

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee in 2001

Annual Report

I. Introduction

Some of the main elements of the **context of operation** of the HAC in 2001 were the following.

1. External evaluation of the HAC

The external evaluation was initiated in the spring of 1999 by the HAC itself upon the 1998 recommendation of the International Advisory Board (Board). Upon evaluating bids of an invited tender the task was awarded to an international panel of experts brought together by the *CRE – Association of European Universities*. The consortium panel was set up of outstanding 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,
- **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.

After a very thorough and intense investigation, in October 2000 the Panel produced its final report containing detailed evaluation of HAC and the Hungarian accreditation system, and recommendations for its work in the future.¹ Already during the evaluation process the HAC implemented several **measures** addressing the panel's criticism. (Ex. drafting strategic theses and composing a Code of Ethics.) As an additional element of the follow-up, upon successfully applying for an INQAAHE scholarship, the HAC sent its staff member in charge of institutional development to EVA, the *Danish Evaluation Institute*, to study its methods and to see what can be of use for the HAC.

Moreover, it is the definite aim of the HAC to go on with **follow-up measures**. The strategic theses have been revised and extended to a comprehensive **strategic plan**. (See more on this

¹ The main documents of the external evaluation have been published and are accessible on the Internet: www.mab.hu/english/doc/extevalh.doc

below in para III/6, and the separate document.) The procedure for **institutional accreditation** is under revision, a new *Accreditation Guidebook* will be compiled by the end of September 2003. The format, transparency and accessibility of **evaluation reports** will also be reviewed. The HAC will launch **pilot study program evaluations** of programs in the same discipline at various institutions in the near future (probably in 2003). The HAC intends to create an **internal quality assurance system** and, for the next term, the **subcommittee structure** will be reviewed.

2. Recommendations of the previous Board

The history and activities of the previous two Boards have been summarized in a separate publication. Since the mandate of the previous Board expired in 2000 and the present Board was set up in mid-late 2001 last year's annual Board was postponed to 2002. Actions taken in response to the **recommendations** of the previous Board **in 2000**² are as follows.

Ad 3. The HAC launched the CEE Network consisting of 14 QA agencies in 13 Central and Eastern European countries. (See more on this in para IV. below.)

Ad 5. In spite of the Board's recommendation, giving an opinion on professorial appointments continues as one of the tasks of the HAC.

Ad 7. Institutional and program evaluation and accreditation continues.

Ad 8. The external evaluation of the HAC was completed, follow-up measures have been and continue to be taken.

Ad 10. The HAC, as it is defined in its strategic plan, intends to be an active partner in Hungarian educational policy debate. Besides discussing relevant issues at its plenary sessions in 2001, we organized two meetings of relevance to national educational policy. (Bologna Day in May, Information Day in June.) The papers and presentations of the two meetings have been published (in Hungarian) and distributed.

Ad 11. It is the firm intention of the HAC to seek advice of the Board on matters of higher education policy also in the future.

Ad 12. The experience and advice of individual Board members will be sought and considered also in the future.

Ad 13. In the appointments of the membership of the new Board the principle of continuity has been observed. Two members are staying on from the previous Board, while two others have been invited from among members of the international panel implementing the external evaluation of the HAC.

² See the complete text of recommendations in our yearbook: *The Hungarian Accreditation Committee and its Work in 2000/2001*, pp. 33-34.

3. About the notion of ‘requirements’

In Hungarian usage the term ‘requirements’ designates a well defined, precise set of quality requirements, something which is perhaps more familiar to the English audience as ‘**criteria**’, or **input and operational standards**. Quality requirements or criteria in the HAC’s practice have always been defined as minimum requirements, i.e. an institution, faculty, or program cannot be accredited if it does not meet these threshold criteria. In the present report we use the term ‘requirement’ in this meaning. (You can see actual examples of such quality requirements or minimum criteria in the separate document on the new accreditation requirements for programs to be launched.)

