

Introduction

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■ THE RENEWAL OF EDUCATION – HUNGARY’S FUTURE IS AT STAKE!

In the world of learning, Hungary is being left behind by its peers. Notwithstanding the series of reforms in recent years, the knowledge gap separating us from the most highly developed regions of the world has been widening rather than closing. Local and international assessments unequivocally show that there are serious problems with the education of not only the average Hungarian citizen but also young adults and students still at school.

Where is the world heading and where are we going?

An international survey¹ – involving 21 countries – of adult literacy in the period 1994–1998 revealed that 70 per cent of the Hungarian non-student population aged 16–32 years (who are under 40 at present) have very poor text comprehension skills – levels one or two on a five-point scale – while the corresponding figure is only 50 per cent for the whole sample and 45 per cent for Western Europe. 60 per cent of Hungarians showed poor performance in understanding simple documents while the share of this group is only 49 per cent across all the countries included and 42 per cent in Western Europe. Hungary has traditionally fared better in simple numeracy skills but in this survey the share of poor performers corresponded to the international average in this area – both proportions came to exactly 47 per cent – and was greater than the Western European average (40 per cent). In Hungary there are similar serious problems concerning the skills of young people still at school. Hungarian 15 year olds showed poor performance both in mathematics and in reading comprehension tasks in the PISA survey² of 2003, which involved 40 countries including 29 developed industrial OECD nations: Hungarian students ranked only 19th-20th among OECD countries. The share of students showing an extremely poor performance – below level three – was 47 per cent for both competences, which is 5 per cent higher than the OECD average. Around 20-25 per cent of Hungarian young people do not achieve the level of proficiency in reading and writing that would be needed for future studies and for work.

[1] IALS: *International Adult Literacy Survey*.

[2] PISA: *Programme for International Students Assessment*.

Some areas are characterised in Hungary by a real decline while for other competences the widening gap is a result of faster progress in peer countries. The position of Hungary has declined dramatically in mathematical and scientific literacy. Twenty years ago 14 year old students were listed first in the international ranking of science proficiency as assessed by the SISS survey³ of 1983-1984. Hungary outperformed countries such as the currently top achieving Finland, Japan, South Korea and Singapore. In the first years of the new millennium the competences of our students only secured an average position in the range: 7th position in the TIMSS survey⁴ of 2003 and only 11th position in the PISA survey of 2003. The view that the Hungarian average may be mediocre but that there is a narrow student elite with excellent, internationally competitive outcomes can no longer be upheld. The surveys reveal that our position does not improve if the best ten to fifteen per cent of our students are compared to top performers in other countries. The results of literacy assessment among young adults reveal that the median Hungarian score and the highest scores (the scores of the top twenty and the top ten per cent) equally fall behind the corresponding international values. The results of the PISA survey of 2003 display the same picture: whether we look at text comprehension, mathematical or scientific literacy the top 10-20 per cent of Hungarian students lag behind the best performers in other countries just as much as the average Hungarian student lags behind the international average.

The knowledge acquired in Hungarian public education – especially at primary and vocational schools – is of little practical use in everyday life; it is not sufficient for fulfilling duties or roles in the service sector or in modern manufacturing industry. Research results indicate that in Hungary people with eight years of primary education or with vocational training have much lower odds of finding employment requiring literacy skills or competences building on these skills – be it in industry, commerce or the service sector – than their Western European peers having the same number of school years. Hungarian companies seek employees with secondary or higher education even for positions that involve just a few reading or writing duties, which greatly limits the job prospects of people with lower educational attainments and keeps their wages at a low level. People with less than eight years of primary education have been excluded from the labour market to an unprecedented extent: their employment rate remains below 40 per cent, which is 20 percentage points lower than the corresponding rate in Western Europe. A considerable proportion of this group has been replaced by workers with vocational training, at low wages. Vocational certification has lost its value: the wage advantage of the 3-4 years of training is now less than 10 per cent in industry and has vanished in commerce and other services while upper secondary education qualifications (the *Matura*) have a wage advantage of over 40 per cent. These facts clearly

[3] SISS: *Second International Science Study*.

[4] TIMSS: *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*.

show that vocational training does not equip students with the general skills essential for adult learning and successful adjustment. This is, however, not simply a problem of vocational education: some pupils leave primary school with such poor knowledge and underdeveloped basic skills and competences that not even practical vocational training can be built upon them. (85 per cent of young adults with less than upper secondary education performed at level two or lower in the text comprehension task of the literacy survey.)

The decline in average performance and the enormous disadvantage of the worst achievers put our children at risk of not being able to hold their own as adults in the world of all-encompassing international competition. The question is whether there is a way of reforming a country's education system in such a way that it becomes a driving force for progress. The question has been settled in recent decades: several countries have demonstrated that the answer is unequivocally yes.

