

THE FERENC KÖLCSEY REFORMED TEACHERS' TRAINING COLLEGE HUNGARY

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1. REVIEW OF THE INSTITUTION

1.1. History

The present college grew out of the Reformed College of Debrecen, one of the oldest educational institutions in Hungary. The first book published on the goals of teacher training dates back to 1538. In the course of history different principles dominated the training. In 1959 the lower primary teacher training became part of higher education and the Institution has been operating as a college since 1976 as the largest of its kind in Hungary. In 1990 the college took the name of the great Hungarian poet Ferenc Kolcsey. Since 1993 the college has been run by the Reformed Church.

1.2. Training

Our college provides two types of training. In the framework of a 3-year study programme we train prospective teachers to teach all the subjects in the lower primary grades. A recently developed curriculum enables students to major in two fields and obtain a dual degree after four years of study. In this 4-year programme, the traditional teacher's degree is combined with one of the following majors: English, German, Librarianship, Cantor Training, Teacher of Religion and Communication. In the course of the general obligatory training our students deepen their knowledge in pedagogy, psychology, mathematics, foreign languages, Hungarian language and literature, science and skill subjects. In addition, they study the methodology of the subjects mentioned. The college offers a wide range of specialisations, among which the most important are library studies, music, arts and crafts, drawing, physical education, technology, multimedia and secretarial studies.

For a year we have been linked to the Reformed Church and the Academy of Theology and as a result our curriculum has been enriched with new courses, such as Bible study.

Regular students are qualified to teach in the lower grades (1-4) of primary education. Language majors have a wider range of choice, as their degree is valid for teaching children aged 6-1. In addition to the regular programme of study a special co-operative programme is offered to theological students enrolled in the Academy of Theology who wish to teach in primary schools. We also offer lower primary training to kindergarten teachers.

Since 1995 lower primary teacher training has consisted of four years of training, which means that students have to choose one of the 12 areas of education. The idea is that they should acquire in-depth knowledge in their chosen area, and can teach it in the 5th and 6th forms (to pupils aged up to 12 years). We are the only lower primary teachers' college in Hungary that can offer all the areas to

its students (mother tongue, man and society, knowledge of nature, mathematics, informatics, technology, home economics, PE, music, visual culture and the two languages mentioned above). This new programme is a heavy load for our students, but we have been able to keep our earlier majors.

1.3. Staff and the infrastructural background

In recent years the number of staff -- mainly due to members going into retirement -- has decreased from 100 to 80 due to the worsening economic situation and economic considerations. Our 80 full-time and some 30-40 part-timers teach the 250 subjects to our almost 1 000 students.

A college of this size has proved to be manageable with a two-level organisation. The upper leadership (principal, assistant principals, the College Board and its committees) directly supervises the ten departments (Pedagogy, Social Sciences, Hungarian Language and Literature, Foreign Languages, Sciences, Technology, Informatics, Physical Education, Music, Visual Education). The subjects are managed by the departments, but the design of curriculum for the majors and their modification is the job of those in charge of the individual subjects and of the Curriculum Design Committee.

The infrastructure supporting training at the college has been at our disposal for a long time and has been steadily developing, such as the library, the hostel, capable of accommodating half of the students, or the demo school that has 850 pupils. The informatics background with the computer network and some special classrooms (such as a typing classroom, a teaching kitchen, an educational technology classroom) are the result of recent developments.

Our city provides an ideal background for high-quality teacher training. Debrecen has traditionally been a centre of education, where along with the many secondary schools there are universities and colleges representing almost all branches of science. Besides the local centre of the Hungarian Academy of Art and Sciences and its institutions the town boasts significant musical, artistic and sports life. All this creates a highly favourable situation for an institution which provides such a comprehensive training as our college.

2. THE ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

2.1. Starting

Our college was one of the first to apply to be part of the accreditation quality assessment and quality assurance system, a procedure that was unknown and new in the whole country. We were the first to apply among the institutions affiliated with the various churches.

The first step was to appoint the chief accreditation officer in May 1995, who was able to participate at the INQAHE conference in Utrecht and at the follow-up training, which provided a significant international perspective.

