

HAC International Advisory Board Meeting

28-29 October 2016

MEETING SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Meeting Summary

The annual meeting of the International Advisory Board of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee took place on 28-29 October 2016. The Friday afternoon meeting was as usual devoted to the discussion of strategic issues while the Saturday morning session focused on the work of the HAC in the past year. With a new president to the HAC, Professor Valéria Csépe, taking up her position in September, she invited the previous president, Professor Ervin Balázs, to join the Saturday meeting on the discussion on the previous year's work.

At the Friday meeting, the President gave a presentation on a draft Strategic Plan 2017-2018. The meeting documents sent to the Board comprised the HAC Annual Report and the HAC Follow-up on the Board Recommendations of 2015.

Board members present were Jasmina Havranek, Jürgen Kohler, and Liudvika Leisyte. Achim Hopbach and Christian Thune sent regrets. Stanislaw Chwirot had resigned some months before due to his retirement. HAC President Valéria Csépe chaired the meetings. Also present on Friday afternoon were Vice-President Ákos Jobbágy, and members István Bérczi, Gábor Gerber, and László T. Kóczy and, from the HAC staff, Deputy Secretary General Éva Ruff attended the first day of the meeting. Secretary General Tibor Szántó and program officer for foreign affairs Christina Rozsnyai also attended each session.

During the dinner with the Board and HAC members, President Csépe thanked the Board members for their dedicated work and expert advice over their past terms. Jürgen Kohler joined the HAC Board in 2004 and Jasmina Havranek in 2010. The President regretted that she could not personally thank Christian Thune, who had been on the International Advisory Board since 2001. The two newcomers, Achim Hopbach, who was not able to attend this time, and Liudvika Leisyte, both of whom joined in 2014, have agreed to stay on if the HAC members decide to invite them.

Recommendations of the HAC's International Advisory Board

Commendation

The Board took note that the HAC launched a fundamental strategic discussion for planning the HAC's work until the end of the term of the current HAC members in February 2018, but building on the previous Strategy 2013-2015 and also with longer-term goals in mind to carry over into the next term. The Board commends HAC for considering in its draft strategy not only the legislated requirements but also the new ESG 2015 and its own quality assurance goals.

The Board believes that this strategic process is a good preparation for the upcoming review of the HAC by ENQA, for which the self-evaluation report should be completed by the end of 2017. The Board also welcomes the President's plans for an inclusive discussion and extensive communication about the draft strategic plan with a number of stakeholders, as the Board has proposed already in its 2015 Recommendations.

Recommendations

1. HAC membership

- The Board is aware of the legislated system of the delegation of HAC members. The system specifies the delegating bodies and the term of six years, which is once renewable. Incoming members replacing outgoing ones in mid-term serve only until the end of the original term. The Board recommends that the HAC seek staggered terms of appointment of HAC members in order to ensure ongoing competence among its members. The shift towards such a system could, for example, be carried out by designating three-year terms for second-time (re-) appointments for half the members;
- In order to strengthen the independence of HAC, the Board recommends that HAC continue to push for legislation that specifies the reasons for a possible recall of HAC members by the delegating bodies.

2. Broaden quality concept

- Over the years since it has advised the HAC the Board has taken note of the HAC's approach to quality assurance and it recommends that HAC broaden its concept of what constitutes quality. This call covers strengthening the following aspects in particular:
 - a) The Board recommended last year to

“...focus on the role of the HAC in helping to enhance the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions in a holistic way that goes beyond curricular and resource aspects but looks at the quality of the student life-cycle and involves governance and managerial aspects, all of which must be seen as a continuous institutional process.”
 - b) HAC should consider, as a starting point of quality and quality assurance in higher education, to focus decisively on the overarching educational objectives and the development of students' competencies aligned to these. Such focus is to be seen as an approach which is in line with the ESG, which state – referring to a Recommendation of the Council of Europe and the Bologna Process Communiqués (London 2007) – that “Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes; including preparing students for active citizenship, for their future careers (e.g. contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation”.
 - c) In addition, the quality approach should focus internal program and institutional quality and also external quality evaluations more strongly on the institutions' and programs' corollaries in terms of learning environments and making due provision along the entirety of the student life cycle, e.g.
 - consulting and support of students (full-time and diverse learners, such as part-time students or those with special needs, etc.);
 - social inclusion;
 - multiple exit paths and flexibility in changing academic pathways;
 - career services;
 - recruitment policies;
 - phasing-in schemes for new entrants; etc.
- The broader concept allows for, and indeed calls for, the recognition of institutions having specific profiles. The Board recommends that the HAC's quality assurance

processes recognize and encourage institutions to develop unique hallmarks that make them competitive while allowing them to build up existing strengths.

- The Board recommends that, with the change in approach, the HAC consider honing its pool of experts to select fewer but qualified persons and with qualifications not only in academia but higher education leadership and management, e.g. admissions, and services. Moreover, the Board recommends that the experts are adequately trained in applying the broader evaluation criteria.
- As regards doctoral schools, the Board takes note that PhD studies have been extended from three to four years, partly in response to the high dropout rate. In order to support the success of doctoral studies, the Board recommends that the HAC's external quality assurance of doctoral schools give due consideration also to e.g. admission and selection policies and consultation services for students. The Board welcomes the HAC plans to conduct the evaluation of doctoral schools in English. It notes again in this context that the HAC ensure the training of especially foreign experts to reach a common understanding of the HAC's concept of quality.

3. *Shifting focus from program to institutional quality assurance*

The Board has been involved in the strategic discussion of the HAC following the end of its third institutional accreditation cycle. In its 2015 recommendations it noted that

“the HAC can use the experience gained to reconsider its self-designed approach to the legal requirements and to revisit the link between institutional and programme accreditation with a view to streamlining its activities under consideration of the resources available.”

The Board again underlines the principle stated in the European Education Ministers' Berlin Communiqué that higher education institutions are responsible for their own quality assurance. It follows that quality assurance agencies must transfer responsibility from external control to external support for institutions in this endeavour. Given the maturity of the Hungarian higher education system after having undergone three institutional accreditation cycles, the Board recommends that the HAC design its new approach in such a way as to build on the institutions' internal quality mechanisms while guiding them towards fostering their internal quality aspiration.

HAC should consider to what extent, and in which cases, HAC's fourth institutional accreditation cycle should and can be tailored to the various levels of maturity of individual institutions in their internal quality assurance of their study programs. A varied external quality assurance approach could encompass institutional accreditation or audit, with the former focusing on all quality-related aspects of institutional management while the latter would check the institution's internal quality assurance policies and mechanisms. Including a selection of study programs in the institutional accreditation process and audit would show the success of institutions in ensuring their programs by carrying out a check on the implementation of the quality policies and mechanisms considered in the aforesaid institutional accreditation or audit processes.

4. *HAC as an organization*

The Board recommends that in order to update its internal management, the HAC consider applying a change management approach by identifying its goals and how as well as when the agency needs to reach those goals. This would apply to

Hungarian Accreditation Committee

- staff recruitment and development to attain specific competences;
- communication, marketing and lobbying activities to gain a shared understanding of the HAC's mission among higher education institutions, policy-makers and the public;
- a blended top-down and bottom-up management and communication practice that builds on both the needs of the agency and the expertise of the staff.

Noted down by Christina Rozsnyai

Amended and approved by the HAC Board via electronic mail.