

**BESSENYEI TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE
HUNGARY**

DEVELOPING A QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN AN INSTITUTE

Laslo Filep

Before 1945 the quality of Hungarian higher education institutes were high even in international comparison. The quality was assured mainly by laws -- and by traditions. There existed neither external nor internal evaluation including student evaluation. After 1945 the quality started gradually lowering. This had several reasons, some important of them were: dismissing many well qualified professors, sharp increase of number of students, more stress on political and ideological subjects, etc.

In 1990 a new situation was created to HE institutions: regained autonomy, competitive society, internationalisation of education and so on. The main challenge was the 1993 HE law (the first in Hungary's history) that prescribed institutional accreditation by international standards. They had to learn the previously unknown quality terms, such as mission statement, self study, quality management. Only very few institutions have reached significant progress in this respect. One of the leading ones is Bessenyei College.

This paper starts with an overview on Hungarian HE system, especially on teacher training, then sketch the institutional accreditation procedure in Hungary. Afterwards there follows short presentation of the college including its quality work. The core part deals with the accreditation and its impact upon the institution.

1. National context for quality assessment

Concerning this topic one must distinguish two different periods: before 1990 and after 1990. Before 1990 Hungary's system was a so-called state socialism, then started the transition period to "capitalism" with market economy and parliamentary democracy.

The main characteristics of this transition on the sphere of higher education were the following:

- from centralised system toward institutional autonomy;
- sharing the power between ministry and newly formed HE federations;
- from unconcern of the labour market to the competitive behaviour;
- responsibility for quality went from ministry to institutions;
- regaining the right to issue Ph.D. degrees by the universities;

Since the whole transition has been going on constitutional basis, the changes were implemented by laws. Among them the new Law on Higher Education (1993) was the most important in our respect. The modification of this law came out on 1st September, 1996.

1.2. The Hungarian higher education system

The inherited structure of higher education was (and remained) binary: universities and colleges.

Before 1945 the system reflected German influence: multi-faculty universities issuing doctor and habilitation degrees, Fachhochschule-type colleges providing bachelor-level courses on some specific field. At that time Hungary had only four universities: Budapest (from 1777), Debrecen (founded in 1912), Szeged (1870 in Kolozsvár, now Kluj in Romania), Pécs (1910 in Pozsony, now Bratislava in Slovakia). Besides these “real” universities the Technical University of Budapest (1782) was regarded as a university.

The universities issued two kind of degrees: doctoral and habilitation. A habilitated doctor was given the right to hold lectures at a university or apply for a professorship.

After 1945 Hungary was forced to change to the Russian system. Universities lost their autonomy and were divided into small specialised universities (academies or schools in western standards). They lost even the right to issued doctoral degrees (1950). This right went over to a special committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, named Scientific Qualifying Committee. The subdivisions of this body controlled all branches of learning in every respect, even the research topics had to be declared to and accepted by the body. It issued two degrees: candidate of science (Csc) and doctor of science (DS) in natural sciences and humanities (not in arts). The qualifying procedure was similar in both cases: to prepare and defend a thesis, to pass a Russian language and a marxism-leninism exam. Having a degree was not yet indispensable for an instructor: political reliability was at least so important. The HE institutions were regarded only as (strictly controlled) teaching establishments, research went over to the newly formed soviet-type institutes

The effect of our 1956 revolution to HE was twofold. Since students and teachers were deeply involved in it, the loss was high after the defeat. Thousands of students and hundreds of teachers emigrated, more were dismissed or imprisoned, several even died, mainly in Budapest, *e.g.* the whole personnel of Sopron academy went into exile and continued its work in the United States (Seattle);

From the other side the strict central control loosened, the institutions gradually regained more and more from their pre-war autonomy in research and teaching. They could issue doctoral titles again, in law and medicine automatically with the diploma as before 1950, for others by a different procedure. This title (Dr) was still not a real degree, only Csc and Dsc that remained in the hand of the Academy. To distinguish between the two doctorates people called Dr “small doctor” and Dsc “great doctor”.