The Scandinavian countries, in the lead in matters of education, have aroused the admiration of the world in several respects. They claim the top positions in terms of economic competitiveness and are among the world's very best in terms of several indicators of quality of life – which may include high life expectancy, efforts to protect the environment or low levels of crime and corruption. These countries have not emerged from nowhere; they had favourable circumstances to start with but then soared from an average position to the cutting edge in just a single generation. It is now known that Scandinavian countries owe this spectacular progress to their excellent standards of public education and to life-wide learning. Their performance in international competence surveys is a convincing demonstration of their achievements. These competence surveys have also drawn the world's attention to another group of countries. Southeast Asia's "tiger cubs" came from an extremely low level but shot to the frontline of the modern world in a single generation. The countries of the two regions have very different cultures and political structures but they display very similar attitudes toward knowledge and learning: their spectacular progress was propelled by their radically restructured education systems. In the United States educational reform was first set in motion by the Sputnik shock (the realization that their assumed superiority, in the technical and scientific arena, over countries such as the Soviet Union, had drastically diminished) in the sixties. America's uncommonly poor performance in international surveys and the spectacular rise of Asian competitors then gave a further push to reforms. In a country where immigration had constituted the main source of knowledge replenishment for centuries, almost fifty years of conscious and focused efforts were needed to produce perceptible results: from the rearmost positions occupied in the seventies, American children have, at the present day, climbed to the middle of the international range. Germany, which is culturally closer and more comparable to Hungary with respect to the emergence of the education system and its contemporary problems, is another country that has had to face the consequences of negative trends: the school system ossified and failed to go through the structural changes and content renewal demanded

by our modern age. The “PISA-shock” that followed the dissemination of the results of the international surveys eventually convinced the general public of the necessity for change. With an unprecedented concentration of financial and intellectual resources, large-scale development programmes were launched in response during the first few years of the new millennium.

The education model of Hungary was relatively successful for a long time; in certain periods and in some areas it produced outstanding achievements even by international standards. The essentially changeless, one textbook system polished through decades of teaching experience functioned reliably within its limits. There has been no obvious turmoil signalling the continuous process of decay, the gradual downward trend. By today, however, such a dense mass of problems has accumulated that the issue can no longer remain ignored. Most of the current tensions go back to the period before the regime change. The concerns of young people leaving the education system with a poor standard of knowledge insufficient for the mastery of relatively complicated skills did not become manifest under the previous political regime. The consequences of this fact are still reflected today in low employment rates.

The shift in the education system happened all at once, deprived of the advantages of organic development. Many children have been left out of nursery and kindergarten education; extreme differences have developed between schools in terms of the social backgrounds of their pupils; education policies have been helpless in curbing school segregation; and, as a result of the rising trend in the share of pupils enrolling in secondary education, the social composition of secondary schools has changed. School curricula and teaching methods have failed to keep pace with these major changes. While in the world at large curriculum development has grown into a science in its own right, in Hungary decentralisation has encouraged – has effectively forced – masses of teachers, without training of the appropriate kind, to develop local curricula. A stream of untested textbooks has flooded schools and there is nothing to ensure that a local combination of these can be amalgamated into a coherent source of knowledge. These circumstances encourage rote learning without comprehension. Pupils’ laboriously acquired knowledge disintegrates, cannot be put into practice and is quickly forgotten.

The curricula that finally emerged – the way schools finally put their course contents together – the textbooks and teaching methods used in Hungary today, are decades behind the possibilities offered by our age and the system lacks any mechanism that could effect a change. No useable data are available on teaching quality and thus parents and school maintainers have no efficient means of monitoring school activities. There are no functional channels through which new knowledge could penetrate the education system: very little scientific research is done that could generate new and original knowledge, and both pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes, which could be a means of multiplying personal knowledge, are underdeveloped. In Hungary teacher education is characterised by overproduction in terms of quantity and underproduction in terms of quality.

The position of Hungary has not improved with respect to foreign languages either. While in Western countries even the man in the street is multilingual, in Hungary not even key intellectual leaders – such as teachers – can be expected to master at least reading knowledge of a foreign language. While billions of Hungarian forints have been spent on in-service teacher training in the past one and a half decades, teachers still cannot access the enormous stock of resources available on the World Wide Web because they lack the necessary foreign language skills. We have not made enough progress in making information technology accessible to teachers. The costly investment and development programmes cannot be exploited if teachers feel uneasy about the technology that has become an organic part of their pupils.

Subject education continues to regard the transfer of the narrow-focus competences of the day as its most important goal. No steps whatsoever have been taken, either preventative or interventional, to tackle the problem of students dropping out of secondary education on a mass scale.

The members of the Round Table for Education and Child Opportunities (OKA) are driven by the firm belief that the school system cannot be renewed through isolated reform initiatives, that education development is a national issue which does not belong in the domain of day to day politics and that reform processes should be set on course without delay. The mission of formal education, its role in creating knowledge, must be reinterpreted placing special emphasis on developing competences of everyday applicability and skills needed to adjust to adult life.

■ THE ORIGINS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE ROUND TABLE FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD OPPORTUNITIES (OKA)

In November 2006 Benő Csapó, Károly Fazekas, Gábor Kertesi, János Köllő and Júlia Varga issued a report on the relationships pertaining between low employment rate and public education outcomes in Hungary as commissioned by the State Reform Committee (ARB).⁵ The authors find that a comprehensive reform of the education system is a prerequisite to achieving a significant increase in employment level.⁶ The report was debated by the ARB and, drawing on the

[5] The State Reform Committee (ARB) is a government committee set up by the second Gyurcsány administration entrusted with the task of assessing and evaluating the reform of state administration from a professional and political point of view. ARB was established by Government Decree No. 1061/2006 (June 15) on institutional and personal issues in relation to the planning and implementation of the reform of state administration. The Decree defines ARB as a body responsible for advising the government on policies.

