - mainly higher education institutions and the authorities - but also towards other stakeholders in the society. A quality-assurance agency would be expected to demonstrate a high level of competence in evaluation, and more especially to carry out a self-evaluation. An external Panel will have high expectations for the quality of a self-evaluation report carried out by a quality assurance or accreditation agency.

108 At the Biennial Conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in Santiago de Chile in May 1999, the possible features of the evaluation of a quality assurance or accreditation agency were summarised in the key-note address as follows:

- Feasibility study/evaluation of pilot operations;
- Analysis and improvement of existing processes/procedures;
- Evaluation of effectiveness or ability to deliver the "underlying rationale";
- Fundamental review of impact on the sector.

The evaluation of the HAC corresponds primarily to the second and third, with elements of the fourth. But the Panel has also considered to what extent the objectives, functions and tasks of the HAC, as prescribed by legislation and interpreted by the HAC, are appropriate in light of the foreseeable changes in the Hungarian higher education system and presents alternative proposals.

109 Several examples of exercises reviewing and evaluating national quality assurance agencies can be cited. In some cases, the review has taken place after completion of a cycle of assessments and it was considered opportune to analyse the available experience in order to define improvements for the next cycle. In other cases, the review takes a more accountability-oriented approach towards the funding agencies and representative bodies or the government. Examples of the former include the evaluation of the effectiveness of the New Zealand Academic Audit; the review of Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews in Hong Kong; the management consultancy review of Academic Audit in the UK's former Higher Education Quality Council and the review of the Danish Evaluation Agency. Examples of the second type of review are the annual reports presented by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency to the representatives and funding bodies, the meta-evaluation task of the Dutch Higher Education Inspectorate and the role of the Portuguese National Council for Quality. These examples correspond to quite different situations and methodologies.

110 While its Terms of Reference do not mandate the Panel to comment on the higher education system in general, the Panel had to consider the importance of the policy context in which the HAC operates and the higher education policy context to which the quality assessment system should be geared. The Panel hopes to have traced the elements that are most relevant to the conditions, tasks and procedures of quality assurance and accreditation. An important component of the evaluation framework comprised the Higher Education Reform Project (HERP) and the related reference documents of the World Bank, as well as recent reports about the Hungarian higher education system. The Panel considers that these documents are to be taken as an essential part of the current policy framework for Hungarian higher education, at least in terms of formally stated objectives and planned reforms. (The Panel does not take any general position as to the contents, analysis or recommendations of the HERP.) While not wishing to assess the Hungarian higher education system as such, the Panel did feel it necessary to examine those specific aspects of the wider framework that have direct consequences for the quality assurance and accreditation system.

B. The evaluation process: activities

111 The draft Self-Evaluation Report (with all the appendices except D2c – detailed programme requirements) was discussed with the HAC during the Panel’s first visit to Hungary, 19-21 December 1999, when revisions were suggested. The revised version was received from the HAC in January 2000 and discussed during the main visit on 19-26 February 2000. (Further commentary on the SER is to be found below in paragraphs 117-120.) The SER did not include very much factual or contextual information about the current Hungarian higher education scene or about recent or proposed reforms.

112 The meetings, visits to institutions and interviews held by the Panel were prepared for and complemented by a substantial documentary review that covered:

- materials and publications (published in English or translated for the Panel) produced by the HAC: apart from the Appendices to the SER, the Panel received a range of additional handbooks and reports about the work of the HAC, including its International Advisory Board, the accreditation profiles of the institutions visited, examples of the forms completed by experts and Visiting Committee Chairmen, part of a (confidential) report on the accreditation visit, and protocols.
 - materials from institutions that were visited, including published papers on quality assurance in Hungarian higher education;
 - a wide range of publications describing current approaches to quality assurance and quality management in higher education in Western Europe and the US;
 - publications and project reports on developments in higher education and quality assurance in Central and Eastern Europe;
 - reference documents of the Higher Education Reform Project (HERP), sponsored by the World Bank;
 - descriptions of the Hungarian higher education system including a report, produced in 2000 by Dinya, L. and Bilik, I.

113 The opinions of the HAC itself (including the leadership, Secretariat, Committee, and Visiting Committee Chairmen), as well as those of the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions and other stakeholders, were sought during the two visits to Hungary. The fieldwork for the project was carried out from November 1999 to February 2000. It comprised discussions and interviews with the main “users” of the accreditation system (the higher education institutions), the main actors in the implementation of the HAC’s procedures – Committee members, experts, the Secretariat, the International Advisory Board – and representatives of other stakeholders, on the work and impact of the HAC. The meetings, visits and interviews were intended to deepen the Panel's knowledge, to validate the factual information and analytical statements in the HAC’s Self-Evaluation Report and to provide the Panel with feedback on the HAC’s assumptions about and ideas for change and development. The meeting and visits included:

- visits to nine institutions with a variety of experiences of HAC accreditation. The institutions were selected on the basis of criteria formulated by the Panel and reflecting geographical and institutional diversity (colleges and universities,

integrated and non-integrated, large and small, public and private, religious and secular). During the visits, the Panel usually met a range of staff including senior management, those with experience of the accreditation process as members or as institutional actors, and students;

- discussions with a range of Visiting Committee Chairmen and HAC Committee members;
- discussions with the staff of the Secretariat, including separate meetings with senior members of staff, programme officers and administrative staff;
- discussions with other interested parties including the Ministry of Education, the Hungarian Academy of Science (HAS), the Higher Education and Research Council (HERC) [*FTT]⁵; the National Union of Students (NUSH) [*HÖÖK], the Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education, the Hungarian Rectors' Conference (HRC) [*MRK], the Hungarian College Directors' Conference (HCDC) [*FFK], the Chair of Art University Rectors (CAUR) [*MERSZ], representatives of the Chambers of Lawyers, Engineers, Physicians, Agriculture, Commerce and Industry, and the Hungarian Association for Innovation; (only one planned meeting could not take place - with the Association of Hungarian PhD Students (AHPS) [*DOSZ]);
- observation of part of the meeting of the HAC Plenum;
- interviews with some members of the International Advisory Board of the HAC;
- contacts with some of the Ministry of Education's international advisers for the higher education sector.

114 There were also internal Panel discussions which focused primarily on the analysis of the present situation and on the design of future options for the development of the quality assurance of higher education in Hungary, leading to the design of the present report.

115 A first complete draft report was delivered to the HAC in early May 2000. This draft was reviewed over the next two months; written comments were received from both sides, and the report was discussed at three meetings (4-5 May, 13 June, 3-5 July). A revised draft report was delivered to the HAC in September and was discussed with the HAC during a meeting on 25-26 September, and the final version was delivered in October 2000. This intensive interaction led to correction of factual mistakes and to the clarification of misunderstandings; the Panel took full responsibility for the analysis and conclusions presented in the report.

C. Evaluation process: observations

116 As Hungary has chosen to use an accreditation-based system of quality assurance, the Panel paid particular attention to the way accreditation is defined there, since the concept is interpreted differently in different countries. The Panel noted that 'accreditation' in Hungary is defined in the Higher Education Act (section 124E), as "the attestation of educational and research activity conducted in higher education institutions and in their faculties, and the

⁵Initials in [], marked * denote the Hungarian abbreviations for the names of the organisations.

attestation of the results of these activities in respect of quality”. In the HAC Accreditation Guidebook (page 4), the Panel noted that “the process of accreditation examines whether the quality of a higher education institution is such that it fulfils the requirements of the Act” (Sections 3 and 4). The Panel decided to analyse what this approach meant in relation to more general concepts of quality assurance as discussed internationally.

117 The evaluation draws on the Self-Evaluation Report and appendices prepared by the HAC, the parameters of which were described in the Terms of Reference for the project. An SER should fulfil a double purpose. First, it serves as the basis for the visit and analysis by an external panel. Second, it serves as a means to establish new quality consciousness and procedures within the institution being evaluated, or to reinforce what exists, the overall perspective being to continue quality improvement. From the numerous interviews, the Panel formed the impression that the HAC’s SER had been widely distributed and was generally understood to be a key reference for the Panel’s visits. However, it was viewed by constituents as being essentially a document prepared by the Secretariat: there was no sense of shared ownership.

118 The apparent absence of published standards for the work of the HAC (other than time-scales for responding to requests and strict adherence to procedural rules), added to the importance of the SER. However, the Panel had the impression that the presentation of strengths and weaknesses in the SER draft was too brief and sketchy. At the suggestion of the Panel, the HAC extended this presentation substantially in the final version. However, the form chosen for this made interpretation difficult and time-consuming.

119 The complex and sometimes confusing changes in the functions, tasks and powers of the HAC present a challenge not only to the Committee itself but also to those who try to understand its role and determine its effectiveness in achieving its aims and objectives. The complexity was exacerbated by the overlapping and interchangeable uses of terminology throughout HAC documentation. Examples of these different usages include: references to Principles for quality assurance (Guidebook page 8 and the SER); Principles of accreditation (SER); Principles of evaluation (SER page 22); Standards of evaluation (SER page 23 - within detailed program requirements); assumptions about accreditation (Guidebook); values of HAC (SER). The Hungarian Accreditation Committee explained later (while discussing the Panel’s first draft report) that this may have been the consequence of commissioning different people to provide English translations.

120 In almost any evaluation scheme, a self-evaluation report reflects the institutional culture, especially the way the institution defines its own identity and views itself. The quality of a self-evaluation report is fundamental to the quality of the whole review process. The fact that the HAC’s SER did not meet these expectations, and that its ownership appeared to be more limited than it might have, had direct implications for the work of the Panel, including the agenda for meetings and visits. Though the SER was rich in information, it was too cautious with respect to the social and political context in which the HAC operates. For example, HAC representatives repeatedly stated in interviews, when problems were raised, that “this is not the HAC’s fault; it is determined by law”. Although the final version of the

SER included a SWOT analysis, the Panel found no clear definition of priorities or strategic proposals for the future development of the HAC. The fact that a significant number of HAC's members will soon leave office may explain this lack and why HAC was more concerned with analysing its current operational problems than with presenting a vision of its future.

121 As established in the Terms of Reference, the Panel made extensive use of interviews as one of the tools in formulating its opinions and conclusions. This is a well-established practice in review processes. While isolated opinions should not be taken too seriously, especially if they contradict other evidence, the Panel had to take such opinions - when consistently voiced at many levels and by many different actors - into consideration, even if their factual basis could not be validated.

2. Review of the HAC

Introduction

200 This chapter begins with an examination of the national higher education context within which the HAC was established and has been operating over the past decade (section 2A). The objectives of the accreditation system are recapitulated and analysed, based on available evidence gathered by the panel (section 2B). The effectiveness with which the HAC is carrying out its tasks and the procedures, values and standards associated with them are examined and assessed. The organisation of the HAC, including the operation of the committee structure, its experts and the Secretariat, is also examined (section 2C). The impact of the HAC, including feedback from stakeholders (section 2D) and the effectiveness of the HAC's internal quality assurance measures are reviewed (section 2E). The section concludes with recommendations for improvement and development (section 2F).

A. The Hungarian higher education context

201 The SER, in particular the SWOT analysis, provided some information about the national context of Hungarian higher education and how it affects the current organisation of the HAC. The Panel noted that the HAC referred to these contextual factors as 'constraints' in its SWOT analysis (SER, 9.1). However, the information provided was not sufficient to fully understand the context in which the HAC was established and has been operating. Hence the Panel took note of additional, published material and reference documents from a variety of sources, including World Bank reports, the experience of participants in PHARE projects, the report "The Hungarian higher education reform process" (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I., 2000), information from "Education at a Glance - OECD indicators" (2000 edition), and discussions during visits and meetings.

A1. *Forty years of specialised institutions*

202 From 1949 until the late 1980s, higher education was under strict state control (SER, C1). Higher education institutions did not have the power to award doctoral degrees (a function transferred to the Committee of Scientific Qualifications) and were divided into many specialised units, each having a small number of enrolled students. The largest Hungarian higher education institution enrolled only about 2500 students.

203 At the end of the 1960s, *"some of the professional secondary schools were upgraded to colleges and polytechnics, and the binary system in Hungarian higher education was created. This reform process was not free from problems even in its initial stage, and some of these problems still exist. The practice-oriented, shorter-cycle higher education institutions did not have enough qualified staff. Several university professors and associate professors*

were appointed to be college professors, and consequently the level of education increased significantly.” (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I., *op. cit.*)

204 In the early 1990s, “immediately after the political changes, new institutions were established by churches and also by foundations and private founders. In addition to this ‘extensive’ development the period saw ‘intensive’ growth as, in response to the demands of the society, the requirements of the stakeholders and the regions, the majority of the universities established new faculties in the different fields of law, economy and management.” (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I., *op. cit.*) As a result of these developments, the Hungarian higher education system was characterised by numerous institutions, in general with limited enrolment and a cross-country network system. Typical to that system was universities having faculties or colleges in different parts of the country, often situated a long distance from the seat of the host-university. (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I., *op. cit.*)

205 Although there has been a change in political regime, the higher education system has, until recently, remained relatively small and elitist. In 1991, only 12% of the 18-22 age group was enrolled in higher education. However, the enrolment of students has risen rapidly since the start of the transition period. According to OECD figures, 34% of the students completing secondary education entered higher education in 1998, although the age-participation rate for the same period is given as 15.9% by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (www.ksh.hu) suggesting that there may be a large number of part-time students. The following table (from Dinya, L. and Bilik, I.) provides a more detailed view of the situation:

Table 1 shows that between 1990/91 and 1998/99:

- The overall number of students increased by 152%, with an increase of 113% in regular students and of 319% in distance-learning students who represent 34.2% of the system.
- The increase of students in the university and college sub-system was similar (109% for the former, 117% for the latter), while the church institutions represent only 3.64% and the private sector 2.86% of the total system.
- The increase in the number of teachers has not followed a similar pattern, being only 23.4% overall, with an 11.3% increase for universities and an increase of 48.1% for colleges. The overall staff/student ratio is about 1:7.6, with a ratio of 1:6.4 for universities and 1:9.5 for colleges. This is very generous by European standards; nevertheless, there have been complaints that massification of higher education has been detrimental to quality.
- The number of professors and associated professors has increased, while the number of assistant professors and assistants has decreased, indicating that a large number of academic promotions have taken place.

Table 1: Numbers of students and teachers

	1990/91	1998/99	% increase
Students by type of study			
Total number of students	102 387	258 309	152%
Regular students	76 601	163 164	113%
Evening students	4 737	6 866	45%
Distance-learning students	21 049	88 279	319%
Foreign students	3 310	6 967	83%
Regular students by enrolment type			
Universities	39 510	82 664	109%
Colleges	37 091	80 500	117%
Church institutions	2 137	9 414	340%
Private institutions	231	7 384	3096%
Number of teachers by institution type			
Total number of teachers	17 302	21 351	23.4%
Universities	11 630	12 951	11.3%
Colleges	5 672	8 400	48.1%
Number of teachers by position			
Professors	1 878	3 002	59.8%
Associate professors	3 466	4 718	36.1%
Assistant professors	6 398	5 385	-15.8%
Assistants	3 941	3 571	-9.4%
Other teachers	1 619	4 675	188.8%

206 According to the World Bank report, the system had no effective mechanisms to facilitate transfer between programmes or levels of higher education. Students transferring to another programme had to start again, almost from the beginning. Opportunities for college students to transfer to a university programme were rare, and college graduates are excluded from entering a doctoral programme. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that specialisation starts in the first year of study, with little or no possibility of transfer from one specialisation to another. The lack of basic, non-specialised courses prevents students from completing some basic studies before embarking on a major course of study, thus forcing students to select an area of study earlier than necessary and perhaps encouraging excessive specialisation. In addition, the sequence of courses is specified, and few electives were permitted until recently. This resulted in frustration of students' expectations, as it is very difficult or even impossible to adapt coursework to special interests, and "*many students finish their own program even though they know that they would rather study something else, thus wasting resources and capacities both at the institutional and individual level*" (World Bank, 1998).

207 While the preponderance of small, specialised institutions has limited the breadth and variety of subjects that can be offered, the proportion of short-term programmes has also been low. This again limits opportunities for students to change their course of studies, forcing them to enrol in lengthy, specialised programmes of study which *“stress mastery of a body of knowledge, rather than skills in solving problems, thinking independently or keeping pace with developments in a field. Students are allowed little opportunity to develop and test their creativity or to acquire problem solving skills”* (World Bank, 1998).

208 The reforms introduced by the 1996 modification of the Act of 1993 provide for not only a reduction in the number of institutions (by allowing institutions to form associations) but also the modification of the financing system, and the introduction of a credit system. Association of institutions should favour increased efficiency of operations and, together with the credit system, should promote student mobility, not only between institutions but also between the various levels (post-secondary vocational, college and university programmes) and modes (full-time and part-time courses).

209 The 1998 Loan Agreement with the World Bank supports activities such as:

- *“new rules for admission based on the decision of students*
- *normative financing*
- *introduction of a national credit system to support student mobility*
- *curricular reforms (from teaching to learning, life long learning, adult education)*
- *reorganisation of higher education organisations, like the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and the Higher Education and Research Council*
- *a wider circle for institutional financial decision making*
- *uniform conditions for investment (Institutional Development Plan, IDP and Capital Investment Plan, CIP)*
- *increasing the student/staff ratio*
- *increasing the value of institutional own income”* (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I.).

210 *“Many decrees were also drafted and accepted that concerned the next steps of the reform process: modifications to normative financing; the introduction of the credit system; student loans; new regulations to the buffer organisations; new teaching programs; and the use of the World Bank loan. After the May elections a new Government took office in mid-July 1998, and all of former priorities were revised. This included the elimination of tuition fees, the re-negotiation of procedures for the World Bank loan, and a review of the role of buffer organisations. This was a time-consuming process that delayed the reform process.”* (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I., *op. cit.*)

A2. *The development of a private sector of higher education*

211 The establishment of a private sector of higher education has also been slow and difficult. With the new regime, some former religious colleges were allowed to resume operation while a few secular higher education institutions were established, including six

foundation colleges. Whether due to the imposition of demanding standards (as the champions of the old public institutions claim), or because of the overprotection of the established institutions against new competitors (as the representatives of the private sector allege), the fact remains that the private sector is minimal: in 1998/99 enrolment in private institutions was only 7384, representing 2.86% of the higher education system. There was little reference to this sector in the SER, although it was understood from the meetings and visits that it was the source of much concern. However, the development of the private (i.e. non-state and non-church) sector of higher education is an integral component of the government's higher education reform programme.

A3. A legal and regulatory structure to support innovation and diversity

212 The legal framework had already been changed to address some of the issues referred to above before the World Bank Higher Education Reform project was designed in 1998. The 1990 Education Act allowed higher education institutions to determine the number and type of admissions, gave them the right to nominate professors¹, subject to Government confirmation, and permitted the establishment of non-state (private) higher education institutions (SER, C12).

213 The 1993 Higher Education Act defined the strategic role of the Ministry of Education, as providing supervisory oversight of higher education institutions, strategic planning, preparation of education policies, approval of the establishment and closure of faculties and monitoring the use of central resources. It established two key intermediary institutions: the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC = MAB) and the Higher Education and Research Council (HERC = FTT). This law also established norm-based budgeting.

214 The 1995 Parliamentary Resolution defined goals for the development of higher education. These included: increasing numbers, creating a flexible system of levels in higher education, with transferability between levels, introducing a unified national credit system, and ensuring that the allocation of state funds is based on quality rather than public or private ownership (i.e. the principle of 'sector neutrality').

215 The July 1996 Amendment of the Higher Education Act integrated post-secondary vocational training into higher education, leading to a four-tier system of education and qualifications:

- 2 years for higher vocational programmes;
- 3-4 years for college programmes;
- 4-6 years for university programmes;
- 1-3 years for postgraduate programmes.

¹ A recent modification of the 1993 Act has entrusted the HAC with the task of assessing the curricula of professors to determine whether they are entitled to promotion in their academic careers.

The amendment also mandated a National Credit Council (NCC), co-ordinated by the HERC, to design and begin implementing a credit system by the end of 1997. It also specified that the HERC should prepare a new decree to adopt broader definitions of academic requirements by discipline and initiated the integration of individual institutions into multi-faculty colleges and universities.

216 The June 1999 Amendment to the Higher Education Act laid down rules for the compulsory integration of higher education institutions in Hungary, an that which had taken place by the time of the review Panel visit, and was taken into account in determining the institutions to be visited by the Panel. The integration process may raise a set of new problems for buffer agencies such as the HAC (SER, C13).

A4. Normative financing and the position of Hungarian higher education institutions

217 Before the 1989/90 political changes, *“the former rules of the game were the rules of a command-economy society with the so called ‘soft barriers’ of state subsidies, and the paternalistic-political rules of allocation without any forms of accountability, or concerns about effectiveness or efficiency. The behaviour of Hungarian institutions of higher education had its roots in this period, and these ‘good old reflexes’ are part of the explanation for many of the problems they experience today. These include the lack of business-like mentality, investing too much energy in lobbying instead of strategic thinking, the selection processes for institutional managers, governance rules within institutions, and the special role of political issues in decision making.”* (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I., *op. cit.*)

218 Since, in the past, those institutions that were better at lobbying could get much higher levels of funding than others, the introduction of normative funding is a welcome development. The most important indicators in determining normative funding are full-time equivalent student numbers (divided into five subject categories, from very expensive subjects to low cost-areas), research performance indicators, and the number of Ph.D. students. The system has the advantages of offsetting lobbying activity, being easy to calculate, being useful for planning and allowing for the control of government expenditure. However, it has a few disadvantages in that it ignores the provision for capital expenditure, allows government to set student numbers and provides an incentive for higher education institutions to start as many study programmes (including Ph.D. programmes) as possible and concentrate on the more expensive subjects (SER, C8). Per-capita funding may work against student mobility because normative funding is allocated to departments, and they do not like the idea of releasing money when students move to other departments.

A5. Economic constraints

219 Over the last decade, Hungary has witnessed significant transformations: *“the basic institutions of democracy have been established and a free market-based economy has started*

to emerge as a result of privatisation, flourishing financial markets and, among other things, a convertible currency. Numerous conflicts and deep economic-fiscal problems have however, accompanied these developments. Hungary may be considered a fairly developed country, but its per capita GDP is still less than a third of similar indicators in Western countries.” (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I.)

