

National Report on Quality Enhancement in Language Studies in Hungary

I. General Introduction

1.1 Languages Spoken in Hungary

The national language in Hungary is Hungarian. Due to historical reasons minority languages are also used by inhabitants in certain areas. These minority languages include German, Slovak, Romanian, Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian. These minorities have their own schools with the minority language as the language of instruction, while other modern languages are taught as foreign languages in pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education.

1.2. System of Education: primary and secondary level

In Hungary compulsory education is extended to the 6-16 year old population. Primary education (általános iskola) is 8 years and within this school type there are two levels: the lower primary (1-4 grades) and the upper primary level (5-8 grades). Secondary education is an additional 3-4 years. School types include secondary grammar schools (gimnázium- 4 years), vocational schools (szakközépiskola- 4 years) and industrial training schools (szakmunkásképző-3 years). Most schools are financed by local governments; exceptions include church, foundation and university/college practicum schools, all of which are financed and controlled by their respective maintaining organisation/institution.

In major Hungarian cities there are some bi-lingual (in certain places minority) schools. Here, before students start their regular secondary education, there is a 'zero' year, during which students have 20 language classes per week, while the material of other subjects is only being revised and recycled. By the end of this intensive language course (660 hours altogether), students are supposed to have reached an intermediate level, based on which they will study certain subjects in the foreign language. (This system, of course, does not apply to minority schools, where the minority language is the students' first language.) For the rest of their studies, students will typically have 5 foreign language lessons per week. These schools tend to employ native speakers to offer 'conversation classes' to students.

At the end of year 4 in secondary grammar schools, school leavers are to pass a comprehensive examination in a variety of subjects, both written and oral, and then they receive a GCE certificate/érettségi bizonyítvány. At least one foreign language is required as part of the final examination. Those school leavers who wish to further their studies in higher education and acquire a degree in foreign languages or in other fields foreign languages are integral parts of, such as tourism, trade, economics, international business etc., will do an advanced-level examination, the results of which are considered in the admission procedure. In vocational schools, foreign languages represent only an elective examination subject. Since foreign languages are not taught very intensively in these schools, school leavers very rarely opt for them and they hope to make up for their deficiencies in higher education, which very often remains a hope only. Those who do not enroll university or college degree programmes upon acquiring their GCE certificate may participate in specialised training in a variety of fields and, having acquired the GCE certificate in one or two years (depending on the specialisation) learners also acquire a specialised knowledge and obtain a certificate as nurses, secretaries, technicians etc. These students take ESP language classes during the preparation phase.

The first foreign language (in most cases now English and German) is taught to children from the 4th grade of the primary school onward. The average number of weekly language lessons is 2-3. There are some schools which offer special language education. Here languages are usually taught at an earlier stage, i.e. in most cases from grade 3, sometimes from the very first grade. In specialised classes the number of weekly lessons is usually 4 or 5.

In secondary grammar schools two foreign languages are compulsory, while in other school types on the secondary level (vocational schools and industrial training schools) only one foreign language is offered, but more recently the specialisation of the school is supported by teaching some specialised language as well.

Schools specialising in teaching foreign languages are becoming more and more popular today, especially in urban areas.

In addition to the traditional 8-grade primary plus 4-grade secondary model of compulsory education, two more models have recently been introduced in Hungary. The 6+6 model is offered nationwide; in many schools there is at least one class per grade whose studies whose

studies are organised according to this experimental curriculum, whereas the other, the 4+8 model is restricted to a few schools only.

I.3. Higher education

The Hungarian model of higher education was consolidated at the end of the 19th century and was largely based on the German / Humboldtian example. Hungarian higher education traditionally was very competitive and provided an elite training for the carefully selected few. Lately this characteristic feature has begun to fade away, since at present the number of students involved in higher education is generally on the increase, and according to ministry policy, about 50% of secondary school leavers will continue their education in institutions of higher education within a few years.