[6] A synopsis of the study was published in issue No. 46/2006 (November 17) of the Hungarian weekly *Élet és Irodalom*. (BENŐ CSAPÓ, KÁROLY FAZEKAS, GÁBOR KERTESI, JÁNOS KÖLLŐ & JÚLIA VARGA, A foglalkoztatás növelése nem lehetséges a közoktatás átfogó megújítása nélkül [Employment level

experiences of the debate, the Prime Minister proposed the establishment of a Round Table for Education and Child Opportunities with the objective of preparing a proposal on reforming the Hungarian education system.⁷ The Prime Minister called on the authors of the report to draw up a green paper setting out the tasks of the Round Table.

The members of OKA were delegated by the Prime Minister, the relevant parliamentary committees, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Council for Economic and Social Affairs, scientific and professional organisations, trade unions, business chambers and the Historical Churches of Hungary. The Prime Minister nominated the first named author of this introduction to act as President of OKA.⁸

The constitutive meeting of OKA was held on 20th March, 2007. The proposed goals of the Round Table were adopted and a paper summarising the methods and procedures of the Round Table was approved. The green paper evaluating the public education system and outlining the most important tasks was discussed and adopted as OKA's mission statement defining its goals and duties.⁹

OKA's goals and methods

As stated in the mission statement adopted by OKA, "It is the goal of the Round Table to encourage a consensus in key issues affecting the whole of society in the short and the long term. It undertakes to initiate the preparation of discussion papers which are to be presented to and debated by the widest possible audience in an effort to produce proposals effectively furthering the work of the government of the time and law making processes.

The Round Table for Education and Child Opportunities strives to rely strictly on the unbiased analysis of attested facts in its activities and to consider the broadest possible range of expert opinion. The Round Table focuses on two main areas. Firstly, it undertakes to shed light on problems characterising the public education system right from the early years of childhood through to employment. Secondly, it seeks to define possible action plans for policy makers (the Parliament and the government) relying on the relevant literature and foreign experiences and taking into consideration the experiences, opinions and interests of the various groups concerned (teachers, students and parents).

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cannot be increased without a comprehensive reform of public education].) <http://www.es.hu/pd/display.asp?channel=PUBLICISZTIKA0646&article=2006-1119-2008-44EANC>

[7] In parallel with the Round Table for Education and Child Opportunities, the Prime Minister proposed the establishment of two more Round Tables (the Round Table on Pensions and Old Age and the Round Table on Competitiveness).

[8] See *Appendix 11* for a list of OKA participants.

[9] http://oktatas.magyarorszagholnap.hu/wiki/1._ülés/tézispapír. Meeting dates and schedules are listed in *Appendix 12*.

In identifying problems and drafting action plans the Round Table relies on professional studies and effects analyses produced by recognised experts. Online discussion forums are set up and moderated by the Round Table to learn the opinions of the different groups affected by the reform. Conferences are organised to discover and discuss the outcomes and experiences of other countries.

It is not, however, the responsibility of the Round Table but that of the government and the Parliament to decide which of the proposed action plans should be adopted and to implement the necessary legislative and state administration measures.”¹⁰

The major rules regulating the activities of the Round Table are set out in the OKA Rules of Order. The Rules provide that the work of the Round Table is led by the President, who is responsible for scheduling the discussion of issues, appointing appropriate subject chairs, inviting experts and chairing discussions. For a meeting to be quorate, more than half of the members must be present. Decisions are made by simple majority voting. Based on the discussion and the final decisions made on controversial issues the Round Table issues a recommendation that sums up the major points of the given issue and offers a set of possible solutions that have been developed and approved by the Round Table. A recommendation is endorsed if it is backed by an absolute majority (more than half of all Round Table members).

Following prior consultation with experts, the President of OKA proposed that discussion papers presenting empirical facts and suggesting solutions should be produced in 11 subject groups. (Later on a twelfth subject group was added to this list.) The activities in each subject group were co-ordinated by the participant who had been appointed subject chair by the OKA President. Chairs were responsible for commissioning and evaluating background studies in their subject groups, for drawing up discussion papers and recommendations and for producing a concluding paper based on the results of the discussions, oral or written communications. Balázs Muraközy from the Institute of Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was appointed secretary by the OKA President. The secretary was responsible for co-ordinating the activities of subject chairs, organising OKA meetings and preparing memoranda based on the minutes and transcriptions of the meetings.

The subject groups endorsed by OKA and their chairs were the following:

1. Early years education (children aged 0–7 years) • *Mária Herczog*
2. Lower primary education (children aged 6–10 years) • *József Nagy*
3. The second stage of public education and school leaving examinations • *Benő Csapó*
4. Equality, desegregation • *Gábor Havas*

[10] Original Hungarian text: http://oktatas.magyarorszagholnap.hu/wiki/A_Kerekasztal.

5. Pupils with special educational needs • *Valéria Csépe*
6. Vocational training and training secondary school dropouts • *Ilona Liskó*
7. Educational science and course contents • *Benő Csapó*
8. Assessment, evaluation and accountability • *Gábor Kertesi*
9. Teacher education and continuing professional development • *Andrea Kárpáti*
10. Institutional system and funding structure in education • *Júlia Varga*
11. The effects of declining pupil numbers • *Judit Lannert*
12. Tools of employment policy • *János Köllő*

From the start of our project it was our aim to use the facts analyses and recommendations approved by the Round Table in each subject group to publish a Green Book outlining the tasks involved in the renewal of public education.