220 In 1995, a serious economic crisis took place and had a negative impact on the state budget, leading to the financially restrictive “Bokros-package” with implications for higher education as well:

- a 10% decrease in the number of staff (circa 5,000 people);
- the introduction of tuition fees (about 15% of the monthly minimum wage);
- a centralised state treasury with negative consequences for institutional autonomy.

However, the decrease in the number of staff was considered unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, and there were demonstrations by student organisations. The GDP has only recently regained the level of the 1980s.

221 As a result of these problems, higher education institutions are under-financed: about 40% of the budget of higher education comes from non-governmental sectors, and salaries are very low (SER, C3, C4). This has led to ‘moonlighting’ by academic staff, as many professors have more than one appointment and teach in more than one institution (SER, C10).

A6. *Other contextual factors*

Unstable higher education policies

222 *“The last decade of higher education reform in Hungary can be characterised by two words: change and continuity. Priorities, objectives and directions have often been changed because of the radically changing environment and political concepts, but there are also standard elements in the reform that relate to the global challenges facing higher education in all countries.”* (Dinya, L. and Bilik, I.) This instability (SER, C14) has had an impact on the definition of the tasks and objectives of the HAC and may cause some difficulties, as will be seen later.

The “small country” argument

223 Several elements in the changing national context of higher education in which the HAC operates were elaborated above. But perhaps the most consistent comment the Panel heard during its discussions in Hungary was that, ‘Hungary is a small country’ (SER, C5). A closer look reveals that the Hungarian academic community is more closely knit than those of some European countries of similar dimension, which makes it difficult for academics to review each other from the necessary distance. The fact that the Hungarian language

community is rather small is also used to reinforce the idea that it is difficult to find foreign experts with a good command of the language (SER, C6).

The “capital city” phenomenon

224 Another common constraint of the national context referred to frequently (SER, C2) is the ‘Budapest’ effect. However, this phenomenon – the strong representation of the interests of institutions from the (large) capital city with its strong academic establishments – is not unique and often occurs in other countries. The Panel was also concerned to note, in the HAC annual reports, cases of imbalance in membership of expert committees. These issues are explored further below.

B. Objectives and tasks

B1. Introduction

225 In Hungary, accreditation is described as “a process of certification” (*Accreditation Guidebook*, 1997, page 3). It is a means by which to determine whether an institution complies with the law, within the context of an institutional mission. However, in Hungary this accreditation process is part of a strict licensing system, as the 1999 Amendment of the Higher Education Act specifies that after June 30, 2002 non-accredited institutions will cease operations, and non accredited programmes will no longer lead to the award of degrees. This is the reason why the HAC (C19, page 34 SER) states that it “*had to develop a highly elaborate procedural structure that over time came to be seen by some as overly complex.*” (see also 233).

B2. Objectives

226 The HAC states in its SER (page 15) that, as its functions and tasks are prescribed by law, it does not have a mission statement. However, in the same paper, it identifies the main objectives of the **accreditation system** (and not merely of the HAC) as (O1-O3):

- Giving public protection to the stakeholders of higher education: students, employers and the society at large;
- Promoting quality improvement;
- And, to an increasing extent, ensuring accountability to the Government and the public as to the quality of education.

227 The Panel had plenty of evidence from meetings, documentation and visits, as to how the HAC had addressed the tasks set out for it in legislation (but not how it had responded to the annual quality-assurance report from institutions, page 20 SER) and this is described below. The standard of performance set for the HAC in achieving these tasks was established by the law, essentially in terms of strict adherence to time scales. However, while the goals of accreditation had been described in the Accreditation Guidebook (see paragraph 232 below),

there did not appear to be standards or indicators, either in legislation or in the HAC publications available to the Panel, by which attainment of the objectives set for the HAC could be measured.

B3. The tasks of the HAC

228 The functions of the HAC are set forth in legislation, and a summary of its tasks in response to changing legislation (up to and including the 1999 Act), is presented in a chart in the SER (page 14). In all, some twenty six tasks were listed in the SER, but the authority of the HAC varies from task to task: it may approve and decide, express an opinion, possibly 'participate in' or advise. According to the 1999 Act, the main tasks of the HAC cover:

- Institutional accreditation and associated sub-tasks;
- Programme accreditation and associated sub-tasks;
- Other tasks such as:
 - Regulation of the credit system
 - International agreements on higher education
 - Doctoral and habilitation regulations
 - Nomination of external members of doctoral-habilitation committees
 - National doctoral and habilitation registers.

229 As the Panel understood it, the core objectives and functions of HAC are:

- to play an advisory role, together with the HERC, vis-à-vis the Ministry in the licensing of institutions, study programmes and new initial-study programmes;
- to approve the operation of doctoral schools (pending a new Government Decree and doctoral programmes) and to decide on the science and arts disciplines in which a university may provide doctoral training and award doctoral degrees;
- to be the prime body in establishing minimum standards for institutions and programmes.

It seems that the HAC and the HERC have different roles regarding programme accreditation, the HAC being mainly responsible for academic standards (see also 240, 241) while HERC takes into account social relevance and economic needs. As the interviews made clear, the HERC bases its decisions mainly on criteria of social need but sometimes makes positive recommendations regarding new programmes if the Hungarian economy is deemed to need them, even if the HAC makes a negative recommendation on the grounds that the institutions lack the requisite standard facilities and human resources.

230 As the Panel interpreted them, the legal requirements incumbent on the HAC are:

- public disclosure of its decisions and opinions in relation to its tasks e.g. accreditation notices;

- the elaboration of detailed procedural protocols and a set of requirements as to how it performs its duties including the requirement that the protocol be designed to meet the criteria of speed, simplicity and professionalism;
- the processing of accreditation applications within the time periods specified in the law.

231 The HAC appeared to have set objectives for accreditation that were broader than the legal requirements, but they were described as objectives only in the SER and seen not as objectives of the HAC *per se* but of the accreditation process. In the Accreditation Guidebook, goals of accreditation are described in such a manner as to appear to relate to the objectives 01-03 in the SER. As these goals were published by the HAC and publicly available, the Panel took account of them as useful indicators in determining whether the HAC had met the wider objectives of quality assurance, that is, promoting quality improvement and accountability.

B4. Goals of accreditation

232 The **goals** of accreditation (outlined in the Accreditation Guidebook, page 7) are:

- to pinpoint the strengths and possible weaknesses of an institution and to highlight good teaching practices;
- to define the criteria for evaluation and to assist in instituting an internal evaluation (self-evaluation);
- to lay the foundations of a system of quality assurance in higher education and thereby to further the effectiveness of the given institution;
- to spread good practice by making the quality assessment public, and to uncover new teaching trends which better match the needs of both science and stakeholders (employers, students, various organisations);
- to provide information to potential students, enabling them to choose the right higher education institution; at the same time furthering healthy competition among institutions;
- to support the autonomy of higher education institutions by assisting them in setting their individual and specific lines of responsibility.

233 The HAC tries to combine its accreditation function (which includes a licensing component - see 225) with an evaluation that points out the strengths and weaknesses of the institution and recommends improvements, i.e. a quality improvement function. Comments to the Panel from institutions visited and HAC members would tend to indicate that little time and few resources are available for improvement initiatives, however desirable these may be. In the current environment, the energy devoted to ensuring compliance with the law and obtaining accreditation works against the objective of quality improvement. Under present conditions, which put a premium on accreditation, a good balance between examining minimum quality requirements and fostering quality improvements does not seem to be feasible. (This will be considered further in Chapters D and F.)

C. Procedures

C1. *The accreditation process*

234 The HAC Accreditation process is described in the Accreditation Guidebook. The Panel received, as Appendix D1 of the SER, copies of the following:

- Accreditation Guidebook for Higher Education Institutions: 2nd revised English edition 1997;
- Supplements to the Accreditation Guidebook: 2nd revised English edition, 1997;
- Supplement 1: tables of data requested;
- Supplement 2: the quality assessment factors: tables used in the assessment;
- Supplement 3: the Accreditation Process;
- Appendices to the English version – notes about the system of higher education in Hungary and ‘factors in quality assessment’;
- Supplement 4: Appendix for Church Higher Education Institutions, 1998;
- Supplement 5: For the Accreditation of Distance Education Degree Programmes, January 1999.

The Panel learned that the Guidebook was in its seventh version (in Hungarian). The frequent revisions resulted from changes in legislation and programme requirements (see 222), as well as from feedback from the accreditation process. Obviously, revisions have been more frequently undertaken than could be absorbed by the institutions.

235 After an announcement by the HAC to the relevant higher education institution, the accreditation process now comprises four elements:

- an indication that the institution has requested an accreditation process;
- the institution’s internal professional evaluation (self evaluation);
- the external evaluation conducted by the HAC Visiting Committee;
- the HAC assessment, which is its evaluation of the educational and research activities of the institution – the accreditation report.

C2. *Institutional/faculty accreditation: the self-evaluation*

236 The basis for institutional accreditation is an institution’s ‘initial internal professional evaluation (self-evaluation)’, and the external evaluation conducted by the HAC. Institutional SERs are typically voluminous documents, measured in kilos in some instances. Much of the data requested is statistical - not an analysis of strengths and weaknesses – and remains at the institution for consultation by the Visiting Committee. This is one of the instances where facets of accreditation/licensing and evaluation/review become confused. Self evaluation as described in the Guidebook page 23:

- compels institutions to acknowledge any chronic problems that were neglected because they were given a low priority and
- provides institutions with an opportunity to show and develop their strengths and ability to master their problems.

237 Visiting Committee members indicated that they did not always read the SER documentation; others reported that they did not find it useful. Institutions complained of the burden of collating and checking the material for the Accreditation application, including the SER. Yet, several of them acknowledged that one benefit of the accreditation process had been the collection of such information for the first time. There was concern that the volume of information was so great on occasion that it was counterproductive (see D below).

238 Control of the volume of material is not in the hands of the institutions alone. The HAC is responsible for managing the expectations of the institutions and Visiting Committees if the volume of documentation is to be reduced. It was not clear to the Panel how frequently the utility of all the categories of information demanded for accreditation purposes should be reviewed. For example, was it covered by the Government decree requiring a review of protocols at least every three years? But, as institutions are moving to introduce their own quality assurance systems and are compiling their own internal quality management data, the HAC will have to be sensitive to demands for data which are neither used nor useful.

C3. Programme accreditation

239 The process of programme accreditation is described in the SER (page 20), and additional aspects were addressed directly and indirectly in the SWOT analysis under the heading of weaknesses (for example WC1, WC2, WC3, WC4, WC8, WC9, WD2, WD4). According to the SER, programme accreditation includes:

- approving individual Ph.D./DLA programmes;
- expressing opinion on national qualification requirements;
- establishing/launching of degree programmes;
- accrediting vocational higher education.

There are five stages to the programme accreditation process, following receipt of an application from an institution:

- identification by the Secretariat of discipline and assignment to the appropriate expert committee and programme officer;
- expert committee opinion
 - chairperson invites two experts, who remain anonymous, to give their opinions.(the experts need not be members of the committee, although one of them usually is);
 - experts formulate their opinion;

- expert committee discusses and conveys its opinion to the respective College of the HAC.
- College discusses and brings a proposal before the Plenary meeting;
- Plenum discusses and votes, passes resolution;
- HAC President informs the Minister and the higher education institutions of the Plenum's resolution.

240 Programme accreditation was in some respects the most appreciated and in others the most criticised work of the HAC. The approval of doctoral programmes and disciplines (see 229) was the activity where the work of the HAC was most appreciated. This coincides with the task for which the HAC has the greatest formal 'autonomy' i.e. where it has the power of approval or decision. This is in sharp contrast to the process of new programme accreditation/approval. In this instance, not only is the HAC's autonomy less, but there are other actors in the process – notably the HERC and the Ministries. The interactions between this 'forum of three' are such that, even when two (HERC and HAC) of the three are in agreement that a new programme should be approved, it can still be refused by the Ministry. Institutions were very critical of this arrangement.

241 The formal division of interests in new programmes gives the HAC (see 229) the role of 'expressing an opinion' in relation to academic matters, whereas the HERC is supposed to consider new programmes from the perspective of social demand and the labour market. However, the Panel understood that there were occasions when this division of work was blurred and overlapped. The Panel could see little point to the continued division of responsibilities in respect of programme approval which increased overall workload for staff in institutions, exacerbated delays and appeared to bring little 'added value' to the approval process. However, one of the interviewees offered the comment that using two separate agencies could be positive in Hungary as it helped to solve the 'small country' problem.

242 The HAC is committed to values (SER) and assumptions (Guidebook) such as transparency, accountability and objectivity in its processes. The Panel wonders if these values would be better served if secret votes in final decisions of the HAC were replaced by open ones.

243 In order to uphold such values as objectivity, impartiality, transparency and professional rigour, the HAC has published very detailed and clear minimum standards for programme accreditation. In a few cases the number and size of lecture halls, of seminar halls, the number of computers, library requirements (number of volumes and number of copies of referred bibliography) etc. are mentioned. If, on the one hand, these detailed and numerical criteria ensure that the above-mentioned values are respected, they are not, on the other hand, a sufficient condition for quality of teaching and may lead to rigid accreditation results. In the interviews, the Panel listened to opinions that "*... Visiting Committees ignore the more fundamental questions, as they stick too much to formal criteria; ...academic accreditation only shows essentially whether personnel and infrastructure conditions are adequate...HAC takes decisions on accreditation based on a set of detailed factual 'accreditation criteria'*"

such as the number and qualification of academic staff, the number and size of lecture and seminar rooms, availability of computers and the number of volumes in the library.”

C4. Accreditation of doctoral programmes

244 The HAC (Accreditation Guidebook page 4) asserts that, for doctoral programme accreditation, it has the tenet that *“the product, i.e. the student receiving the doctoral degree would stand ground at a European or American university”*. It retains the same tenet for institutional accreditation but it is difficult to understand exactly what indicators are used to determine the achievement of this objective, given the diversity both within and between US and European higher education systems in comparison to the more selective nature of Hungarian higher education.

245 In general the opinions collected by the Panel about the accreditation of doctoral programmes were favourable (see 240). However, a written document mentioned that *“the doctorate system did not fulfil the hopes. The involvement is low level, the scholarship is little, the participants have no perspective (continuous reduction of staff), more of them consider the university occupation a “springboard” and good time to seek a suitable job. Not the best apply for doctorate and few finish it with Ph.D. degree.”*

C5. Visiting Committees

246 The Chair of a Visiting Committee, proposed by the President of HAC and approved by the Plenum, selects three to seven experts (or more depending on the nature of the institution/visit) as members of the Visiting Committee. A member of the HAC Secretariat acts as Secretary. Experts are expected:

- to have a thorough knowledge in the field of **accreditation**, including the operational and procedural regulations concerning HAC, its method of assessment and knowledge of its documents (requirement of expertise in accreditation);
- to be free from all influences which could bias their objective evaluation of the matter (requirement of impartiality);
- to comply with the rules of confidentiality (requirement of confidential procedure);
- to participate in the briefings organised by the HAC Secretariat to acquire and maintain proficiency.

247 The Panel noted (Accreditation Guidebook) that members of the Visiting Committees must hold a doctoral degree – Ph.D. This limitation in respect of Visiting Committee membership appears to be self-imposed by the HAC and could preclude the involvement of persons with other competencies and skills who might be better suited to participate in evaluation activities relating to Colleges and post-secondary education or who could bring new perspectives on, for example, matters of institutional management and finance (see 275, 299).

248 Although there were extensive procedural rules in the Guidebook and By-laws about Visiting Committees' duties, there was no evidence of written guidance to Visiting Committee Chairmen concerning proposals for the composition of the Visiting Committees in terms of ensuring a balance of expertise or avoiding over-representation by experts from any one higher education institution on the Visiting Committee (see 253).

249 The Panel heard from various sources that the requirement for experts to participate in briefings was not consistently respected. Given the comments on the need for better training and briefing of experts (from the SER, foreign experts and institutions), and the identification of problems in relation to the consistency of approach by Visiting Committees, this would appear to be an essential aspect of quality control in the accreditation process. In addition to fostering consistency, it has the potential to contribute towards the creation of a 'corporate' culture for HAC.

250 Programmes for visits are negotiated between the Head of the Institution and the Visiting Committee chair during a one day pre-visit. It appears that this is done before the Visiting Committee chair has brought together the other members for the purpose of preparing the visit. Good practice would suggest that a Panel always meet before a programme is devised but in any case it appears that the Panel is meeting to divide up the work rather than to identify issues or themes in the self-evaluation report that should be pursued or clarified. (See §1.4 - the Visiting Committee prepares for the visit, Supplement 3 of the Accreditation Guidebook). The Panel noted that members apparently did not always show up for these meetings.

251 There do not appear to be any guidelines to Visiting Committees for the conduct of visits. The By-laws do not contain the sort of advice and guidance on matters such as questioning, demeanour and good practice in the organisation of visits in order to foster consistency. As the HAC acknowledges, this provides room for heterogeneous practices. It was stated many times that the Visiting Committee was too content-oriented, and gathered evidence mainly through the interviews, instead of using the SER. An international expert (SER, Appendix E) states that, in contrast to Hungarian practice, "*rather than relying primarily on interviews during the visit, American teams rely heavily upon institutional self-study documents in formulating opinions and conclusions. Interviews during the team visit are quite selective, focusing upon clarifying ambiguities and verifying claims in written documents.*"

C6. Peer review: identification and selection of experts

252 Peer review is an important principle in all external quality evaluation systems. It is a principal means of legitimising references to good practice outside the institution in question (and hence encouraging development and improvement). The quality of an evaluation process is crucially dependent on the quality of the reviewers/experts. The Panel believes that a written detailed specification on criteria for the selection of reviewers and the composition of the review teams would be useful to counter the charge that the teams might not be

appropriate - a much-voiced criticism that is seen, for example, in the ‘small country’ argument.

253 The Panel understood that the Secretariat had a pool of experts who could be called on to act as Visiting Committee members but did not find any criteria for the selection of experts other than the fact they had participated in accreditation events. There was no notion of securing a range of expertise, regional distribution, institutional background or the like. There was evidence, however, that the expertise or interest of Visiting Committee experts in institutional matters, including finance – a topic included in the SER – should be strengthened. This point was also raised – appendix E2 of SER (see 299) – by a visiting expert from the United States. As institutions develop more sophisticated approaches to quality management and assurance, competence in and experience of quality management will become an important factor in selecting experts.

254 The HAC might wish to consider the inclusion, as far as possible, of non-academics in the Visiting Committees. This is likely to increase the weight of a range of criteria which, though not exclusively indicative of academic quality, are important for assessing quality in a wider framework, e.g., graduate careers or regional benefits. The Panel is aware that there are practical problems in finding suitable persons, but there are examples in Hungary of other experts serving well in deliberations on higher education. (In several higher education institutions there are advisory bodies that include members from commerce and industry or from the local authorities.) However, such persons should never outnumber experts from within higher education.

255 Peer review is based on trust. If institutions themselves are to propose experts for training and development by the HAC and work as experts, they will have some ownership and responsibility for the process and an incentive to nominate appropriate people.

C7. Reports

256 The Accreditation Guidebook (pages 38-43), states that for each institutional accreditation, two main reports² are produced:

- the report of the Visiting Committee, which comprises two parts – the executive summary and the detailed report, which is a full description of the concise assessment provided in the Executive Summary. The Chair of the Visiting Committee is responsible for the final report. The circulation of the more detailed report, which is sent to the Rector, remains at the discretion of the head of the institution;
- the HAC’s Accreditation Report, which contains the resolution on HAC’s proposal along with a detailed explanation for the grading given, HAC’s comments, proposals and deadlines for objectives to be met and the proposed schedule for the accreditation process pending the next round of accreditation. This will depend on

² There is also a report produced by the Expert Committee for Institutional Accreditation prepared after discussion of the Visiting Committee’s report with its members. This report is presented to the Plenum.

monitoring procedures and scheduling of the interim procedures. The report is widely disseminated – it is the public announcement of the accreditation decision.

257 Given the central importance of reporting as one of the elements of a quality assurance system in terms of providing feedback to institutions, promoting quality improvement and providing information to stakeholders, the Panel noticed that little mention was made directly of this aspect of the accreditation process in the SER and of the potential implications for future reports, once the new quality assurance process had been introduced. For such an important element in the evaluation process there was little comment in the SER as to the effectiveness of the HAC reports or consideration of their potential contribution to achieving some of the ‘goals of accreditation’ relating to the promotion of quality improvement (see 233, 281, 282). The production and quality of reports for both institutional and programme accreditation appeared to be problematic. This matter was mentioned in the SWOT analysis in the SER under ‘weaknesses of methodology’, WC8, WC9, WD6.

258 The final document approved by the HAC is divided into a public part comprising the decision and a confidential part informing the institution of higher education about the assessment. Obviously, the latter part might refer to a broad range of issues, e.g. judgements about prevailing modes of teaching and learning. The Panel saw, in confidence, a copy of part of the full report that went to the Committee and the Rector. It ranged quite widely, including a number of points and judgements about teaching and learning. After the first round of accreditation, it might now be possible to establish a list of themes worth taking into consideration in all assessments, and to disseminate more widely examples of good practice in relation to teaching and learning, both within the institutions and across the sector.

259 In the SER (WE1), it is acknowledged that feedback to institutions on accreditation is ‘not sufficient or regular’. The Panel understood that there were no legal constraints preventing the HAC from undertaking quality improvement initiatives or constructing digests of good practice on the basis of information from accreditation activities. Neither was there any legal requirement for them to undertake such activities.

260 While the overall impressions from the HAC survey (see paragraph 278) was one of satisfaction with the HAC, there was critical comment about the adequacy and quality of feedback in the reports of experts on new programme applications. Given the general concerns about the approval of new programmes, the less transparent way in which initial judgements are arrived at by anonymous experts, and observations by the Secretariat concerning sloppy report writing (SER, WC8), the HAC needs to consider seriously the quality of operations in a number of respects – selection of experts, training and reporting all of which relate to the promotion of quality improvement.