The guide book issued by the Secretariat of the National Accreditation Board was read during the summer, so by the end of August, with a detailed plan of action and with our own guidelines at hand, we were able to set to work. Initially only the task of the principal, the assistant principals, the heads of department, and the departmental accreditation officers was delineated.

The latter were put in charge of seeing the procedure through to its completion by the departments.

2.2. Collecting data

As the first step we started to collect data and information about the departments and some other units based on the following guidelines:

- how the subjects taught at the individual departments are built on each other and how they fit the system of training;
- co-ordination with other departments;
- initiatives for developing the training;
- quality assurance systems in the departments;
- ways of student feedback;
- ratio of full-time and part-time teacher trainers;
- scholarly and scientific activities assisting training:
 - topics, participants, supervisors;
 - applications, grants;
 - achievements, publications;
 - infrastructure supporting training;
 - library, informatics;
 - labs, subject classrooms, instruments;
- practical training, demo school;
- subjects taught, people in charge of the subjects;
 - elaborateness of subject descriptions;
 - ratio of class activities and assignments in;
 - individual subjects;
 - assessment methods;
- evaluation of special training provided by the department.

2.3. Thesis topics recommended by the department and their reception by students.

This information had to be supplemented somewhat later, but by the end of September we had most of the basic information required for the self-evaluation of the majors and the institution. The missing parts were collected while we were working on the self-evaluation reports. It was the Registrar's Office, responsible for keeping the records of the students and managing their educational affairs, that had the lion's share in providing data. They provided most of the information concerning admission, studies, thesis, graduation exam and future employment of our students. They also collected most of the data on staff and subjects.

2.4. Self-evaluations

The data collected and the evaluations served as the basis of the self-evaluation of the college and its leadership on the one hand, and the basis of the self-evaluations of the majors on the other. These self-evaluations were prepared in early and mid October, making use of the several comprehensive analyses performed by the accreditation officers. Altogether about ten staff members contributed to the final document, but if we add the self-evaluations of the lower-primary majors, the accreditation report of some 400 pages was authored by about 25 staff members. The unified format of the partial reports required that a set of guidelines be worked out, a job performed by the chief accreditation officer.

One of the most significant and longest self-evaluations was the one of the college itself, which can be broken down into the following parts:

- History, facts, structure:
 - history, traditions;
 - current situation (October 1994).

- Ancillary units, infrastructure:
 - basic data of the college;
 - demo school;
 - library holdings;
 - student hostels;
 - information technology infrastructure;
 - finance department, ancillary units;
 - registrar's office;
 - administration.

- Relationships, regional function:
 - regional role;
 - institutional relationships.

- Research, role of college in professional public life:
 - research topics;
 - relationship between training and research.

- Students:
 - registration;
 - studies;
 - the students and the college;
 - the future of our students.

- Operation, leadership:
 - leaders and their selection;
 - committees;
 - people in charge;
 - regulations.

- Quality and the future:
 - quality assurance;
 - development;
- The achievements of self-evaluation.

The self-evaluations of the individual majors were made on the basis of the national guidelines, which are the following:

- the general objectives of the majors;
- the co-operation of the professional groups (departments) in charge of the majors, the co-ordination of the work, the authority of those responsible for the majors;
- the staff participating in the training of majors; co-opting outside experts in the training of majors;
- the curriculum of the major:
 - subjects built on each other;
 - the ratio of compulsory, compulsory elective and elective classes;
 - the ratio of classes in practical and theoretical training;
 - class load and time for extra curricular activities;
 - practical training for majors;
 - requirements of signatures, seminar grades, exams, comprehensive exams;
 - opportunities for transferability of credits;
- thesis system of graduation exam:
 - providing thesis topics, opportunities for consultations;
 - grading thesis;
 - the way of conducting the graduation exam;
 - participation and role of outside experts at the exam;
 - grading the diploma;
- required knowledge of foreign languages, opportunities for language learning;
- students:
 - admission system, admitted students;
 - student achievements during training;
 - achievements of graduated students;
- scientific activity supporting training;
- student's scholarly circles;
- infrastructure supporting training;
- evaluation of the majors by students;
- the quality policy and quality assurance methods of the majors;

- the development policy of the majors (subjects, curriculum development); the development policy of faculties and the institution from the point of view of the majors.

