

## Hungarian Accreditation Committee CoARA Action Plan (2024-2029)

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### 1. Introduction

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB) is a national-level, independent body of experts tasked with the external evaluation of the quality of educational and related research activities and the internal quality assurance (QA) systems of higher education institutions in Hungary. It operates within the scope of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The Board is comprised of 20 higher education experts, students and external stakeholders and is the highest decision-making board. It determines the by-laws, rules of procedure, organisational framework and evaluation and accreditation criteria and procedures, and passes resolutions on accreditation decisions. Expert colleges and a Secretariat contribute to its operations.

In addition, the MAB has two statutory boards, a Financial Supervisory Board and a Board of Appeals. The latter board of three independent members handles appeals against the MAB's decisions and, in line with internal regulations, may deal with complaints against procedures. A Strategic Planning Board provides guidance and recommendations for the MAB's work.

The MAB scope of activities extends to

- initial (ex ante) accreditation of new institutions
- initial evaluation of education and learning outcome framework requirements of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes
- initial evaluation of education and learning outcome framework requirements of Bachelor programmes;
- initial evaluation of education and learning outcome framework requirements of Master programmes;
- initial accreditation of VET programmes;
- initial accreditation of Bachelor programmes;
- initial accreditation of Master programmes;
- initial accreditation of new doctoral schools at universities;
- accreditation (ex post) of institutions in five-year cycles;
- accreditation of doctoral schools in maximum five-year cycles;
- WFME standards-based accreditation of basic medical programmes.

The MAB may evaluate running Bachelor and Master programmes if requested by an institution or the ministry. Additionally, it evaluates applications for awarding university professor positions<sup>1</sup>.

To increase the efficiency and competitiveness of the Hungarian HEIs, a major transformation has been taking place in the past five years; within this transformation, twenty-one formerly state-run HEIs have undergone a change in their governance and are now managed by Boards of Trustees. The aim of the Hungarian Government with the model change was to enhance the level of education in higher education by providing a more flexible and feasible operational environment<sup>2</sup>.

The National Higher Education Act of 2011, lists some 64 higher education institutions operating in Hungary: 5 state universities, 24 non-state universities (18 foundation-owned - 16 owned by Public Trust Funds Performing a Public Function, 6 church-run), 12 non-state universities of applied sciences (10 foundation-owned - 5 owned by Public Trust Funds Performing a Public Function, 2 church-run), 1 state college, 22 non-state colleges (4 foundation-owned, 18 church-run). Act IX of 2021 on Public Trust Funds Performing a Public Function: The Act stipulates that “the duty of the Foundation is to exercise the founder’s and operator’s rights of the educational institution to ensure the realisation of its institutional development goals, to which end and in the framework of its business activity.

In order to receive state recognition and to issue degrees, all higher education institutions, including private ones, must be accredited. Denominational higher education institutions receive state financing similar to state institutions and are accredited but the MAB’s mandate pertains only to secular programmes. Foreign higher education institutions are also required to be evaluated in order to receive license to operate from the Educational Authority. A precondition is that they are legally recognized as HEI in their home country.

## 2. Starting Point

### Identify key challenges to address

#### Quality assurance of the scientific activities of Hungarian higher education institutions

One of the factors of the higher education model change mentioned in the introduction is that, parallel to the growing institutional autonomy, results-oriented management evaluation came to the fore, which introduced a new, market-oriented approach to institutional evaluation. A priority objective is to increase the scientific performance of institutions, through which innovation performance and competitiveness can be increased, which gives universities the opportunity to appear in global rankings and advance. Global rankings - mainly Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and World University Rankings, Times Higher Education (THE) are now the most important assessment tools for global and competitive higher education, even if they are subject to many criticisms due to their methodology, chosen indicators and weighting. At the same time, MAB, as a higher education external quality assurance organization, assumes responsibility for ensuring that the quantitative pressure on institutions does not come at the expense of qualitative quality. In light of this, let's formulate the goals and activities in the CoARA action plan.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mab.hu/en/about-mab/>

<sup>2</sup> Hungarian Accreditation Committee – Report for the year 2020 until September 2021: [https://www.mab.hu/wpcontent/uploads/MAB-Annual-Report-2021\\_v2..pdf](https://www.mab.hu/wpcontent/uploads/MAB-Annual-Report-2021_v2..pdf) p.3.

### 3. Operational action plan

#### ARRA Commitment 3

##### **Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index**

The MAB evaluates applications for university professors within a uniform quality framework. The Section 28 (5) of the Hungarian CCIVth Act of 2011 on national higher education (Act) sets out the conditions to be fulfilled for the appointment of a university professor. At the request of the institutions (higher education institutions, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Arts, Hungarian Olympic Committee), based on the provisions of the Act [69 §. (1) and (4)], the MAB assesses the teaching, scientific, artistic, and sports achievements of applicants for the title of university professor, taking into account the provisions of the law and assigning quality criteria of compliance to them [Act § 64 (7)]. In the evaluation process, the MAB applies criteria developed for providing expert review on general and study and research field specific merits of the applicants, in compliance with explicit requirements of the relevant legislation and its own procedures described in transparent and easy to understand documentation.