Changes in the socio-economic system have speeded up the transformation processes in higher education and have already contributed to a growth in student numbers. Formerly 80 thousand students attended Hungary's universities and colleges, while today there are over 250 thousand.¹ At the same time higher education has also become more flexible and liberal. New – often interdisciplinary – courses are becoming common, and due to the newly introduced credit system, students enjoy an increased freedom to choose their courses and they can also design and programme their own studies.

The two major types of institutions of higher education in Hungary are universities and colleges. The majority of institutions are state universities and colleges, although recently many private, foundation or denominational (church) institutions have also been established.

Geographically and traditionally Budapest is the centre of Hungarian higher education with its 19 institutions, but there are some major university-cities in different corners of the country as well (Debrecen in the east, Szeged in the south-east, Miskolc in the north, Pécs in the south-west and Veszprém in the west) and they affiliate institutions of higher education and/or run different programmes in over 30 smaller towns in Hungary.

¹ In: *User's Guide to Hungary*. A handbook published by the TEMPUS Foundation in Hungary. Budapest: 1999. p. 17.

In June 1999 the Hungarian Parliament modified the Bill on Higher Education and launched a programme for the integration of the system. Accordingly, regional university centres are being established right now, incorporating previously independent colleges and universities. The administrative bodies and, more recently, the language centres of the new institutions have already been and are being integrated, while the process of the harmonisation of educational programmes, research and infrastructure has just started.

At present (December 2001) there are 28 government- (Ministry of Education) run universities and colleges in the country, 26 denominational, church-run institutions, 9 private/foundation universities and colleges and, in addition, 6 institutions affiliated with a foreign university or college.²

The length of studies at colleges is 6-8 semesters, while universities require 8-12 semesters of study. Institutions of higher education can mix university and college level education in their programmes: universities are entitled to issue university as well as college degrees and some colleges run a few university-level programmes. In addition to these major levels, institutions of higher education can also run 4-semester accredited specialised training programmes, post-graduate (second degree) as well as in-service programmes. The so-called 'doctoral schools' are affiliated with universities and run 6-semester PhD programmes in the accredited field.

By form of education there are regular, correspondence and, more recently, distance learning programmes.

I.5. Accreditation

Accreditation has become the most significant quality measure in the evaluation of Hungarian institutions of higher education as well as university- and college programmes, including various forms of language studies from simple language courses to degree programmes. The first accreditation of institutions of higher education and of their programmes for the first time took place in Hungary in 1996 and it considered the period between 1991 and 1995. (The changing of the social and political system took place in 1989.)

² Data taken from: *Felsőoktatási Felvételi Tájékoztató 2001 (Admission Guide to Higher Education)*. Budapest: a Ministry of Education publication.

By the Bill on Higher Education the accreditation process is to be carried out by the National Accreditation Board (MAB) and it takes place every 8 years. Institutions and programmes are evaluated as Excellent, Satisfactory and Non-satisfactory. If they receive the Satisfactory status an intermediary evaluation is to be carried out. The current system of accreditation seems to lack specificity and flexibility, so a system of institution- and programme-specific criteria is to be established in order to avoid the pitfalls of being too rigid and bureaucratic. An example of good practice is that between the two 'official' evaluations the institutions and departments are to prepare an annual progress report, in which not the status quo but the changes are to be emphasized.

The main points to be considered in the accreditation process were as follows:³

Accreditation of degree programmes, including the ones in languages:

1. Overall description and general characteristics of the **programme**.
2. **Objectives** of the programme.
3. Identification and the evaluation of the **teaching material**: professional adequacy, its innovative features.
4. Teaching **staff** involved in the carrying out of the programme: positions, scholarly qualifications, guest lectureships, scholarships, publications, memberships in professional organisations.
5. **Student achievement**: knowledge, skills, added value. General student numbers, teacher/student ratio are considered, in addition, thesis work topics and the results of major comprehensive examinations (szigorlat) as well as those of the final examinations (záróvizsga) are to be evaluated along with the number of failed examinations.
6. **Curriculum and credit system** characteristics are considered, with a special view of student transferability and course equivalence.
7. **Infrastructural** characteristics are considered, and the teaching and learning environment is evaluated.
8. **Coordination** of the entire process: management, competences and responsibilities.