C8. The Committees

261 Provisions concerning the membership and official operation of the HAC Committees were prescribed in the law and detailed in the Government decree of 1997. The other HAC

committee to be mentioned specifically in the law is the International Advisory Board. The Committee sub-structure was established by the Plenum, and the operation of the committees and their protocols are described in the By-laws of the HAC.

262 The single function assigned to the expert committees and institutional accreditation committees is dealing with accreditation or approval requests and addressing matters of procedure. The Panel noted from the By-laws that the colleges themselves determined the mode of functioning and operational procedures which were approved by the Plenum. Many of the complaints about over-representation of particular interests on Visiting Committees are made equally or more vociferously about expert Committees.

263 As regards the structure of the committees within the HAC, concern was voiced that many committees are established for limited purposes, and that there are hardly any links between the various committees below the Plenum. This situation needs to be reviewed, given that the attendance of some committees is perceived as irregular and that it does not seem easy to secure the commitment of committee members.

C9. International Advisory Board

264 The HAC, early in its existence, established an International Advisory Board, thereby demonstrating its interest in international developments and an apparent readiness to take account of them. The main task of the International Advisory Board is to evaluate and advise on the operational principles, rules of procedure and the accreditation criteria and practice of the HAC, especially from the point of view of conformity with international requirements.

265 Over a seven year period, however, the annual meetings between the HAC and its International Advisory Board resulted in no major developments or changes in aims, procedures or methodologies. From the International Advisory Board's annual reports, it is clear that some recommendations have been repeated several times. The Panel has interpreted this as meaning that the HAC took no visible or substantial action to implement those recommendations.

266 The HAC might like to consider including in the International Advisory Board's membership some representation of members from agencies with a responsibility for work similar to that of the HAC. Thus, the International Advisory Board could play a stronger role of reviewing the operational processes of the HAC and of providing advice.

C10. The Secretariat

267 The staff of the Secretariat approached their work with care, integrity and thoroughness. The Panel observed that the By-laws of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (SER Appendix C1) describe the HAC as 'a body made up of 30 members', then elaborate in considerable detail the role and operating procedures of the Plenum, the

Presidency, Colleges, Committees, External Experts. However, the Secretariat merits a one-line entry stating that ‘the order of organisation and operation of the Secretariat is regulated by independent By-laws’. It is appreciated that the Secretariat By-laws contain much administrative material that would be inappropriate for inclusion in the overall By-laws. However, the Panel noted a lack of concern on the part of the HAC about a management culture that might minimise the role of the Secretariat as a partner in delivering the Committee’s remit.

268 The role of the Secretariat in carrying out the tasks of the HAC and their potential contribution to the improvement of the accreditation system and to the development of the quality assurance system were explored. A major criterion for appointing programme officers was that they were subject specialists. The rationale for this was that they needed subject expertise and credibility in order to write reports, to assist the Visiting Committee Chairmen and help special committee chairmen in inviting experts for programme applications.

269 This is different from the position in Western European agencies where a range of staff profiles and competencies is the norm. There, the equivalents of programme officers in the HAC, and indeed the equivalents of Visiting Committee Chairmen in some systems, are not necessarily subject specialists because their role is to ensure the consistency of the evaluation process – they are the ‘evaluation’ experts. This reflects the division of labour in the evaluation process between the subject professionalism of the experts and Committee members and the evaluation professionalism of the secretariat staff.

270 There is no formal training process for Secretariat staff other than experience gained ‘on the job’. The Panel observed that while many staff had participated in international study trips and conferences, they did not appear to have had the opportunity of secondment to or work experience in agencies outside Hungary, nor of training in management or other associated skills. The HAC informed the Panel that negotiating the possibility of training periods in other agencies has in practice been very difficult or even impossible.

271 The International Advisory Board had advised HAC on more than one occasion that there was a need to ensure appropriate briefing and development of members and staff alike in evaluation. The International Advisory Board had recommended that attention be given to determining the competencies required of staff members supporting the HAC and continuing training to support such competence. There did not appear to be any follow-up to these recommendations by the HAC.

272 The Panel considered that the potential contribution of program officers to the work and development of the HAC was perhaps underestimated. They were in the position of being able to provide comparative overviews of operations and processes that were not available to individual Committees or members. This was demonstrated by their contribution to the SER and in particular to elements of the SWOT analysis. As such, they could potentially play a more important role in securing the consistency which the HAC was aiming for and achieving goals such as identifying and disseminating information on good practice.

C11. The role of the stakeholders

273 The terms of reference for the evaluation required the Panel to take account of the opinion of the Ministry of Education, the higher education institutions and the other stakeholders as to the effectiveness of the process for institutional and faculty evaluation and the impact on higher education institutions and other stakeholders. They are also called upon to investigate how effectively the tasks of HAC are undertaken, by reviewing the process used and obtaining the views of the stakeholders.

274 After identifying a wide range of stakeholders in higher education, the SER made reference to the four groups – the Ministry of Education, the International Advisory Board, the HAC committee members and the higher education institutions – from whom feedback was regularly and actively sought in connection with the work of the HAC.

275 The Panel frequently heard the criticism being voiced that external interests are not well represented within the HAC committees. While some see this as an indication that external interests cannot properly be incorporated into accreditation at all, others claim that the regulations and the culture of the HAC discourage the participation of external experts. The stipulation that experts are required to hold a Ph.D. limits inappropriately the pool of candidates and forces some interest groups to appoint professors as their representatives.

276 Some Chambers complain about lack of influence in accreditation of study programmes leading to a relevant professional activity. There were also complaints about the under-representation from colleges and from the private sector of higher education.

277 The Panel also heard from those who considered that the external representatives had little chance of being regularly involved in the HAC's activities. There was also some feeling that the burden of paperwork and bureaucracy had overshadowed the benefits of internal and external evaluation. There was consensus across the various groups on the need for change in aspects of the tasks and operations of HAC. There was also consensus that:

- There should be greater involvement of the 'users' of higher education in the work of HAC. When the HAC was originally set up, industry and commerce were really in a transition period. This was a good reason for not involving them in accreditation, as they had no idea what they wanted from higher education or its graduates, but this position has now changed;
- The relationship between higher education and the economy is not strong enough and should be improved – the HAC should be closer to industry and commerce;
- The major focuses of programme accreditation are too theoretical and do not take account of the demands of the labour market concerning the competencies of graduates. The professional experience of academic staff could be more highly appreciated in certain disciplines and types of institutions, namely those of the college sector;
- Accreditation is too focused on the quality criteria of universities;

- The more active involvement of external representatives could help take into account a broader set of criteria in the accreditation of the college sector.

D. The impact of accreditation

278 To obtain “*systematic feedback on its work and an overall assessment of accreditation the HAC has conducted a survey of all 89 higher education institutions in Hungary*” (SER page 31, paragraph 3.C, and Appendix E1). The results of the survey show a general agreement that accreditation was necessary, except for specialised postgraduate degree programmes where a negative response of 37.8% was registered. Despite the fact that the accreditation poses a serious burden for the institutions, it was felt that in general the impact had been positive. Independence of the HAC from both the higher education institutions and state administration was considered necessary by 93.2% of the institutions, but 14.5% found fault with it in terms of its independence and representation. The HAC’s adherence to regulations, the publicity of its procedures and the degree of accessibility of the assessment criteria also registered positive degrees of satisfaction.

279 The survey also registered some significant objections concerning the HAC’s work, namely about the information on the composition of the expert committees (32.4% of negative answers) and on the composition itself (20.3%), the flow of information from the HAC to the institutions (21.6%), lack of transparency (27.6%), discrimination in the HAC’s decisions regarding the institution itself (24%) or in more general terms (22.4%).

280 There was not, however, any analysis in the SER itself which correlated this feedback with either institutions’ comments on institutional accreditation reports (SER page 31 para 3 A) or the programme approval process. There were, however, examples of how the complaints from institutions, identified in the report as being about e.g. the quality of feedback on committee decisions (SER, pages 38-39), could be addressed through better training of experts, better reporting or better use of experts.

281 The Panel has recorded comments from the institutions visited that in general they consider that both the accreditation process as well as the institution’s preparation for the exercise, especially at institutional level, had some impact in terms of promoting quality improvement or stimulating quality assurance. The process had:

- acted as a catalyst for self-evaluation which might otherwise not have happened;
- provided confirmation for staff where improvement is needed (but that depended on whether the full visit report was shared with staff by the Rector);
- increased student involvement in quality issues, marginally in some cases;
- sometimes provided new ideas about good practice;
- helped stimulate institutions to develop or codify their quality assurance and control processes, or at least revealed the value of collecting quantitative data, which could be used for quality management purposes.

While there were positive aspects to accreditation, it was felt that the impact on quality did not meet the expectations of the institutions as a result of a combined effect of the predominance of the licensing function over the quality improvement function and the excessive work imposed by the rules of the accreditation procedure.

282 Various criticisms were made on detailed matters and confirmed weaknesses identified in the SER (WD5, WB2, WB3, WD2, WC2). The frequency of the criticisms addressed at some aspects of the HAC's operations demonstrate a degree of dissatisfaction that does not match the more positive results of the survey conducted by the HAC. Even though it may not be feasible to put all the implicit desires for improvement into practice, it is worth mentioning the most frequently voiced criticisms:

- The accreditation was too burdensome in requesting too much information. This often leads to voluminous self-evaluation reports that are unlikely to be fully taken into account.
- The accreditation does not take sufficiently into account the characteristics of the college sector but treats this sector as a lower-level university sector.
- The accreditation is too confined to internal academic criteria of quality. A broader composition of the review committees might contribute to a broader set of quality criteria.
- The accreditation process has taken too long in a substantial number of cases. The several actors involved (the HAC, the institutions of higher education themselves, the ministry) might well have contributed to this.
- The results of the accreditation are not widely known by the employers, the students or the public at large.

E. Quality assurance within the HAC itself

283 Various quality assurance agencies have moved towards an external evaluation of their activities. This leads to strengthening the authority of a quality assurance agency, because it indicates that the agency is scrupulous in reflecting upon its own quality. The Panel considers that the decision taken by the HAC to implement the International Advisory Board's recommendation to seek an international evaluation of the system and the procedures of HAC (SER, page 9) is an important contribution to HAC's own quality system.

284 The Panel noted from its meetings and discussions that where participants had read the HAC self-evaluation (and the most impressive feedback on this was from higher education institutions visited by the Panel), they considered it to be 'on target' in terms of identifying weaknesses. The main credit for this must go to the Secretariat who were largely responsible for its drafting. However, the Panel noted that many of what were identified as weaknesses in the SWOT were issues which had been a constant source of concern since the establishment of the HAC. The quality loop, in terms of implementing action on areas identified for improvement from evaluation and feedback, did not appear to have been completed.

285 The Panel also considered that some of the weaknesses identified in the SER were fundamental in terms of the HAC's aspirations to deliver on the wider objectives of the accreditation process. There did not appear to be any kind of strategic plan to deal with the areas for improvement (weaknesses); the Panel felt that the HAC's proposals were merely piecemeal and sensed that there was little that HAC could do.

286 The Panel considered that the HAC should give higher priority to exchanging views on best practice with other countries that share similar problems in terms of the size of the academic community, resources and so on. For this purpose the HAC should implement international interchange of expertise with agencies having a mandate and experience similar to that of the HAC.

F. Conclusions on the present state of HAC

287 A review of the HAC needs to take account of relevant contextual and historical factors that have conditioned its development (SER, pages 32 to 35). The HAC emerged at a time when the political interference of the past was giving way to strong academic self-control, when concern about a possible collapse of minimum standards was high, and when new social forces were able to articulate themselves. This might explain why a preoccupation with rigid distinctions between academic quality and social relevance was widely accepted and the assessment of minimum quality became so much the target that little room was left for the quality improvement dimension of assessment. Thus contextual features too had to be taken into account in order to understand some problems of the operations actually set in motion, such as the problems implicit in the selection of reviewers (e.g. the small-country argument and the capital city phenomenon).

288 In these difficult circumstances, the HAC has established a firm foundation for the review of higher education in Hungary and has contributed to the introduction of quality assessment methodologies. The HAC is to be congratulated for achieving a great deal with modest resources in a fast changing and complex environment. Over its relatively short existence, it has undertaken an increasingly diverse portfolio of tasks and functions, the management of which is complicated by the differing roles and responsibilities assigned to it in respect of those tasks.

289 *The HAC's achievements are reflected in the completion of the first round of institutional and faculty accreditation, the approval of doctoral programmes, the publication of the Accreditation Guidebook and clear and public rules of procedure and principles for evaluation. The fact that the HAC covers the whole range of disciplines and study programmes can be considered as a strength of this agency (SER, SA, SB5).*

290 Considering the dramatic changes that have occurred in Hungarian higher education over the last ten years, the HAC has acted as a stabiliser and contributed to the development of the higher education system. The HAC, its Secretariat and Committee members are to be commended for promoting the values and characteristics recognised internationally as

essential to a quality assurance system – independence, transparency, self-evaluation, peer review and public report – within the higher education community in Hungary. It is important to recognise the independence of the HAC vis-à-vis the government and the higher education institutions (SER, SB1). All the more so since “*quality culture is not yet a dominant factor for a vast part of society.*” (SER page 33).

291 The implementation of the Hungarian accreditation system has also built up a pool of national experts with some training in the methods of quality assessment; their work has been complemented occasionally by the presence of foreign experts in peer-reviews and Visiting Committees (SER, SB6).

292 The existence of an International Advisory Board (SER, SB7) is also a positive feature of the HAC, even if not all of its recommendations have been diligently followed. The International Advisory Board provides the HAC with a view of developments in other countries and offers an independent outside view about the general conditions of the Hungarian accreditation system.

293 Since its establishment, the HAC has devoted considerable energy and time to upholding minimum standards against a background of rapid evolution of the Hungarian higher education system towards a mass system, and the emergence of a private sector of higher education. The Panel considers that the HAC has been successful in containing an explosive development of this private sector, thus avoiding a situation that is rather frequent in other Eastern European countries, where a large network of private institutions with low academic standards has been established.

294 The criteria employed for institutional accreditation and the approval of new programmes, the bureaucratic systems used, accreditation standards based on rigid numerical criteria, and the strong reliance on established academia in the HAC Committees have resulted in a limited capacity for innovation. HAC functioned primarily to preserve the status quo by favouring a range of institutional and programme patterns which were uncontroversial in Hungary. Its strict observance of procedural rules and protocols (SER C19, page 34) and its need to be recognised as a politically neutral organisation have been at the expense of reflection on academic policy and development and fostering innovation, diversity and change.

295 The HAC has fulfilled its legal obligations in carrying out accreditation within the law, and it has ensured that Hungarian higher education meets minimal quality requirements, thus giving the necessary public protection to stakeholders' interests. However, it has not yet achieved the wider objectives of accreditation and quality assurance which form part of its own goals and to which it is committed by law. To some extent, the HAC has been so concerned about being neutral and objective and following the law to the letter, that the accreditation system has had some negative effects in that the licensing function seems to have prevailed over the quality improvement function (see 233, 281, 282).

296 The HAC's need and will to be recognised as a neutral organisation, although motivated by strategic reasons, may have had a dysfunctional effect on its own corporate culture: the absence of an autonomous organisational culture, beyond law and regulation, based on commonly discussed and shared values and policies within the HAC Committee(s) and updated regularly, might make the HAC more vulnerable to the particular interests (SER, C18), implicit or explicit, of the different constituencies and actors of the Hungarian higher education. The representatives and the staff of the HAC are well aware of this.

297 It would appear that the benefits of accreditation have not been effectively communicated to wider circles, e.g., the public at large, employers and the students. However those potentially interested in information on accreditation have not been very active in asking for this information.

298 The accreditation system has had the obvious effect for the institutions of higher education of stimulating self-assessment, of providing a quality judgement, with the relevant explanations, as well as of securing stability over a period of time. The Panel believes, however, that the impact on the institutions of higher education could be more beneficial if follow-up procedures were envisaged from the outset, if the assessment were more improvement oriented, if the accreditation were to focus on groups of subjects and open people's eyes as to the possibility of restructuring programmes and if the assessment also addressed matters of institutional and quality management.

299 A letter from a foreign member of Hungarian Visiting Committees (SER, Appendix E2) states that ... *“visiting committees devoted little attention to matters of institutional governance, financial records and financial stability, operations, and institutional support activities. ... Finally, in respect to quality assurance, you should emphasise the need for institutions to “close the loop” by linking assessment findings to planning and budgeting processes. When needs for improvement are identified, it is important that improvement measures actually make their way into formal plans and resource allocation.”*

200a The HAC has not given emphasis to good teaching practices. The Accreditation Guidebook lists the goals of accreditation as including “the pinpointing of good teaching practices” and the “uncovering of new teaching trends which better match the needs of both the science and the stakeholder (employers, students, various organisations)”. A large amount of data has been collected and much effort expended on accreditation, but the Panel saw no evidence of any strong emphasis on teaching and learning in the assessment or in the reports made available to the institutions.

201a The letter referred to in 299 remarks that ... *“It seems to me that your accreditation manual and any professional development publications or services you provide must emphasise the distinction between mere operational efficiency and true educational effectiveness. ...In my opinion, the evaluation team visits in which I participated focused more upon the substance and quality of curricular content and academic discourse within each of the institutions than upon educational processes, policies and outcomes”* (compliance function prevailing over quality improvement function).

202a The Panel considers that the HAC has made serious attempts to assess its own strengths and limitations in a coherent and analytical way, and this is seen as a positive feature. The HAC in its Self-Evaluation report, which was candid and, at times, very self-critical, identified many of the issues for change which feature in this report, including the need for greater involvement of external representatives and the elaboration of its own internal system of quality assurance. These were not new issues, but there was little indication as to where they were being debated or how and when change would be implemented. Even more important, it seems that the HAC has not yet defined its own strategic plan for the future, containing clear options for change and setting priorities.

203a In the following paragraphs, the Panel presents some recommendations that might help the HAC improve its operations within the present definition of tasks and objectives. In Chapter 3, the Panel presents a review of the changing context of higher education, with emphasis on Europe and the US. Chapter 4, takes into account these developments and the changes in the Hungarian higher education system that, in the Panel's view, are likely to occur; it goes on to describe possible developments in quality assurance.

G. Some recommendations for current operations

204a The present mode of operation of the HAC can be improved within its traditional definition of tasks and objectives. The following suggestions would be relevant, even if the HAC did not change its scope, as suggested by the Panel, towards a closer linkage of the criteria of academic quality and social relevance, or towards increased emphasis on an improvement-oriented function of quality assurance.

205a The SER presented by the HAC contains suggestions intended to rectify some of its perceived weaknesses. In general the Panel agrees with those suggestions, but some are not seen as being very effective (for instance, WB3: *it is hoped that the level of interest...will rise in the near future*, WB4: *we shall draw the attention of committee chairmen...* WC2: *We have drawn the attention of program officers...* WC3, WC5, WC7, WC8, WC9: *Program officers should lay even more stress...*). Some are seen as very negative (for instance WC6 - allowing expert committee members to vote without being present to discuss the resolutions).

206a **Standards of performance for the HAC, in addition to time schedules and adherence to the law, should be developed and implemented.** Such standards should include criteria for reporting, for committee decisions and for feedback to higher education institutions and the society at large. This should enable the HAC to demonstrate where it has achieved its goals and to identify areas for further action and improvement. This implies a move away from presenting the outcomes of HAC's work (SER page 30 and annual reports) purely in statistical terms, or as a series of procedural matters and announcements, towards a presentation of reports that analyses trends and highlights good practice.

207a **HAC urgently needs to address the problem of excessive bureaucracy and overly complex demands in the collection of material for self-reporting.** This has negative consequences for the process. The Panel was informed by institutions that the process was tiresome and, as a result, the component of quality improvement has been neglected. A very thick self-evaluation report is not likely to be heeded or even read. In this respect, the Accreditation Guidebook needs revision.

208a **The HAC needs to establish clear guidance for Visiting Committee Chairmen on proposals for the composition of the Visiting Committees.** This means ensuring a balance of expertise and avoiding over-representation of any one higher education institution or of institutions from the capital. More consistent monitoring of the composition of Visiting Committees by the Secretariat, better guidance to Visiting Committee Chairmen on the optimal composition of Visiting Committees and clear guidance on ‘over-representation’ of any particular institution or constituency on other committees are all strategies which could mitigate this problem.

209a **The HAC needs to publish a Guidebook with a clear code of conduct for members of Visiting Committees,** addressing matters such as training and briefing, the purpose of pre-visit meetings, prior study of applications, behaviour during the visits, reporting, etc.

210a **The HAC needs to create an internal system of quality assurance.** The Panel suggests that the opinions of accredited institutions on the accreditation procedures should be systematically solicited after the visits. Issues such as the behaviour of the visiting experts, their degree of proficiency and their knowledge of the self-accreditation report should be considered. The HAC needs to act on the basis of these assessments as, in its interviews, the Panel heard opinions to the effect that the quality and performance of Visiting Committees were uneven.

211a The HAC needs to establish a clear strategy for training members of the **Visiting Committees** and of the Secretariat.

212a **The HAC needs to review the format, transparency and accessibility of accreditation reports.** The current position of two final reports – one detailed and semi-confidential, the other public but often containing no more than a yes/no decision – does not provide the sort of information needed by constituents in the society at large. The public impact of these reports, through wide dissemination, is the only real power evaluation agencies can wield.

213a **The importance given to experts holding a scientific degree needs to be attenuated, as it tends to reduce the membership pool for the HAC and limit the choice of experts eligible for the Academy** (see 274). This would allow the pool of reviewers to be extended to experts having a background in the arts or in subjects better adapted to the vocational emphasis of the college sector. It would also facilitate participation on the part of representatives of the society at large.

214a The HAC needs to consider options that would better address the more vocationally oriented characteristics of the college sector. One possible solution to this problem would be the establishment of separate chambers for the accreditation of universities and colleges.

215a The HAC may consider reviewing the utility and purpose of committees, with a view to reducing their number.

216a The Panel suggests that the HAC consider new ways of addressing the issue of programme breadth and interdisciplinarity. For example concurrent review of a group of fields of study, including related interdisciplinary fields, might be a suitable way of solving some problems.

