

HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

Annual Report 2017 to September 2018¹



September 2018

¹ Based on President's Report for 2017 as submitted with the ENQA application, with updates for 2018

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) began its first complete year under the leadership of its president, Prof. Valéria Csépe, with a stable budgetary framework in 2017.

The HAC started its activities along the lines of its strategy adopted at the end of 2016. The associated action plan was adopted by the first meeting of the HAC Body in 2017. Both the strategy and the action plan set forth ambitious, diverse and organically interconnected groups of tasks.

In 2017, the Body and the Secretariat successfully initiated changes to acts of laws in two areas important for the operation of the HAC.

1. Strategy and legal changes

Ongoing discussions of the strategy, and the specification of the Committee's professional and operative tasks have confirmed that the role of the HAC is to support institutions in ensuring that rather than applying any set of the HAC's criteria only formally, they - motivated by a deep-rooted commitment to quality in education - integrate them in their day-to-day operations, from the launch of programmes to the accreditation of institutions and the operation of doctoral schools. This is the mindset that informed all activities of the HAC in 2017. It has continued on in 2018 and in several cases led to the complete or better acceptance of its position among higher education stakeholders.

An amendment to Government Decree No 19/2012 of 22 February 2012 on specific issues of quality assessment and quality enhancement in higher education - i.e. the decree governing the operation of the entire HAC - was adopted also at the end of the year, after lengthy consultation and work.

In addition to clarifying the responsibilities of the HAC, the amendment also confirmed that the cost of institutional accreditation procedures shall be borne by the institution applying for accreditation. The funding for the HAC's activities had not covered its accreditation activities in the first to third accreditation rounds, which were financed from its own revenues. Procedures to be delivered in 2018 will now be covered by one-off contracts signed with the institutions concerned, and carried out for a fee. The legislative changes concerning the operation of the HAC enable the specification of tasks in the new Rules of Operation and Organisation in a clear and precise manner.

2. ENQA and EQAR

In 2017, the HAC applied for an ENQA-coordinated external review to both renew its membership in the association and, for the first time, to apply to be registered in EQAR. At its Board meeting on 13 September 2018, ENQA approved the HAC's membership for another five years. The Register Committee of EQAR will pass its decision at its 5-6 December 2018 meeting. The report confirmed that the objectives specified in the strategy were necessary and that the tasks based on these goals were especially important to increase the international visibility of the HAC.

3. Organization

HAC Board

The term of the HAC Board members ended at the end of February 2018. Following negotiations with the Ministry, a new Board was set up with only six of the twenty previous members remaining and five women included.

In the course of 2018, the HAC set up a new set of standing and ad hoc committees and is well on the way to being an efficient and operative organisation.

Expert Committees

The new expert committees for disciplines range from 12 to 22 members and are headed by a HAC Board member. Their task is to review discipline-related applications, such as learning outcome framework requirements and new programme applications. The HAC Board member on the committee presents the relevant issue for discussion and voting at the Board meetings.

Other expert committees were set up for dedicated tasks.

Expert committees for disciplines

- Agriculture
- Humanities
- Theology
- Engineering
- Arts
- Medicine and Health Sciences
- Sports
- Social Sciences
- Natural Sciences

Other expert committees

- University professorships and doctoral training
- Teacher training
- Quality Assurance and Development
- Strategy
- Legislative matters

Board of Appeals and Board of Financial Supervisors

The mandate of the three-member Appeals Board continues until October 2018. In 2017 it decided on 37 cases (18 of them university professor, 8 programme, 6 doctoral schools, 5 institutional appeals). Until September 2018 it has reviewed 15 cases (5 university professor, 5 Master's and 5 Bachelor's programmes). A further nine cases (8 university professor and one Master's programme) have been submitted but not yet decided.

The mandate of Board of Financial Supervisors ended together with that of the HAC Board and a new one has not yet been appointed by the Ministry.

Hungarian Advisory Body

A session of the Hungarian Advisory Body was held in July 2017. The Body welcomed the renewed role of the HAC and its assumption of the role of cooperative service provider. At the same time it considered it important that the HAC firmly maintain its set of professional criteria.