Institutional accreditation:

1. Competences and responsibilities.

³ Based on data from the accreditation package of 1996.

2. Admission strategy.
3. The coordination of teaching and research.
4. Regional role of the institution.
5. In-country and international relations.
6. Quality enhancement within the institution: policies and procedures adopted.
7. Institutional strategy for development.⁴

The potential problems and dangers of the accreditation of 1996 included too much emphasis on and the fetishisation of numbers and statistics as well as the preference of a detailed description of the status quo, while less attention was then paid to comparison, analysis and recommendations.

This drawback of the past accreditation process is intended to be counterbalanced by the fact that each year a supplementary accreditation package (progress report) and self-evaluation is to be prepared and filed at the institutions and departments. A new feature is that the supplementary material is aimed at describing and focusing on the changes, their background, and the concrete quality measures which had been taken by the institutions and the departments.

1. 6. Quality assessment/evaluation

For the description of the procedure and of the responsible bodies see previous chapter. Within the institution of higher education there is an Institutional Accreditation Board, whose main task is quality assurance within the institution. Within departments department heads are responsible for quality issues.

Regarding the ratio of teaching and research the teaching load of staff should be considered. It varies according to the status of the teachers. Minimum teaching requirements can be briefly summarised as follows:

University professors. Min. 4 hours/week	College professors: 6 hours/week
University associate professors: 6 hours/week	College associate professors: 8 hours/w
University lecturers: 8 hours/w	College lecturers: 10 hours/week
University assistant lecturers: 10 hours/w	College assistant lecturers: 12 hours/week

Language teachers: (teaching non-language degree students) 16 hours/week

⁴ Taken from the home page of the National Accreditation Board. www.mab.hu

In the scheduling process usually one day/week (20% of work time) is theoretically used for research activities. A sabbatical leave of 6 months is available upon separate application. It is granted only with good reason. (Dissertation writing, or textbook writing).

1.7. Funding

State run universities and colleges are funded by the Ministry of Education. Funding depends on student numbers. Institutions of higher education might also earn some money by running fee-paying (second degree, in-service etc.) programmes or by taking fee paying students (foreign students for example).

1.9. Student fees and student support

Except for the private,- foundation and foreign institutions of higher education students do not pay a tuition fee when studying for their first degree. However, second degree, in-service and PhD programmes are not free of charge. Tuition fees are determined by the institutions themselves. Because foreign languages are often not taught very efficiently to non-language majors (large groups, lack of time, non-existent or very rare exchange programmes with schools abroad) if students want to pass the required language examination(s), they are to take private language classes or enroll the very expensive programmes of private language schools. Examination fees are also high and very often retakes are needed. Students get reimbursement for the examination fee of the language examination needed for their first degree.

Students may get two kinds of regular (monthly) support. One type is dependent on the financial background of the students' family, while the other is more closely related to quality criteria and is dependent on the students' academic achievements. The most talented students might apply for national scholarships (Köztársasági ösztöndíj). Low-interest student loans have only recently been introduced and they are becoming more and more popular.

1. 10. Departments

Departments are those units within an institution of higher education, which are in charge of the programmes. Language degree students are taught by staff of foreign language departments. At the universities, where academic research and specialised theoretical subjects play a very important role, departments are also specialised according to the field of specialisation. Departments include Department of Linguistics, Department of Cultural studies etc. Foreign languages are taught to non-language degree students by staff belonging to foreign language centres.