217a The HAC should continue its international co-operation in the exchange of good practice and benchmarking of standards.

3. International trends in higher education and quality assurance

Introduction

300 This chapter examines key issues and trends in the global higher education context which are of relevance to the accreditation and evaluation activities of the HAC and to the future development of higher education and quality assurance in Hungary. It also focuses on aspects of the quality assurance of higher education in Europe and in the United States, to present a panorama that may provide useful information to the Hungarian authorities. The Panel does not intend to present the context as a stable model, to be taken over as a kind of obligation, all the more since the trends are seldom fully convergent or coherent. However, the international environment is moving fast, and some dominant trends can be identified. Hungary has already demonstrated, through the Higher Education Reform Project, its willingness to observe the external environment and to determine how to take account of it in finding appropriate solutions for the Hungarian higher education system.

A. Higher Education: general trends

A1. Context

301 There are no international norms and requirements for higher education systems or, more specifically, for quality assurance systems. However, given the interest of the HAC in international networking and its expressed desire to ensure that its procedures keep abreast of developments outside of Hungary, the following elements have been included as contributions to the overall discussion on the development of quality assurance.

302 The quality of higher education was one of four key issues discussed at the UNESCO World Conference, held in Paris in October 1998, when the global challenges to higher education were identified as:

- increased demand for access;
- the impact of mass participation;
- the need to diversify post-secondary education and training;
- the trend towards dual modes of funding – private and public;
- the potential of information and computing technologies to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- the impact of internationalisation in terms of the mobility of persons and expertise.

303 Two years later, the Task Force for Higher Education (World Bank and UNESCO, 2000) has published a major report on higher education in developing countries. They have identified a common set of characteristics which effective systems of higher education (wherever) tend to share. In summary these include:

- **Diversity** manifested by a stratified structure, with one tier that is oriented towards research and selectivity and another which imparts knowledge to large numbers of students. This allows institutions to pursue clear objectives and avoid duplication of effort and enables a higher education system to produce a mix of specialised and broadly trained graduates.
- **Competition** between similar institutions for staff, students and resources which improves standards by rewarding merit and performance. Competition requires a high degree of autonomy for academic institutions, allowing them to exploit their strengths and weaknesses. Adequate market information is also essential; otherwise institutions will continue to thrive even when they are weak.
- **Flexibility** allowing institutions to adapt quickly to changing enrolment levels, to the rise and fall of different fields of study and to changes in the mix of skills demanded in the labour market.
- **Well-defined standards** articulated by higher education institutions which set challenging goals for themselves that are consistent with the needs of their societies and labour forces. A culture of accountability is essential, allowing improvement to be continually monitored and rewarded.
- **Links to other sectors** – a higher education system does not operate in isolation.
- **A supportive legal and regulatory structure** which encourages innovation and achievement while discouraging corruption, duplication of effort and exploitation of poorly informed consumers. In many systems, initiative is stifled by counterproductive legal constraints.
- **Adequate and stable** long-term funding.
- **System-wide resources** – many tools for improving higher education are best developed centrally and shared widely. Such tools include management information systems.

304 The Report (www.tfhe.net) suggests that the State should be “*economical in its interventions ...State supervision should aim at balancing the state’s responsibility to protect and promote the public’s interest with an individual institution’s need for academic freedom and autonomy.*” So-called buffer mechanisms are important in achieving this balance. An example of a buffer mechanism would be “*councils of higher education that advise the government on the size, shape and funding of higher education and are often responsible for quality assurance, promotion mechanisms and accreditation.*” To be effective, it is suggested, these bodies need clear mandates, well-established operating procedures and full autonomy vis-à-vis both government and academia. These requirements coincide with the goals for higher education reform in Hungary.

A2. *General trends in Europe*

305 In a recently published working paper, the CRE summarised key factors for change as well as developments affecting quality assurance in European higher education. These include:

- European higher education is facing a range of major challenges:
 - transparency of supply (providers, modes of delivery, degree structure);
 - compatibility of degrees and qualifications within Europe;
 - flexibility in meeting new and diversified needs and audiences in higher education; enabling access for a larger part of the population by removing barriers to participation;
 - comparability of the supply (quality and pertinence of the degrees).

The Bologna process (see below) is supposed to be one response to these challenges.

- Internationalisation of higher education as a global trend affecting the whole range of institutional activities leads to an interest in internationalising quality assurance, in making systems transparent and comparable, for the sake of "consumer protection".
- Quality assurance in Europe is basically national and decentralised; at the same time, European-wide initiatives exist, like CRE's activities (Quality Audits, International Quality Reviews), accreditation schemes like EQUIS and the constitution of the European Network of Quality Assurance agencies (ENQA).
- Apart from some Central and Eastern European countries, Europe has no tradition of accreditation for academic purposes, other than formal authorisation to award degrees granted to institutions by the State to award degrees.
Accreditation may be considered as one type of quality assurance in higher education, leading to some kind of formal opinion (usually yes/no), based on implicit or explicit minimum quality standards. This represents a filter to protect consumers.
- Some sections of European higher education institutions are interested in some kind of accreditation option for specific programmes. Some of these universities use US agencies (especially in the fields of business management and engineering), as do some franchised and transnational providers.

A3. *The Bologna Declaration*

306 An important new element in the development of higher education structures in Europe with a quality assurance dimension is the Bologna Declaration. It was signed by 29 European countries (including Hungary) which "undertake to attain the Declaration's objectives" and to that end "engage in co-ordinating [their] policies". It is a pledge to reform the structures of their higher education systems in a convergent way, a voluntary commitment by each signatory country to reform its own higher education system or systems in order to create overall convergence at European level. The Bologna Declaration is not a reform imposed upon national governments or higher education institutions.

307 The process originates with the recognition that, in spite of their valuable differences, European higher education systems are facing common internal and external challenges related to the growth and diversification of higher education, the employability of graduates, the shortage of skills in key areas, and the expansion of private and transnational education. The Declaration recognises the value of co-ordinated reforms, compatible systems and common action.

308 The Bologna Declaration is not simply intended to be a political statement, but rather a binding commitment to an action programme based on a clearly defined common goal, a deadline and a set of specific objectives:

- a clearly defined common goal: to create a European space for higher education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education;
- a deadline: the European space for higher education should be completed in 2010;
- a set of specific objectives:
 - the adoption of a common framework of readable and comparable degrees, "also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement";
 - the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries, with first degrees no shorter than 3 years and relevant to the labour market;
 - ECTS-compatible credit systems, also covering lifelong learning activities;
 - a European dimension in quality assurance, with comparable criteria and methods;
 - the elimination of remaining obstacles to the free mobility of students (as well as trainees and graduates) and teachers (as well as researchers and higher education administrators).

309 At the moment, it is too early to assess whether these ambitious goals will be achieved. However, the Bologna Declaration and the present process leading to the next ministerial conference in Prague (May 2001) show that the Bologna Declaration has at least managed to put issues like academic and professional mobility, the competitiveness of European higher education and quality assurance at European level high up on the agenda.

B. Developments in the quality assurance of higher education

B1. Initial steps towards European co-operation on quality assurance

310 Within the European Union, the development of national quality assurance systems is relatively recent. In 1994-95, to enhance the development and implementation of national systems (which existed in only four member states, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the UK), the European Commission sponsored pilot projects in programme evaluation and came to the conclusion that, although there could be no question of designing a unified European quality assurance agency, some common minimal principles could be confirmed which each agency should strive to implement:

- the creation of a national or co-ordinating body independent of both government and higher education institutions;
- internal evaluation, at either institutional or programme level and preparation of a self-evaluation report;
- external evaluation by panels of experts, based in part on a visit to the institution;
- publication of the results of the evaluation.

311 Nowadays, national systems of quality assurance exist in nearly all EU states, although the establishment of evaluation agencies in several of them post-dates the establishment of the HAC. In some states, especially those with a decentralised political system (regional autonomy), there are regional agencies and, possibly, a national co-ordinating body (Germany and Spain). Some others have a sector-based approach, with separate agencies for university and non-university sectors (Finland and the Netherlands). In Portugal, there are three separate agencies for public universities, for public polytechnics and for the private sector, and a national co-ordination agency responsible for meta-evaluation and for ensuring the overall coherence of the system. A comprehensive report on trends in quality assurance in the European Union was published in 1998.

312 At the moment, the CEE countries have in common based their national quality assurance systems on accreditation rather than on quality assurance. This probably made sense in the context of a rapid and wide-ranging transition from a system of centralised bureaucratic control to one of greater autonomy, with a huge increase in demand, and the unregulated development of a private for-profit sector. Although the conception of accreditation aims and procedures is almost the same in countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic, the focus and outcomes are different. However, one common outcome in the countries mentioned above is that accreditation leads to recognition of the institution by the state. A comprehensive report on trends in quality assurance in CEEC countries was published in 1999.

B2. The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

313 The ENQA was officially launched in March 2000 as a network comprising public national (or regional) quality assurance agencies and the three organisations representing higher education institutions (the Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences, CRE and EURASHE). The participation of the CEEC countries has recently been accepted and they will be integrated into the network. ENQA has been established to promote European co-operation in the field of quality assessment and quality assurance among all actors involved in the quality assurance process. The idea for the Network has its origin in the European Pilot Project that demonstrated the value of sharing experience in the area of quality assurance. Further momentum was given by the Recommendation of the Council (08/561/EC of 24 September 1998), European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education and the Bologna Declaration.

314 The immediate Action Plan for the Network focuses on dissemination activities, training and advisory support and thematic activities; the priority topics are:

- the quality assurance and quality assessment of new forms of delivery of higher education, including transnational education;
- the outcomes and follow-up of the external assessment;
- the use of outcomes of assessment by other stakeholders;
- mutual recognition of the work of quality assessment agencies;
- the European dimension in quality assessment;
- accreditation, European standards and equivalence of programmes. The Bologna Declaration, of which Hungary was a signatory, and the emerging structures of higher education will raise questions about the equivalence of Bachelors' or Masters' degree in a given discipline in different countries. Questions such as 'what do we mean by accreditation in Europe?' will have to be answered.

315 Although they share common principles, Western European agencies present substantial differences: in their legal status, governance, funding, staffing, focus of evaluation (some include research, some are sector specific), selection and training of peers, methods used on visits and the nature of the published report. There are also major differences in how the assessment results are used, and whether or not there are follow-up mechanisms. The use of quantitative data is an issue: in principle, no EU quality assurance agency bases its approach on performance indicators, but data are often used to complement qualitative descriptions. Most agencies have only limited experience of, let alone operational procedures for, dealing with private institutions and/or new providers, especially 'virtual' universities. Countries also differ in their response to the convergence of degree structures (bachelor/masters/Ph.D.), recommended in the Bologna declaration (see above).

B3. The aims of quality assurance: accountability and improvement

316 The balance between these two aims is another variable from one European country to another; a similar situation prevails in the rest of the world. Uncertainties about quality, arising from the diversification of higher education, the rapid expansion of education as well as the increasing autonomy of higher education institutions are all factors behind the growing need for institutions to be accountable to their stakeholders – funders, students, employers. Accountability does not imply interference, but it imposes a requirement to explain actions periodically and to examine successes and failures in a transparent way. Recently, accountability has also been seen in terms of consumer protection rather than solely in terms of satisfying requirements set by the authorities. Quality improvement as an aim is manifest in various ways: through the nature of the self-evaluation exercise; the design and focus of the evaluation process; the nature of reporting and feedback; the dissemination of good practice by the agency in the form of publications such as Codes of Practice; benchmarking; assistance to higher education institutions for the development of their own internal quality-control and management processes and follow-up activities.

B4. Focus of evaluation: institution and/or programme

317 Agencies differ in the focus of their quality-assurance processes. In some countries, they carry out evaluation at both institutional and programme level but, in the majority of countries, the evaluation process has been introduced at one level or the other. Institutional quality evaluation is a useful support for governance and management, particularly in a period of major organisational change in higher education, when institutions are, for example, being granted greater autonomy or being merged. Evaluating all programmes in the same subject/discipline within the same academic year provides an overall view of the quality of education in the subject across the country and helps to identify good practice. There is a tendency for agencies to become multifunctional i.e. to have more than one focus or process.

B5. National quality-assurance systems: actors, roles and responsibilities

318 Three main groups of actors in the field of quality assurance in higher education can be identified:

- national (and regional) authorities, as well as professional bodies and other stakeholders in some countries;
- higher education institutions (universities, colleges and others);
- national quality-assurance and/or accreditation agencies.

The authorities represent the collective need for and demand on higher education and may express these expectations in different ways, either through legislation or policy plans. In most countries, institutions have a relatively wide autonomy as to how these expectations are interpreted and met. The quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies act as an interface in order to formalise the processes examining whether the institutions fulfil these expectations. The operational objectives of an agency may vary in respect to how they:

- promote procedures for improving quality;
- assess, evaluate or review educational systems, institutions, programmes and subjects, with or without formal accreditation of study programmes (at under- and postgraduate levels) and/or institutions;
- follow up and monitor the implementation of the recommendations resulting from evaluations;
- collect and process statistical data, e.g. enrolment, completion and non-completion data;
- disseminate good practice;
- advise on higher education policy developments.

Detailed objectives may be defined in a more specific and differentiated way within these areas.

319 Since the beginning of the 1990s, many activities and contributions to the debate have centred around the evolution of quality assurance in general and more specifically its role vis-à-vis public opinion. However, there seems to be a widely shared consensus about the need for an agency not only to have wide autonomy, but also to develop an explicit institutional

culture, encompassing clearly stated values and objectives, which show how the agency intends to fulfil its mandate. Western European experience would suggest that the importance of formal ownership of the agency has been over-emphasised. What is important is not so much whether the agency is owned by government or by higher education institutions, but rather whether it is free to set up its own procedures and methodologies for evaluation.

B6. New accreditation initiatives in higher education in the European Union

320 In some member states there is growing interest in the accreditation of programmes or qualifications independently of evaluation or quality assessment. In some countries, there has been a long tradition of the accreditation of academic programmes by statutory and professional bodies enabling graduates to practice a profession or to be admitted to the profession for further training. This activity is distinct from subject or programme review by the national quality-assurance agency, but the different organisations involved may collaborate in order to minimise the burden of external review on higher education institutions.

321 In other EU states, there are recent initiatives with respect to accreditation. They have different purposes, origins and focuses: in the case of the Netherlands, the possibility of universities seeking accreditation from international associations will not replace the existing quality assessment process but will allow that exercise to be more focused on the actual educational content of study programmes. Thus, the accreditation exercise will be complementary to the national quality assessment process. In Germany, a country that does not have a national quality assurance system, an Accreditation Council has recently been established. The impetus for this came from the introduction of Bachelors' and Masters' programmes of study alongside the traditional longer programmes which has resulted in the need to develop recognition arrangements for these new types of course. The main principles underlying accreditation of Bachelors' and Masters' programmes in Germany is supposed be 'diversity, assurance of quality and transparency'. Although the initiatives for accreditation are different in these countries, the outcome is the same: recognition of the qualification, for academic and/or professional purposes.

322 There is also an increasing interest in discipline-based initiatives, for example in business administration: the European Foundation for Management Development's EQUIS, programme; the Association of MBAs (AMBA); or the AACSB, the International Association for Management Education; and, in the field of engineering: the American Board for Engineering and Technology Inc. (ABET). The newly established European network of quality assurance agencies (ENQA, see above) is about to publish a status report on recent initiatives in the fields of quality assurance and accreditation and on key issues linked to the changed environment for quality assurance. ENQA will be discussing these matters further.

323 This growing interest in accreditation in some European Union member states may be interpreted as a reaction to the increased diversification and internationalisation of higher education. Accreditation is seen as complementary to existing national schemes of quality

assurance, especially for new types of providers, but also as a means to provide a general scheme fostering the comparability and transparency of European higher education.

C. Accreditation and quality in higher education in the US: an overview

324 Accreditation in the United States is a non-governmental activity carried out by private, non-profit organisations. It is not government-based. It may be institutional or programmatic. Institutional accreditation focuses on an entire college or university. Programmatic accreditation focuses on a particular field or profession such as law, medicine, accounting or nursing, more rarely in academic disciplines. It is mostly implemented by professional bodies. Self accreditation is not an option, and all institutions and programmes wanting accredited status must undergo periodic review. As such, accreditation is not compulsory, but lack of accreditation may make it more difficult for educational institutions to attract new students and funding resources and hamper their access to federal funds earmarked for student support.

325 The major elements of accreditation are similar to those of a quality-assurance review in a number of other countries. Institutions or programmes prepare self-study documents based on the standards of the accrediting organisation. A group of peers is assembled to review the self-study and to undertake a site visit to the institution or programme. The peer review culminates in a report with recommendations to the accrediting organisation to award, renew, defer or deny accreditation.

326 In the US, accreditation is a process for addressing quality assurance and quality improvement. It is a means to examine whether institutions and programmes meet standards established by private organisations – if the institutions and programmes voluntarily seek to do so. Accreditation does not result in chartering or licensing of US institutions or programmes. It is not a compliance activity.

327 “Quality assurance” generally relates to the accrediting organisation confirming that the institution or programme under review at least meets the standards or criteria laid down by the accreditor. Quality assurance serves a public need for information about higher education. When students, public officials and taxpayers ask, “Is this institution or programme accredited?” they want confirmation that at least the minimum conditions of quality are present.

328 “Quality improvement” generally relates to an accrediting organisation providing assistance to an institution or programme as it strives for excellence in various areas. Quality improvement serves the higher education community, providing a peer-driven, consultative mechanism for change that improves both institutions and programmes.

D. Developments in European and US quality systems: relevant experiences for Hungary?

329 While the characteristics of the HAC and its activities may appear to be similar in outline to those of agencies in Western Europe, there are substantial differences in practice:

- Governments in the EU have encouraged (sometimes by legislation) the development of systems of higher education evaluation, but they have generally given the agencies considerable freedom in determining their aims and functions. The agencies are not driven by a ‘compliance’ function – they do not have to check that institutions are complying with legislation nor do they have a licensing function. The major purposes of such agencies are **accountability** to stakeholders, mainly to the authorities, and **improvement** of quality at either institutional or system level, not control;
- The outcomes of evaluation do not confer a formal status – that is, the systems do not lead to accreditation;
- The evaluations are based mostly on the stated missions and goals of institutions and on the stated aims and objectives of programmes (*"fitness for purpose" approach*);
- There is increasing focus on trying to design schemes to follow up the actions taken by institutions in response to evaluation reports, although this is not yet very well developed, except in Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK;
- Reports of evaluations are in the public domain.

330 It is important to stress the wide range of quality of the US institutions across a diverse structure of degrees/qualifications throughout the country. In Europe, there is an extreme diversity of curricular and degree structures, while the range of quality seems less wide than in the US. The US accreditation system protects institutional diversity by using a criteria of “fitness for purpose” but could be considered as too permissive in many European countries.

331 Current strategies to strengthen quality improvement in the US include:

- expanded use of academic audits, redesign of accrediting standards to place additional emphasis on quality improvement and reduce quality assurance obligations;
- the restructuring of self-studies and site visits such that the accreditation experience enables an institution or programme to focus on a particular area in which it is seeking major improvements.

Introducing expanded use of academic audits in accreditation review has focused additional attention on improving the teaching, learning and review processes needed to maintain quality. Redesign of accreditation standards has reduced the investment of institutional or programme time in activities generally associated with quality assurance – fewer reports, less required evidence – and freed institutions and programmes to concentrate on developing improvement strategies for a number of institution or programme functions. Focused

accreditation reviews enable an institution or programme to devote more attention to a single area such as improving the undergraduate curriculum, distance learning or professional education in a particular field.

332 The HAC has demonstrated an interest in international networking, including the hosting of a meeting of the agencies from Central and Eastern Europe in 1997, in Budapest. Participants had agreed that mutual staff visits would provide the possibility for those involved in the practical, administrative work of evaluation to get insight into the working of other agencies (Quality Assessment in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe 1997). However, the Panel observed from the discussions and evidence in PHARE reports, that there is very little real co-operation or networking at an operational level among Central and Eastern European countries. It was noted that the HAC hosted a meeting of the INQAHE (International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) in Budapest, in May 2000. The Panel encourages this openness and recommends that the HAC and other actors involved in quality assurance and accreditation maintain an open approach to the international environment.

333 Hungary, like other CEEC countries, appears to interpret European and international contacts as being primarily those with Western European countries and the US. While the HAC is the most well-established agency in the CEEC, it could undoubtedly benefit from a much more intensive and operational contact with other CEEC countries. At the same time it could disseminate some of its own experiences among other CEEC countries. This is exactly the kind of networking that has proved so stimulating for the development of quality assurance agencies in Western Europe.

4. Options for the future: establishing a new framework for quality assurance

Introduction

400 In the present Chapter, the Panel examines international trends in higher education and the likely development of the Hungarian system and analyses how far the present standards of operation of the HAC will be suitable under the new conditions. The Panel offers alternative solutions for organising the Hungarian quality-assurance system and includes comments about the HAC and its role in this future development.

401 Options for the future of the HAC are not separate from considerations of the type of higher education system the relevant authorities wish to foster. The Panel understood that it would have features that would promote diversity in terms not only of types of institutions – colleges, universities, private and public – but also types of programmes of study, specialised, general and vocational; and that there should be increased participation.

402 Any scenario of change has to take into account a range of elements linked to:

- policy choices at the level of the higher education system in general;
- the extent to which the international environment should be taken into account;
- the role assigned to institutions of higher education and in particular the level of autonomy granted to them;
- fundamental choices about the chosen quality assurance culture and philosophy;
- the human and financial resources available to implement any chosen system.

403 The Panel is expected to formulate recommendations and options for the future of the HAC. It did not interpret this task as having to deliver a unique set of explicit recommendations for operational changes which could be implemented by the HAC (or other concerned actors) in the manner of a check-list. The Panel may provide options and hints about how to design a strategy to choose and implement them but will not provide the solutions themselves: this has to be done by the Hungarian academic community itself, together with its main stakeholders. Proposing a fixed set of legislative and/or structural and/or procedural changes for the HAC would reinforce the natural "legalistic and over-regulating" tendencies of the present system (SER, C19).