The schedule, concerns and principles of writing the Volume

■ Stage One: producing and debating discussion papers

During the one and a half years of the project OKA held 18 meetings discussing the papers. In addition to OKA members, the discussions were attended by permanent guests from relevant state administration departments and meeting-specific guests with expertise in the relevant subject. The debates were voice-recorded, minutes were kept and memoranda were prepared. OKA meetings were open to the public, the materials discussed (discussion papers, written comments and the memoranda) can be found on the OKA website. The end of the first stage of OKA's activities was marked by a conference organised jointly with the Hungarian Pedagogical Association.¹¹

■ Stage Two: writing and discussing individual chapters of the Green Book

Drawing on the experiences of the discussion meetings, written comments and the, by then, completed background studies, the earlier facts analyses and recommendations were revised and the chapters of the Green Book were written by the subject chairs. In December 2007 a brief preliminary facts analysis and recommendation package was produced at the request of the Prime Minister. The publication was commissioned to lay the foundations of education related measures of the action programme 'New Knowledge, New Awareness' announced in February 2008.¹² The recommendation package was discussed at three OKA meetings and the recommendations were passed by a majority.

Several arguments and counter arguments were voiced in discussing the recommendations. The details of critical comments and divergent views are available to read in the minutes of the meetings and transcriptions of the voice

[11] Conference materials can be found in Hungarian at http://oktatas.magyarorszagholnap.hu/wiki/Kategória:A_közoktatás_megújítása_Magyarországon_című_konferencia.

[12] <http://oktatas.magyarorszagholnap.hu/images/Javaslatcsom.pdf>

recordings. Written criticisms and responses to them are published on the internet together with the documents of discussion meetings. Most commentators agreed that the recommendation package was coherent and constituted a suitable foundation for a firm development programme. This, of course, does not only mean that measures can be introduced in the spirit of the recommendations but also that no decisions should be made in the opposite spirit and that policies should be consistent in giving priority to the issues contained in the recommendations in the allocation of resources.

■ **Stage Three: producing and discussing the final version of the Green Book**

The President of OKA invited János Köllő and Júlia Varga to edit the chapters of the Volume. The final manuscript of the Volume was discussed at the OKA meeting of 18th June, 2008.¹³ *The Green Book was approved with 19 votes in favour, one vote against, two abstentions and one vote in favour on the condition that minor corrections were made.* Tamás Bihall backs the contents of the Green Book on the whole but raises the objection that the chapter on vocational training does not place due emphasis on the importance of corporate internships and does not devote appropriate attention to the rapidly developing institution of employer funded studies. In his written comments György Horn assures the Round Table that he agrees with several ideas in the Volume and supports the implementation of most of the recommendations. He raises the objection, however, that several recommendations assume unrealistic conditions, with integration being a notable example, where – unfortunately – only very vague ideas of the means of implementation are available for the moment. Horn observes that the question of clearly manifest problems in social acceptance is not raised even though a society falls apart without integration and forced integration simply has the effect of accelerating this process. The commentator argues that the most pressing concern of the education reform is to maintain or raise the motivation of pupils and their families in every social group. He objects to the fact that the Volume does not address the question of motivation, whether it is present or absent or what could be done about the issue. A further shortcoming noted by Horn is that the challenges of pedagogical modernisation are not discussed; the Volume does not offer solutions to the problem of introducing modernisation into schoolwork taking into account the organisation of schools and the question of how – if at all – schools can adjust to changes.

The Green Book was presented to audiences at a conference organised by the Round Table on 25 November 2008.

[13] A summary of the discussion and comments submitted in writing can be read in Hungarian on the OKA web pages: http://oktatas.magyarorszagolnap.hu/wiki/Kategória:18._ülés.

■ Incorporating international experiences

In creating the Green Book every effort was made to incorporate international experiences of public education development. The green paper was translated into English and Jean-Paul Reef, education expert for the Luxembourg Ministry of Education, was invited to comment on the green paper and OKA's work plan. At our request Professor Reef gave a talk on the experiences of education reform in Germany.

A conference entitled 'Renewal of Education – Hungary's Future at Stake'¹⁴ was organised with the participation of key experts involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the education reforms in Finland, Luxembourg, Germany, Canada, the United States, Greece, Cyprus and the United Kingdom. The aim of the conference was to familiarise Hungarian experts with international experiences and to discuss the position of education in Hungary.

The internationally recognised McKinsey & Co management consulting firm was invited to produce a Hungarian version of Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed's study entitled 'How the World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top', the original version of which was financed by the firm. The conclusions of the study and their relevance to education in Hungary were discussed at a conference attended by Mona Mourshed.¹⁵ Drawing on the analysis of education reforms in more than two dozen countries, the study finds that successful education systems share the features that by increasing the salaries of newly qualified teachers, introducing selective teacher training programmes, limiting student places and through various other measures they ensure that 1. the most talented people are the ones who enrol in teacher training programmes, 2. they develop into competent teachers as a result of their studies, and 3. every child receives the best possible education service including children with learning difficulties. Efficient reforms have been especially successful in improving the achievements of pupils with below average performance. The conclusions of the study and the talks presented at the conference acted as an encouragement for the members of the Round Table to persist in their efforts and gave support to the approach we had been pursuing in seeking the basic goals and means of improving public education.

■ Reaching a consensus with the various players in education

Professional dialogue with representatives of the political sphere, interest groups and trade unions has been an integral part of our activities over the past one and a half years. The results of OKA's work have been disseminated at numerous professional meetings, conferences and workshops. OKA's members had talks

[14] An English summary of the conference is available at <http://oktatas.magyarorszagholnap.hu/images/Szept3.pdf>.