In 2018, a new Hungarian Advisory Body was set up with seven members from business and industry. Their mission is to provide feedback to the HAC on the quality of higher education and the needs of the employers as to the qualifications of graduates. The new Body will hold its first annual meeting in late 2018.

International Advisory Body

The International Advisory Body held its first meeting in November 2017. Its recommendations were communicated to the HAC, which responded to them in a part in its self-assessment for the external review by ENQA. Some recommendations:

- Develop medium and long-term strategies, involving all stakeholders in the process.
- It is desirable to increase the proportion of the HAC's own revenues in order to preserve, and, if possible, to increase its independence and create a stable source of funding.
- It is imperative that the HAC Secretariat, the experts and the new members receive

training, with special regard to the new type of institutional accreditation and the approach that internal quality assurance is primarily the task and responsibility of the institutions.

- The pool of Hungarian experts needs to be further narrowed; at the same time it is essential that the pool is expanded to include foreign experts and that the necessary base in terms of language skills is established.

The International Advisory Body will hold its second meeting on 26-27 October 2018.

4. Institutional accreditation

A major development is a new approach to institutional accreditation, which is the main focus of HAC in external quality assurance. In line with the strategy, the ESG 2015 Working Group was set up in spring 2017, tasked with developing a novel set of self-assessment criteria along the lines of the ESG 2015 standards that can be used to evaluate an institution's quality assurance system while it is in operation.

Based on this set of criteria, a pilot accreditation project covering six institutions (University of Debrecen, University of Pécs, Wekerle Sándor Üzleti Főiskola, Szent István University, University of Kaposvár, Közép-európai Egyetem /the Hungarian entity of CEU/) was launched in May 2017. All of these accreditation processes were completed within 7 months on average.

The HAC Secretariat helped these institutions' preparatory work by offering consultation on the interpretation of the criteria used.

Based on these processes, review of the criteria began at the end of the year by the HAC's newly re-established Quality Assurance Committee. The new set of criteria was approved in February 2018. The objective of the revised processes is to encourage the institutions to view the ESG 2015 standards not as a self-contained system but rather - in line with the HAC's attitude, which is focused on providing support and objective assessment - as an effective tool for implementing the institution's strategy, to be integrated into all of its processes.

The institutions were not always able to adopt the new approach; also, it was a challenge for the visiting teams that each committee visited a pair of institutions with similar programme profiles. The evaluation reports, however, were effective at dispersing institutions' concerns: their findings, worded in a way to be supportive, and their emphasis on the breadth and depth of the quality assurance system and the recognition of good practice confirmed the role of the

HAC as a cooperative partner.

In autumn 2018, preparations for the evaluation of a further seven universities, including two denominational ones, and three universities are on the way.

5. Doctoral schools

Government Decree No 387/2012 of 19 December 2012 on doctoral schools, doctoral procedures and habilitation, which became effective at the end of 2017, stipulates that multidisciplinary doctoral schools must have at least nine core members, with a minimum of three core members for each discipline. This replaced the earlier stipulation for a minimum of 7/9/11 core members, which the HAC had considered to be problematic and erosive of quality in doctoral programmes ever since the decree had become effective. The new stipulation is applicable to doctoral schools established after the effective date of the new decree.

An external stakeholder for HAC, the Hungarian Doctoral Council, received a new legal mandate and started operations in 2018. Following negotiations with the HAC, it will take over the review of core criteria, such as academic staff, while the HAC will now concentrate on the evaluation of quality. The Council and the HAC Board have formulated a joint position stating that the lack of accreditation should have an impact on the funding of non-accredited doctoral schools or possibly on determining the number of their students. There is no such link between the statutory provisions and accreditation by the HAC, however.

In autumn 2018 the HAC has started to revise its approach to the evaluation of doctoral schools entirely, with a focus on their overall quality – rather than the qualifications of their academic staff – and internal quality assurance and site visits with experts that are to include international team members. The new procedure will be finalised in early 2019 and should start in autumn of that year.