A. Trends in higher education

404 An overview of some relevant international and European trends in higher education and in particular in quality assurance, that may affect Hungarian higher education has already been provided. Questions such as the mobility of European citizens across national borders, the recognition of foreign degrees and the need to enhance the transparency of the provision of higher education will have a visible effect on European higher education systems. For

instance, the decision of the 60th Assembly of the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences of 15th November 1996 states that *“Individual higher education institution profiles in the framework of national or European higher education systems present a diversity which requires a high degree of transparency and comparison at the various levels.....This includes transparency in course programmes, courses and services, capacity, productivity and results of higher education institutions, as well as of infrastructure and facilities for applicants, students, scientists as well as for politicians and the public.”*

405 More recent developments include the Lisbon Convention, the Bologna Declaration, rumours about European accreditation agencies, and issues like handling new foreign providers, the international recognition of degrees and access to local labour markets for non-local degree holders.

406 The Hungarian higher education system has also been changing very fast and it is likely that it will continue to change in the future. The strategy defined in the 1998 Loan Agreement with the World Bank and more recent developments include changes that aim at creating a more flexible system, more responsive to societal demands, allowing for increased student mobility and choice of study contents, with an increased participation of the private sector and with the introduction of market-like mechanisms that will promote competition among institutions.

407 Hungary's commitment to the expansion of higher education is associated with an increase of the system's diversity by integrating post-secondary vocational training into higher education and establishing a four-tier system of education and qualifications (see 215). This wider spectrum of qualifications and standards means that assumptions about quality dominated by traditional academic patterns and approaches may have to be reconsidered by the relevant actors, including the HAC, to ensure the coherence of the different ongoing and planned policies.

408 The more general aim of the now completed integration process of higher education institutions is, as far as the Panel understood it, to promote a model of proactive, strategic thinking and cohesive institutions of higher education, with an increasing level of autonomy. The establishment of minimum standards and the licensing function might not be given such a high priority today as in the past because, as institutional autonomy is progressively implemented, the major concerns will shift to an increasing interest in matters of institutional strategy, curricular change, improvement of quality beyond the minimum level and links between academic quality and social relevance. In the interviews, the Panel noted that there are already some clear signs of this shift.

409 The Panel understood that the higher education institutions are supposed to develop a quality assurance strategy as a part of good governance and of a global approach to strategic management. This has direct implications for the governance of the institutions, including the quality assurance strategy, as part of their capacity to meet accountability requirements. A new quality approach based on external supportive quality audits will contribute more to the

desired model of institutional culture than an accreditation system focused strongly on programmes and contents, rather than on institutions, policies and processes.

B. The HAC and the changing higher education context

410 The HAC represents an unusual combination of an agency close to the authorities and strictly embedded in law, while being run by established members of the Hungarian academic community. The dominance of the latter in the HAC may reinforce a tendency to run the whole system as a community of individual academics, thus avoiding giving the higher education institutions a real role in the system while excluding the meaningful participation of representatives of external stakeholders.

411 In the documentation collected by the Panel there are many references to the need to “*speed up the accreditation process and permit greater freedom to higher education institutions in setting new programs, or to remove obstacles that impede the development of private higher education, such as overly rigid accreditation*”, or to design and implement “*methods of new program reviews that will promote broader degree reforms rather than reinforce an overly specialised degree structure*”, as well as recommendations that Government needs to ensure that “*implementation (of new degrees) is not delayed by lengthy accreditation procedures, as especially for institutions with approved IDP’s speedy accreditation should be made possible¹*”. This raises doubts about the adequacy of the present system to meet the future needs of Hungarian higher education. In the following paragraphs, the Panel explores this issue in more detail.

B1. Accreditation versus quality assurance

412 The review process used by the HAC has a strong component of licensing: a determination that institutions should operate according to specific laws and regulations and fulfil minimal requirements deemed necessary for their operation. The nature of many of the criteria for institutional accreditation (Accreditation Guidebook) and the focus of enquiries are more appropriate for the licensing of institutions than a quality assurance process. As such, licensing may well be considered as a valid option for Hungarian higher education, especially as a gatekeeper for new institutions or programmes. However, as Hungarian higher education institutions develop more sophisticated internal quality assurance mechanisms it will be important for the external quality assurance process to develop ways of bringing ‘added value’.

413 The HAC took from the US, as one of its starting points, the notion of perceiving a major social need for quality assessment in terms of examining whether minimum standards are fulfilled, the aim being to create a non-state mechanism for identifying minimum quality. Over time, some of the lessons of successes and limitations associated with the US quality

¹ IDP refers to the Institutional Development Plans submitted by higher education institutions when they apply for funds of the World Bank loan programme.

improvement efforts may be of value in Hungary as it expands its quality improvement efforts.

414 Indeed, HAC has tried to develop improvement-oriented activities along with a minimum standard-oriented licensing. Obviously this has not been very successful. This view is shared for instance by the International Advisory Board to the Ministry of Education in noticing that “... *in Europe the emphasis lies on assessment and that in Hungary there is not a “quality culture” yet. All European countries seek and - temporarily - find their own balance between these two aims - improvement and accountability . The question is whether Hungary has found this balance yet.*”

415 Many stakeholders feel that continuation of the present model would not be able to meet the future needs of Hungarian higher education: it is, in their view, a partial element for assessment within a strong state licensing system and simply measures compliance with minimum standards rather than combining assessment with a quality-improvement function geared to feedback. This is particularly true if the system is supposed to both expand and diversify, while keeping pace with innovation in content and modes of delivery.

B2. Diversity and innovation

416 The fact that the HAC has a strong involvement in state licensing means that there are major interests at stake, and this has led the HAC to develop a highly elaborate procedural structure (SER, C19).

417 The World Bank’s Staff Appraisal Report clearly refers to the need to remove “*overly rigid accreditation*” and to “*permit greater freedom to higher education institutions in starting new programs*”, while the International Advisory Board to the Ministry of Education also refers to the need to give incentives to the creation of innovative interdisciplinary programmes, avoiding lengthy accreditation procedures. The International Advisory Board of the HAC too has stressed the need to increase flexibility and to protect innovation in all its annual reports since its establishment in 1994:

- “*...the system must allow for flexibility for the purpose of promoting innovation and creativity. (1994)*
- *...that the HAC should take positive steps in the formulation of its criteria and rules to ensure that innovation is not handicapped. (1995)*
- *...recommend careful attention to the preservation of flexibility... thus permitting innovation and creativity.(1995)*
- *...recommend careful attention to the preservation of flexibility.(1996)*
- *...to find the balance between innovation and consolidation. The International Advisory Board welcomes the possibility of preliminary accreditation .(1997)*
- *...that the structure of the HAC committees should allow for innovative developments. Attention should be given to ways in which the HAC can assure viability of innovations.” (1998)*

418 The Panel is well aware of the efforts made by the HAC to create more flexible mechanisms and to become more open to innovation. Examples of this include allowing for the accreditation of roughly 430 different degree programmes (in a total of more than 1600 course programmes, increasing the allowance for difference between programmes from 20% to 40%, i.e., if a programme has a new content of up to 40% it remains solely the responsibility of the higher education institutions, and until April 2000 it has accepted 51% of the 606 applications for new programmes). Despite these efforts, the HAC is still perceived by many actors in the higher education system as having too rigid criteria and creating obstacles to innovation.

B3. Institutional quality assurance

419 The HAC can provide little evidence of having embarked upon the important transition from having a mode of operation geared primarily to compliance and licensing to one emphasising quality assurance and improvement. The accreditation system seems to be based on the belief that it can voice the academic minimum standards most clearly and uncontroversially if it considers itself to be completely neutral and reactive to issues of policy and the relevance of programmes. But the price for preserving this position is that the HAC can hardly handle policy issues if they crop up in their daily affairs, cannot actively address interrelationships between academic quality and social relevance where these relationships are relevant for the assessment of quality, and cannot proactively address changes in the higher education system.

420 The HAC has known since 1996 that the focus of its operations would change with the shift towards the 'ongoing quality assurance of institutions'. As yet, the HAC does not appear to have fully considered its aims and objectives in the light of what is a significant change in the context and nature of its operations, especially when combined with the institutional integration process. The Panel was presented with little evidence of any kind of strategic planning or analysis of the implications of these developments for the HAC.

421 The Higher Education Act (section 59) has, since 1996, required institutions to submit annual reports on their quality assurance systems to the HAC. The HAC intends to use these reports in the second round of institutional accreditation. To date not all institutions had complied with this requirement; where reports had been sent to the Secretariat, they had not yet been addressed. The SER (page 50), contained a brief description of the activities and plans which the HAC had either initiated or was about to introduce in this area in relation to what was hoped to be a substantial change in direction and a new mode of interaction with institutions. It was noted from the SER, that there had been a pilot project to 'prepare materials elaborating special issues of quality assurance in higher education'. However, no report or analysis of the outcomes of this was made available to the Panel until after the main visit when information about the general structure and elements of content of the reports was received. There appeared to be a focus on identifying data requirements for the report rather than any consideration of the need for a fundamental review of definitions and concepts.

422 The HAC had very recently presented some Guidelines for Quality Assurance to the institutions. The institutions had a very negative reaction regarding the HAC's proposals as was made evident to the Panel during the interviews: *"They came under the impression that the HAC is looking for detailed annual reporting and this will be very negative as everyone will be tired of the exercise. What we need is much shorter reports, neat and clear, dealing only with the major problems. Unfortunately it seems that now instead of institutional reports they also want reports from each faculty...and no one will be willing to read the whole documentation."*

423 Higher education institutions did not see any fundamental change in the traditional demands for burdensome reporting and in establishing detailed procedural regulations. As institutions will be responsible for their own quality-assurance system any external quality agency should have a mainly supportive role for the institutions, while performing periodic (not annual) quality audits to help the institutions develop their systems. However, as the HAC still keeps an accreditation role based on the annual reports, and as it seems that it is already creating a set of rules which are not very different from those used in the traditional system, the institutions are concerned that the fundamental changes in the direction of a quality assurance dominated model will not be possible.

424 Action has been taken to define the nature of the annual quality assurance reports which institutions should make – once again, a focus on procedures – and on working out evaluation criteria for the assessment of the reports. But while there were plans to organise training for persons working for Quality Assurance within higher education institutions, these were not matched by any training or development strategies for the HAC staff or members even though this had been recommended by the HAC's International Advisory Board. Given that the main criterion for appointment of staff and Committee members is subject expertise, it is difficult to see how they can provide effective support to institutions without any opportunities for the development of their professional skills. Neither did there appear to be any consideration of how this would impact on the role of the existing Institutional Committees. The Panel appreciated that plans had not yet been finalised and looked forward to learning more about progress in imminent developments.

C. Options for the future

425 There is no unique optimal combination of these factors, no kind of standard model of quality assurance systems. The choices which have to be made when designing a national quality assurance and/or accreditation system are, on the one hand, consequences of the broader policy framework for higher education and, on the other hand, intrinsic choices linked to the system culture.

426 One of the most essential strategic choices is about the main purpose of the system:

- to maintain accreditation as a main option, in the sense of licensing;
- to move completely towards improvement-oriented quality assurance;
- to combine the two approaches with a clear division of roles and focuses;
- or to combine the two purposes within a single comprehensive model.

Again, there is no unique best option. In the case of Hungary, the Panel would tend to recommend the third one (which does not preclude any organisational pattern or other choices, see below).

427 The Panel recommends that the choices made when adapting the Hungarian accreditation and quality assurance to the country's future needs should address the following issues:

- the type of self-evaluation process (and report format) to be provided by the higher education units (institutions, faculties, departments, etc.);
- the type of experts to be selected and trained;
- the format and process of reporting, including the dissemination;
- the follow-up actions;
- the type of organisational pattern for managing the system (agency);
- the type of competencies and resources needed in the agency

At the same time, more emphasis should be placed on the evaluation-related skills and practice of the HAC staff and less on discipline-based expertise, especially in regard to activities oriented to quality assurance.

428 A variety of structural scenarios for organising such a system, combining improvement-oriented quality assurance and accreditation/licensing on the basis of the third option in paragraph 426, can be envisaged:

- separating or not separating accreditation/licensing and improvement-oriented quality assurance
- separating or not separating the systems for universities and colleges.

429 Options include:

A) One agency, two separate divisions for each main set of purposes:

- Accreditation/licensing and evaluation/quality, assessment/quality audit of institutions and programmes carried on in the same agency but operating separately.
- A sub-option would be to limit licensing to new institutions/programmes/doctoral degrees (gatekeeper function) and to focus improvement-oriented quality assurance on existing institutions and/or programmes.

B) Two agencies for each main set of purposes

Separate agencies for the two sets of functions but keeping together the Colleges and Universities within the same agency:

- to emphasise the idea of a spectrum of higher education;
- to maximise potential for innovation;
- to foster credit transfer.

C) A ministerial unit for licensing, an agency for improvement-oriented quality assurance:

- A separate, slimmed-down agency for licensing/accreditation of institutions and programmes (probably subsuming some of the Ministry and HERC role) and a separate, independent Improvement-Oriented Quality Assurance Agency for the quality evaluation/assessment of institutions and disciplines in all sectors of higher education institutions.

D) An agency for licensing and specific separate agencies for each sector of higher education

- Licensing/accreditation agency and separate Improvement-Oriented Quality Assurance Agencies for the different sectors of higher education, differentiating between universities and colleges, and/or public and private institutions.

430 Within the debate on organisational pattern, the Panel recommends that the role of the HERC be reconsidered, including the division of tasks with the HAC (or any agency responsible for accreditation and/or quality assurance). The Panel is not convinced that two bodies are necessary for the approval of new programmes, especially if the HAC were to become closer to stakeholders and if the funding basis were to be re-organised. The Panel does also not recommend the separation of the responsibilities for implementing institutional and programme accreditation or evaluation.

431 In designing the new improvement-oriented quality assurance system, the recommendations of the PHARE project concerning characteristics, are commended:

- Comprehensiveness: national quality assurance system should be comprehensive and embrace all higher education in a country;
- Flexibility: make quality assurance systems more flexible and pragmatic – place more emphasis on analytical self-evaluation;
- Institutional quality assurance: the national agency should provide external assistance and support services to help higher education institutions to build up effective internal systems of quality assurance;
- Explore ways of collaboration by staff exchanges;
- Transparency: in all processes including publishing outcomes in reports;

- Developmental: providing staff development in improvement-oriented quality assurance procedures for academics and for administrative staff in higher education institutions, as well as for the staff of the national agency.

432 A stronger focus on quality assurance aimed at both improvement and accountability implies a good knowledge of and practice in the key generic factors which affect quality within a higher education institution and which should influence the development and evaluation of institutions' quality-assurance systems. This will require, for instance, greater emphasis on mission, governance, institutional management, teaching and learning methodology, and resource management.

433 There is a need for reliable management information systems in individual institutions. Effective quality management and assurance at either institutional or national level is difficult to achieve if there is a lack of data about what is going on. This need not lead to overlapping demands for information from different organisations.

434 Whatever the choices made by the Hungarian government and the main actors of higher education, the Panel, following the review of the HAC, offers the following reflections:

- a) Trust is an essential ingredient of quality improvement.
- b) Institutions are now responsible for the implementation of internal quality-assurance systems. The role of an external agency should be mainly supportive and the periodic (not annual) quality audits should mainly have the function of helping institutions to improve their internal systems. This new role is quite incompatible with imposing detailed external regulation or burdensome reporting.
- c) The Panel wonders if the HAC can make the organisational and cultural changes necessary to this new role, particularly if it keeps the licensing function. The recent decision to give the HAC a role in the process of academic promotions may have a very negative effect in developing trust among academe and the institutions.

435 Quality assurance, including the accreditation option, is not an end in itself but a means to an end, which is the effectiveness and improvement of the higher education system as a key pillar of a modern society. This being said, it has to be added that quality assurance, although essential, cannot be the only means to this end and will not, as effective as it may be, transform the higher education system in the desired way: many other means, such as funding, staff recruitment, innovation and responsiveness to established and new demands, overall capacity, diversity, and internationalisation also play an essential role.

Annex Nr. 1A

Sections to Act LXXX of 1993 and LII of 1999 on Higher Education Concerning the Hungarian Accreditation Committee⁶

Section 3

(1) A university may be established and may operate if it is capable of and suitable for in several areas of science and within areas of science in several disciplines and in several degree programmes,

- a) providing at least four-year university graduate education, and further on general and/or specialised education;
- b) carrying on scientific research, doctoral and doctor of liberal arts education (hereinafter together: doctoral education), and the awarding of the doctoral (Ph.D.) and doctor of liberal arts (D.L.A.) degree (hereinafter together: doctoral degree);
- c) conducting habilitation procedure; and if
- d) its professors possess doctoral degrees and habilitation;
- e) its associate professors possess doctoral degrees.

(2) A university must proportionally possess at the time of its foundation and at all times thereafter

- a) the full-time teaching personnel, including adequate number of professors and associate professors, necessary to supply the tasks defined in Para. (1);
- b) the objective conditions necessary for education and scientific research (building, institution library, informational background, laboratory, places for experiments and practising, equipment and other resources).

Section 4

(1) A college may be established, and/or may operate if in a discipline or in a area of art it is capable and suitable

- a) for at least a three-year college graduate education in several degree programs, and for general and specialised postgraduate education;

⁶ Includes pertinent changes pursuant to the amendments to the Higher Education Act from 1993 to 1999, and key sections or paragraphs referred to in the selected text.

- b) for pursuing research and development activities; furthermore, if
- c) the teachers of the college have doctoral degrees.

(2) The conditions laid down in Section 3 Para. (2) shall apply to colleges as appropriate.

Section 4/A

Repealed

Section 7

(1) The task of higher education institutions is

- a) to provide tertiary-level education of specialists;
- b) to prepare students for professional life through the medium of national and universal culture;
- c) to prepare students to extend and apply academic knowledge, and to generate and produce artistic and other creations and results; and
- d) to promote the development and practice of the sciences, the arts, and culture;
- e) to promote the knowledge of the mother tongue and foreign languages, to develop the skills of professional language.

(2) Higher education institutions shall perform the tasks defined in Para. (1) above by fostering teaching, further education, academic research, artistic activities and management of scientific activities, and international educational academic links, furthermore by offering scientific and other services, and by ensuring the conditions for a healthy way of life and sports.

(3) In line with the conditions defined in legal regulations, higher education institutions may achieve their educational and research tasks objectives through using benefits in money or in kind, as well as through scholarships and other means.

(4) The scope of basic tasks of state higher education institutions is determined by the established founding charter of the institution compiled according to Para (1) of the Act XXXVIII of 1992 on the administration of public revenues (hereinafter: Áht.).

(5) The modes and the degree of state financing of the basic tasks of state higher education institutions may be determined by applying regulations described in Sections 9/A-9/C of this Act.

(6) A state higher education institution may - beyond its basic, state financed tasks - conduct tertiary education of specialists - as service on defrayal of expenses, in accordance with the regulations of this Act.

(7) Non-state higher education institutions themselves determine their tasks within the framework of the founding charter laid down by the founder. The state may finance tertiary education in non-state higher education institution according to the related commission.

(8) Higher education institutions may conduct vocational higher education organised within the school-system according to the National Qualification Register in compliance with their education profile after an accreditation prescribed by this Act.

(9) Higher education institutions, in line with regulations governing vocational training, may also conduct vocational higher education organised outside the school-system as service on defrayal of expenses or as entrepreneurial activity.

(10) Higher education institutions - without damaging the fulfilment of their basic tasks - may perform for outside customers teaching, research and development work, consultancy, services and other tasks, as services on defrayal of expenses or as entrepreneurial activity.

(11) Higher education institutions - in relation to the specific educational activity conducted in the institution - may maintain public education institutions based on the opinion of the Higher Education and Research Council and by the permission of the minister of education. Regulations concerning public education shall be applied to this activity. The legal status of those participating in public education and the financing of training correspond to the legal status and financing of students attending public education institutions maintained by the local government.

Section 7/A

(1) Higher education institutions according to regulations laid down in this Act - in line with regulations concerning vocational training - may conduct accredited vocational higher education organised within the school-system, and may issue certificate appropriate for such activity, in accordance with requirements prescribed for higher level qualifications laid down in the National Qualification Register if the possibility for continuing education on college or university level is assured by the higher education institution within its own framework, and one third of the knowledge obtained in the vocational higher education may be transferred to college or university credit. The same regulations shall apply to transferring college or university credit to credits obtained in vocational higher education.

(2) Institutions may start accredited vocational higher education organised within the school-system following accreditation according to this Act.

Section 8 ***(Act LII. 1999)***

(1) Legal successor institutions shall operate in accordance with the provisions of this Section from 1 January to 31 December 2000.

(2) The institutional council shall make a decision on the following in agreement with the faculty council concerned:

- a) use of property available;
- b) transformation and/or termination of the educational, research and other organisational units of the faculty;

c) real and movable property used by the faculty.

(3) The faculty (faculties) continuing the operation of the organisation of the legal predecessor institution in the legal successor institution shall continue to operate as financial units.

(4) Financial units

a) the institutional council shall provide at least 90% of the subsidy granted as training and maintenance normative to cover the costs of maintenance and operation of financial units;

b) financial units shall dispose independently of the revenues related to the fulfilment of their tasks.

(5) Any debt incurred at or commitment assumed by the legal predecessor institution prior to 1 January 2000 shall debit the given financial unit in the legal successor institution.

(6) The conditions required for continuing education in the institution, in the accredited degree programmes and/or vocational education and accredited doctoral programmes of the legal predecessor institution, shall be provided as long as students admitted for the academic year 1999-2000 complete their studies in the degree programmes in which their studies were commenced.

(7) The faculty (faculties) continuing the operation of the organisation of the legal predecessor institution may operate in the legal successor institution as budget units with partial authority, as defined in Section 15, Para. (1), Item c) of Government Decree No. 217/1998 (XII.30.) on the Operational Order of State Finances based on the decision of the minister of finance and the minister of education. In accordance with the decision of the minister, a unit of partial authority may exercise a part of the rights due to budgetary agencies carrying out partly independent business operations pursuant to legal rules.