2.5. Discussion and correction of the documents in the college

As the submission deadline of the accreditation document was 1st November 1996, at about 20 October the relevant committees started to give an opinion on the self-evaluation reports. The self-evaluation of the institution was discussed and accepted by the College Board. Almost one third of the some 30 member Board is made up of student representatives, but this document was not new for them, since from the very beginning we had been striving to draw them in. So much so that they provided background materials to parts of the report that concerned them. The case was the same with the self-evaluation of the majors, which came to include the opinion of the students in an unchanged form. The self-evaluations of the majors were assessed by the Curriculum Development Committee, consisting mainly of the department representatives and staff members responsible for the majors. The self-evaluation of the lower-primary major -- being the most significant and a standard of comparison for the others to come -- was also accepted by the College Board;

There was a lot to do before submitting the report to meet the deadline to ensure the unified format of the document, but it did not mean the end of the tasks. We were preparing until mid-February to receive the Visiting Committee. During this period the descriptions of the subjects were given a unified format, or were amended. Descriptions that existed only in their outlines were written out in full. This job was done by the departments, staff members responsible for the individual subjects, and by staff at large. It was also up to the departments to prepare their own self-evaluations. Despite the fact that the official guidelines did not contain provisions for this, at the end of so much work it seemed practicable to make such an assessment. Another spin-off was the full records of the publications the college staff produced in the past five years. Earlier it existed only as partial data collected by the Science Committee of the college.

2.6. The visiting process

Five members of the Visiting Committee spent the period between 11 and 13 February 1996 at the college. During the preliminary visit to the college the chair have a favourable opinion of the structure, layout and contents of our report, and asked for only some supplementary information. The Visiting Committee did part of its job as a body: they talked to the representatives of our current and one-time students, to some staff members who either have a PhD or are training to have one. During the three days the members of the Committee mainly did specialised work either individually or in groups, examining the majors in line with their own field, which mainly consisted in conversations with the staff members in charge of the individual majors. They also examined the departments, which meant that they had conversations with staff, studied thesis, descriptions of subjects and the infrastructure of the departments. They also observed classes, visited the library, the demo school a the students' hostel. At the end of the tiring and busy three days the Committee informed the principal and the chief accreditation officer of their observations and impressions. They had some comments on certain areas, but had a favourable overview and indicated that they would recommend a "strong" qualification, which is the second after "outstanding" on the 4 grade scale. It coincides with what we considered fair in our self-evaluation.

2.7. The statement of the Visiting Committee

We received the opinion of the Visiting Committee and the report of the Special Committee on Teacher Training in Higher Education of the national Accreditation Committee in writing at the end of May. We could comment on the report until 14 June. They evaluate the lower primary major -- as the basic major -- "strong", and recommend that degrees should be awarded continuously until the next evaluation to be held in the 1999/2000 academic year. The short explanation contains the following:

- the curriculum of the major takes into consideration the requirements of the central curriculum;
- the system of staff members being in charge of individual subjects functions well
- the level of thesis is continuously improving, the requirements of the graduation exam are adequate;
- the students of the major do proper scientific work;
- quality control at the major is adequate.

Concerning the communication and library majors they recommend further monitoring because the requirements of qualification have not yet been approved of by law. The curriculum is suitable, but staff is not complete and needs to be developed. The Committee says that authority over the teacher of religion and the cantor majors rests with the church, so their curricula cannot be evaluated by the state. They recommend that the report of the Visiting Committee should be taken into consideration in the accreditation of the Calvinist Academy of Theology.

2.8. The resolution of the Hungarian Accreditation Board

The six months between the opinion of the Visiting Committee and the resolution of the Board provided enough time for thorough reconsideration at every level. This is all the more justified because our college was the first one among the teacher training colleges affiliated with various churches that had been accredited according to guidelines that seem to be finalised and the modified Higher Education Act>.

According to the resolution the Kölcsey Ferenc Teacher Training College can as a college be accredited. The explanation underlines that:

- the proportion of teachers who have post-graduate degrees is adequate
- the traditions of teacher training are outstanding;
- the institution is suitable for new type of teacher training, *i.e.* able to launch the educational areas defined by the qualification requirements;
- the infrastructure and the equipment of the library meet the needs of college education.