II. Description and analysis of quality measures relating to the training of teachers and trainers professionally engaged in the area of languages

2.1. Definition of learning outcomes

“Bölcsész képezési követelmények/ Requirements for Qualification in Philology” is the document identifying the key criteria for degree programmes in the field of languages as well. After two years of preparatory work, in June 2000 the draft format was made available for the institutions, and then in June 2001 the document itself came out. It specifies the qualification to be given upon the completion of a programme, identifies the total number of credits within a programme, sets the objectives, describes the major areas of study and, at the same time, lists the major examinations to be included in any related programme. In the training programme of foreign language teachers the general objectives to be met include language proficiency, firm background knowledge of the culture and literature of the country (countries) in which the target language is spoken as the mother tongue, the theory and practical issues of language teaching methodology as well as translation and interpretation skills.

The programme itself is divided into two major stages. The initial stage focuses on language development and a number of introductory subjects including introduction to linguistics, literature, history and culture, while the second stage includes further courses in language development, civilisation, literature, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, language pedagogy and applied language studies. These ministerial criteria described by the document on the one hand may grant the unity and the comparability of language teacher training, while the control and testing mechanisms are aimed at assuring quality within and across the system. The document regulates the number and content of the major examinations. These include one

complex language examination testing written and oral communicative skills, use of language in form of debate and argumentation, as well as testing essay writing and composition skills.

Thesis work is a significant issue in quality. It is only the most basic requirements for thesis work which have been laid down by the document of Qualification Requirements. The practice of thesis writing and defence, and the criteria for evaluation vary from institution to institution. The quality of student research and students' academic writing can be better seen in the work carried out within student academic circles (TDK) and during the bi-annual student academic conferences (TDK konferencia). It is a pity though, that these occasions are still dominated by the more traditional academic areas, and the study of foreign languages and applied language studies are not yet well represented.

Final examinations include a variety of components and quality is assured by the requirement of an external examiner who is to participate in the examination processes.

2.2. and 2.3

The definition of learning outcomes in the area of languages is the result of a series of consultations within and across the profession itself. On the other hand, no economic partners or potential employers were present at these discussions. Consequently, the learning outcomes might not always be relevant to the issue of employability. Concerning foreign language skills in the non-teaching job market employers are only aware of the system of Hungarian state language examination and are usually ignorant of other language-related skills and issues. The skill-specific levels of the Common European Framework of Reference is not yet widely known. Internationally recognised language examinations have just begun to be accepted/accredited by institutions of higher education and by some employers. The most widely known examinations include Cambridge, IELTS, and Pitman examinations.

2.7. Admission requirements

As far as admission to Hungarian institutions of higher education is concerned, all applicants must hold a secondary school (GCE) certificate. Usually secondary school credits (final grades) and the scores of a written and an oral entrance examination are combined and converted into a score system (the maximum score is 120). For the applicant this entrance score becomes the

basis of acceptance. In language degree programmes bonus scores or exemption from the whole or parts of the entrance exam might be given to applicants who have passed an intermediate or an advanced level language examination. The written entrance examination paper consists of a multiple choice test including reading comprehension tasks and an essay (often letter) writing task. The oral examination varies from institution to institution. Most often it includes interviews, reading comprehension tasks (sometimes translation) and picture description. A new admission system is to be introduced in the country soon: advanced level GCE examinations in foreign languages taken at the end of year 4 of secondary school studies will also serve as state-recognised language examinations and as entrance examinations to institutions of higher education.

2.8. Course content

Training is founded on a seminar and lecture system. Seminars are more informal, typically organised for small discussion groups of 10-15 students and specialise in a certain topic. Lectures are more traditional forms in higher education. They are formal, held for larger audiences, and usually there is no room for student participation. Although general language classes are optional, in programmes other than foreign languages state-certified language examinations are prerequisites of actually obtaining a university or college degree in any field. The state certified language exam can by form be monolingual or bilingual (including a translation component), whereas by content it can either focus on general language skills or on specialised (technical) language. University students are required to pass one intermediate level 'C' and one basic level 'C' examination ('C' examinations test all language skills), while college students are required to have one intermediate-level 'C' language certificate before they actually graduate. In certain programmes where the study of a specific foreign language is part of the specialisation itself (Greek and Latin for students of philosophy and history, Chinese and Japanese in Oriental studies, etc.) one language examination is needed for graduation. Certain institutions run language examinations in specialised fields. These are often bilingual exams, heavily relying on evaluating comprehension and translation skills.