[15] http://oktatas.magyarorszagholnap.hu/wiki/Kategória:McKinsey_elemezés_a_legsikeresebb_oktatási_rendszerekről

with representatives of the Prime Minister's Office and the Hungarian National Development Agency, with members of parliamentary committees and professional organisations of parliamentary groups. Trade unions, professional chambers and associations were represented as permanent or meeting-specific guests or invited speakers and voiced their opinions at OKA meetings as well.

- Four key principles underlying the work of the Round Table
- Our goals were set high: it was conceded that the initial verdict concluding that Hungarian public education is in a very serious condition and that major long-term changes are needed to improve the efficiency of the system was correct.
- Both subject chairs and discussion participants pledged to accept nothing other than arguments based on the strictly scientific analyses of empirical evidence.
- Although the conditions of public education are closely related to several domains of society and the economy, every effort was made to focus on the most important aspects of the problem during the process of preparing the Green Book.
- It was acknowledged that problems could not be solved without recourse to measures seriously offending the interests of some groups. The task needs patience and perseverance and the consequences need to be weighed up. Finally, we need to be steadfast in our resolution and refuse to lower the minimum requirements of the necessary changes.

Let us take this opportunity to thank, in OKA's name, all the schoolteachers, university and college instructors, state administration and local government professionals and researchers, politicians and the representatives of trade unions and civil organisations who supported the work of the Round Table.¹⁶

We fondly remember and sorely miss our co-author, Ilona Liskó, whose tireless commitment to her role as chair of the subject "Vocational training and training secondary school dropouts" was a great asset to the Round Table and who has sadly passed away.

■ AN OVERVIEW OF SUGGESTED PROGRAMMES

OKA has suggested changes in 12 different *areas of intervention* in public education and some related domains. The number of goals that the reforms are meant to achieve is, however, considerably smaller. Our recommendations are

[16] We are also grateful to the secretariat to the Round Tables of Tomorrow's Hungary for supplying the infrastructure needed for our work. We would further like to thank Zsuzsa Balabán, academic secretary of the Institute of Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, for her commitment and diligence in organising and co-ordinating the activities of OKA.

organised according to their area of intervention but let us first show the system of interconnections consolidating these recommendations into a package aimed at achieving the most important goals.

Priorities

- 1** Research outcomes and the unequivocal experiences of successful education reform programmes point to *measures enhancing the quality of teaching staff and consequently the social status of the teaching profession* as the most important component of improvement. It is this goal that must be kept in mind in distributing resources among institutions offering teacher training and professional development programmes and in developing policies affecting teacher employment. The path to this goal involves improving teachers' salary prospects but the usual, quickly depreciating, "teacher pay rises" and broadly applied, low value pay supplements are not the right solution. The experiences of countries with internationally outstanding education outcomes demonstrate that the primary factor in the endeavour to attract and retain highly competent young teachers is to offer salaries for newly qualified teachers which are comparable to other graduate salaries. It is therefore essential to improve the currently saliently poor relative income position of *newly qualified teachers* (which is considerably worse than that of experienced teachers). Furthermore, substantial improvement is needed in the salary prospects of teachers whose work involves more than average challenges or requires innovative approaches in order to guarantee quality education for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is equally important to ensure that pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes teach *skills which earn higher prestige for the profession*, which is a goal that not every college or university is capable of attaining. The highly fragmented system of teacher education accommodates dozens of institutions where academic staff do not meet the standards (of research, publications and foreign language skills) expected of university teachers in other countries of the world. It is crucial to establish strong links between *research* and *teaching* – first, by giving greater responsibility in teacher education to research universities which are *measurably* recognised by the international scientific community and second, by taking every opportunity to involve teacher trainees in research aimed at enhancing teaching practice and at shedding light on concrete school failures and successes in present day Hungary.

If the lessons learnt from Hungarian and comparative international competence surveys are to have an impact on schools, it is not enough to complete the surveys and disseminate the methods of data collection and basic summary statistics of the results. This would be senseless wastefulness: the process of analysing the data demands comparable funds and much greater work effort (with the help of Ph.D. students, visiting scholars and teachers on research scholarships) relative to the process of data collection. Appropriate analyses,

evaluation and impact assessment are also needed to empower education advisors to recognise and adopt the innovations of the best teachers and to distinguish those from specious initiatives posing as innovations.

- 2 Our second goal shall be to progress beyond the concept of school as an institution transmitting course contents. What is needed is an education programme that develops fundamental skills, views achievement differences between pupils as *different developmental phases* and educates everyone until a specific set of targets has been reached. Grade retention and the homogenisation of classes have proved to be unsuccessful measures in efforts to tackle the problem of underperformance; they cannot redeem the need to renew teaching culture. The consistent implementation of the reforms in 1 above is a prerequisite to the delivery of target-oriented education. Should this condition fail to be met, the tools of skills development (test packages, auxiliary materials) and the education methods which have been shown to be successful abroad and have been tried and scientifically tested in Hungary cannot reach schools or it will not be *these* that reach schools. Skills development on a mass scale cannot proceed without feedback, diagnostic assessment and evaluation. Investments are needed to create the infrastructural conditions for skills development (classrooms suitable for group work and computing facilities which are also useful for continuous feedback), and a relatively large lump-sum development grant is required to develop a diagnostic assessment system that tracks pupils' progress over time. It must be emphasised, however, that standardised assessment methods and modern tools of information technology complement and assist rather than replace autonomous teaching activities. A diagnostic assessment programme cannot survive unless all those concerned – pupils, teachers and parents – have confidence in the system. For this reason, the programme must not be used as a direct reference for penalisation or reward. A system of incentives should nevertheless be developed to encourage genuine achievements.
- 3 The third goal is to *prevent the development of an uncloseable starting gap* and to progress beyond the practice of *segregation in response* to differences between pupils. This problem has been explored in great detail in our papers, which is justified by at least two observations. First, the Hungarian public education model is one of the most highly segregated systems in the developed world, which is the least successful model in moderating initial differences stemming from social inequalities. Among the countries participating in the PISA surveys Hungary was found to display the strongest effect of family background on pupil outcomes and Hungary was the country with the greatest variation in performance attributed to differences between schools. This is the combined effect of regulations on school enrolment, the exceedingly fragmented maintainer (local government) system and the failure of teaching methods to adjust to the growth of secondary education into an almost all-encompassing service where the natural homogenising filter of early exit, the practice of aban-