The above statements are related to accreditation at institutional level, but ht majors had also been accredited and its brief summary is as follows:

- In teacher majors the degrees can normally be issued because:

- the curriculum is in line with the national requirements;
 - the system of staff members being in charge of individual subjects functions well;
 - the level of thesis and the final exams is adequate;
 - the students do proper scientific work;
 - the quality control in the majors is adequate.
- In religious education major degrees can be issued, because besides the reasons mentioned above the quality of outside staff (from the Academy of Theology) provide required spirit and quality:
- the College intends to set up a Department of Theology;
 - the staff member who is in charge of the major works well.
- At cantor, communication and library majors the accreditation procedure should be completed by 2001, because no students have graduated in these majors:
- in cantor major the departmental background is good, the equipment is excellent and outside staff members also provide proper quality;
 - in communication and library major the curriculum is suitable, but the qualification requirements have not been nationally approved. The staff is not complete yet and needs to be developed.

The resolution of the Board has been submitted to the Minister of Culture and Public Education and will be available in the relevant periodicals and official documents. At the same time the College can also publish its position and the length of the document cannot be more than the Resolution of the Board.

3. THE IMPACT OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

3.1. As we perceived it at the time of self-evaluation -- Extracts from the self-evaluation report of the institute

3.1.1. Quality control

The quality of teaching and research as well as the level of the management of the institution and its staff are the prerequisites for the knowledge of the students and the quality of their degree. In order to assure quality, the above factors should be investigated, which also provide the general topic of self-evaluation reports and the major tasks of the management, boards and persons in charge. Also the activities related to the admittance of students, such as the application, entrance examination process and application from other colleges and teaching are also taken into consideration. The latter includes the development of both the content and the methodology of the subjects, their relationships, the testing and examination system, the dissertation and the final exam as well as the teaching practice expanding through the whole training practice. The renewal of education has been an ongoing process at our colleges shown not only by several new curricula of majors and specialised courses, but the spectacular updating of technology in areas such as informatics and the improvement of the organisation of education, new textbooks, study-aids, teaching in small groups or differentiating education.

On the other hand, quality can also be seen as the system of feedback relating to quality. This can happen through gathering and evaluating information, and surveys and studies on education, its efficiency and the employment of our students. In line with the rules and regulations of the college, students' participation is ensured in teaching and major issues of the college, in order to gain direct feedback from the students. Another channel for gaining access to students' opinion is a system in which every student-group has a support-teacher, who provides help in their studies. Students' responses are usually directly addressed to the departments or the staff of the Administration Department. However, the systematic gathering of students' opinions needs to be worked out together with the students' self-government, and the introduction of four-year training may entail the increase in the role of students' representatives.

Another way of quality assurance is to take into consideration the external measurement of the achievement of both the students and the staff at various national competitions organised by the teacher training colleges in areas such as teaching mother tongue, physical education, technology, as well as mathematics and pronunciation. Several spectacular prizes have been won by our students choirs and exhibitions. Students' professional achievement is also measured at the national forums of students' scientific study circles every two years, where several awards have been won by our students, although their interest in participation has diminished recently. The fact that several of the final examinations are chaired by recognised authorities from universities and other institutions has made it possible to directly evaluate the staff's teaching achievement and has also contributed to the recognition of our language major training programmes;

Several of the staff members have attended regional or national conferences, presenting their research results in methodology or other areas. Our staff's recognition is also shown by the fact several of them have been invited to lecture at symposiums, memorial sessions, and further education programmes. Similarly, most of our colleagues in the Department of Art and Music are well-known performers of concerts and participants of art exhibitions.