3. Description and analysis of quality measures related to the process of teaching and learning

3.1. New methods facilitating quality language learning

There has been a shift from the traditional methods to new methods, that is a learner-centred approach has been adopted in language teaching throughout the country. Learners' needs are more emphatically taken into consideration and there is an emphasis on language awareness, self-study and linguistic competence. Instead of using one of the many one-sided approaches, like grammar-translation method, or communicative method, in language classes there is a skill-based approach today and thus both the form and the content of teaching have become well-balanced. When organising and compiling university and college language examinations more and more increasingly the internationally recognised language examinations serve as models.

3.2. Learning environments

Quality language learning is facilitated by a number of 'mixed' programs, that is tailor-made programs for concrete participants of economic life, which also include language instruction. Examples of good practice include the training of employees for the financial and banking sphere, which is a joint programme run together by the departments of Mathematics and English at the University of Szeged. The practical component is provided by banks and other financial institutions.

3.3. Delivery of programmes in other languages

Foreign language degree programmes are at present most often combined with teacher training, in some cases with other areas, such as media or business studies, art, music and sciences. In the academic year of 2001/2002, foreign language degree programmes in Hungary were offered in English, German, French, Italian, Arabic, Finnish, Hebrew, Japanese, Polish, Czech, Dutch, Russian and Ukrainian languages. Minority languages are also available in the form of degree programmes and include German, Slovak, Slovenian, Romanian and Serbo-Croatian.⁵ There is only one institution of higher education in the country to offer a single degree programme (second degree programme) in Romology, but no teacher training programme is available in Romany (Gypsy) language, although recently some language schools have adopted such

⁵ Ibid. pp. 53-75.

courses and they also run intermediate-level language examinations in it, which are increasingly popular with students. (Students might consider it easier to pass than the 'classical' examinations.) As part of Hungary's preparation to become a member of the European Union, more and more scholarships and other forms of support (boarding schools, preparatory courses, special grants etc) have been made available for Romany children. Also, at the moment an attempt is being made nationwide to elaborate and introduce language programmes for refugees, who often spend several months in camps all over the country.

Non-language programmes (medicine, law, business) which are taught in foreign languages are rare. If they are offered, they are designed for foreign (permanent or exchange) students who usually pay for the tuition or in some other form represent some form of prestige or extra benefit for the Hungarian institution. The foreign languages in which degree programmes are offered include English, French and German.

4. Description and analysis of quality measures relating to the training of higher education teachers and trainers working in the area of languages

4.1. Human Resource Management

Due to the lack of adequately prepared language teachers formerly it was also possible to teach foreign language classes in primary and secondary schools with a mere intermediate-level language certificate, or with a lower-grade degree. Today employment rules tend to be stricter and the degree requirements are to be increasingly emphasised and required by employers. This recent insistence on adequate degree level (although not on quality) also means that nationwide there is an increased need for second-degree, degree upgrading and accredited tailor-made in-service programmes in the field of foreign languages.

Language teachers are trained by different institutions of higher education. The Colleges of Education (Tanítóképző Főiskola) train general teachers for the lower primary classes; some of them run specialised language programmes and give their graduates a supplementary certificate which enables them to teach foreign language classes to pupils up to 12 years of age. Teacher Training Colleges (Tanárképző Főiskola) run foreign language programmes and train teachers for the upper primary level. Graduates with a college degree are enabled to teach pupils up to the age of 16. Secondary school teachers should theoretically all be holders of university

degrees. In addition to their regular academic degree programmes universities (Tudományegyetem) also run teacher training programmes thus training teachers for the secondary and higher level. In teacher training colleges the so-called teaching profession module is an organic part of the programme and its completion is compulsory, while at the universities it is a rather independent module, one of the many options students might choose from.

