



# **HUNGARIAN ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE**

## **FOLLOW-UP REPORT**

**2020**

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### TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE HAC OF MAY 2018

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) was evaluated by an international panel coordinated by ENQA, with a process that began in late 2017 and the panel report submitted in May 2018. The ENQA Board decision on the HAC's overall substantial compliance with the ESG and the continuation of HAC membership in ENQA was issued on 13 September 2018. The ENQA Board letter also stated that the HAC should submit a follow-up report by September 2020.

This report presents the recommendations of the ENQA panel for all ESG standards where HAC was not fully compliant, and the responses given by HAC on actions taken since 2018 and actions planned to be completed by the HAC's upcoming self-evaluation report in late 2022, early 2023.

Following the ENQA panel report in 2018, the HAC realigned its Quality Assurance and Development Committee (QADC) to coordinate and in part execute actions called for in the panel recommendations. For compiling and checking the follow-up report, drafted by a staff member, a Follow-up Committee was invited under the guidance of the deputy director to provide input and oversight over the content of the report. Discussions in both committees were self-critical and constructive, as was the input from the HAC Board, which finally approved the follow-up report at its meeting on 25 September 2020.

## ENQA JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

#### **ENQA: Substantially compliant**

*ENQA recommendation:* the HAC should ensure publication of the thematic work underway, disseminate it widely and follow up on the promise to publish reports and conduct more system-wide analyses.

#### *HAC response:*

The HAC is keenly aware that it continues to lag in producing thematic analyses. It has been difficult to motivate the committee and working group members dedicated to this task to devote the time required for contributing to HAC projects. The QADC tasked with coordinating and designing the thematic analyses reports has conducted background research in the course of 2019. The discussions focused on producing regular thematic analyses and decided on a realistic plan on issuing one analysis per year. During 2019 a working group has conducted background research on quality assurance practices

internationally and publishing a comparison with the practices of the HAC. The HAC staff is also asked to contribute analyses.

In order to facilitate the dissemination of information, HAC established a journal titled *Hungarian Accreditation Review*, which will be online on the HAC website and electronically distributed to external stakeholders. It has an editorial committee of HAC Board members and external experts. Several articles have already been submitted, including one analysing the lessons learnt from the pilot round of the new doctoral school evaluation procedure, another on the involvement of employers' representatives in the work of the HAC, another on the experiences of the first year of the new Board of Appeals, and others.

*HAC actions planned:*

Thematic analyses will be published on a thorough analysis of the experiences and reflections on the institutional accreditation and doctoral school accreditation procedures in both 2020 and the following year. Moreover, the first issue of the *Hungarian Accreditation Review* is scheduled for release in Fall 2020.

The HAC has decided to contract an external researcher to conduct thematic analyses.

### **ESG 3.6: Internal quality assurance**

#### **ENQA: Substantially compliant**

*ENQA recommendation:* the HAC should (1) ensure methodical follow-up on and feedback from all procedures and all types of stakeholders; (2) conduct systematic analyses of data regularly; (3) inform users of improvements and developments from feedback; and (4) prepare the aggregated system-wide analysis on the impact of its own activity suggested in 2013 by former review panel.

*HAC response:*

An internal quality assurance system (IQA) has been in place already during the 2018 ENQA review. It comprises the HAC's by-laws and regulations pertaining to evaluations and accreditation; survey templates for evaluated institutions and doctoral schools and the involved visiting team members, sent out after each accreditation process, with procedures regularly revised based on their feedback; a programme officers' guidebook detailing all aspects of their work; expert training material, and other related processes.

The HAC Board has reviewed and updated its Action Plan, in line with the *Strategy 2019-2024*, and defined the objectives, tasks, responsibilities, and deadlines of various actions. Moreover, the HAC's QADC has been working on a quality driven new IQA system since 2019. It will set down the regular review of a) accreditation criteria and processes, and b) periodic review or the HAC external quality assurance system.

Information specifying changes is, and has been, published only when a process has been modified substantially. Stakeholders receive up-to-date guidelines that always contained the latest changes when they receive accreditation application documents, and these are on the HAC website as well. Of course, the staff, at its meetings discusses the quality goals and tracks feedback from the site visits and site visit team reports.

*HAC actions planned:*

The agenda for the 21 February 2020 meeting of the QADC included discussing task-based process descriptions; updating the programme officers' guidebook; and a human resources development plan. The meeting has been postponed to a later date when the COVID-19 lockdown is over. The planned, and eventually comprehensive, IQA system will extend to HAC's activities and to all groups participating in the HAC's external quality assurance activities. Regular thematic analyses should be regulated there. Specific IQA procedures are being developed step by step and for institutional evaluation they are scheduled for completion in 2020, for doctoral schools in 2021, and for new programme evaluations in 2022.

**ESG 2.2: Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

**ENQA: Substantially compliant**

*ENQA recommendation:* the HAC should (1) discontinue the practice of evaluating doctoral schools every six months; (2) consider including the evaluation of doctoral schools within the institutional evaluation procedure; and (3) involve non-academic stakeholders and international experts in the design and improvement of its QA procedures.

*HAC response:*

The HAC has discontinued the formal evaluations of doctoral schools every six months, the last of which were carried out in summer 2019. Entirely new ESG-based criteria and new procedures for evaluating doctoral schools were launched as a pilot with six doctoral schools in autumn 2019. The new criteria were drafted by a HAC staff working group, then circulated among a wide range of stakeholders (HAC expert committee members; universities) and revised following their feedback. A launching conference was held in May 2019.