6. Programme procedures

After the year in which Government Decree No 139/2015 of 9 June 2015 on the register of higher education qualifications and the inclusion of new qualifications in the register became effective, no applications for new programme learning outcome framework requirements could be submitted. The register of programmes was opened to the institutions in 2017, after which they submitted new applications of this type to HAC.

To enable use of the procedures set forth in the above Decree, consultations were needed to harmonise the relevant administrative processes with the other actors (Ministry of Human Capacities, Educational Authority (OH), Higher Education Planning Body (FTT), and the Chamber of Commerce) involved in the process. Until the resulting guide was communicated to the institutions, the HAC supplied the higher education institutions with relevant information on the administrative processes. In programme learning outcome framework requirements procedures it is not the Educational Authority that requests the HAC to provide its expert opinion, rather, institutions submit the applications directly to the HAC. Still it performs complex tasks as an expert in this type of procedure as well, for which it may not charge an expert's fee.

For the accreditation of new programmes at higher education institutions, the HAC adopted revised guidelines and assessment criteria aligned with the programme learning outcome framework requirements at the end of 2016 for all levels of learning. Throughout 2017 the HAC Secretariat provided consultation opportunities to discuss questions to clarify the interpretation of the guidelines before institutions submitted their applications.

7. Applications for university professor positions

A revision of the criteria applied to evaluating applications for university professor positions in May 2017 made the connection between the descriptive assessment and the points awarded with certain criteria unambiguous and transparent, thereby contributing to the objective clarity of assessments.

The expert committees had the opportunity to expand the assessment criteria to include discipline-specific items which, in addition to the general requirements, enable sounder assessment of applications in the relevant discipline. As a result, clearer assessment criteria were developed with respect to the discipline-specific requirements as well.

8. Institutional operating licenses

One of the legal tasks of the HAC is to act as an expert for the Educational Authority in their re-licensing of higher education institutions every five years. For this, the HAC checks its existing accreditation documents. Additionally, it evaluates all heads of study programmes about which the Educational Authority reports changes in the past five years. For this evaluation, external experts are used. Once the pilot procedure was completed, this task did not arise with the intensity envisaged by the HAC. In 2017, the Educational Authority invited

the HAC to act as an expert in three procedures. One procedure was completed in 2017, and another ten will be completed in 2018.

9. The HAC Secretariat

From January 2017 onward, the HAC Secretariat did not fill the positions of secretary general and deputy secretary as the HAC's statute is under revision. The duties of professional and operative leadership of the Secretariat were assigned to the head (director in the HAC's plans) of secretariat. The upside down age pyramid of the Secretariat typical by the end of 2016 was changed by recruiting young professionals in order to change the quality of work and professional capacity of the Secretariat. In February 2017, recruitment of young colleagues with experience in higher education institutions was started. During the course of the year, there was significant movement: the employment of several old employees was ended, and the new employees – both programme officers and administrative staff – were recruited. In 2018 there was additional turn over, and still more staff members are recruited. Currently the Secretariat has a staff of sixteen: nine programme officers, five administrators, one IT expert (system administrator) and the head of secretariat.

A manual with detailed description of all tasks required from the administrative staff and programme officers for all levels and types of tasks was produced in the second half of 2017. This document is used as the basis for drawing up process specifications for evaluators, visiting committee members and other evaluators. The individuals fulfilling positions at the Secretariat need to possess a wide range of knowledge and it is essential that they have experienced with higher education institutions.

When handling cases, the staff of the HAC Secretariat need to represent with more authority the professional knowledge and experience they possess. To organise and update this knowledge and experience, internal training has been launched on the new criteria and the interpretation and implementation of laws.

The Secretariat can contribute to the supportive role of the HAC by pursuing consistency in its professional work.

10. Decisions adopted by the HAC Body in 2017 / 2018

Type of case	positive	Positive with comment	negative	in approval	total
Assessment of doctoral school (operating, establishment)	101/		4		105
Applications for university professor positions	103/		23		126
Programme establishment	10	2	2		14
Programme launch	10	40	52		102
Programme monitoring			1		1
Cluster-based programme accreditation	20	13	9	14	56
Institutional accreditation	2				2
Institution monitoring	11				11
TOTAL					485
Appeal cases	11		26		37