4.2. Status, career prospects

Today on institutional level quality is assured by means of contracting and the system of staff appraisal and promotion. Teaching assistants and lecturers (tanársegéd, adjunktus) are offered contracts for only a restricted period of 3-4 years. After serving their second period in the same category in case they do not meet the criteria for being promoted their contracts cannot be renewed. For approving contract renewals a complex system is available: applicants first are evaluated by a body of elected members of their departments (student representatives are also included), and then by the scientific committee of the institution in question. Promotions are finally approved by the institutional council. The multi-level system in theory is able to assure quality and development. Its drawback in practice is that the procedure is lengthy and occasionally it becomes monotonous and automatic; staff members develop a 'voting machine' attitude.

On higher levels – associate professors and full professors - permanent contracts are offered, but the criteria of promotion are very strict, especially in the area of academic work.

Foreign language examinations are required from all staff at all levels, including non-language departments. Senior staff members – because of the one-sidedness and the general inefficiency of language teaching in the past - often have difficulties meeting these criteria.

The prestige of the teaching profession has for some time been very low in the country, which is partly due to the fact that teachers are often stressed, overworked and underpaid. Teachers of foreign languages and language departments are very often seen as secondary members of staff, 'service providers', who are there to translate, interpret, proofread etc. for members of other departments. This work is very often seen as a 'duty', 'voluntary' or 'charity' work, that is, it remains unpaid and even unrecognised.

In January 2001 a new salary system was introduced in higher education, which intended to increase salaries considerably. (14.2% for professors and 39.3% for assistant teachers.) In fact the new system rather levelled out earlier differences because at the same time all the bonus and extra payments were taken away from teachers. Currently the system does not offer any reward for any form of extra or quality work. The new salary system has also generated some tension between staff (with the same qualification) working in foreign language departments and in foreign language centres. The latter group of language teachers, including foreign teachers from abroad/lektors, received only a minimal pay rise. This situation, if not changed or remedied, might also have an undesirable effect on the quality of teaching.

Most teachers of foreign languages in the country are young, so they are supposedly familiar with the most up-to-date teaching methods and materials, but they lack experience and often a focus as well. Although the teachers of foreign languages generally receive good methodological education and training, when they actually teach they very often go back to and adopt more traditional teaching methods. Classrooms are traditional and no specialised language cabinets are available in most schools. Large groups make it impossible to enhance individual work and students are also primarily tested with written forms of evaluation. Course books – especially if teachers plan and order them ahead - are usually available, although not always affordable. Specialised language libraries and resource centres are very rare, and due to the lack of resources, in the near future this situation is not likely to change.

4.6. Staff development programmes

Unlike in primary and secondary schools, staff development programmes are not declared as compulsory in higher education. In the early 1990s several foreign cultural and educational organisations – British Council, Goethe Institute, Alliance Francaise - offered regular and quality staff development programmes, which simultaneously aimed at improving teachers' language skills and their cultural, professional as well as methodological alertness and preparedness for the job. As a result of educational decentralisation and probably the lack of available financial resources, these programmes have become less and less frequent, and have gradually been replaced by far less ambitious programmes of sometimes dubious quality offered by new organisations and institutions, very often by publishers of textbooks. The primary aim of textbook publishers is understandably the promotion of their own teaching

material and not the general aim of improving the quality of language teaching. Consequently, in this latter case the main aim is rather the promotion and selling of certain (new) language teaching packages and less emphasis is laid on quality of language teaching per se.