Although there are no explicit criteria for this procedure in the ESG, the QA relevance can be connected to the ESG standard 1.5, and is revised at regular intervals, with the contribution of university professors in Hungary and abroad experienced in advanced assessment and evaluation. The evaluation criteria comprise, in addition to scientific performance, primarily measured in publications and further scientometric data. The invited experts examine the applicant's educational performance, including talent recruitment and support including supervising, international cooperations, e.g. participation in joint research projects and programs, awarded/success tenders/applications and awards to strengthen the qualitative nature of the assessment.

#### ARRA Commitment 5

##### **Commit resources to reforming research assessment as is needed to achieve the organisational changes committed to**

The MAB as QA agency and higher education expert organization is committed to reform the evaluation of research-based education linked to research assessment. Therefore, its staff and experts participate in the ENQA, EUA and CoARA webinars, in QA and quality enhancement (QE)-related projects of ENQA including the Working Group on QA of Research. Organizational changes have started in all evaluation procedures and need further steps in approach to research evaluation when revising the sub-procedures. Training sessions will specifically be organized for MAB colleagues to increase awareness and support knowledge developments related to ESG reviews in addition to the international trends. Support of external experts will be used to the strengths and weaknesses of the organization's operation to make it even more efficient.

#### ARRA Commitment 7

##### **Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance, and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as their use**

Based on the ESG standard 2.4, MAB organizes trainings for experts participating in external quality assessment procedures. These trainings are currently fully implemented in the doctoral school accreditation procedures and the WFME standards-based accreditation of basic medical programs.

The training sessions planned in connection with further procedures are held at regular intervals, planned to organize on a 3-4 months basis. Actually, two target groups can be identified: experts who have not participated in external quality assessment procedures before and those who want to further expand their knowledge, i.e. at an advanced level. For the trainings, we would prepare a fit-for-purpose program, which would be available online in a secure system and which would be reviewed at regular intervals in its content.

### **ARRA Commitment 8**

#### **Exchange practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond the Coalition**

Participation in the work of the National Chapter ensures a continuous exchange of information with the Hungarian CoARA signatories. In this way, the MAB can get first-hand information about the work taking place in CoARA's working groups, the online presentations, and application opportunities and share experiences with colleagues representing the organizations concerned.

### **ARRA Commitment 10**

#### **Evaluate practices, criteria and tools based on solid evidence and the state-of-the-art in research on research, and make data openly available for evidence gathering and research**

Based on the ESG standard 2.2, MAB aims to contribute to the development of institutions' internal quality assurance processes as a result of its external quality assessment procedures, which helps to implement institutional goals and strategies. Therefore, MAB aims at developing its external quality assurance procedures in such a way as to support the development of internal quality assurance systems. During these development processes, in addition to quantitative aspects, MAB always aspires to add qualitative aspects to the evaluation criteria and raise awareness of the importance of advanced research assessment. This approach can strengthen the HEI's performance-based assessment and support a better understanding of the MAB's reports on institutional accreditation.

Continuous monitoring of the quality assurance including the internal and external procedures ensures the possibility of QE and the further development of all activities. As a first step in the development, within the framework of the RRF-2.1.1 project, MAB merged the accreditation procedure of the Doctoral Schools with the accreditation of the institutions and started the integrated external QA with a focus on the QE as well. The framework of this new procedure was created by developing an advanced tool for an integrated institution and program accreditation. Furthermore, areas such as the support system of the institution's academic performance and third mission activities including the societal impact, more and more prominent in the HEI's activities are also evaluated. The examination of the support system of scientific activity already allows for a connection to the QA on Research approach planned to contribute to the renewed ESG guidelines to be published in 2027.

## **4. Roadmap of the MAB research assessment reforms**

### **2023**

- [MAB joined CoARA](#) and signed ARRA.
- MAB joined the Hungarian National Chapter.

## 2024

- The MAB's designated representative continuously monitors CoARA's online events and participates in the General Assembly. At the EUA Conference held in Swansea at April, she had the opportunity to learn about the organization's introduction and future plans in person from Prof. Rianne Letschert.
- MAB carried out the CoARA action plan.

## 2025-2026

- Continuous improvement of the MAB's procedures.
- Development of the concept of expert trainings, development of curriculum, organization of the first training sessions in a hybrid form.
- Active participation in national and international organizations, networks and working groups.
- Revising of the MAB's CoARA action plan.

## 2026-2028

- Continuous improvement of the MAB's procedures
- Active participation in national and international organizations, networks and working groups.
- Evaluation and assessment of further development goals.
- Preparation of MAB's new CoARA action plan.

Budapest, 1th of October, 2024