Section 9/H

(1) In state recognised higher education institutions established by a church as a legal entity (hereinafter: Church higher education institutions) and other non-state (foundation, private) state recognised higher education institutions (hereinafter: private higher education institutions), conditions for the fulfilment and development of tasks are provided by the maintainer, as defined in Section 7 Para. (1) of this Act, in addition to the state support as determined in said Para. The maintainer shall be responsible for ensuring the conditions for development, to which the state may grant additional support.

(2) A non-state higher education institution may fulfil the task of tertiary education of specialists as service on defrayal of expenses or as entrepreneurial activity. Private higher education institutions may, according to separate agreement, also conduct state-financed tertiary specialist training. The agreement shall state that the institution shall receive allocation based on the ascertained number of students according to the following.

a) Student Allocation shall be established for its state-financed students according to Section 9/A of this Act;

b) The higher education institution is entitled to education norm and facilities maintenance allocation determined according to Section 9/B Para. (2) of this Act, with respect to the particular professional field, on the basis of the number of students defined in the agreement;

c) The higher education institution may receive support from the allocation for programmes.

(3) For the activities or to launch activities described in Para (2), the state may provide support if the institution wishes to perform tasks whose educational content is significantly different or in addition to the one conducted in state institutions.

Section 11/A

(1) Based on the opinion of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and the position taken by the Higher Educational Research Council, training in one or more degree programmes may be pursued, with the permission of the minister of education, outside the registered main seat of the university or college, if the conditions required for launching the given degree programmes of education - connected to the institution in the case of institutions not divided into faculties and to the faculties in the case of institutions divided into faculties - outside the registered main seat are satisfied.

(2) The costs of education beyond the Hungarian border are to be taken into consideration as education outside the seat when fixing and distributing the Programme Financing Allocation.

Section 17

(1) A university professor at a state higher education institution shall be appointed and dismissed by the President of the Republic, at the proposal of the minister of education, on the basis of a submission from the institution council.

(2) The institution council will express an opinion on applicants for posts of university professor. In the event of several applicants the institution council establishes an order of preference and submits the name of a suitable candidate who received the most votes, or at all events the clear majority of the votes in the institution council.

(3) The minister of education shall refuse the submission of the proposal if infringement of the legal regulations has occurred in the course of the application procedure. Indicating his/her reasons for doing so, the minister will advise the institution council of this, and, if necessary, shall initiate the announcement of a new competition.

(4) Someone may be appointed as a university professor who, in addition to the stipulations in Section 14 Para. (1), possesses a doctoral degree and habilitation, has proved through his/her teaching, scientific or artistic activity that he/she is suitable for directing the studies, academic research and artistic work of students, participants in doctoral education, and lecturers, and is to give a lecture in a foreign language as well. An applicant possessing habilitation may be

appointed as a university professor at a college, too, on the basis of a submission from the college council.

(5) The President of the Republic may dismiss a university professor on the basis of the procedure defined in Para. (1) above, in cases defined in Act XXXIII of 1992 on the civil servants (hereinafter: Kjt.).

(6) The President of the Republic may dismiss a university professor if

a) he/she has reached the age of seventy years; or

b) he/she has seriously violated the norms of academic ethics, or for another reason has become unworthy of continuation in the office of university professor, and this has been established in the framework of a disciplinary procedure; or

c) the university professor himself/herself requests it.

(7) In the case of Items a) and c) of Para. (6) it is satisfactory only to give notice to the institution council about the proposal for dismissal.

(8) A university council, in the case of university professor appointed to a college at the proposal of the college council, may confer the title "*Professor Emeritus*" on university professors who have retired. The rights and duties accompanying the title will be regulated by the Regulations of the institution; the benefits accompanying it will be dealt with in a Government decree.

Section 18

(1) In state higher education institutions a college professor - with the application of the stipulations of Section 17 - shall be appointed and dismissed by the Prime Minister on the basis of a submission from the minister of education. In non-state higher education institutions a college professor shall be appointed and dismissed by the maintainer.

(2) Someone may be appointed as a college professor who, in addition to the stipulations in Section 14 Para. (1), possesses a doctoral degree, has proved through his/her teaching, scientific, professional and artistic activity that he/she is suitable for directing the studies, scientific and artistic work of students and lecturers, and is able to give a lecture in a foreign language as well.

(3) The stipulations in Section 17 Paras. (5)-(7) must be applied in the appropriate way for the dismissal of a college professor.

Section 48

(1) In a state higher education institution the establishment and abolition of a faculty, in non-state higher education institutions the recognition of the establishment and abolition of a faculty, shall belong to the sphere of competence of the Government. On the basis of the opinion of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (hereinafter: HAC) and at the proposal of

the Higher Education and Research Council the minister of education puts forward the proposal. The establishment and abolition of educational, research and other organisational units shall belong to the sphere of competence of the higher education institution.

(2) A list of the faculties of higher education institutions shall be contained in a Government decree.

Section 53

(1) The governing body of a higher education institution shall be the institution council.

(2) To the sphere of authority of an institution council shall belong

- a) the deciding and sanctioning of the principles governing the activity of the institution, and the accepting of the developmental plan of the institution,
- b) the framing of the Regulations of the institution, and the sanctioning of other regulations,
- c) the laying down and sanctioning of curricula,
- d) the laying down of scientific programmes, and the evaluation of research results,
- e) initiating the appointment and removal of the rector, the college rector, the director general and the financial director (general);
- f) the submission for appointment and dismissal of university and college professors,
- g) expressing an opinion on the mandating of vice rectors and deputy college director generals,
- h) expressing an opinion on the mandating of heads of teaching, research, and other organisational units,
- i) expressing an opinion on the nomination of university and college associate professors,
- j) expressing an opinion on the nomination of the secretary general and financial director (general) .
- k) proposing the establishment of a faculty, a programme for conducting accredited higher vocational education organised within the school system, the qualification requirements of a new degree programme in graduate or specialised postgraduate education, the establishment of new degree programmes, and a doctoral educational programme.

(3) The institution council shall decide on

- a) the institution's budgetary proposals, and the theory of utilisation of the budgetary allocations approved,
 - b) the acceptance of the report concerning the implementation of the budget of the year preceding the target year,
 - c) the principles governing the utilisation of the wealth resources at the disposal of the institution,
 - d) the proposals concerning the economic activity of the institution,
 - e) the evaluation of the management of wealth in respect of the development of the whole institution, especially of teaching and scientific research,
 - f) the establishment and termination of education, research and other organisational units.
 - g) the launching of specialised postgraduate education degree programmes and higher vocational education of accredited school system, and/or the approval of the launching of the latter jointly with vocational secondary schools.
- (4) The institution council's spheres of authority stipulated in Para. (2) Items c), d), f), and i) may be transferred to other bodies.

Section 56

- (1) The rector of a university shall be a university full professor, and be mandated and/or dismissed, on the basis of the decision of institution council and at the proposal of the minister of education by the President of the Republic.
- (2) Rectors of colleges with several faculties and directors general of colleges not divided into faculties shall be appointed and removed by the prime minister from among professors, associate professors and college professors through competitive applications, on the basis of the decision made by the college council, in accordance with the proposal of the minister of education.

Section 59

- (1) A higher education institution may establish a separate committee for the continuous supervision of the educational and research activities conducted there. The committee is the advisory body of the institution council, its director and members may be professors and researchers, and are elected by the council for a period of three years. The student self-governing body, by the approval of the institution council, may delegate a representative into this committee.
- (2) The committee shall evaluate the enforcement of the qualification requirements, as well as the quality of the specialised postgraduate education degree programmes launched within the

competence of the institution and of the accredited vocational higher education organised within the school system, and the existence of personal and material conditions, shall summarise the results of educational and research activities and shall submit its annual report to the institution council, together with its proposals for taking measures, annually, on a regular basis.

(3) After approval the council sends the report to the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. All data included in the report being of common concern are public.

(4) Separate bodies (committees, councils and colleges) may be established on the basis of the Regulation from among instructors, scientific researchers, students and other employees in order to fulfil the administrative, educational, scientific, organisational and other responsibilities of the institutions and faculties. The institution council and the faculty council may transfer some of its rights to such bodies on the basis of the Regulation, with the exception of those which come exclusively under the competence of the institution council, the rector, the college rector, the college director general, the faculty council or the dean and the faculty director general. The establishment, the sphere of responsibilities and the operation of the bodies shall be defined in the Regulation.

(5) In a higher education institution, according to the Regulations, a Social Council may be established as an advisory body, and its members may be representatives of the socio-economic sphere and outsider experts. Its task shall be to monitor the institutional activity to fulfil socio-economic needs, and to develop proposals in connection with the educational and research activity of the institution, and its developmental plan.

Section 63

(4) The mandate of the head of an organisational unit shall be in office for five years at the most, and, according to the stipulations of Para. (3) above, may be renewed for a further five years. For a second, and any additional, renewal, the proposal of the faculty or institution council shall be supported by a two-thirds majority votes. Under the Regulations of the institution the leadership may be resolved on the basis of rotation, too. The leadership of an organisational unit may not be performed by a person above sixty-five years of age.

Section 72

(1) The Government, in its sphere of tasks connected with higher education, shall

a) ensure the maintenance and operating conditions of the state higher education network, lay down state financed tasks for higher education development and the development of scientific research, and shall ensure the conditions necessary for the implementation of these,

b) approve in a state higher education institution, the establishment and abolition of a faculty, recognise the establishment and abolition of a faculty in the case of non-state higher education,

c) *Repealed: 1 Jan. 2000.*

d) decide the qualification requirements for undergraduate education,

- e) lay down the procedural rules governing doctoral training and for the awarding of the doctoral degree, as well as the rights and responsibilities of those participating in doctoral training and those with the doctoral degree,
- f) lay down the state benefits accompanying the “*Professor Emeritus*” title,
- g) lay down the general rules for the habilitation procedure,
- h) lay down the general rules for the organisation and operation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee,
- i) lay down the conditions for the recognition, or nostrification of foreign degrees, certificates and diplomas, and regulate the procedure directed at this,
- j) determine the annual number of state financed students who may be admitted,
- k) regulate the fees and expenses to be paid by students in state higher education institutions, and the regulations for the issuing of the student identity card and the benefits available by means of it,
- l) lay down the system of state support for students,
- m) regulate certain issues to do with foreign students at Hungarian higher education institutions, and to do with studies by scholarship holders carried on in higher education institutions abroad,
- n) regulate the procedure of the establishment and abolition of higher education institutions, and of the authorisation of their operation.

Section 74

(1) Within the sphere of authority of state tasks connected with higher education, the minister of education shall

- a) participate in the preparation and formation of state decisions concerning higher education development and policy, and make submissions in connection with this,
- b) submit to the Government the annual budgetary report and the plan for the support of higher education on the basis of the position of the Higher Education and Research Council,
- c) perform legal supervision in respect of higher education institutions, and within this sphere of authority, he may declare all institutional regulations and decisions null and void which violate legal rules, and may take measures in the interest of terminating the unlawful status;
- d) permit the launching of a degree programme on the basis of the position taken by Higher Education and Research Council (FTT) and Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC), or shall withdraw the permission;
- e) determine the qualification requirements of specialised postgraduate education on the basis of the opinion of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee,
- f) upon the request of the higher educational institution publish the launching of the specialised postgraduate education degree programmes corresponding to the qualification requirements defined in a separate decree as of the accredited vocational higher education courses within the school system entered in the National Training Register and proposed on the basis of approved professional requirements.
- g) decide on the basis of the position of the Higher Education and Research Council, the number of state financed students who may be admitted to first year in various levels of education, their distribution among institutions, and appointments that may be assigned to non-state higher education institutions,

- h) on the proposal of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, for a specified period of time, may suspend the right of certain institutions or degree programmes to conduct final examinations or to issue degrees,
- i) supervise the effectiveness and lawfulness of the utilisation of resources made available by the state, in co-operation with the Higher Education and Research Council the mechanism of supervision, and organise the publication of the findings of supervision, also giving scope to the positions of the institution examined,
- j) support the establishment and development of the international links of higher education institutions,
- k) make proposals to the Government on the tasks stipulated in Section 72, Items a)-c), and perform the tasks connected with the planning of higher education,
- l) regulate the conditions for the awarding of doctoral degrees with the distinction *Promotio sub auspiciis praesidentis Rei Publicae*,
- m) authorise the operation in Hungary of foreign higher education institutions considering the opinion of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee,
- n) regulate the organisation and basic principles of the Higher Education and Research Council,
- o) *Repealed: 1 Jan. 2000.*
- p) exercise the right of agreement following the proposal of the institution council and prior to appointment and/or removal by the head of the institution, on the occasion of the appointment and removal of the financial director (general) of a state higher education institution. The period of mandate of the financial director (general) shall be not more than five years. The financial director (general) may be appointed repeatedly on several occasions, on the basis of competitive applications.
- r) make a decision in the other cases defined in this Act.

(2) The minister of education must give reasons for deviating from the position of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee or the Higher Education and Research Council decision.

(3) In the case of Para. (1), Item h) above, the students of the higher education institution shall be entitled to sit their final examination in another higher education institution providing the same education, or, in the absence of such, in a higher education institution designated by the minister of education. The minister of education may request another higher education institution, providing the same education, in case of the termination of a higher education institution, to provide the opportunity for the student to continue his/her studies, and to finance this education.

(4) The decisions of the minister of education made within the sphere of legal competence stipulated in Para. (1), Item c) above may be contested in the courts, according to the regulations relating to the review of public administrative decisions.

Section 80

(1) For the ongoing supervision of the standard of education and scientific activity in higher education, for the perfecting of classification there, and for the supporting of quality assurance, the Government shall set up the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. One half of the members of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (15 persons) shall consist of representatives of the higher education institutions, and one half shall be representatives of the

scientific research institutes (10 persons) and professional bodies (5 persons) possessing doctoral degrees. The Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall elect its president who may not be a civil servant.

(2) The members of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and the president shall, at the submission of the minister of education, be mandated by the Prime Minister for three years. Mandates may be renewed on one occasion.

(3) An International Advisory Body (consisting of eleven people at most), may operate besides the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. Its member shall be invited by the president of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee also requesting the position of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee.

(4) At the sittings of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, one delegate with advisory rights from the National Union of Students in Hungary shall take part.

(5) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee may establish subcommittees, inviting also outside members. Foreigners and the representatives of the consumer sphere as experts may be invited onto a subcommittee on an occasional basis.

(6) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee is a legal person, an independent body in the service of higher education, its secretariat is a publicly financed body possessing full legal rights. Its operation shall be financed by Parliament from a separate part of the annual central budget.

(7) Rules governing the organisation and operation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, and the accreditation procedure, shall be established in a Government decree. The minister of education shall have legal supervisory rights over it.

(8) A list of names of the members of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee must be published in the Hungarian Official Gazette and in the Educational Official Gazette.

Section 81

(1) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall

a) approve the operation of doctoral schools and shall decide on the area of science, and more specifically, on the discipline in which the university may pursue doctoral training and may award doctoral degrees;

b) adopt a position on matters that involve the quality of higher education during the execution of this Act.

(2) At the request of the minister of education, the Higher Education and Research Council or a higher education institution, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall express an opinion concerning

a) the establishment or recognition of a higher education institution or higher education association,

- b) the establishment or recognition of a faculty,
- c) the qualification requirements,
- d) granting permission for launching a degree programme in graduate education;
- e) the doctoral or habilitation regulations of a university,
- f) the disciplines and areas of art of higher education institutions where the conditions required for launching and pursuing specialised postgraduate education and vocational higher education organised within the school system exist;
- g) the regulations of the application of the credit system,
- h) the operation of a foreign higher education institution in Hungary,
- i) the drafts of international agreements on the nostrification and equivalency of degrees.

(3) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee, at the request of the higher education institution, may participate in the nomination of the outside members in doctoral examination and habilitation committees.

(4) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall evaluate the level of education and scientific activity in the individual higher education institutions on a regular basis, but at least eight-yearly. Based on the operation of graduate and specialised postgraduate education degree programmes, furthermore, of the vocational higher education courses organised within the school system and of the doctoral schools, it shall express an opinion on the areas of sciences and areas of art in universities, and on the disciplines and areas of art in colleges where the conditions of graduate education, specialised postgraduate education, the vocational higher education courses organised within the school system and doctoral education exist. Upon the request of the minister of education, it shall proceed with the examination falling within the sphere mentioned above and indicated in the request in priority procedure, and shall make available the evaluation prepared by it. If Hungarian Accreditation Committee establishes that the higher education institution or certain degree programmes of it do not correspond to the training objective, it shall decide on the suspension of the doctoral school, and/or shall make a proposal for

- a) suspending or withdrawing of the right to organise final examinations and to issue degrees for a specified period of time, or for withdrawing state recognition in the case of non-state institutions;
- b) closing the higher education institution or withdrawing state acknowledgement;
- c) verifying the execution of necessary measures within a specified period of time.

5) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee, for the accreditation evaluation, may request the institution to hand over information concerning its educational and research activities. It shall examine the report, done according to Section 59 Para. (3), with respect to the operation and activity of the institution, and shall use it during the next accreditation evaluation of the institution.

(6) The management and administration of the affairs of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall be performed by a secretariat. The head and employees of the secretariat are civil servants, employer rights in the connection with them are practised by the president of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. The secretariat governs the national habilitation and doctoral register which are public.

(7) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall develop detailed procedures and a system of requirements concerning the methods and requirements for fulfilling tasks laid down in Paras. (1), (2), (3) and (4). It shall publicise the developed procedural order and system of requirements. The minister of education may request the Hungarian Accreditation Committee to repeat the procedure in the case of the infringement of these regulations.

Section 91

(1) A university shall be entitled to provide doctoral training, and to award the doctoral degree, in those areas of science and disciplines in which its suitability has been recognised by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee.

(2) For the organisation of doctoral training and for the awarding of the doctoral degree, a university shall establish a doctoral council: in larger universities doctoral councils may also be organised for faculties and certain departments. One member with voice but no vote of the doctoral council shall be a representative elected by students participating in doctoral training.

(3) All members of a doctoral council shall possess a doctoral degree; persons who are not employed at the university may also be members.

(4) No person shall take part in the doctoral procedure who has a relationship of subordination or dependence with the candidate, or someone from whom for whatever reason an objective judgement cannot be expected.

Section 92

(1) A doctoral degree may be obtained within the framework of participation in education organised by a university or on the basis of individual research.

(2) The conditions for obtaining a doctoral degree shall be:

- a) fulfilment of the obligations prescribed on the basis of the university's doctoral regulations, and passing the doctoral examinations successfully.
- b) evidence of independent scientific work in the form of assignments, articles or in another way,
- c) proof of the knowledge of two foreign languages at levels necessary for study in the area of science,
- d) the independent solution of a scientific task, or the submission of a doctoral dissertation or a valuable work (creation) in conformity with the requirements of the degree; and the defending the achievements in an open debate.

(3) The doctoral council of a university may grant exemption to any candidate from participation in organised education, or from participation in such training.

Section 94

(1) A central record will be kept concerning all awards and rejections of the doctoral degree. The organisation of this shall be the task of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. The record shall be open to everybody.

(2) The detailed regulations for doctoral education and for the awarding of the degree shall be established by the university's doctoral regulations.

Section 97

(1) On the basis of a successful final examination, the higher education institution shall issue a diploma for the student. The diploma shall be an official document supplied with the coat of arms of the Republic of Hungary which will testify to the successful completion of studies in the degree programme named on the diploma.

Section 110

(1) A foreign higher education institution may conduct regular graduate education, specialised postgraduate education, or doctoral education (independently, within the framework of another organisation, or in co-operation with one), and may issue foreign degrees if

- a) in the country where it is based, the institution is officially recognised as a higher education institution, and the degree issued is recognised as a higher education degree, and if it can prove this convincingly,
- b) the minister of education, taking the opinion of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee into consideration, may authorise such an operation of the higher education institution.

(2) A Hungarian higher education institution may conduct joint graduate, specialised postgraduate, and doctoral education with a foreign higher education institution insofar as the co-operating foreign higher education institution satisfies the conditions mentioned in Para (1), Item a) above. Such co-operation must be reported to the minister of education.

(3) The minister shall frame a decree concerning the nostrification and Hungarian equivalency of foreign degrees issued on education authorised by the minister of education and based on Para. (1). This decree gives an annex with the list of the institutions and programmes which the decree shall apply to.

Section 113

(2) In the maintainer's provisions in non-state higher education institutions, and in the Regulations of these institutions, provisions differing from the stipulations in Section 14, Paras. (2)-(3); Section 17, Para. (2); Section 22; Section 52, Paras. (2)-(4); Section 53, Paras. (2)-(4); Section 54, Paras. (2)-(3), Section 55; Section 56, Paras. (3)-(6); Section 57, Paras. (2)-(3); Section 58; Section 61, Paras. (3)-(4); Sections 62-65, Section 66, Paras. (3)-(6);

Section 67, Para. (1), Items b), f), j), and k); Section 83, Para. (5); and in Section 85, Para. (4) may be established. In other cases, the provisions of this Act shall apply.

Section 114

(1) Church higher education institutions offer education connected with theological and religious belief. Church universities and colleges may establish non-theological faculties and degree programmes as well. The state recognition of these degree programmes and the state financing of students according to the stipulations in Section 9/H shall be exercised on condition that all the legal requirements on the basis of state recognition shall be met.

(2) At the time of the state recognition of church higher education institutions connected with religious belief, the content of subjects connected with religious belief and theology shall not be examinable. In respect of these qualification requirements shall be determined by the church higher education institutions on the basis of the church regulations relating to them.

(3) the Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall involve the special requirements of the church in the process of the accreditation of educational subjects based on secular knowledge, that are also applicable in religious beliefs.

(4) Concerning the religious education conditions laid down in the introductory part of Section 3, Para. (1) and Item a), and in the introductory part of Section 4, Para. (1) and Items a) and c), may be disregarded.

(5) Church higher education institutions offering qualifications connected with faith may, together with the provisions in Section 113, Para. (2), in their regulations, lay down measures which differ from the provisions in Section 17, Para. (4); Section 18, Paras. (2) and (3); Section 53, Para. (1); Section 56, Paras. (1) and (2); Section 63, Para. (4); and Section 97, Para. (1).