EU projects (especially the mobility schemes) as well as the Council of Europe workshops play an important role in staff development and result in acquiring up-to-date knowledge, improved methodological skills, networking, joint research, curriculum development and staff and student exchange programmes. Unfortunately very often the prestige, the location and the former experience of teachers are the decisive factors when joining international projects and the project itself or the issue of quality play only a minor role. Potential foreign partners prefer the prestigious schools/universities in Budapest or in other preferred location to small and modest country schools which would really need to learn from foreign partners and enhance the quality of language teaching by giving their own work international dimension. Potential problems in the field of international project work include the general inexperience of Hungarian teaching staff in project planning, project management and evaluation, as well as the lack of interest abroad resulting in the difficulties of reciprocity. The key issue here might be to find international partners who are well prepared.

PhD programmes are offered by many institutions (universities) and they seem to be ideal for staff development purposes. The main problem in this field is that only the youngest staff members, fresh from universities, can afford the time and become full time PhD students. PhD programmes are theoretically very rewarding and they enhance the quality of teaching on departmental level, but they also distract young teachers from teaching; since these people cannot be counted on as full time instructors for at least 4-5 years. (3 years of in-class education plus 1-2 years of dissertation work). Some more mature and more experienced staff members, often for financial or family reasons, cannot take the opportunity of taking leave from teaching. For them, in addition to undertaking teaching and very often organising responsibilities, it is extremely difficult to keep up with the PhD examination and dissertation requirements and do their PhD work on their own. There is no equal opportunity in this field and it creates a tension between younger and middle-aged staff members within the same department(s).

Some college and university departments- including the area of foreign languages – run in-service teacher training programmes. In Hungary the Act on Public Education of 1985 granted the right to teachers to participate in in-service training programmes. In 1996 this

'privilege' became an obligation . According to the Government Decree for fulfilling the obligation, it is necessary to participate in “in-service training on a regular basis – every 7 years”⁶. The completion of a 120-hour accredited in-service training course is necessary. At present all in-service training programmes undergo a rigorous accreditation and implementation procedure. Quality is assured by the fact that the In-Service Teacher Training Accreditation Board evaluates the level of elaboration of course content, its goal, topics, requirements, staff, infrastructural, and financial background. There is also the obligation to assure quality.

The Minister of Education issues an official in-service training programme register twice a year. Teachers who are interested in attending in-service training courses can use this register to find out about the programmes. In the past year and a half approximately 2,500 programmes were submitted for approval to the Minister.

The current system, while trying to meet quality requirements, also has its weaknesses. The training system is organised on market principles, which means that not only accredited institutions of higher education but private schools, organisations or even individuals have the right to request the accreditation of their own training programmes. Thus, the “in-service training market” is not only flexible, but very often lacks cohesion and stability, which are imperative of high quality. The sustainability of programmes is also a problem in this rapidly changing “market”, especially in the field of foreign languages..

Experience shows that only a small proportion of programmes is based on accurate and thorough needs analysis. In most cases institutions offer programmes on the basis of the availability of their staff and ready-made curricula. It also means that instead of focusing on the priorities set by the current educational policy both in Hungary and in the EU, these courses most often are “shadow courses” of those programmes already offered to regular students.

The two-step official recognition of in-service training courses is too lengthy, costly and bureaucratic, having a discouraging effect on some (sometimes the best) experts.

An additional problem of in-service training is the almost zero level of planning ahead and the lack of coordination on institutional level, that is at schools. Heads of educational institutions

⁶ From “Peculiarities of In-service Teacher Training in Hungary”.
<http://www.ptmik.hu/ujhonlap/doc/2000/jun/9-1.htm>

most often do not have any system or policy as to what direction their staff as a team should develop which would be in accordance with the profile of the school. Consequently, individual teachers choose courses at random, and often it is their own personal motives and not general needs or the requirement of quality that drive them. (Low course fees, the attendance of colleagues and friends, etc.)