Political reliability (party membership) became less and less important that helped the improvement in quality. The role of elected bodies grew in institutions, but the party control was abolished officially only in 1988.

After the political changes in 1989-1990 Hungary became an independent democratic state that wants to be a member of the European Community. This goal has raised new challenges for higher education, too, one of these was: measurement of quality by international standards. The 1993 HE Law left the traditional binary system unchanged, but defined university as multi-faculty one, hence

opened the road of reintegration process. As a result of the 45 year long disintegration process Hungary now has a pretty big number of HE institutions (see table below).

	State	Church	Private	Total
Universities	25	5	-	30
Colleges	31	23	5	59

From the 30 universities Budapest alone has 18. Almost all of the church and all of the private institutions are newly established. It is expected that the number of higher education institutions will be sharply lowered as a result of the integration movement. The modified HE law (1996) tries to accelerate the integration. During three years (1993-1996) only the number of colleges decreased by three.

The universities regained their former autonomy including to award again doctorate (PhD) and habilitation (Dr Habil.) degrees. The modified law introduced a new doctorate degree in arts: doctor of liberal arts (DLA). The Scientific Qualifying Committee was dissolved. The former Csc can be converted to PhD at some universities.

If one find this degree system somewhat confusing and complicated, it is not one's own fault: it is a consequence of Hungary's turbulent history in 20th century.

1.2. Teacher training in Hungary

Since both Hungarian institutions preparing case studies deal with teacher training we must say something about the structure of teacher training in Hungary.

The training is of four levels. The universities of humanities and sciences train teachers for secondary schools. Besides, we have three different kinds of teacher training colleges: one trains subject teachers for the upper four grades of general schools, other instructors for the lower four grades of general schools, and the third one for kindergartens.

To clarify this difficult situation, see the following table:

Training institutes	Universities	Colleges		
		1. Kind (6)	2. Kind (14)	3. Kind (33)
	Secondary	General (elementary)		Nursery (kindergarten)
Age of pupils	14-18	10-14	6-10	3-6
Grades	1-4	5-8	1-4	3 groups
Subject teachers?	yes	yes	no	no
Length of study	5 years	4 years	4 years	3 years

The restructuring of teacher training has always been, and even now is being a topic of lively debate in Hungary -- as probably in many countries. For instance, the colleges of first kind tend to become a faculty of a university. This process is stimulated by the modified HE law introducing the “fuzzing” concept of unified teacher training.

1.3. Institutional accreditation in Hungary

The legal basis for this was the HE Law that came into effect on 10 January 1993. It prescribed: “by 30 June 1998 at the latest, all higher education institutions must be accredited using a uniform procedure”.

This law also established the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) that had another task, too, besides institutional accreditation: to evaluate PhD programme proposals submitted by universities, to judge applications of institutions for establishing or starting new majors (see Table 1 for more information about HAC).

Accreditation and related concepts, such as mission statement, strategic plan, self evaluation, etc., were absolutely new for Hungarian higher education. Thus the HAC had to work out first a self-evaluation guidebook and conducted a pilot project in 1994 involving six institutions (two universities, four colleges).

Making use of the experiences HAC rewrite the guidebook and finalised its procedure (see the flow-chart on Table 2). The final outcome of the accreditation for an institute can be: accredited, conditionally accredited, not accredited. These outcomes are based on the quality assessments of each major using the following code: exceptional, strong, weak, inadequate. The courses are not judged separately, but serve as one of the main factors for judging majors.

The first phase of “real” accreditation started in 1995 involving ten institutions from Debrecen region (including ours). Since the accreditation is a periodic procedure at least every five years for each institution, it should stimulate and enable higher education institutions to committed to and competent in working out their own internal quality control systems. As a direct result Hungary has been included into the second experimental round of Euro-Accreditation (the first one involved only three universities, namely those of Utrecht, Göteborg and Porto).

