

The Hungarian Doctoral Council and the Hungarian Doctoral Data Base

The Hungarian Doctoral Council (HDC) is a legally acknowledged voluntary association of universities of Hungary with the following aims:

- to provide a forum for the universities to articulate their needs and opinions concerning doctoral training,
- to achieve consensus in different questions related to third-cycle education, and to granting of PhD or DLA degrees,
- to have a place to discuss and to propose the principles and formula for the Ministry of the distribution of state-funded grants (i.e. 3 years scholarships plus research expenses) for doctoral students among the universities,
- to develop and maintain a common, up-to-date public data base of all doctoral schools, supervisors and doctoral students in Hungary (Hungarian Doctoral Data Base, HDDDB).

HDC is non-profit, with its only support being the membership fees from the universities. Most of its budget is used for further development of the data base. Members of the HDC are the presidents of the doctoral councils of each university, at present 27 persons.

The predecessor of HDC, the Hungarian Doctoral and Habilitation Council (HDHC), was founded in 1994 as a subcommittee of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference. It was reorganized in 2007 as HDC, from this year on with the legal status of an association, defined in the Higher Education Act.

HDHC helped the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC), which has the evaluating and accreditation rights and duties in the Hungarian PhD system, to develop and run its first data base in 1994-2007: <http://www.mab.hu/odhny/> (in Hungarian only).

In about 2001, the Ministry of Education was given the task to electronically collect the PhD theses submitted to different doctoral schools. This data base was obligatory to use for every thesis, and contained the following number of works/year in PDF form:

2002 281 items
2003 515 items
2004 616 items
2005 620 items
2006 534 items
2007 (half year) 169 items

The numbers probably should have been closer to or even above 1000 as an average of the awarded PhD degrees yearly. "Obligatory" was seemingly not enough to achieve full coverage. Moreover, from the second half of 2007, the ministry was no longer obliged by law to maintain the data base, and stopped this activity. The electronic storage of PhD theses became the duty of the universities (preferably their libraries). The system – which began to work with HDDDB – was that universities could (and had to) upload the data of the public discussions into the data base with an obligatory field of the full-text thesis, and these data were used as a basis of the next year's doctoral grant distribution. Thus it became the interest of the universities to make all data available... Now the numbers (items uploaded for degrees in a given year) look like this:

2008: 1445 items
2009: 1547 items
2010: 1466 items
2011: 1441 items
2012: 1374 items
2013: 1326 items
2014 (half year): 812 items

From 2007, the HDC overtook the development and maintenance of the HDDDB. The development of a comprehensive data base was initiated. All doctoral activities were documented, and public access to all data (available also in English) was targeted as means of quality control and measure of performance. By the beginning of 2008, most data of the doctoral schools and of their supervisors were uploaded, and by the time of the accreditation of the doctoral schools by HAC in 2009, data were comprehensive indeed.

Cross-links to university-stored theses were provided, with links to data of doctoral schools, supervisors, public discussions, and granted (or denied) degrees. An important aim was to continuously provide data for the Hungarian Accreditation Committee to be used in the evaluation when regular accreditation of doctoral schools takes place. The start of work was financed in 2007 by the Ministry of Education. Since then, the HDDDB is financed by HDC and in smaller part by HAC which uses the services of the data base for accreditation evaluations.

Credibility of degrees was assured by the developments starting from 2011. Degrees granted by the doctoral schools were connected within the data base to data of the theses and to their full texts, to scientific statements discussed, to doctoral supervisors, and to the doctoral school. From 2012 on, research topics for PhD students can only be published in the data base if the supervisor has valid data in the data base, with active research (publications), as documented in the way HAC requires.

The doctoral education in Hungary is organised by doctoral schools of the universities, accredited by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee in a given branch of sciences. There are about 180 doctoral schools at 27 institutions. The law requires as a minimum 7 so-called “core members” to found and maintain a doctoral school. Core members are HAC-accredited qualified researchers who jointly ensure high quality of doctoral training and of doctoral theses. In Hungary a supervised doctoral candidate should have publications before submitting his/her thesis which is then judged and defended in an open public discussion. All responsible researchers in a doctoral school have to upload data of 5 publications (possibly with full-text link) of the last 5 years proving their current research activity, and 5 further ones of highest value or mostly cited, showing their scientific performance.