4.9. Exchange Programmes for Staff Members

Most exchange programmes in Hungarian institutions of higher education operate under the Socrates/Erasmus scheme. The difficulty in this respect is reciprocity. While eastern European staff are eager to travel and teach in a foreign country, especially if the country is the one where the language in question is the native language, teachers from EU countries do not always prefer eastern European universities and colleges (especially if they are not in the capital) as sites of exchange visit: the teaching and learning environment is often less attractive, teaching hours and duties are more hectic, there are large classes, ill-equipped libraries and classrooms. Some 'visiting professorship' schemes might remedy this situation to some extent, like the one organised and sponsored by the British Council. Visiting foreign professors who arrive under this scheme are not assigned to one single university, but they are to 'circulate'. Thus several institutions and a large student population can benefit from the work of one visiting professor.

Instead of the more traditional "one on one" exchange programmes networking, especially regional (CEEPUS) or content-based networking seem to be more up-to-date and very importantly, tailor-made ways of staff (and student) exchange. These programmes are more focussed, they have very clear objectives and beneficiality is always assured. On the other hand, writing up these projects, their preparation, as well as their management would require the skills and the experience, educators in Hungary – and in other eastern European countries – can very rarely demonstrate.

5. Description and analysis of quality measures relating to the organisation and management of the process of teaching and learning.

5.1. Descriptions of programmes and courses

The previously described ministerial guidelines also determine what areas courses should cover within the individual programmes, but the actual course design is a departmental task. Teachers in charge of certain areas usually form a specialised team within the departments and they agree on the course contents and requirements. The completed course descriptions are debated and finally approved by the departmental staff. Student representatives are also invited to this meeting. On institutional level a special committee operates whose task is to coordinate the programmes offered by the various departments of the institution. Curricula and major requirements can be changed (e.g. major examinations introduced or dropped) only if the institutional council (senate) approves the change. In addition to the common ministerial regulation the rules of which are compulsory for all parties involved, there is no regular or systematic exchange of information between departments working within the different institutions of the country. Occasionally, upon the initiative of some international or national professional organisation, cross-institutional workshops, meetings and discussion groups are organised, or sometimes handbooks or brochures are published to help the orientation of fellow teachers and to disseminate examples of good practice.

On the other hand course descriptions today are increasingly public, thus they are continuously compared and evaluated by a broader group of specialists and non-specialists, including colleagues, students from other institutions and prospective employers as well. In shortened version, curricula and course descriptions often appear in university booklets or promotional packages and, more recently, they can also be read via the Internet.

The adoption of the ECTS system by the majority of institutions of higher education in Hungary on the one hand grants transferability and mutual acknowledgment of credits. This example of good practice was originally pioneered by foreign language departments. The same purpose is served by those institutions which are today adopting a system called ETR (Unified System of Studies). It is an open, controllable and well-documented system, but in its present form it lacks the elements of flexibility and innovation, which would be essential in a modern and changing world.

At institutional level decisions are made by the institutional Senate (Council).

The work of the institutional senate (council) is assisted by the board of unit leaders/department heads, consisting of department heads as well as by the heads of the permanent and temporary

committees, all of which have a counselling function. The most important areas the advisory committees work in are as follows:

- a) Admission Committee
- b) Scientific Committee
- c) Youth Committee
- d) Committee of Foreign Relations and Applications
- e) Committee of Vocational-, Distance-, and In-Service Training
- f) Student Welfare Committee
- g) Practical Training Committee
- h) Credit and Educational Committee
- i) Academic Committee
- j) Committee of Scientific Student Research Groups
- k) Financial Committee
- l) Maintenance and Engineering Committee
- m) Quality Management Committee

Departments are also annually asked to write reports on and compile statistics in relation to finances, research, education and foreign relations. Statistics and reports are then to be synthetised on institutional, then on ministerial level , but no official feedback is given to the departments. Still, in order to maintain an adequate level of information flow both traditional and modern information channels are used. Institutions usually publish a monthly newsletter, but they also make use of an inner e-mail system. Institutions of higher education including foreign language departments in Hungary today have their own web- pages which are regularly updated.