3.2. Developments

As far as development is concerned, under present circumstances and in this training structure, quality assurance seems to be crucial. Improving the system of students' feedback is an essential element of raising level of teaching. In the past six or seven years the earlier system of students' representation at departments has atrophied. Students' self government has been gaining enough strength, but voicing their opinion is occasional, like staff applications, promotions, etc. The outlines of the students' responses on teaching are emerging in discussions of teaching and students. We also intend to revitalise the students' representation system at the departments, which provides direct although occasionally highly subjective feedback. Moreover a questionnaire related to a subject taught by one specific teacher is being worked out, which could be a more objective feedback to be processed by computer. Moreover we will also take into consideration the experiences of our graduate students, which very often put things in a wider perspective and may also reveal deficiencies as well. Questionnaires on employment and further education, forwarded to our former students also contained questions on the content of education. In order to improve teaching we intend to rely more and more on the feedback of teachers from other institutions, members of examination committees and mentor teachers. Gathering and processing this kind of written material (reports on teaching practice, and reports of chairpersons on final examinations, etc.).

In the field of improving quality one of the most important tasks is to support research related to education. Significant progress has been made in surveying the structure of research, whose financing through external applications will also be supplemented with internal resources, particularly in the case of research topics just started or serving the immediate aims of education.

3.3. The results of self-evaluation

In 1995 autumn we put it this way: we are coming to the end of a long and unusual job and it has become quite clear that there is a lot to be done. The college perhaps has never had to cope with a task like this, which required a highly intense co-operation between the students, the staff, people in charge and the management. This task has also revealed much of our resources, our strengths and weaknesses.

Drawing up the self-evaluation on the institution, including the majors and the departments according to the guidelines had a kind of value-orientation role. Focusing on the operation of the college has shifted our attention to the majors, and people in charge of majors and subjects. We also had to consider the role of the departments as the place where the external teachers giving lessons are attached to the institute and also as the source of the teaching documents and actual teaching. This should also serve as a guideline for the operation of the college board which should put the regular accounting of the majors and departments on its agenda. Our recent college schedule has been formulated accordingly, which has also meant a return to an earlier routine. Besides lots of obligatory tasks, the preparation of self-evaluation and the reconsideration of development strategies did not involve much extra work, but may well serve future overviews.

Self-evaluation carried out by majors has strengthened the role of those in charge of majors, whose tasks is the integration of the teaching process. this applies particularly to the new majors which may require more careful planning in course descriptions, hiring outside staff and appointing staff members to be in charge of subjects.

The recurrent motive of self-evaluation was quality assurance. As it turned out, several of its elements had already existed but not systematically, and these were rather subjective and ad hoc although we also had gathered for more objective research.

Gathering data from the majors and the departments has resulted in a more objective self-knowledge. Deficiencies and disproportions have also been revealed, included the rigidity of our training programmes and the very small amount of elective courses. Courses that are actually elective are foreign languages, specialised courses or the second majors.

Gathering data for the accreditation and evaluation has revealed new points in areas that seemed to be traditionally well-organised. In the 80's several staff members got their title of doctor and this process was regularly monitored by the college board. Scholarly achievements broken down according to subjects, persons, publication and lectures have been followed up by the Scholarly Committee. Despite this fact we did not have summarised data on the institution and particularly on subjects. We did not have an overview on the applications according to topics and persons, the contacts of departments and staff members with other institutions, regions as well as memberships in scholarly and other professional organisations. It seems to be evident that more financial resources should be provided for scholarly work and the quality of equipment should be improved in the field of languages, psychology, physical education, natural history and technology.

There have been several other spin-offs of the self-evaluation and data collection, which have revealed deficiencies and hitches, most of them however have already been put right, although there is a lot to do.

3.4. How we see the gain of accreditation according to a survey carried out among the staff

After familiarising ourselves with the report of the Visiting Committee, a questionnaire has been administered to the staff and two thirds of the questionnaires filled in were actually returned. The distribution of the questionnaires which were not returned is not even, and part of the staff members of some departments en masse were left out perhaps due to some administration failure. This fact however will not significantly change the validity of the survey in relation to the whole institution. The first five questions were concerned with self-evaluation answering the questions on a five grade scale. All the answers were expressed in figures and no one put their comments in writing. Most of the respondents marked the first three questions with a three or a four, which shows the organisation and the preparation of the task.