HDDDB is on-line connected to the Hungarian Scientific Data Base (MTMT) managed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Supervisors can spotlessly upload the bibliographic data of their selected publications, or upload their comprehensive scientometric data, and there is direct link from HDDDB to their full publication list in MTMT.

Direct links are maintained to home pages of individuals, and home pages of doctoral schools, by this we rely on much more data than just contained by the data base.

Quality is assured through public access to all of the data. This automatically increases the quality of education and of degrees. Students have a good overview of available research topics, scientific work of the supervisors, and earlier theses. This even provides means to check originality, and by this, helps to avoid plagiarism.

The data base is the tool for HDC and HAC to follow the performance of doctoral schools. On this basis, HDC each year proposes, based both on quality and quantity, the proportions of state scholarships at each university for the Ministry of Human Resources for distribution. This is again a built-in direct interest for the universities to properly maintain their data. Another aspect is accreditation: the data base provides (partly non-public) data for schools and supervisors for self-check: they immediately see what is formally not conform with the law or with HAC's publicly available requirements, and later HAC can see what is fulfilled and what is not. Therefore, the data base is more than just the data shown in the public pages.

The data base follows not only PhD/DLA activities, but also habilitations granted by universities. Habilitation lectures and degrees granted are publicly announced in the data base, and the information if a researcher is habilitated or not is also followed.

The doctoral schools can upload data in a controlled way. The data are then available both in Hungarian and English. Thus, the related activity in Hungary is available on the Internet.

Used as an administrative tool, via the HDDDB it is possible

- to check formal conformity with the laws and with HAC resolutions of doctoral schools and of individuals,
- to overview doctoral schools of the institution and of the country, maybe filtered by research field,
- to send personalized warning messages to researchers to correct their data,
- to send out circulars (to supervisors/core members/members of the doctoral council of the doctoral school, DI administrators of the institution, all institutional administrators, etc.), addressed to each individual separately.

It is a very complex task to assure credibility of data, and to organize their continuous refreshing. Since 2012, we implemented cross-connections among diplomas – theses – supervisors – students, and

request introduction of identification numbers in registrars of the universities. This was done for grants in 2008 or later: the universities can claim grants based on these data, so they diligently upload them.

The original aim of the data base was quality through transparency. All doctoral schools see what the others do, and can compare it with their own activity. For this, country-wide statistics were not necessary. We would be happy to publicly provide even aggregated statistical data, but in the present financial situation (the budget of HDC is in the red because of the extensive programming works done in 2013), we need some external financial support for bringing the budget even, and some more to do programming of further developments.

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Prof. István Kollár
coordinator of the Hungarian Doctoral Data Base

Related links in English:

Hungarian Doctoral Data Base:

<http://www.doktori.hu/index.php?menuid=100&lang=EN>

Hungarian Accreditation Committee:

<http://www.mab.hu/web/index.php?lang=en>

Slides of lecture "QA Conclusions from Electronic Database and Parallel Evaluation of Doctoral Schools in Hungary":

http://www.mit.bme.hu/services/pubinfo/Doctoral_schools-EUA_QF-2008.ppt

Hungarian Scientific Data Base (MTMT in Hungarian):

https://vm.mtmt.hu/www/index.php?mode=html&url_on=1&type_on=1&Independent=1&lang=1&DocumentID=2605014/

Abbreviations:

HDC – Hungarian Doctoral Council

HDHC – Hungarian Doctoral and Habilitation Council

HDDB – Hungarian Doctoral Data Base

HAC – Hungarian Accreditation Committee

MTMT – Hungarian Scientific Data Base

PhD – Philosophiae Doctor

DLA – Doctor of Liberal Arts