According to the published guidelines<sup>1</sup>, the procedure includes a self-evaluation report by the doctoral school; a site visit by an expert team; an expert team report with possible conditions to be checked in a follow-up procedure as well as suggestions for improvement. To improve the efficiency of the HAC's accreditation procedure, questionnaires were prepared for doctoral schools as well as for the expert team members. The inclusion of employers' representatives in specific committees, which discuss and approve, *inter alia*, new procedures, as well as in expert panels evaluating doctoral schools is being implemented since spring 2020. Fundamental procedural changes, such as was the case with the introduction of the new institutional and doctoral school procedures, are discussed in both the Hungarian and International Advisory Boards (the former composed of employers' representatives).

The option to synchronize with institutional evaluations within a short time was rejected for logistical reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Accreditation Guide for Doctoral Schools: Part 1 Self-assessment Criteria; Part 2 Accreditation Procedure

*HAC actions planned:*

The HAC is gradually involving more international experts, many of them Hungarians from abroad, although their number is still low.

A substantial step in increasing the international presence of Hungarian quality assurance is the recent submission by the Hungarian government to join EQAR as a government member.

**ESG 2.4: Peer-review experts**

**ENQA: Partially compliant**

*ENQA recommendation:* the HAC should (1) give up anonymity and invisibility of its experts for ex-ante procedures; (2) involve foreign experts in all visiting panels and disciplinary committees; (3) ensure the involvement of students in ex-ante evaluations and in all processes and decisions; (4) increase the training of experts; and (5) standardise the method of training according to the purpose and type of evaluation activity.

*HAC response:*

The anonymity of ex-ante experts has been discontinued and rectors of the Higher Education Institutions were notified of this in the HAC accreditation decision letter. The HAC considers involving foreign experts in all visiting panels and disciplinary committees as unrealistic at this time but though started to invite foreign experts to act in some visiting panels, first of all, but not exclusively, Hungarians living abroad. As noted in the previous chapter, their number is still relatively low but continuously increasing.

Students participate in decision-making on all levels, including the HAC Board and all standing expert committees (in 2018 three of eight committees did not have a student member). They are, and have been for many years, included in all site visit teams.

Ex-ante evaluations for new institutions have not occurred for many years, but as with all ex-ante procedures, such evaluations extend to providing an expert opinion for the Educational Authority and would not involve site visits. Whether a student would be involved in this case would be decided when such a case comes up.

Evaluations of new programmes are expert opinions provided to the Educational Authority for licensing new programmes and are conducted via the HAC database. The criteria are currently being revised to reflect both the ESG and national regulations. A draft has been produced by HAC staff in consultation with experts and the Educational Authority. The ex-ante evaluation process involves two, or in undecided cases three, external reviewers who are academics. Students participate on the decision-making level in the expert committee dealing with the application and subsequently the HAC Board.

Ex-ante evaluations of new doctoral schools involve site visit teams that include PhD students. International experts are increasingly involved.

Experts are trained prior to site visits. The half-day training includes the HAC approach to external evaluations, the quality assurance philosophy, and expectations during the site visit and writing the evaluation report. In addition, experts are provided training documents via email. (During the COVID-19 lockdown in spring 2020, all trainings were conducted online.) The National Union of Students and the National Union of Doctoral Students conduct regular

trainings in quality assurance for their nominated and delegated students in HAC committees and site visit teams. Moreover, the HAC takes care to include one or more experienced evaluation team member in the site visit panels to ensure the qualifications of the team.

As far as the involvement of employers' representatives in site visit is concerned, they are increasingly included in institutional accreditation processes. And on the institutional side, employers are always interviewed during site visits.

The annual meeting of the HAC International Advisory Board in October 2019 was held jointly with the Hungarian Advisory Board and the main theme of this meeting was how to improve and to increase the participation of the stakeholders in the HAC's procedures.

*HAC actions planned:*

The HAC has compiled standard training material for the training sessions but it still needs to be finalized for the different procedures.

The QADC has begun to discuss how to involve students in ex ante programme evaluation procedures. The outcomes of the discussion are to be included in the next comprehensive review of the HAC methodologies. As of now, there is no training or training material for ex-ante programme evaluation procedures.

## **ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals**

### **ENQA: Substantially compliant**

*ENQA recommendation:* the HAC should develop a policy of complaints and communicate to the public how complaints will be handled.

*HAC response:*

The new by-laws of the HAC include the possibility for complaints in addition to appeals and the procedures and regulations for the Board of Appeals include both complaints and appeals. While appeals are always discussed by the Board of Appeals, complaints may be handled by the HAC Secretariat, the HAC Board, the HAC president or the Board of Appeals, depending on the nature of the complaint. Concurrently with the acceptance of the Follow-up Report, the HAC Board passed the rules of procedure for appeals and complaints at its meeting on 25 September 2020.

Appeals may be lodged by the rector of the institution that was evaluated or where the programme or doctoral school was evaluated; complaints may be lodged by anyone. Institutions are informed about the possibility for complaints on procedures in the accreditation decision letter. The by-laws are published on the HAC website.

## **ENQA PANEL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The HAC carefully considered all ENQA Panel's suggestions. Some of them have already been implemented and are included in the discussion of the standards above. Others are less

feasible in the HAC context. There are two suggestions implemented that have not been discussed above. One is the adoption into the most recent amendment of the Higher Education Act of the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*. The HAC has acted in accordance with it in international joint programme evaluation procedures but it is now legislated. The amendment to the law also declares that evaluations of international joint programmes by agencies recognized by ENQA and EQAR must be accepted without further evaluation. Eleven Hungarian universities have been included in the first and second round of winning European Universities consortia, and the ratification of the European Approach facilitates its implementation by HAC when their applications for quality evaluation are submitted.

The second suggestion, to prepare an executive summary of site visits, requires an explanation. While there are no chapters labelled as such, the introduction to the site visit reports does contain what amounts to an executive summary.