It must be noted, however, that there is a shift in the ‘philosophy’ of accreditation practiced by the HAC. While in the early years the accreditation process focused on meeting **minimum criteria**, there are now also actual recommendations provided in order to **enhance quality**. In the near future there will be increasing emphasis on the HAC’s enhancement role. Moreover, it is our intention that in the third cycle of institutional accreditation the HAC will practice something like a ‘**meta-accreditation**’. We believe that the basic responsibility of maintaining and enhancing the quality of institutional leadership, teaching and learning lies with the institutions themselves, and that the HAC should gradually shift its focus toward evaluating their internal quality assurance mechanisms.

II. Chronological overview of the main events in 2001

January:

- Setting up the new HAC.

New president:	Pál Michelberger
Honorary president (new title):	András Róna-Tas (first president)
- Joint meeting of the previous and the new HAC. Main items on the agenda:
 - ◇ General report (legal regulations, HAC by-laws, accreditation requirements, external evaluation report by CRE international panel, HAC report to Parliament).
 - ◇ Activities of the *Doctoral schools committee* and the *Professorial appointments committee*.
 - ◇ Code of Ethics.
 - ◇ Strategic principles and theses.
 - ◇ Current tasks.
 - ◇ Matters pending, principles, recommendations.
 - ◇ The subcommittee structure.

February:

- Leadership elections:

New vice-presidents:	László Muszbek, Dezső Sima, János Rechnitzer
New college presidents:	Zoltán Bedő, Mihály Mózes, István Páczelt
- Memberships to expert committees for areas of science (‘colleges’).
- New non-voting HAC members.
- Elections of chairs to special committees.
- Membership to the *Doctoral schools committee* and the *Professorial appointments committee* finalized.

March:

- Giving opinions on applications for university and college professors appointments.

April:

- Setting up the expert committees for the various disciplines (23 committees).
- Giving opinions on applications for university and college professors appointments.
- Criteria for establishing and operation of doctoral schools.

May:

- Bologna Day. HAC members and invited speakers discussed the implications of the Bologna declaration for Hungary.

June:

- Information Day II. (Organized jointly by the Ministry of Education and the HAC.) Deputy Secretary of State *Ádám Kiss* and HAC leaders spoke to an audience of 150 from HEIs around the country on trends and actual issues in HE and future plans of accreditation. Two institutional case studies on introduction of QA systems also were presented too.

July:

- Discussion on new by-laws of HAC. (New procedures in 9 annexes.)

August:

- Work on Strategic Plan starts.

September:

- New homepage of the HAC launched.
- New by-laws of HAC accepted by the plenary session.
- Hearing appeals against opinions on applications for professorial appointments.
- Changes in monitoring procedures and work schedule.
- Criteria for giving opinions on applications for professorial appointments for the academic year 2001/2002.

October:

- New by-laws with annexes accepted by the minister and published in ministry gazette.
- Disciplinary committee's work on new accreditation requirements for establishing/launching institutions, faculties and programs starts.

November:

- Staff takes part on the information day organized by the Ministry of Education on introducing QA systems at HEIs.
- Visits and meetings in connection with the full accreditation of running doctoral schools start.

December:

- Plenary session on Strategic Plan.
- Setting up the Hungarian Advisory Board of the HAC (representatives of professional organizations and employers).

Throughout the year:

- Giving opinions on establishing new HEIs and faculties, and on establishing/launching new degree programs.
- Monitoring visits and reports (institutional accreditation, off-site and distance education programs).

It must be emphasized that as in earlier years the latter set of activities represented the bulk of the HAC's work in 2001.

III. Main issues in 2001

1. Giving opinions on applications for professorial appointments.

Evaluating the applications for university and college professorships was a completely new task for the HAC in 2001, required in the 2000 amendment to the Higher Education Act (HEA). It is important to emphasize that it was not simply one more duty in the regular set of tasks but of a fundamentally different character. Up till last year the HAC has never had to evaluate individuals. Personal matters were always elements within institutional (or faculty) and/or program evaluation. The HAC proceeded to implement this task with extreme caution.

