

HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

2017

23 February 2018

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) began its first complete year under the leadership of its president, Ms 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.

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.

The same paradigm was reflected in the Committee's work with higher education regulatory bodies and other higher education organisations, which in several cases led to the complete or better acceptance of its position.

In 2017, the HAC renewed its membership in ENQA and applied for membership in EQAR. The Committee prepared a Self-assessment Report, providing it with an assessment of its role in the context of compliance with the European standards. The report also 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.

1. Legal environment

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

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 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. Institutional accreditation: a renewed procedure

2016. Back in 2016 the accreditation of the National University of Public Service was part of the so-called 4th accreditation round, carried out to the ESG 2005 standards. While the ESG 2015 standards have not resulted in any major change and the philosophy behind them has not changed either, the accreditation processes in rounds 1 to 3, while ensuring that the institutions committed to the ESG, had not brought about a shift towards the effective integration of ESG standards into the institutions' quality assurance systems and toward their effective implementation.

In line with the strategy, the ESG Work 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 6 institutions (University of Debrecen, University of Pécs, Wekerle Sándor Üzleti Főiskola, Szent István University, University of Kaposvár, Közép-európai Egyetem) was launched in May 2017. All of these accreditation processes were completed within 7 months on average.

The HAC Secretariat helped these institutions prepare 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 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 Committees that each committee visited a pair of institutions with similar teaching 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.

3. Tasks performed in an ongoing manner

Programme establishment 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 new programmes could be established. The register of programmes was opened to the institutions in 2017, and programme establishment procedures were launched.

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), Chamber of Commerce) involved in the programme establishment 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 establishment procedures the HAC does not act as an expert invited by request through the Educational Authority. It does, however, perform complex tasks as an expert in this type of procedure as well, for which it may not charge an expert's fee. The procedure is free of charge.

Programme launch procedures

Programme launch guides and assessment criteria aligned with the learning outcome-based education and outcome requirements adopted at the end of 2016 were adopted for all levels of learning.

Throughout the year the HAC Secretariat provided consultation opportunities to discuss questions to clarify the interpretation of the guides before programme launch applications were submitted. These consultations confirmed that more precise wording of the guides and the design of documents with a more consistent and intuitive structure are necessary.

Applications for university professor positions

The revision of the criteria applied to applications for university professor positions in May made the connection between the descriptive assessment and the points awarded 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.

Doctoral schools

An assessment of operating doctoral schools was carried out both in the spring and in the autumn, based on the doctoral database. A total of 105 cases were decided by the Body, discussed by the EDK (the

college of the HAC for university professor and doctoral school applications) and prepared by the expert committees and programme officers.

The HAC attaches special importance to the review of doctoral schools and of their lawful operation, but it is unable to deliver assessment and audit efforts deep enough to address the actual operation of the quality assurance of education activities due to the abundance of its operative tasks.

The Hungarian Doctoral Council and the HAC Body 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.

The HAC's tasks in the field of reviewing operating authorisations

Once the pilot procedure for reviewing operating authorisations 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 has been completed, the other two are still ongoing.

4. External assessors

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.

International Advisory Body

The International Advisory Body held its meeting in November 2017. Its recommendations were communicated to the HAC, which responded to them in a part in its Self-Assessment. 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 of the body 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.

ENQA and EQAR

In May 2017, the HAC Body decided to renew its membership in the ENQA and apply for membership in the EQAR. For this purpose, a Self-assessment Workgroup was established headed by programme

officer Ms Krisztina Rozsnyai. Nearly six months of work resulted in a self-assessment report of almost a hundred pages, which the Quality Assurance Committee also discussed before the Body adopted its decision.

5. Operation of the HAC Secretariat

From January 2017 onward, the positions of secretary general and deputy secretary were not filled at the HAC Secretariat. The duties of professional and operative leadership of the Secretariat were assumed by head of secretariat Dr Ágnes Gödény Mosolygó. The age distribution graph of the Secretariat at the end of 2016 resembled an urn, the greatest negative effect of which was the lack of young professionals with the requisite professional capacity. 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. Currently the Secretariat has a staff of 14, which needs to be further expanded in 2018.

In the context of the professional activities of the HAC, in the first six months of the year it was necessary to devote time to ingraining the attitudes arising from the new HAC strategy and from its new role based on that strategy, to learning to write concise and factual sections in the decisions and outgoing correspondence, as well as to reviewing the administrative processes attached to professional activities in detail.

As a result, a manual containing the descriptions of the tasks of administrative staff and programme officers for all categories of cases was produced in the second half of the year. This document will be used as the basis for drawing up process specifications for evaluators, Visiting Committee members and other evaluators. This will be adopted by the new Body.

The human resources at the Secretariat and the competences required to perform their tasks have improved, their further development is needed. 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.

6. Decisions adopted by the HAC Body:

Type of case	subtype	in support	in support, with comment	not in support	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 accreditation (closure)	progr.	20	13	9	14	56
Institutional accreditation	inst	2				2
Institution monitoring	inst	11				11
Institution monitoring	progr.	8		2		10
TOTAL						485
Appeal cases		12		26		38