doning studies on a large scale is no longer operational. Second, in European countries where average pupil performance has been substantially improved (as in Poland) or raised to the highest level (as in Finland), the improvement is largely explained by a reduction in the extent of pupil selection.

Institutions involved in early years' child care and education fulfil an important function in preventing developmental disadvantages that emerge *before the age of compulsory education*. This also holds for currently less popular alternative child care arrangements as well as programmes and initiatives undertaking to improve parenting skills or to alleviate child poverty. What is now needed is to develop the health visitation network into a comprehensive service and to expand the nursery and infant care institution network and alternative early years' facilities to a substantial extent – multiplying the number of places in the long term. Kindergartens, which can admit children from the age of three years, are of special significance: they must be made *accessible to everyone* from the age of four years and to every child of poor and uneducated parents from the age of three. Regardless of the expected improvements in the capacity and quality of early years' education, provision must always be made for cases where effective help can only be offered by specially trained professionals. To ensure that help of this kind can be offered in time and that those in need can choose to make use of it, the information gathered by family doctors, health visitors and different child care institutions must be amalgamated and made accessible to families. As this is not possible under current conditions, we propose that the necessary changes be implemented.

The measures outlined in 1 and 2 above will effect clear improvement in the work of schools but segregation efforts may be expected even from competent and development-oriented teaching staff. To curb these efforts, a *desegregation programme* should be introduced and *education policies* should be revised. Our recommendations concerning desegregation target the reduction of segregation between schools and within schools, first by introducing appropriate regulations and a system of monitoring adherence to these regulations and second, by allocating special-purpose grants that must be accounted for. It is further proposed that methods of educating pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds should be part of the teacher training curriculum. The issue of professional diagnosis and services for children with *special educational needs* (SEN) is discussed in detail showing that failure to distinguish achievement difficulties of different kinds and the use of the SEN category as a means of securing additional funding work against the interests of not only children with special needs but also those who are wrongly categorised as having special educational needs when their difficulties in fact stem from social or family causes or teaching failures.

Developmental delay and segregation have acute consequences in *vocational training*. The labour market chances of people with vocational qualifications are very limited and this is not primarily explained by the contents of technical instruction but by the very poor quality of general skills which students

acquire at these schools. We suggest that part of the solution to the problem of reducing developmental delay would be giving priority to those models of Regional Integrated Vocational Training Centres (TISZK) which allow vocational training to be offered at the Training Centre itself while general skills are taught at secondary schools within commuting distance of the students' place of residence. This solution ensures that students carry out part of their studies at schools where the focus is on general skills development, teachers have appropriate competence in teaching methodology and the necessary subjects are offered. Since these secondary schools teach subjects both in preparation for academic secondary examinations (the *Matura*) and for vocational qualifications, they may eventually become models of a uniform comprehensive secondary school.

Our recommendations devote a separate chapter to the second stage of public education, to the problems that may currently prevent some students from attaining upper secondary qualifications, i.e., completing their *Matura* examinations. Students attending vocational schools are especially likely to interrupt their studies and drop out of the training programme. It is important to introduce measures preventing students from leaving early. These measures should not involve punishment but, instead, students at risk should be given individual support aimed at retaining them and additionally institutions characterised by high drop-out rates should be given assistance. To tackle the problem of dropping out of school, detailed information is needed on students who have dropped out. We therefore propose changes to the system of data collection. We find that the solution to the problem of reintegrating dropouts lies in encouraging the establishment of “second chance” type schemes and institutions, elaborating the conditions of claiming state funding for these initiatives, developing education methods and introducing student grants as incentives to completing training.

Half of first grade pupils with parents who left school at or before the age of 14 (some but not most of whom are Roma) live in families where nobody works. This is the reason why our Volume discusses measures of *employment policy* that are needed to reduce unemployment among parents and the effects of unemployment on the child – child poverty, underachievement at school and lack of motivation. The measures are aimed at increasing employment among that element of the population with less than upper secondary qualifications, especially people with only eight years of primary education or less.