- The definition and the size of the task at the beginning of the process
Grades: 1 -- 5% ; 2 -- 18% ; 3: 27% ; 4 -- 47% ; 5 -- 3% ;
- The transparency of the level of organisation
Grades: 1 -- 8% ; 2 -- 11% ; 3: 24% ; 4 -- 47% ; 5 -- 3% ;
- The definition of the role of the staff members
Grades: 1 -- 8% ; 2 -- 11% ; 3 -- 18% ; 4 -- 30% ; 5 -- 33% .

Grades related to the access of information and co-operation during the preparation of the documents:

1 -- 8% ; 2 -- 3% ; 3 -- 18% ; 4 -- 41% ; 5 -- 30% .

Emphasis was laid on the accessibility of the finalised documents while being prepared and after the documents were submitted. Accordingly, the responses are rather positive:

1 -- 5% ; 2 -- 5% ; 3 -- 15% ; 4 -- 44% ; 5 -- 31% .

The preparation of the accreditation documents, and commenting and correcting the finalised documents meant a lot of extra work for the staff, which cannot be easily expressed in figures. The question related to the increase of administration in comparison with the average level was answered as follows:

+10%: 3% ; +50%: 26% 100% (that is it doubled) : 50% + 200%: 9% ; +300%: 3% ;
+400%: 3% 500%: 3%

That means on the average the amount of tasks increased by 117 per cent for college.

The question related to the 200 page guideline of the Accreditation Committee and the relevance of the required data was answered affirmatively in a high proportion. Thirty-three per cent of the respondents considered the required date relevant on the whole, and 23 per cent found at least 80 per cent of them important. Only 17 per cent of the respondents attached relevance less than 50 per cent to the required data. Whereas some of them would have dropped the detailed statistics, others found

some of the data unnecessary. It may well be that the respondent is right who thinks that what has not been taken into consideration was probably unnecessary. It is noteworthy that two respondents whose job significantly increased attached only very little importance to the required data.

Most of the staff members found the work of the Visiting Committee fair and co-operative but too busy and too short for proper evaluation. Some staff members appreciated the circumspection and the discretion, whereas someone complained about the lack of interest of one of the committee members. Some respondents said that more in-depth information could have been gained during the department visits. As someone put it: "The hype about it was bigger than it deserved.

The following answers were given to the question related to the accreditation procedure and to the perceived and the expected changes. Seven per cent of the respondents did not attach any importance to it, whereas the systematic information gathered about the institution, the departments and the majors was considered relevant by 74 per cent. The data were considered important for the formation of a realistic self-image by 52 per cent and 37 per cent think it will contribute to a favourable image. According to 5 per cent the accreditation procedure may improve the level of teaching. 10 per cent think it will contribute to scholarly work, 7 per cent expect the improvement of infrastructure, *i.e.* effect can by all means be only indirect. The role of accreditation was considered more positive in connection with the co-operation between management, staff members and the students by 17 per cent. In the structure of the institution, the strengthening of the role of the staff members in charge of majors was found positive by 23 per cent and further 10 per cent, *i.e.* altogether 33 per cent refers to the importance of staff members responsible for subjects. The effect on rules and regulations was not considered significant (7 per cent) whereas 15 per cent expects the increase in the role of bodies, committees and the students.

Fifty-five per cent of the respondents who answered the question related to the effect of accreditation on quality assurance said that the awareness of things like admission ratio, participation in competitions, employment opportunities of our students, etc., has increased. Fifteen per cent have had experience with the introduction of the evaluation of staff members by the students and 26 per cent are looking forward to it. The involvement of students, the regular surveys within the institution and its internal accreditation were emphasised by some of the staff members. Some of them have also suggested that the accreditation procedure ought to be more tailor-made for the specific institutions and Hungarian conditions.

4. SUMMARY

4.1. The general tasks of quality assurance

It is generally admitted that constant quality control is in the best interest of the institution. In order to enter into a higher level, a new committee has been set up to cope with the immediate and the long term tasks as follows:

- giving opinions on the training programmes by staff members and students;
- evaluation of staff members by students;
- giving opinions on the efficiency of the training by our former students, data on their employment;
- introduction of new majors and new subjects;
- infrastructure and testing staff members' abilities for teaching new subjects;

- streamlining majors and separating them from the teacher major;
- harmonising research and teaching;
- recognition of quality work.