

HAC International Advisory Board Meeting

31 October – 1 November 2014

MEETING SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Meeting Summary

The annual meeting of the HAC International Advisory Board took place on Friday, 31 October and Saturday, 1 November. As has become a tradition in the past few years, the Friday meeting took place following the plenary meeting of the HAC, and several HAC members stayed on for the discussion with the Board. The item on the agenda was the coming monitoring review by an ENQA panel in order to check for the HAC's compliance with the ESG. The Saturday meeting focused on the work of the HAC in the past year.

The meeting on both days was chaired by **HAC President** Ervin Balázs. **Board members** present were, Stanislaw Chwirot, Achim Hopbach, Jürgen Kohler, and Liudvika Leisyte. Jasmina Havranek and Christian Thune sent regrets. **HAC members** Gyula Bakacsi, István Bérczi, Ferenc Gazdag, Gábor Gerber, Ákos Jobbágy, Katalin É. Kiss, and Gábor L. Kovács. Gábor Szabó represented the **Hungarian Rectors' Conference** and Gergely Bohátka the **Ministry of Human Resources**, department of Higher Education. 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 joined the meetings on both days.

The meeting documents included, in addition to the HAC **Self-Evaluation Report** and the ENQA review report that the participants had received last year, the **ENQA letter** with its decision to grant the HAC “full membership under review” status for the Friday session, and the **HAC Annual Report** and its **Follow-up Report on the Board Recommendations of 2013** for the Saturday discussion.

Recommendations of the HAC's International Advisory Board

Preamble

The Board was once again pleased to meet HAC members during the Friday meeting and appreciated the background on the HAC's current situation. The insight it gained into recent developments at HAC and the national legal framework helped the Board to formulate its Recommendations.

Recommendations

1. HAC Strategy

The Board was informed that a national higher education strategy is currently being discussed by the Ministry and higher education stakeholders.

The Board recommends that the HAC use this window of opportunity to **take a proactive role in shaping the strategy** in order to ensure that the quality as well as the **quality assurance of higher education become one of the strategy's cornerstones**. HAC is well placed to advocate that “consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself”, a concept that Hungary has committed to by signing the Berlin Communiqué.

In order to ensure the viability of the HAC's external quality assurance that supports the internal institutional processes, the HAC should clarify its own position within the

national concept and the Bologna commitments internally and then discuss it with the Ministry and higher education stakeholders.

In reconsidering its internal strategy, the HAC must have a vision for the development of higher education quality and the agency's role in the process. In aligning its own strategy with the national one, the HAC should be aware of its **quality enhancement and supporting role**. In this light, it might **reconsider its current tasks** and tailor its future processes to the state of development of internal quality assurance of individual higher education institutions. The goal would be to **prevent quality assurance from becoming a repetitive routine essentially based on checking compliance with defined standards and instead moving more decisively towards the promotion of an internalised quality culture** in the institutional stakeholders, thus enabling and testing higher education institutions' capability to take responsibilities for steering their quality-oriented processes and criteria themselves. In addition, it could **optimise the HAC's resources to focus on essential actions**.

2. HAC Internal Quality Assurance

The Board takes note of the internal quality assurance mechanisms practiced by the HAC, such as the annual surveys following institutional evaluations. In order to safeguard the quality of its operations and to optimise its resources, the HAC should also take steps to **ensure the consistent quality of its experts**, both for ex ante and ex post evaluations, especially in view of its large expert pool. Experts, and **particularly team leaders, must be trained periodically**. In order to do so effectively and efficiently, the HAC may need to reconsider the size of its expert pool.

The Board recommends further, that the HAC **ensure that all disciplinary fields are evaluated** equally. The system must be aligned to cover the full range of programmes, but should take into consideration, and indeed promote through tailored quality assurance processes, the degree of maturity of the internal quality assurance mechanisms at individual higher education institutions.

3. HAC Independence

From the documents received and its discussion with the HAC in the past years, the Board is of the impression that the HAC operates independently and its members are not influenced by external parties in their decision-making. The Board takes note of the positive developments in the legislation, with two additional HAC members not delegated by the Minister (and two more such members expected in the near future), and by declaring that members may not be repealed without explanation.

The Board believes, nevertheless, that independence must be safeguarded as much as possible by procedural means in order to ensure independence in times of conflict, should these arise. The Board still sees a need to definitely securing enhanced safeguards by explicitly stating the grounds for possible repeal of membership, and repeats its recommendation from 2013, that members **“can only be dismissed on grounds of serious misconduct** in relation to HAC's mission and specified tasks, and only after the **grounds have been set out in a document** to them stating the facts and the reasoning on which the decision is based”.

The Board would be reassured of the HAC's long-term independence if the number of HAC members **delegated by the Minister would constitute no more than one third of all members**.

4. *Balance of Disciplinary Areas in HAC Member Appointments*

Given that the Minister delegates the largest single group of HAC members, the Board notes the opportunity in this process to **seek a balance of disciplinary fields represented in the HAC**. The Board also recommends that **the whole of the all delegating bodies consult with each other in order to ensure an academic balance and quality assurance experience** among the HAC appointments before appointments are actually made.

5. *HAC Funding*

The Board has taken note of the recent actions by the Ministry to alleviate the lack of proper funding for HAC experienced in 2012 by having raised the 2013 budget to what HAC reports to be an operable level and by providing the same amount for 2014. It may be expected that the 2015 budget will be calculate including the expenses for the additionally added HAC members. The Ministry has also raised the amount of fees the HAC may charge for specified services and has provided one-time funding for inviting foreign experts.

Still, the Board believes that **funding should follow from the HAC's operational tasks**. To support the political process for funding, the Board recommends that the HAC review its current tasks as a whole and item by item, and consider **how they are fit for its strategy and the new national strategy**. In light of the outlined strategic development of quality assurance, the HAC could identify also specific quality assurance projects to be carried out for the next period, such as the review of doctoral schools, and request special funding for them.

6. *Appeals*

The Board took note of the legal remit of the HAC Appeals Board to refer to professorial appointments.

In light of the ESG (old: Standard 3.7, new: Standard 2.7 where the guidelines explain that “A complaints procedure allows an institution to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out”) and to ensure that the HAC fully meets this standard, the Board recommends that the HAC **establish an Appeals Board of its own design to deal with its quality assurance concerning institutions and programmes**. This could be the existing Appeals Board, which is currently limited to appeals in university professor appointments, but it may be given an additional remit directly by the HAC. There could also be a separate Board to be set up in order to match appeals tasks better which are concerned with non-staff related quality issues. HAC is entitled and must define the composition of such a Board and set down the terms of reference on what issues it is to consider, within which substantive limits appeals are admissible, and what decisions it may take (such as referring applications back to the HAC for reconsideration).

The Board set the dates of the next annual meeting for Friday and Saturday, **30- 31 October 2015**.

Noted down by Christina Rozsnyai on November 4, 2014.

Amended and approved by the HAC Board via electronic mail.