We have worked out a **detailed set of quality requirements** and make it public in due time to allow applicants to consider these when deciding on and filing their applications. The work was carried out in 2000 so that the requirements were ready by the time the amendment of the HEA came into force. Applications came in in early 2001. Each application was **evaluated in writing** by two experts (professors in the field of the applicant) and subsequently the HAC's **Appointments committee** discussed and voted on the applications. Final votes and recommendations to the minister for accepting or rejecting the applications were made at the **plenary sessions** in March and April with appeals discussed in September.

The **most disputed element of the requirements** was the one which expected the applicants for university professorships to have a doctoral degree or title granted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (or an equivalent academic achievement). Such degrees, created in the old, post-war system of scientific qualifications in Hungary, were a rank above the '*candidatus scientiarum*' (which existed until the mid nineties), and considerably more demanding in performance and research experience than the new PhD or DLA degrees granted after 1993 by universities. (Today the Doctor of the Academy is not a 'degree', but a 'title' with the same granting procedures.) The basis for disputing this requirement was that the HEA requires only having a PhD/DLA degree as a sufficient qualification for the appointment of university professors. The HAC was thus considered to be more strict than required by law.

The reason for the HAC's insistence on this standard was the proliferation and obvious **deterioration of the quality** of newly appointed professors in the last few years. This development was perhaps the key factor why the educational policy-makers decided to involve the HAC as an instrument of external quality control in the appointment process. We believe that the outcomes of the HAC's evaluation procedure have legitimized our set

requirements. (See the statistics of the decisions in our yearbook: *The Hungarian Accreditation Committee and its Work in 2000/2001*. Budapest, 2001, p.71.)

The procedure and the requirements have been revised for the academic year 2001/2002 as part (annex 9) of the new by-laws. The most important changes are the following:

- Three reviewers instead of two for each application.
- Applications with reviews discussed and voted on by the relevant expert committees for disciplines. The reason for this change was that the make-up of the Appointments committee did not match up with the disciplines in which the applications were filed. The Appointments committee became the second-level forum for discussion and voting. (Final voting and recommendations to the minister remained the responsibility of the plenary session.)

2. Full accreditation of doctoral schools

Hungarian universities got back the right to grant PhD/DLA degrees in 1993, on the basis of authorization by the HEA. For this purpose they set up doctoral programs, which had to be accredited by the HAC. (In fact the HAC was initially established in 1993 for this purpose.) By the end of 2000 altogether 413 doctoral programs had been accredited.³ In order to converge the array of related programs and concentrate intellectual capacity the 2000 HEA amendment required for universities to merge their doctoral programs into doctoral schools. A precondition was a government decree listing the areas of science and disciplines which came out that year, since HEIs may run one doctoral school per discipline.

Accreditation of the doctoral schools was quite a job for the HAC. Since this item in the amendment of the HEA was put into motion by the HAC's work on detailed guidelines and quality requirements begun in 1999. The first version of the requirements were worked out in February 1999, while the revised, more detailed final version was accepted by the plenary session and sent out to the institutions in October 2000.

Accreditation of schools based on fusion of previously operating programs was (and is) done in two steps. Schools meeting the quality requirements with regard to academic staff got provisional accreditation status in December 2000, in a short and is simplified procedure in order to insure continuity of operation (imminent entrance examinations) for the academic year 2001/2002. As a second step, by October 2001, each provisionally accredited school had to hand in a detailed application for full accreditation, including a self-evaluation, basic information on operation, and by-laws of the school. Members of the HAC Doctoral schools committee and external experts evaluated the applications, held meetings for leaders of doctoral schools operating in the same disciplines, and, occasionally, made visits to certain institutions. Based on the applications and their written evaluations, and on the Doctoral schools committee's suggestions, the plenary session decided on the full accreditation of 125 doctoral schools in February 2002. Decisions on 16 schools were postponed till May.

Please note that newly formed doctoral schools without prior programs have a separate, one step accreditation procedure (based on the same quality requirements). Up till March 2002 four new schools have been accredited, and one application has been rejected.

³ Accreditation in the case doctoral programs – and later schools – means license of operation at the same time. In all other cases (institutions, faculties, programs) accreditation is only a step towards license: permission for operation is given by the Parliament (institutions) or the minister of education.