Section 118

(1) A university doctoral title acquired on the basis of doctoral endeavours before September 1, 1984, or a university doctoral title acquired later on the basis of doctoral procedure authorised before that date, may continue to be used.

(2) A person who acquired a university doctorate (*doctor universitatis*) degree after September 1, 1984 may continue to use the “dr. univ.” abbreviation.

(3) Holders of the doctor of theology title awarded before the Act came into force in church universities may continue to use it.

(4) On the request and in judging individual cases, and in the event of satisfying the conditions laid down by the university in question, the doctoral degree may be awarded to a holder of the doctoral title mentioned in Paras. (1) and (3) above, or to a holder of the university doctorate (*doctor universitatis*) degree mentioned in Para. (2) above, by the university originally awarding the title or degree if the university is entitled to award the

doctoral degree, or if the university may establish the equivalence of it with a doctoral degree according to this Act. This procedure may not be conducted after 31 December, 1997.

(5) Insofar as a university is unable to establish the equivalence mentioned in Para. (4) above, it shall reject the request in a reasoned decision. There shall be no legal redress against a decision of rejection.

(6) To promote the right of church universities and the theological faculties of church universities to issue doctoral degrees the following transitional procedures shall be used:

- a) the head or maintainer of the church university shall make a proposal to the Hungarian Accreditation Committee to establish an ad hoc committee, consisting of internationally recognised, Hungarian and foreign, members possessing at least a doctoral degree, which shall prepare the determination of the re-qualification and equivalency of the existing church university doctoral degrees,
- b) the ad hoc committee shall start its work with the approval of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee,
- c) the ad hoc committee shall send the regulations including the principles and procedure of re-qualification to the Hungarian Accreditation Committee to adopt a position,
- d) the ad hoc committee shall terminate its work by 31 August 1999,
- e) the Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall act on Section 81, Para. (1) of this Act, based on the position of the ad hoc committee.

Section 120

(1) An art university may only be established and operated if it is capable and suitable to fulfil the contents of Section 3, Para. (1), Items a) to e) at least in two degree programmes in an area of art.

(2) In respect of art subjects taught at higher education institutions, it shall be possible to depart from the requirements determined in Section 3, Para. (1), Item d) and e); in Section 4, Item c); in Section 14, Para. (1), Item a); and in Section 20, Paras. (1)-(2). In this case, the basis of judgement shall be the artistic performance of the person continuing his/her education.

(3) At universities of arts, faculties of art, and in the art majors of universities, doctoral education may be substituted by [*mester*] education ending in the Doctor of Liberal Arts degree; the period of the said education shall be at least two years.

(4) Within the framework of habilitation conducted at universities of arts, the applicant must give proof of his/her artistic creative ability, besides of his/her educational and lecturing abilities.

(5) Divergently from stipulations in Section 83, Para. (1) Item a) of this Act, an art student may be admitted to the full-time education of universities and colleges of arts prior to taking the matura examination - in the area of arts determined with the consent of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee.

Section 122

(1) Following the coming into force of this Act - by June 30, 2000 at the latest - the first accreditation evaluation must be done in respect of all higher education institutions. The order of the institution accreditation shall be determined by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee.

(2) If it is proved in the course of the accreditation procedure that a higher education institution does not meet the requirements contained in Section 3, Para. (1) and in Section 4, Para. (1), and fails to fulfil the above requirements by 30 June 2002 at the latest, it may not continue to operate as an independent higher education institution following the expiry of the above deadline, may not issue degree certificates recognised by the state and its training activity may not be financed by the state. The maintainer shall ensure the reorganisation or termination of the institution.

(3) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall publicise the accreditation requirements. The accreditation procedure may only be conducted based on the publicised requirements.

Section 123

(1) In respect of Section 3, Para. (1), Item d), university full professors appointed before the coming into force of this Act shall be regarded as having habilitation, and those universities shall be viewed as universities conducting habilitation that were appointed to this.

(2) The provisions in Section 14, Para. (2) shall not affect the public sector employee employment rights of the part time employed, and teaching assistants and assistant professors appointed for an indefinite time before the coming into force of this Act, however institutions shall initiate their transformation to public sector employees employed for a definite time by agreement.

(3) In respect of college professors appointed before the coming into force of this Act stipulations in Section 4, Para (1) Item c) shall not be applied.

(4) Those possessing doctoral degree, or a degree equivalent to it, may be employed for a definite time as university assistant professors, and based on educational-research experience of at least five years may be employed for an indefinite time as university associate professors.

(5) The higher education institution shall, in its Regulations, lay down the working time for teaching staff and scientific researchers, and within the framework of this, the spheres of educational and other tasks to be performed regularly, and their conditions.

(6) Higher education institutions shall issue the normal annual holiday of teaching staff primarily in the summer break; in the academic year they shall provide it only in deserving cases, or in periods laid down in the Regulations of the institution.

(7) In those professions in which the accredited doctoral or [*mester*] education is not conducted, divergently from stipulations in Section 18, Para (1) Item c); Section 18, Para. (2) and Section 20, Para. (2) of this Act, the conditions for appointing a college professor, or for issuing the honorary college professor title, are the creative professional practical activity, or artistic creative activity, instead of the doctoral or Doctor of Liberal Arts degree.

(8) From the time of coming into force of this Act, in higher education institutions, faculties or majors of arts, for the habilitation, for the appointment as college professor, or for the appointment as university associate professor, the applicant must possess Doctor of Liberal Arts degree, or artistic prize described in Section 25, Para. (6) of the Act XXVIII of 1996 on public sector employee rights, or foreign artistic prize shall be recognised as equivalent to this by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. To appoint in this way could be established until the appropriate institutional accreditation.

(9) New courses may be launched in the specialised postgraduate education degree programmes established in higher education institutions prior to 1 September 1996 until the coming into force of the qualification requirements of the specialised postgraduate education degree programmes, but in the academic year 2001/2002 at the latest. The professional qualification certified by the specialised postgraduate education diplomas shall be equivalent, from the respect of holding a position and practising a job (activity), to the professional qualification that may be obtained at the specialised postgraduate education courses defined in this Act.

Section 124

(1) Honorary university professors and honorary associate professors may, in accordance with the provisions of the university Regulations, continue to use their titles, and, insofar as they accord with the provisions in Section 20, may be awarded the title of university privatdocent.

(2) Honorary college professors and honorary college associate professors may, in accordance with the provisions of the college Regulations, continue to use their titles, and, in accordance with the provisions in Section 20 and in the Regulations, a college may confirm the use of the titles of honorary college professors, and may grant the title of honorary college professor to a honorary college associate professor.

Section 125

(1) With exceptions included in certain places, this Act shall come into force on September 1, 1993.

(2) Student expenses determined for the year 1996 under this Act shall be considered tuition fee in respect of personal tax exemption.

(3) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee shall operate as the legal successor of the National Accreditation Committee.

(4) Higher education institutions may use the coat of arms of the Republic of Hungary on their buildings, and on all their official document and certificates.

(5) Higher education institutions shall elaborate the amendment to their Regulations by 30 June 1997 (Section 51). Until the adoption of the Regulations, previous Regulations shall be valid with the exception of rules that are contrary to this Act.

(6) The organisation described in Section 67/A of this Act shall be established by 31 December 1996.

(7) The deadline for the accreditation of the education pursued outside the main seat of universities and colleges, as indicated in Section 11/A, Para. (1), shall be 30 June 2002.

Annex Nr. 1B

Government decree Nr. 66/1997. (IV. 18.) on the organisation and operation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee and the fundamental rules of the accreditation process⁷

Authorised by para. (7), Section 80 of Act Nr. 80 of 1993 on Higher Education (HEA), the Government orders the following:

The legal status of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee

1. § (1) The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (hereinafter: HAC) is an independent body created by the Government for the tasks identified in § 81 of the HEA.
- (2) Pursuant to para. (7), § 80 of the HEA, the legal supervisory rights over the HAC shall be exercised by the Minister of Culture and Education (hereinafter: the Minister). In his powers of legal supervision, the Minister shall examine whether the HAC's composition, organisation, operation and decision-making mechanism comply with the laws and regulations as well as with the HAC's own rules of organisation and operation., the legal supervisory power shall extend to the enforcement of the detailed rules of procedure and set of requirements as established based on para. (7), § 81 of the HEA.
- (3) Acting in his legal supervisory powers, the Minister shall call on the HAC to discontinue any infringement or violation by a specified deadline. The HAC shall examine the merits of the instruction and notify the Minister within the specified deadline of its position or disagreement.
- (4) The Minister's legal supervisory powers shall not apply to the HAC's evaluation of the quality of higher education institutions. Such statements can only be reviewed by the Minister on the grounds described in clause (2).

The duties of the HAC

2. § (1) In accordance with the first sentence of para. (1), § 80 of the HEA, it is the HAC's duty to regularly and continuously check the standards of the instruction and scientific/scholarly activity in higher education, to perform evaluations, and to support quality assurance activities in higher education institutions.
- (2) Except for cases identified in para (1), § 114 of the HEA, the HAC is entitled to examine and evaluate any public and non-public higher education institution in the Republic of Hungary in matters belonging to its official duty pursuant to the HEA.
- (3) In the course of performing its tasks as detailed in § 81 of the HEA, the HAC shall elaborate a position on the minimum requirements to be enforced in accreditation proceedings. The requirements shall be discussed with the profession and then made public.
- (4) On the basis of the published positions and the professional requirements in accordance with para. (5) § 28 of this decrees, the HAC shall perform tasks in preliminary accreditation as well as the accreditation of programs and institutions.

⁷ A new government decree on the HAC [Nr. 199/2000. (XI.29.)] is in force from 7 December, 2000.

3. § (1) Based on the description of its duties in clauses a), b) and h), para. (2), § 81 of the HEA, the HAC shall be active in the preliminary accreditation of institutions.

(2) In the course of preliminary accreditation, acting in its duty as defined in clauses a) and b), para. (2), § 81 of the HEA, the HAC shall take a position on whether the higher education institution, faculty or association to be established will possess the conditions, in fact or at least potentially, for the institution or its programs to be accredited.

(3) When acting in the preliminary accreditation of an integration, the HAC shall examine whether it is possible to secure for the new institution to be established the conditions laid out in clauses b) and c), para. (3), § 12/A of the HEA. The HAC shall examine preliminary accreditation of an integration in an abridged process and move to form a position on the issue at its next session.

(4) In examining the preliminary accreditation of a faculty, the HAC shall decide whether the training and research conducted or planned by the institution warrants organisation in the format of various faculties.

(5) Acting in its duty of preliminary accreditation as described in clause h), para. (2), § 81 of the HEA, the HAC shall examine whether

a) the institution applying for a license in Hungary is accredited abroad and authorised to issue a diploma acknowledged by the state there, and further whether

b) the training to be undertaken and its accreditation meet Hungarian training and professional requirements or if the standards thereof are at least comparable to those of our own.

4. § (1) In the area of program accreditation, the HAC shall

a) *decide on the launching of doctoral and DLA programs⁸*;

b) advance an opinion on whether the training requirements elaborated for basic training and specialised further training in the desired new study program have the content and the standards that could justify the launch of a new major discipline;

c) advance an opinion on whether the quality conditions in basic training *and specialised further training* obtain for granting license for the new study program, and whether they comply with training and professional requirements;

d) *advance an opinion on whether specialised higher education programs in the accredited school system possess the quality requirements, and on the launch of new programs.*

(2) In the area of program accreditation, the HAC shall examine whether there are quality assurances for launching or maintaining programs, which guarantees are set down as the condition for accreditation in the general position of the accreditation committee and by professional considerations.

(3) Program accreditation may be requested and granted for a specific period of time, as well as made subject to certain conditions. For a program to be accredited for a specific period of time, as a prerequisite the applicant institution shall present a contract to the effect that in the event the institution fails to meet the final accreditation requirements, another higher education institution has undertaken to transfer students admitted to the study program and to continue their instruction in the same discipline.

(4) The fact and duration of the accreditation for a specific period of time shall be announced at the time of granting the license for the new study program, as well as published in the "Higher Education Admissions Report." When the accreditation is valid for a specific period of time, extension of the accreditation for the rest of the instruction can only be granted if the institution can certify the prescribed requirements for the remaining part of the training.

⁸ Parts of the decree which are overruled by the HEA of 1999 are hereinafter shown in italics.

(5) When the accreditation is granted for a specific period of time, that is when it is not valid for the entire period of the given program, only those parts of the program shall be launched or receive acknowledgement and financing by the state that are commensurate with the duration of the accreditation.

(6) When the study program to be launched in accordance with clause c) of para. (1) is a new study program that did not exist before, then the accreditation for the launch will be subject to an examination of the training requirements in the given study program. In such cases the accreditation examination shall address the question whether the substance of the planned instruction really justifies the launch of a new study program or whether it could be conceived of as part of another, existing major discipline.

(7) After the first round of institutional accreditation process has been concluded in the entire higher education system, a comparative accreditation of same study programs shall be completed.

5. § (1) In accrediting institutions pursuant to para. (4), § 81 and § 122 of the HEA, the HAC shall form a position on whether the instruction and research at the given higher education institution comply with the set of requirements for higher education institutions as set down in the HEA, in particular in Sections 3 and 4, as well as with the quality requirements defined in the general position of the HAC as the condition for the accreditation of programs and institutions.

(2) Once the government decrees on the introduction of the credit system has taken effect, the institutional accreditation procedures shall include the examination of the equivalence between the credit system and the credits themselves.

6. Pursuant to clause b), para (1), § 81 of the HEA, the HAC shall take a position

a) on issues pertaining to the quality of education as they are revealed by the specialists in charge of quality assessment and accreditation;

b) on its interpretation during its procedures of concepts set down in § 124/A of the HEA and of concepts not listed there but of consequence from the point of view of accreditation;

c) on issues in which higher education institutions seek its opinion with respect to its quality assessment or to their own quality assessment and assurance protocols to be adopted.

(2) According to the rules governing the general statements of the HAC, positions on the interpretation of concepts under clause b), para. (1) shall be disclosed to the public.

7. Pursuant to clause c), para (2), § 81 of the HEA, the HAC shall take a position on every qualification requirement that entails the award of a higher education degree.

8. § (1) *Upon request by the higher education institution, the HAC shall take a position on higher specialised programs in the accredited school system that can count as credit in the higher education institution, on the suitability of the program for accreditation and admission to the higher education institution.* The HAC shall elaborate a special procedural protocol and set of requirements for quality assurance and control in higher specialised training in the accredited school system.

(2) *The HAC shall form its opinion on the submitted higher program in the accredited school system in view of the specific features of the specialised training in question, giving special consideration to creditability toward a basic higher education degree, as well as to the question whether the institution wishing to launch the program possesses the staff and material assets necessary for the training.*

(3) *Pursuant to para. (2), § 19 of Government decrees Nr. 45/1997. (III. 12.) on higher education in the accredited school system, the HAC shall be entitled to consultant's fee for evaluating applications for higher training programs and their launch in the accredited higher education system. The fee is payable to the treasury account of the HAC's Secretariat.*

9. § A The HAC's collaboration, under para. (3), § 81 of the HEA, in nominating outside members to the doctoral examination and habilitation committees in a higher education institution shall not mandate the higher education institution to actually invite the members recommended by the HAC.

10. § (1) The HAC may examine the standards of doctoral training and habilitation either by institution or by discipline. If the institution fails to change, by the mutually agreed deadline, its practices objected to by the HAC in its specialist evaluation, the HAC is entitled to reverse its former accreditation decision. The HAC shall disclose any such decision to the public in the usual manner.

(2) The activities of the HAC described under para (1) shall not extend to nullifying the decisions of universities pertaining to matters of the doctorate or habilitation, or other personnel decisions involving the quality of the work performed by faculty. The HAC shall inform those with a submission of such nature that legal redress is possible through the Minister's powers of legal supervision.

11. § A As ordered by para. (6), § 118 of the HEA, the HAC shall co-operate in the process of ensuring the right for theological universities and the theological faculties of ecclesiastic universities to award doctoral degrees.

12. § A The HAC shall contribute to defining those art study programs to which students may be admitted prior to graduating from high school under para (5) § 120 of the HEA. The position elaborated by the HAC on this matter shall be disclosed as a general position.

13. § A The HAC shall form a position on those art prizes and awards from abroad which para. (8), § 120 of the HEA defines as being equivalent to Hungarian art awards that can be accepted in lieu of a D.L.A. degree for appointment to habilitation or a college or university professor's or docent's position, until such time as the accreditation process is completed for the entire institutional system.

14. § A Pursuant to the provisions of the HEA, the HAC shall run, through its Secretariat, a national register of habitation and doctoral degrees. In order to keep the record up to date, the HAC shall be promptly notified of any doctoral degrees awarded and habilitation decisions made. The protection of personal rights in connection with the record of personal data shall overseen by the HAC President, as provided by Act Nr. 63 of 1992 on the protection of personal data and the disclosure of data of public interest.

The accreditation process

15. § (1) On the manner and requirements of performing its duty under the HEA and this decrees, the HAC shall elaborate a detailed procedural protocol and a set of requirements.

(2) The protocol shall provide for the processing times by case type—which may not exceed six weeks for program accreditation—, the terms of suspending the process and the consequences of refusal. The protocol shall be designed in a way that observes the criteria of speediness, simplicity and professionalism for the process.

(3) Except for institutional accreditation and processes with special dispatch that are requested by the Minister, accreditation applications shall be evaluated in the order received.

(4) The HAC shall not be mandated to complete a process with special dispatch, as defined by the Minister under para (4), § 81 of the HEA, unless the Minister has initiated it for reasons of higher education policy of national significance, and has provided satisfactory justification for the request. No request by institutions for a process with special dispatch shall be granted.

(5) The HAC shall review its protocol and requirements on a regular basis, but no less frequently than once every three years. Any changes in the protocol or requirements shall be disclosed to the public.

16. § (1) Positions shall be defined and construed by the HAC as the joint statement of an official body.

(2) From time to time, the body may transfer its right to form a position to one of its specialised committees, in which case the HAC shall be notified of the evaluation. In case of disagreeing, the HAC as a body is entitled to revise the position. No position shall be disclosed before the HAC has been informed.

(3) In preparing for a decision, it is possible to invite the HAC's President, a professional member, the chairman or member of one of its professional committees, without transferring the right to make the decision.

17. § (1) Applications under clauses a) through c), para. (3), § 76 of the HEA, which must be evaluated both by the HAC and the Higher Education and Research Council (hereinafter: HERC), as well as applications under clauses a) through d) and h), para. (2), § 81 of the HEA, shall be submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Education (hereinafter: MCE). The MCE shall examine the applications from the point of view of the formal requirements published by the HAC, calls on the applicant to supply any missing information, and shall not forward any application to the HAC unless it meets all the formal requirements in full.

(2) The HAC shall evaluate accreditation applications according to the protocol and accreditation requirements published no later than 90 days prior to the receipt of the applications, unless the applicant requests in writing, at the time of submission, that the application be evaluated according to a more recent protocol.

(3) Should there be a change, after the application has been submitted, in the basic legal and regulatory background of the accreditation in such a way that would make it impossible to evaluate the application without taking it into account, the applicant shall be notified and an appropriate deadline, but no longer than sixty days, shall be allowed for the applicant to prepare for the new requirements and to supply any missing information. In the absence of this step the applicant shall not be put in a disadvantaged position due to the denial of the application.

(4) The applicant shall be notified 8 days prior to the date of the accreditation decision. Upon request, the leader of the applicant institution shall be granted an interview.

(5) Before the final decision is brought in the accreditation of the institution, a written statement by the leader of the institution shall be submitted to the HAC session.

18. § A The HAC shall justify its position in such detail that make it possible to ascertain the grounds for the position or decision.

19. § (1) The official position of the HAC shall not be contested unless the HAC has violated the rules of procedure or failed to enforce the requirements. The official position of the HAC may be contested by higher education institutions only.

(2) Submissions objecting to the violation of the rules of procedure or the requirements shall be addressed to the Minister and submitted to the President of the HAC, who shall be liable to forward it to the Minister.

(3) In cases described under para. (2) and para. (2), § 1 of this decrees, the Minister is entitled to call on the HAC to repeat the process.

(4) Instructed in this way by the Minister, the HAC shall examine the case on the merits and bring a new decision.

(5) If the legal supervision of the accreditation process finds that a rule of procedure has been violated, and proves beyond a doubt that the denial of the application resulted from this

violation, and subsequently if the accreditation committee revises its earlier decision, then the accreditation shall be considered granted as of the time of the original, negative decision.

(6) The HAC shall notify the Minister of its new resolution with a justification attached.

(7) In matters where the HEA authorises the Minister to bring a decision against the HAC resolution, the Minister shall publish such decision together with a justification. The justification shall invariably refer to the point of law which provide the grounds for diverging from the HAC resolution.

20. § (1) In connection with its operation as described in paras. (1) and (2), § 122 of the HEA, in arriving at its qualification, the HAC shall request the institution's self-assessment, may request information on instruction and scientific research at the institution, and shall review annual reports prepared in accordance with para. (3), § 59 of the HEA. It shall also dispatch a group of specialists to the institution to collect information on the spot.

(2) 30 days prior to such visit, the institution shall be notified of the members comprising the group of specialists. The leader of the institution has 15 days to file a conflict of interest objection in connection with the members with the HAC's President, together with an explanation.

(3) In the course of institutional accreditation, the HAC shall run minutes of any problems found, which will inform its accreditation decision. The HAC shall disclose the requirements for accreditation to the institution and elaborate, in conjunction with and for the institution, a work program (action plan) complete with a deadline. Upon the expiration of the deadline, specialists appointed by the HAC shall verify the implementation of the work program (action plan). Should the institution fail to complete the requirements by the given deadline, the HAC shall move to recommend the enforcement of legal consequences as defined in clauses a) and b) of para (4), § 81 of the HEA.

21. § The HAC shall invariably notify both the Minister and the institution in question of any position taken on the accreditation. The institution is entitled to have its own opinion on the HAC's position published in the same forum. The comments by the institution shall be confined to the material issues of the matter.

22. § In matters not settled by this decrees and in the detailed rules of procedure, the HAC shall act as described in its rules of organisation and operation.