2. Institutional context for quality assurance

2.1. The Bessenyei College of Education -- general information and governance structure

The Bessenyei College is basically a teacher’s training college of first kind, but includes a second type one as a separate department. It was established in 1962 in Nyíregyháza and by now is one of the largest colleges in Hungary. The next table shows some data on the college from the last five academic years:

	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1.10.1996
Number of departments	26	29	30	31	31	31
Number of majors	23	27	32	33	33	33
Number of major-pairings	50	64	87	92	98	110
Number of students (T)	2 533	2 719	2 950	3 576	3 864	3 875
Number of ordinary (full-time) teachers (O)	272	276	286	308	264	273
Reduced number of O-Teachers (R)*	199	204	212	235	200	207
O/T ratio	1/9.3	1/9.9	1/10.3	1/11.6	1/14.6	1/14.2
Teachers with scientific degree (S)	28	31	36	44	47	61
Qualified teachers (Q)	122	127	137	143	133	133
S/R ration in per cent	14%	15.2%	17%	18.7%	23.59%	29.5%
Q/R ratio in per cent	61.3%	62.3%	64.6%	60.9%	66.5%	64.9%

*: Reduced number of teacher; total: drawing, music, physical education departments.

S: Having at least PhD degree.

Q: Having at least university doctorate title.

The 31 majors are the following: Hungarian, English (2), French (2), German (2), Italian (2), Russian, Ukrainian, Cultural and Adult Education, Drawing, Visual Communication, History, Librarianship, Music, Folk Music, Conductor, Social Pedagogy, Typing and Shorthand (humanities and arts); Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Ecology, Geography, Household Economy, Mathematics, Physics, Physical Education, Technics (sciences).

The students take up two majors combined in more than 100 variations. Four of the majors (all have been introduced lately) do not belong to teacher training. This shows that the college started to cross the borders of teacher training and widen its profile. Commencing of two more non-teacher majors are also expected, namely economy and international relations.

2.2. Quality work in the college

Our management put more stress on quality assurance and improvement than usual in Hungary's HE before 1993, too. Some measures were implemented in the academic principles and regulations, such as:

- yearly tenders for writing high level papers suitable for publication;
- establishing teacher and student awards for recognition of excellent work;
- reward system for getting a new degree or passing a language exam;
- supporting student research to prepare studies for national student competition;
- financing half-year study trips for staff members.

With these tools the college reached a good progress in quality that has been accelerated since 1992 (the figures are shown on page 4 table), when we joined a three-year project named “Quality enhancement of Hungarian higher education”. The main motivation was the preparation for the coming institutional accreditation, that is the first overall external evaluation of college’s work. This project involved six Hungarian “college associations” and 16 Dutch “hogescholen” and was conducted by HOBEON, that is the Association of Dutch Colleges. Our partner institute was the “hogeschool van Amsterdam”. As a result of this project we were more prepared for external evaluation, namely institutional accreditation when it “broke in”, then the other institutions in Debrecen region.

Connected with accreditation we started to build up a quality assurance system within the college by selecting one person from each department and training them to “quality business”.

3. Accreditation of the college

The accreditation started last summer with a letter from HAC stated “your institution will be accredited next year”. Then a guidebook was sent to fill in. This book asked a lot of data about the whole institution, the field of studies, the students, the departments, the research activities, and so on. Since these kind of data has never been asked before, the filling of this book was a pretty hard job. Another problem was that the same book was sent to all kind of institutions, so first one had to specialise to one’s specific institutions the generally draft items.

It may be interesting to readers from other countries to sketch the main data groups requested by HAC guidebook:

- data on the whole institution: mission statement, governance structure, statistics (employees, students, degrees issued), international relations, infrastructure, support units, system and means of quality assurance, application and admission procedure;
- data on faculties (if there is any): departments, fields of study, data on undergraduate training and continuing education, student/teacher ratio, research work;
- data on the fields of study (majors): the general aims and specialities, the detailed description of curriculum, course description by subjects, language learning, students, student evaluation, infrastructure, developmental policy;
- data on departments: instructors and researchers, tenders gained and publications by employees, infrastructure, documentation of department’s activity (publications, prize-winning student’s studies, theses).