3. The new by-laws of the HAC

The by-laws of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee extend to the organization, the operational rules, the tasks, and the decision-making mechanisms of the HAC. Another major part are the annexes on the evaluation criteria and procedures for the various accreditation tasks. The by-laws and the procedures need regular updating. The draft version of the new by-laws and procedures was worked out last year by deputy secretary general *Nóra Halmai*. The *By-laws committee* and subsequently the full membership discussed the draft and made some modifications. The final version was accepted by the plenary in September.

According to the government decree on the HAC the by-laws must be published in the official gazette of the Ministry of Education. For the publication the approval by the minister is needed. In order to reach agreement on each point in the by-laws and procedures (i.e. to get the minister's approval) there were meetings and discussions during the summer and autumn months between HAC leaders and ministry officials. (The hot issue was the procedure and set of requirements for evaluating applications for professorships.) The minister was invited to and took part in the debate at the plenary session of the HAC in September. After these meetings and discussions the minister approved the revised text of the by-laws in October.

4. Changing of monitoring procedures and work schedule

In the course of institutional accreditation between 1994 and 2000 there were institutions and programs that were only conditionally accredited. The HAC assigned about one fourth of the running programs to a monitoring procedure either because of quality problems or for not yet having a graduated class at the time of evaluation. These monitoring visits and evaluations were planned in altogether 123 institutions/faculties for the period 2000-2004, and actually began as scheduled in the academic year 2000/01.

However, the 2000 amendment of the HEA required the HAC to also accredit (i.e. visit and evaluate) all distance education programs by June 2002. Moreover, since according to the HEA the HAC has to accredit institutions in an 8-year cycle, and the first round of institutional accreditation was begun in 1995, the new cycle must be launched in 2003. In order to avoid confusion and to keep our workload on a manageable scale the original schedule for monitoring visits had to be revised.

In September the plenary passed a resolution according to which by June 2002 the HAC will have accredited all the institutions which were granted conditional accreditation status and all off-site and distance education programs. Other programs waiting for a monitoring procedure will be evaluated only in the course of the second cycle of institutional accreditation. (See more on the latter in the strategic plan of the HAC.) This was one case where the changed legal environment impelled the HAC to abandon its work schedule in line with government priorities.

5. New accreditation requirements

According to the government decree on the Hungarian Accreditation Committee the HAC has to revise and update its accreditation requirements regularly (at least once every three years). Since the requirements were last published in September 1999, a revision is due in 2002. After a preliminary proposal by vice-president *János Rechnitzer* in May, expert committees for disciplines began to work on a set of minimum quality requirements for establishing/launching institutions, faculties, and programs in October. The plenary session discussed their proposals in January 2002, and accepted the revised version of the minimum quality requirements in February. Currently disciplinary committees are adding their particular disciplinary specialties to the basic requirements, which will be added to the text as an annex in May. The final requirements will thus consist of two parts, the basic requirements common to all disciplines and the special requirements pertaining to the individual disciplines and degree levels.

Please note that for the operating institutions, faculties, and programs the quality requirements will be adjusted in the new *Accreditation Guidebook* to be completed by the end of September 2002.

(The accreditation requirements are summarized for the Board in a separate document.)

6. The Strategic Plan of the HAC

One of the results of the external evaluation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee was the recommendation that it should place more emphasis on strategic thinking and operate more proactively. We have taken the recommendation very seriously. In the autumn of 2000 the (previous) HAC worked out and accepted some strategic principles and theses. The new HAC took up work on the strategic plan in July 2001, when it formed the Strategic Committee consisting of seven HAC members, chaired by *László Györfi*. The committee began work in August, held three meetings during the autumn months discussing two drafts of the strategic plan. The third draft was discussed in the plenary session in December, the fourth in January 2002. The text, together with an action plan in annex, was finalized and put on the website (in Hungarian) after the January discussions.

(The strategic plan is summarized for the Board in a separate document.)