- 4 It is important that the process of improving the work of schools and education should rest on an *appropriate feedback system*, i.e., individuals, schools and the education system as a whole should have access to feedback on their progress and on the quality of their work, and this feedback should be based on professionally gathered data and must be resistant to manipulation. It is essential for summary evaluation measurements and the planned diagnostic assessment procedures to conform to international standards. All those con-

cerned should receive direct feedback; evaluation should be the responsibility of knowledge centres equipped with appropriate competences in pedagogy, education science and mathematical statistics; services should be developed in response to the feedback; and anonymous data sets should be used for research. A feedback system is an important tool in strengthening the relationship between scientific research and teaching (Goal 1), in enabling teachers and pupils to keep track of the development of basic skills (Goal 2) and in identifying the locus, magnitude and sources of inequalities in the education system (Goal 3). To establish an appropriate feedback mechanism, *an inspection and mentor system should be set up* (modelled on the British Ofsted system) which, in addition to fulfilling a function of ensuring lawfulness, assesses school performance on a regular basis and monitors not only pupil achievements and school management but also the education policies of a school's local or micro-regional authorities, the implementation of these policies and differences in teaching conditions between schools within a given micro-region. The inspection authority should evaluate the results of the assessments and make recommendations of intervention in specific cases. We propose that the Hungarian Educational Agency should be given extended powers and should be supervised through a revised structure.

Although the new *Matura* was a significant step towards standardising the system of school leaving examinations, further development is needed. Recent changes in higher education and public education – the expansion of higher education and the introduction of the three-level (Bologna) system – call for further changes to school leaving examinations. The *Matura* must be a trustworthy measure of competence; it should reflect pupils' knowledge and skills in areas needed for personal development, participation in socio-cultural processes and further studies across a broader spectrum and in more detail than it now does. There is no longer a need, in contrast, for early specialisation or for the wide choice of examination subjects allowing specialisation. With the objective of consolidating the education of young generations (eliminating current imbalances) and to improve the student base of higher education courses in natural sciences and engineering, we propose that natural sciences should be a compulsory examination subject and the number of examination subjects should be radically reduced.

Priorities and reform areas

We believe that the reforms proposed by OKA will yield their first results in about ten years' time provided that current and future governments remain tenacious and consistent in their observation of the proposed priorities. Some of the above steps can and must be taken immediately but it is crucial to *build on scientific analyses and pilot studies where needed* and to introduce these changes *with reference to the complete programme, in concord with other con-*

current or planned steps. If education related regulations or public expenditure are to be modified, policy makers – or a delegated body – should investigate the expected effects of each proposed measure on the programme as a whole. It must be taken into account that the proposed changes call for close co-operation between a number of authorities (the government departments for education, health, social affairs, labour, local administration and finance, the National Development Agency and its Managing Authority). Programme components that can be launched without delay are listed with their respective objectives in *Table 11* grouped according to intervention area. The table only presents a quick summary, see Chapters 1–12 for details of each intervention area.

Costs, resources, sustainability

Most of the programmes that can be launched in the short term are related to the objectives set by the New Hungary Development Plan and to the priorities of the operative programmes. For this reason the initial implementation/development of these initiatives can be largely financed from the above sources. These sources, however, do not allow for a steady increase in spending needed for growth. A steady increase in running costs is expected in regions where there are a large number of children of poor and uneducated parents: the expansion of the health visitation network and the creation of more kindergarten places will increase running costs and the reform of teachers' pay schemes will require extra spending on the part of maintainers.

In the short term extra running costs can be covered by special-purpose, monitored grants. Our recommendations include measures aimed at making claims on public education funding transparent and reducing any illegitimate use to a minimum. Improved transparency, however, cannot make up for the increase in costs and the proliferation of funding entitlements that are expected to accompany the changes.

To ensure long-term sustainability, institutional and funding models need to be fundamentally revised. Our recommendations concerning this issue are discussed in a separate chapter. Some key elements of our programme cannot be realised unless the system of local administration is restructured. Our recommendations define a model of institution maintenance and funding which is based on the establishment of *micro-regional governments*, which is a solution that calls for amendments to government acts requiring a two-thirds majority. If the system of local administration cannot be reformed however, there is little realistic hope for important components of the programme to be sustainable. Since a substantial share of the reforms requires extra resources the last chapter of our Volume discusses estimations of potential savings due to demographic changes on the one hand, and improvements in the efficiency of public education on the other, which could be used to finance reforms without a need for additional central funding.

[TABLE 11]
PROGRAMMES
THAT CAN BE LAUNCHED
IN THE SHORT TERM
IN THE INTERVENTION
AREAS IDENTIFIED IN THE
SUMMARY

INTERVENTION DOMAIN	PRIORITY				INVESTMENT, DEVELOPMENT	MAINTENANCE COST INCREASE	REGULATORY AMENDMENTS
	1 Prestige of teaching profession	2 Basic skills development	3 Prevention of starting disadvantages	4 Assessment, evaluation, mentoring			
SUPPORTING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT							
Start planning a comprehensive health visitation system, including issues of travel support, pay schemes and work load, after taking stock on the district level			•	•		•	
System of indicators: standardise indicators, ensure comprehensiveness, plan rules of procedures and data protection, develop information technology and form extra duty compensation procedures for the National Health Insurance Fund			•	•	•	•	
Expand <i>Sure Start</i> , training and professional development for staff	•	•	•		•		
Create the legal and financial conditions of expanding home-based childminding and family day care		•	•				
Make kindergartens accessible to all from the age of four		•	•		•	•	
Launch independent training programme on early childhood development, provide professional development programmes for current experts	•	•	•				
TEACHER TRAINING							
Revise founding documents of master's programmes in teacher training	•	•					
Improve institutional accreditation conditions, define criteria specific to teacher training	•	•					
Develop a scheme of quality assurance in in-service training	•			•			
Plan the programme of one-semester school placement	•	•	•			•	
Define a grant scheme for teachers, senior teachers, mentors and subject advisors	•			•		•	