Provisions concerning the members and official operation of the HAC

23. § (1) The HAC is a body of thirty members, each of whom shall hold at least a doctoral (Masters) degree. Each member has the right to vote at the official sessions of the HAC. The right to vote and the obligations entailed by membership in the HAC are not transferable.

(2) In order to ensure equal representation for all disciplines, the HAC shall invite other members with the legal status of a consultant.

24. § (1) The HAC shall be set up in such a way that can guarantee the uninterrupted performance of duty and the regular rotation of members. Steps shall be taken to ensure that at least half of the membership is replaced every three years and that disciplines, their branches, various types of institutions and region have an approximately proportionate representation in the composition of the HAC.

(2) Upon being first elected pursuant to this decrees, the HAC shall be appointed for 3 years. No mandates shall be extended for those who have been members all along of the National Accreditation Committee and the HAC as the legal successor. Mandates given mid-cycle shall not be effected by the reelection of the HAC.

(3) Half of the HAC's membership is delegated by higher education institutions. To these seats members are delegated, based on the nomination of the higher education institutions' institutional councils, by the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, the General Directors' Conference and the Chair of Art University Rectors.

(4) 10 members of the HAC come from scientific research institutions. To these seats members may be delegated by the Hungarian Academy of Science and—concurring with non-academic research institutions—by the President of the National Committee for Technical Development.

(5) 5 members of the HAC come from professional bodies, which nominate members upon request by the HAC Secretariat. Chambers established by law shall be especially invited to designate nominees. The members of the nominating organisations shall hold a joint meeting to decide on the delegates.

(6) The list of delegates shall be forwarded to the Minister by the head of the HAC Secretariat. Delegates shall make statements to the effect of accepting the nomination and not being influenced by conflict of interest. After examining any conflict of interest regarding HAC members and the minutes taken at the election, the Minister shall move to recommend the Prime Minister to confer the mandates.

25. § (1) The following persons are excluded from membership in the HAC and all of its professional committees: committee members of the HERC, the Credit Council or the Basic Programs in Higher Education Development (BPHEd); employees at the secretariats of these bodies; members of the Curatorium of Applications in Higher Education; employees of the Bureau of Higher Education Applications; members of any other curatoriums established to evaluate higher education activities; public servants.

(2) Conflict of interest rules regarding HAC membership shall be enforced in the mandating process.

(3) No HAC member shall have the right to vote on HAC decisions who is in an employment or other contractual relation involving material remuneration with the institution concerned, or who cannot be expected to pass impartial judgement in the matter for any other reason.

(4) Conflict of interest objections concerning a person's participation in the accreditation process shall be submitted to the HAC President, who shall request the HAC for a decision upon disagreeing with the objection.

26. § (1) Membership in the HAC shall terminate when

- a) the mandate expires;
- b) the member resigns;
- c) the member deceases;
- d) the member is relieved of duty;
- e) conflict of interest arises.

(2) Relief of duty shall be recommended by the HAC when the member has failed, without substantial reason, to contribute to the work of the committee for half a year.

(3) Whenever it becomes necessary—based on points b), c), d) or e) of para (1)—to mandate a new member during the regular term, the HAC President shall make a recommendation to the Minister, in agreement with the nominating organisation representing the field in question.

27. The President and members of the HAC shall receive a fee. The fees and the terms of payment are fixed in the HAC's rules of organisation and operation. The amount of the fees shall be commensurate with the work performed.

28. § (1) The HAC has at least one professional committee for each discipline, the chairman of which may be either a full right member of the HAC or one with advisory status.

HAC decisions are prepared by the professional committees or ad hoc committees. Outside specialists may be invited to help elaborate general statements of position.

(2) Professional committees shall be put together in such a way as to have a reasonable proportion of specialists working in areas other than higher education. Foreign specialists may be invited to participate in the work of the professional committees.

(3) In exercising its right to evaluate higher vocational training in the accredited school system, the HAC shall set up especially composed professional committees, which shall include professionals in the appropriate field.

(4) The general positions—which reflect the professional criteria for the accreditation of programs and institutions and are worked out in collaboration with all of the professional committees and outside specialists—shall be elaborated and disclosed to the public no later than by the end of the first year after the HAC was set up by authority of this decrees and commenced its operation.

(5) In the ongoing upgrade of accreditation requirements consideration shall be given to the professional expectations of users in connection with the training.

(6) The HAC shall ensure the appropriate professional preparation and further training for the professionals participating in the accreditation process. In such training the HAC shall primarily rely on its own international specialists but may also invite other foreign specialists as needed.

(7) Specialists and members of the ad hoc committees shall receive a fee in consideration of their work. The fees and the terms of payment are fixed in the HAC's rules of organisation and operation.

29. § (1) The President of the HAC shall be elected from among the members with secret ballot, for a term identical with that of the committee. The President shall receive the mandate from the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the Minister.

(2) The mandate of the President requires a majority vote of HAC members. In the second round only those three may run for the office who have received the highest number of votes; in the third, only the two with the most.

(3) The HAC President is responsible for leading and organising the work of the committee, as well as for its representation toward other bodies, institutions and organisations.

(4) Official information on the matters pending before the HAC can only be given by the President, who also has the sole authority to grant permission to inspect documents. It is his duty to refuse permission when that would infringe on the rightful interests of the institution applying for accreditation.

(5) The President of the HAC exercises employer's rights over the staff of the Secretariat. He may request members of the HAC and its committees to perform special tasks, and he may invite outside specialists to perform or organise certain assignments.

(6) The President shall be in charge of having the quality requirements elaborated for the accreditation of programs and institutions, to have them published pursuant to para. (3), § 122 of the HEA, as well as of disclosing any rules of procedure regarding accreditation that are not provided for in this decrees.

(7) The procedure of replacing the President with a deputy shall be set down in the HAC's rules of organisation and operation.

30. § (1) Side by side the HAC, and International Advisory Board (of up to eleven members) shall be set up (hereinafter: IAB). The members are invited by After concurring with the HAC, the President invites the members to the board, bearing in mind suitability requirements for the tasks identified in para. (2).

(2) The foremost function of the IAB is to assess and evaluate the HAC's policy of operation, rules of procedure, its accreditation requirements and practices, with special regard to the harmony with international guidelines.

(3) IAB members shall be informed of the HAC's work on a regular basis. The Board shall convene meetings as necessary but no less frequently than once a year.

The HAC's Secretariat

31. § (1) The Government creates a Secretariat to take care of the administrative work of the HAC. The Secretariat is supervised by the Minister. The Secretariat in addition to body with full authority, funded from the central budget.

(2) The head of the Secretariat is appointed to and relieved from duty by the Minister in open public competition for the position. The mandate is also issued by the Minister, in agreement with the HAC President. The relief from duty of the head of the Secretariat is subject to the approval of the HAC as a joint body.

(3) In order to ensure speedy processing of state administrative tasks in connection with accreditation, the head of the HAC's Secretariat shall co-operate with the competent department of the MCE. The co-operation also involves the mutual supply of information.

(4) Based on the recommendation of the head, the Financial Director of the Secretariat is appointed and relieved from duty by the Minister.

(5) Employer's rights over the Secretariat's employees shall be exercised by the HAC President in accord with the head of the Secretariat.

32. § (1) The HAC's draft budget and its budget report are approved by the HAC as a body. In the budget the operational funds for the Secretariat must be treated separately from the funds earmarked to pay fees.

(2) The head of the Secretariat has the right to undertake obligations against the HAC's budget, while the deputy Financial Director has the right to countersign.

(3) Any commitment amounting to over 5% of the HAC's annual budget requires the President to countersign.

Provisional and concluding stipulations

33. § (1) This decrees shall become effective on the 8th day following its announcement.

(2) The procedure of setting up the HAC as a legal successor of the National Accreditation Committee shall be concluded within two months after the effective date of this decrees. The starting date of the three-year mandate shall be the date specified in the Minister's letter of mandate.

(3) Until such time as the newly elected HAC can begin functioning, pending matters shall be entrusted to members of the HAC mandated prior to the effective date of this decrees. For this transitional period the members and President of the HAC shall be appointed by the Minister.

(4) The list of members shall be published in Magyar Közlöny (*Hungarian Bulletin*) and Művelődési Közlöny (*Culture Bulletin*).

(5) The HAC, elected in accordance with this decrees, shall prepare its rules of organisation and operation in 4 months after the founding session. The rules shall be adopted by the HAC as a body and disclosed to the public.

(6) The HAC shall publish its rules of procedure and other announcements in the periodical Akkreditációs Értesítő, the *Accreditation Bulletin*. In addition, it shall publish

accreditation requirements and its position on the accreditation of institutions in *Művelődési Közlöny (Culture Bulletin)* as well.

(7) Until such time as the accreditation requirements have been published, the HAC shall act in accordance with the requirements it has so far evolved in practice.

(8) Until such time as the treasury account has been opened for the HAC's Secretariat, fees for the evaluation of vocational training programs and their launch in the accredited school system shall be remitted on the treasury account of the House of Professors. The proof of payment shall be attached to the accreditation petition.

Resolution Nr. 54.975/1997. MKM of the Minister of Culture and Education on the founding charter of the Secretariat of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee

Authorised by para. (1), § 88 of the severally amended Act Nr. 38 of 1992 on the state budget, and by para. (1), § 31 of Government Decrees Nr. 66/1997. (IV. 18.) on the organisation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, its operation and the rules of the accreditation process, the Minister of Culture and Education, in agreement with the Minister of Finance, defines the founding charter of the Secretariat of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (hereinafter: the Institution) as follows:

1. The name of the Institution: Secretariat of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. Abbreviated name: HAC Secretariat. Name in English: Hungarian Accreditation Committee, Secretariat.
2. The founder of the Institution: the Government of the Republic of Hungary.
3. The Institution is supervised by the Minister of Culture and Education
4. Institution headquarters: 1146 Budapest, Ajtósi Dürer sor 19-21.
5. The legal status of the Institution: a fully authorised body funded from the central budget, with independent management of the assets entrusted to it by the treasury.
6. *The business management of the Institution: the funds required for operation are secured by the National Assembly as part of the annual central budget, from the chapter of the Ministry of Culture and Education. The annual budget shall be compiled according to the rules applying to fully authorised budgetary bodies with an independent management of assets, and approved by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (hereinafter: HAC) as a body. In the budget the operational funds of the Institution shall be treated separately from the remuneration of HAC members and specialists.*

Further funds for operation shall come from the revenues after services prescribed by the severally amended Act Nr. 80 of 1993 on higher education (hereinafter: the HEA) and by Government Decrees Nr. 66/1997. (IV. 18.) on the organisation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, its operation and the basic rules of the accreditation process, which revenues shall be used only to cover the expenses associated with the service (consulting services).

In exercising its duties, the Institution shall have at its disposal the assets invested in the House of Professors by its legal predecessor, the National Accreditation Committee, as well as property created by the investments (immaterial goods and assets) and leasing rights. The available assets shall be managed and used as required for the Committee's performance of duty and in observation of relevant regulations.

The head of the Institution has the right to undertake obligations against the HAC's budget, while the deputy Financial Director has the right to countersign. Any commitment amounting to over 5% of the HAC's annual budget requires the President to countersign.

Rights pertaining to undertaking obligations, remittances and countersignatures are contained in the rules of organisation and operation.

7. The basic function of the Institution on assignment by the Government:

The Institution performs secretarial work for the HAC in the administration, preparation, organisation and implementation of its tasks as defined in § 81 of the HEA and Government Decrees Nr. 66/1997. (IV. 18.) on the organisation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, its operation and the basic rules of the accreditation process. The

Institution runs the national habilitation and the national doctoral records, both of which are public.

According to TEÁOR:

7510 Other research and service activity

8059 Other activity complementing education (SZJ Nr. 165900: Other services complementing education)

8. The Institution's professional activity is overseen by the HAC President.

The employees of the Institution are public servants.

The head of the Institution is appointed to and relieved from duty by the Minister in open public competition for the position. The mandate for the higher post (that of the General Secretary) is also issued by the Minister, in agreement with the HAC President. His relief from duty is subject to the approval of the HAC as a joint body.

The Financial Director of the Institution is the deputy head of the Institution, who is mandated and relieved from duty by the Minister of Culture and Education upon the recommendation of the head of the Institution.

Other employer's rights over the Financial Director, as well as all employer's rights over the employees shall be exercised by the HAC President, in accord with the head of the Institution. The employer's rights—except for appointment and relief from duty—may be transferred to the head of the Institution by the HAC President.

The organisational structure and the rules of operation of the Institution are established in the rules of organisation and operation, prepared in compliance with the founding charter. The Institution's rules of organisation and operation, the administrative protocol of its business organisation and its budget report are approved by the Minister based on the position of the HAC as a joint body, while its management of assets is supervised by the Minister.

Based on para. (4), § 10 of Government Decrees Nr. 156/1995. (XII. 26.), the Institution may assign some of its business management tasks to another publicly funded body.

The Institution is created by being entered in the records kept by the Ministry of Finance.

Budapest, June 1997

Signed:

Dr. Péter Medgyessy
Deputy Secretary of State

Dr. Bálint Magyar
Minister

Annex Nr. 2

HAC Secretariat Staff as of February 2000

Leadership

Gabriella Homonnay PhD
Nóra Halmay
László Gémesi

Secretary General
Deputy Secretary General
Financial Director

Program Officers

Márta Éry
Tibor Szántó PhD
Judit Borzsák
Zsófia Dávid dr. univ.
Terézia Hernáth
György Homonnay dr. univ.
Péter Kiss PhD (part time)
László Mayer (part time)
Christina Rozsnyai (part time)
Éva Ruff

Head of Section (Programme accreditation)
Head of Section (Institutional development)

World Bank Project

Balázs Hunya
Beatrix Borza

Project Manager
Project Assistant

Administrators

Katalin Juhász
Ildikó Barna
Marianna Bátovszky
Ilona Bus
Beatrix Licskó
Éva Mákó
Katalin Martinovics
Katalin Monostori
Andrea Szabó
Gabriella Szórádi

Head of Section

Annex Nr. 3

List of material consulted for documentary review

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Statement of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee concerning its external evaluation⁹

1. Having reached a decisive stage in its development, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee has invited an international panel to evaluate its work. The HAC believed that at this stage in its history it was imperative to obtain an “evaluation of the evaluators.” The external review was timely and important because the first round of institutional accreditation was completed and it became urgent that the HAC should adapt to a changing environment, moreover the need arose to plan the HAC’s strategy for the future. According to the Terms of Reference the consortium undertaking the evaluation had the following mandate.

- Explore how far the aims and functions – prescribed by legislation – of HAC are appropriate for the next decade and the process of integration of HEIs.
- Examine the roles, functions and effectiveness of HAC and its sub-committees.
- Examine whether the structure, composition, terms of reference, the size and competence of the secretariat are suitable for the aims and functions of HAC.
- Explore how effective the process for institutional and faculty evaluation have been, the impact on HEIs and other stakeholders and what improvements can be made.
- Examine the role and assistance of HAC in preparing the self evaluation of HEIs.
- Examine the practice of appointing the visiting committees.
- Examine the practice of site visits of the visiting committees.
- Explore how effective are the reports of the visiting committees and what are the follow-up mechanisms.
- Investigate how, and how well HAC carries out its function of approving doctoral programmes and expressing opinion on degree course requirements.
- Investigate how effectively are the tasks of HAC undertaken by reviewing the process used and obtaining the views of the stakeholders. The evaluation team should report to what extent HAC has made progress with these task, and make recommendations for improvements that HAC might make in respect to these tasks.
- Monitoring the measures taken by HAC in response to the report of the consultant.

Under the auspices of the *Association of European Universities* (CRE) the consortium panel was set up of especially renowned experts representing diverse traditions and trends in higher education quality assessment. The panel members were

- Alberto Amaral, Chairman of the Panel, Director of the *Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies* (CIPES), Portugal,
- Judith Eaton, President of the *Council for Higher Education Accreditation*, USA,
- Marie-Odile Ottenwaelter, former Deputy Secretary General of the *Comité National d’Evaluation*, France,
- Ulrich Teichler, Director of the *Centre for Research on Higher Education and Work*, Germany,

⁹ The statement is the outcome of a debate of the HAC plenum at its meeting on November 24, 2000.

- Christian Thune Executive Director of the *Danish Evaluation Institute*, Denmark, and President of the *European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA),
- Carolyn Campbell, Former Assistant Director at the *Higher Education Quality Council*, United Kingdom,
- Sami Kanaan Program Manager, CRE – *Association of European Universities*, Switzerland.

To finance the evaluation the Hungarian government disbursed a significant sum from the World Bank loan for higher education reform in this country.

2. The panel was circumspect and thorough in the task it has accomplished. In the course of the panel's work it was not always unequivocal how well its members understood the particular problems which grew out of both the traditions and the current situation in Hungarian higher education. Nevertheless the majority of these questions could be cleared up in the course of the procedure. We would like to stress that no established practice exists as yet for the external evaluation of national organisations of quality assurance in higher education. While focused evaluations have been done (in the U.K., Denmark, Hong Kong, etc.) there has never been such an in-depth and detailed exposing and evaluation of problems. The panel is to be commended that despite the diverse experiences and views among its members and the lack of an established international practice for this type of evaluation it put on the table a document which provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis and evaluation as well as recommendations. We are especially grateful to Alberto Amaral, who has ultimately succeeded in establishing a common platform for the views of the panel members, derived from their different backgrounds and convictions. He played no small part in overcoming the challenge the panel has faced in understanding the Hungarian context, and consequently a coherent document was produced.
3. In the course of the procedure we have had useful and extensive discussions with the panel, and these were more detailed and intense than is customary in visits of this kind. The panel's recommendations include several which we have begun to implement already before we received its final report. They involve two documents in particular: The HAC plenum has been presented with a draft for a strategic plan for the HAC, and a draft code of ethics, that is a set of guidelines for the conduct of HAC members, expert committee members, and staff members. In compiling these documents we have very much observed the panel's recommendations.
4. All of the panel's recommendations deserve close scrutiny. For some of them the necessary legislative background, which was missing earlier, was enacted even before the panel finalised its report. Among these are the greater involvement of external stakeholders, and the broader representation of colleges in the HAC's work, which were set down in the 2000 amendment to the Higher Education Act and the new government decree on the HAC passed on November 14, 2000. The new plenum can be selected accordingly. Now follows the reworking of the regulations on expert and visiting committees, which the future HAC plenum will pass.
5. The panel stressed in its recommendations that the established division of responsibilities for the HAC and the Higher Education and Research Council (HERC) should be reconsidered. The panel found that although in the initial stage there was a rationale behind

the HAC and the HERC separately evaluating new degree programs or qualification requirements (the HAC being mandated to look at their quality, while the HERC charged with examining them in light of higher education strategy and financial feasibility) this should be changed in the future. The HAC also needs to consider such programs' social relevance and compliance with higher education strategy. Therefore it is evident that the needs of society must be included among the criteria for evaluation. It is more difficult to pinpoint how social and group interests can be separated (something the panel did not attempt to do either) given the fact that group interests always appear as necessary parts of the national strategy. In restructuring the HERC, the government obviously held a similar view as the panel's.

6. The panel believes that the accreditation system based on a strict set of criteria has fulfilled its function, and that now accreditation based on compliance with minimum standards should appear combined with assessment with a quality improvement function. We completely agree. This approach is manifest in the 2000 amendment of the Higher Education Act, which declares that quality assurance is a responsibility of higher education institutions. With this, the HAC is able to turn its attention, in addition to accreditation, to an improvement and support oriented "meta-evaluation" of quality assurance. The panel and the HAC had different views on the pace and mode of managing the transition, but in planning it all the elements in the recommendations must be considered.
7. The panel recommended that the HAC reconsider its requirement that everyone involved in its work hold a scientific degree. This was not a requirement for external experts in the past, but in the future the members of the HAC's expert committees and visiting committees should also include members who represent, and offer their insight into the requirements of, a given profession, and thereby assist in the quality assurance of higher education in Hungary. We must accept the panel's point that in the quality assessment of the college sector more experts with college practice should be involved, noting, however, that college professors have been active in both our expert committees and visiting committees, also as chairpersons.
8. The panel noted on several occasions that the accreditation procedure is in some places overly bureaucratic, exacting too great a workload on those involved, and that the regulations often exist for the purpose of protecting the HAC against a possible legal inquest. Again, we must concur. On completion of the first full round of institutional accreditation the "quality inventory" of Hungarian higher education is in place; every degree program of every institution underwent the accreditation procedure and has also received a more or less full evaluation. We believe that this one-time investment will pay off, while completely agreeing with the panel that the bureaucratic elements, those based purely on numerical standards and which demand an unnecessary amount of work, must be eliminated in the future.
9. The panel criticised two current problems. One is that the HAC expects detailed and formalised annual quality reports from higher education institutions, the other is the mandate for the HAC to state its opinion regarding academic promotion. The criticism that the HAC demands too much data from institutions must be heeded in this context as well. (We must note however, that the HAC accredits institutions on the basis of evaluating their degree programmes. That is the reason why we ask for a short description of each program within the given institution.) Nevertheless, both the annual quality reporting requirement

and HAC's involvement in academic promotion are set down in the Higher Education Act, consequently the HAC will pass on the panel's comments to the policy makers.

10. The panel believes that the HAC should establish an internal system of quality assurance and that the members of the staff and committees undergo regular training and briefings. These are very important recommendations. (We should note here that we have invited tenders for the first and are taking measures concerning the second issue.) We must also think about how the HAC should evaluate its work in the future. For this the recommendations unfortunately fail to include feasible suggestions.
11. We do not wish to hide the fact that there were some issues on which the panel's and the HAC's opinions differed, and which even the utterly correct discussions could not bring closer. These debates will no doubt continue in the forums of higher education in Hungary and elsewhere. We do not think that the external evaluation of the HAC is the proper occasion to carry on the debate.
12. Finally and in summary we wish to extend our special regard and appreciation to the international panel, its chairman and each member, and to the CRE which organised the procedure, for their very thorough and altogether useful work. The HAC's activities have improved already as a result of their visit. Their recommendations must be examined with care, and each achievable element must be exploited. We recommend that the panel's report be published both in English and Hungarian. At the same time we urge the new HAC whose members are to be elected shortly that they carefully study the report and use the recommendations as they deem best.