Table 2 shows the steps after submitting the guidebook to HAC. From these the VC’s call is the crucial one for the institution. This happened in our college between 16-18 March, 1996. The coarse outline of their activity:

1st day

1. A brief meeting with the top management to finalise the programme.

2. Short introductory meetings between staff and respective VC members by departments.
3. Starting the real working phase. Some VC members checks the data on institution while others deal with majors: discuss curriculum, syllabuses, schedule of examinations; look into textbooks, students diploma works, teachers' publications; sit in classroom, etc.
4. Afternoon from 5 to 7: meeting with student self-government, then with alumni.
5. Evening: informal dinner and discussion with managers, leading instructors and some alumni.

2nd day

1. Visiting the infrastructural units (library, computer centre, etc.).
2. Like 1st day 3. expanded by visits in the two laboratory schools and talk some individual students.
3. Evening: business dinner for VC members only; closed discussion.

3r day

1. Like first day 3
2. Early afternoon: VC meeting to compile their major points of the evaluation.
3. Farewell meeting with top managers to inform them of VC' major findings, possibly request additional information.

The final HAC decision was sent to the college in August, 1996. The overall "verdict" for the college as a whole was: accredited as a HE institution, since it meets the requirements of the HE law. Among the colleges it was classified excellent. Data shows that we are the first considering the number of degrees of staff, the second one has about only half of it. From the 31 majors 12 received excellent, 12 strong, two inadequate marks (the two Italians). The two English language majors received conditional accreditation, which means that they can continue giving diplomas till 1998. By that time the department will have had at least one PhD degree holder instructor. In case of the five new majors not giving diplomas yet the accreditation was postponed.

The two Italian majors lost the right issuing degrees and recruiting new students, but can finish the training for the existing ones. They will get their diplomas from some other college.

4. The impacts of accreditation upon the college

The accreditation, that is the first overall expert external evaluation, was a milestone in the life of the college. It was in fact a forced SWOT-analysis of the quality of staff, courses, teaching, research, management, students and infrastructure.

The first response was the forming of a stable Quality Assurance Unit from the provisional Accreditation Committee. Until now it is the first such unit in Hungarian HE, and the first head of this unit of the writer of this study. It is also worth mentioning that the creation of such unit was prescribed neither by HAC nor by HE law;

This new unit has worked out the college's quality assurance system (Table 5) and "responsible" partly for the planning of the new governance structure (Table 4).

The basic task of the unit is to prepare the college for the next institutional accreditation and for the in-between monitor evaluations. Besides, the unit works out the applications for issuing university level diplomas of those majors proving excellent in accreditation. These applications are also submitted to HAC. We also want to start two new majors, namely: international relations and economy.

Another important effect of accreditation was the setting of a new management information system off. We recognised while filling out HAC guidebook that we have not a coherent overview of the information which is necessary for an autonomous institution. Formerly we collected data mainly for ministry. Roughly speaking: the ministry knew everything about institutions, but those knew nothing about themselves. We could not even calculate the cost of a diploma issued, partly because formerly it was the concern of ministry partly because we have not enough information for it. We elaborate a plan for developing a computerised information system that can support better the decision-taking process.

The changing of culture in the college has also started motivated mainly by the requirement of the next accreditation but partly by the new challenges of society. The Quality Assurance Unit plays a key role in this process.

The unit based on the data and experiences gained during accreditation is developing a quality monitoring and improvement system. The main elements of our work are the following:

- working out an institutional procedure by which each new academic programme is approved and each existing programme is regularly reviewed;
- setting up a standard set of performance indicators prepared for programme review;
- involving external people (*e.g.* alumni) in the internal evaluation process including exams;
- improving the methods and increasing the role of the existing student evaluation;
- elaborating and introducing a credit system compatible with ECTS standards;
- to write a study guide for recruiting students (the first one in the college);
- managing the applications (tenders) for research and teaching funding;
- organising further education courses in the college for staff and encourage them to participate in postgraduate (PhD) or postdoctorate courses at some university;

- surveying the college infrastructure and weighing them in the view of their importance in quality of teaching and research.

Last but not least: to spread the quality concern among staff we want to write a quality assurance handbook -- firstly in Hungary's HEK.