IV. **International activities**

Keeping track of international developments in higher education is a very important feature of the HAC's work since the time of its establishment. Besides setting up the **International Advisory Board** we have a fairly good **library** with some international journals and various books and other publications by HEIs and foreign QA agencies. Moreover, we try to gain direct experience on the work of other agencies through **short visits and study trips**. And, as far as our financial possibilities allow, the HAC leadership and staff members regularly attend **international seminars and conferences** on QA issues in higher education. (It must be mentioned here that the HAC's budget for the year 2002 is extremely limited in this respect.) The most important international contacts and activities of the HAC in 2001 were the following.

András Róna-Tas, honorary president of the HAC, responsible, among other things, for the international relations of the HAC, is member of the Steering Group of ENQA, The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, where he represents the Central and Eastern European countries. (See more on the CEE network below.) The Steering Group meets usually bimonthly in Brussels.

He is also a member of the Steering Committee of EUA's (the European University Association, formerly CRE and CEURC) Institutional Evaluation Program. Both he and HAC staff member *Christina Rozsnyai* regularly take part in EUA organized institutional evaluations at various European universities.

On October 13, 2001 the *Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education* (CEE Network) was launched in Cracow, Poland. It has a separate website at www.ceenetwork.hu.

The CEE Network is the successor organization of the Regional Subnetwork for Central and Eastern Europe of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) established on the initiative of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee in Budapest in November 2000. Though the subnetwork was not an official organization of the INQAAHE, the decision to continue as a fully independent group was important. It facilitates the regional cooperation in quality assurance matters while allowing members on an individual basis to affiliate with INQAAHE as well as ENQA, to which in addition to EU members also the associated countries have now been accepted.

The CEE Network members are the quality assurance and accrediting agencies of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary.

The aim of the CEE Network is to provide a forum for continuous cooperation and contact between members for the purpose of working toward the comparability of quality evaluation systems and ultimately to promote the mobility of the actors in higher education. The CEE region is thus an important step toward achieving the European higher education area set forth in the Bologna Declaration.

The CEE Network's next meeting will be hosted by the Czech agency in Prague in October 2002. A workshop on staff development and training, in part supported by ENQA, is also scheduled. Until then *András Róna-Tas* continues as coordinating chairman of the CEE Network.

The main international activities of the HAC in 2001 in chronological order were the following:

- 'Towards Accreditation Schemes for Higher Education in Europe' Lisbon meeting organized by CRE. (Oeiras, February 8-10)
András Róna-Tas
- 6th Biannual Conference of INQAAHE. (Bangalore, March 19-22)
Papers by *András Róna-Tas*, *Pál Michelberger* – *Gabriella Homonnay*. (Presented by *Tibor Szántó* and *Gabriella Homonnay*, respectively)

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- Study trip to the *Danish Evaluation Institute* (EVA) (Copenhagen, April 2-11)
Tibor Szántó (INQAAHE scholarship)
 - Accreditation in HE: Comparative Policies in Europe (Vienna, April 27)
Christina Rozsnyai
 - Launching of the Higher Education Quality Committee of South-Africa, seminar (Pretoria, May 9)
Presentation by Christina Rozsnyai
 - ENQA General Assembly + Steering Group meeting (Brussels, May 22-23)
András Róna-Tas (representing the CEE countries in the Steering Group)
Membership of Hungary, among other associated countries, approved
 - ‘End of Quality?’ (Birmingham, May 25-26)
Conference paper sent by Christina Rozsnyai
 - ENQA workshop on institutional quality assurance (Nicosia, September 21-22)
Christina Rozsnyai
 - Induction seminar for EUA’s Institutional Evaluation Program (Leuven, October 5-6)
András Róna-Tas and Christina Rozsnyai. (Both regularly participate in institutional visits respectively as member and secretary of review teams)
 - CEE Network meeting (Cracow, October 12-13)
András Róna-Tas (Coordinating President of the Network) and Christina Rozsnyai (Secretary of the Network)
 - Visit to the *Danish Evaluation Institute* (EVA) (Copenhagen, October 31)
Gabiella Homonnay, presentation on the activities of HAC