INTERVENTION DOMAIN	PRIORITY				INVESTMENT, DEVELOPMENT	MAINTENANCE COST INCREASE	REGULATORY AMENDMENTS
	1 Prestige of teaching profession	2 Basic skills development	3 Prevention of starting disadvantages	4 Assessment, evaluation, mentoring			
THE RENEWAL OF TEACHING CULTURE							
Extend the use of current diagnostic and development tools		•	•	•			
Disseminate methods encouraging meaningful learning	•	•	•				
Create the professional and material conditions for electronic (online) diagnostic assessment, start the development process		•	•	•	•		
Define, calibrate and parameterise tasks suited to follow progress (6-7 years, 3 years for testing purposes)		•	•	•	•		
EDUCATION SCIENCES							
Establish a Science Fund for educational research		•		•	•	•	
Create research universities with the strong presence of Ph.D. students, postdoctoral scholars and foreign researchers	•	•		•	•		
Priorities in allocating resources: scientific achievements as measured by internationally accepted indicators, large and long-term projects, long-term co-operation with a greater number of schools, participation in pre-service and in-service teacher training, involvement of trainee teachers	•	•		•	•		
ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION							
Centrally process all comprehensive competence tests in grades 6, 8 and 10			•	•	•	•	•
Store student identification numbers for longitudinal assessment (in progress)			•	•	•		
Start developing assessment tools for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) (by 2010)			•	•	•	•	
Increase number of assessment supervisors				•	•	•	•
Expand to new competence areas (pilot)			•	•	•		
Regulate compulsory completion of background questionnaires at schools				•	•		
Analyse the possibility of setting subgroup specific standards for children of poor and uneducated parents			•				
Improve the <i>Matura</i> system					•	•	•

[TABLE I1 – continued]
PROGRAMMES
THAT CAN BE LAUNCHED
IN THE SHORT TERM
IN THE INTERVENTION
AREAS IDENTIFIED IN THE
SUMMARY

INTERVENTION DOMAIN	PRIORITY				INVESTMENT DEVELOPMENT	MAINTENANCE COST INCREASE	REGULATORY AMENDMENTS
	1 Prestige of teaching profession	2 Basic skills development	3 Prevention of starting disadvantages	4 Assessment, evaluation, mentoring			
Set up knowledge centres to interpret test data	•			•	•	•	
Test performance incentive schemes at local level, with voluntary participation	•			•	•		
EQUALITY, DESEGREGATION							
Improve identification procedure of children of poor and uneducated parents			•	•			•
Give kindergarten access for children of poor and uneducated parents from the age of three		•	•	•	•	•	
Decrease segregation at school entry		•	•	•			
Decrease all forms of segregation in multi-school settlements and at schools with more than one class in each grade		•	•	•			•
Restrict the practice of subsidising enrolment from outside school districts from public funds			•	•			•
Reform teacher pay schemes, introduce performance related pay, introduce salary supplements to reward special achievements and extra challenges	•						•
Define clear regulations concerning the conditions of closing small schools and primary schools with only four grades			•			•	•
Prepare trainee teachers for teaching children of poor and uneducated parents	•	•	•			•	
Create the conditions of successful secondary education for children of poor and uneducated parents	•	•	•		•	•	
Implement complex programmes in underdeveloped and segregated areas			•		•	•	
Set the rules of subsidising with regard to equality			•			•	

INTERVENTION DOMAIN	PRIORITY				INVESTMENT DEVELOPMENT	MAINTENANCE COST INCREASE	REGULATORY AMENDMENTS
	1 Prestige of teaching profession	2 Basic skills development	3 Prevention of starting disadvantages	4 Assessment, evaluation, mentoring			
VOCATIONAL TRAINING, DROPOUTS							
Divide vocational schools into vocational training centres and secondary schools		•			•		•
Compensate for disadvantages at secondary schools preparing for vocational training		•	•			•	
Reintegrate dropouts		•	•		•	•	
Record causes of terminating student status in the central data collection system				•			•
TOOLS OF EMPLOYMENT POLICY							
Reform minimum wage policy			•				
Discourage disability pension claims motivated by poor employment prospects			•				
Reform local welfare system			•				
Reduce disadvantage of people without maturity certificate in participating in retraining programmes			•			•	
Develop comprehensive, exceptional crisis management programmes to tackle acute local crises			•		•	•	
Overhaul the system of employment subventions			•				
SYSTEM OF INSTITUTIONS, FUNDING							
Restructure teacher pay schemes, gradually raise the salaries of newly qualified teachers, recompense for extra challenges		•				•	•
Set up comprehensive central inspection system modelled on the British Ofsted				•	•		•
Conduct comprehensive assessment of all schools every 3 or 4 years				•	•	•	
Implement a system of claiming and accounting for per-pupil subsidies through the pupil-level database of the Public Education Information Office (KIR) based on education identification numbers				•			•
Record the causes of terminating student status together with year of study and gender in the central data collection system			•				•

[APPENDIX 11] MEMBERS OF THE ROUND TABLE FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD OPPORTUNITIES

	NAME	AFFILIATION, POSITION	DELEGATING BODY
PRESIDENT	KÁROLY FAZEKAS	Institute of Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Director	The Prime Minister
	GYÖRGY ÁDÁM	ELTE University of Budapest, Professor Emeritus	Hungarian Pedagogical Association
MEMBERS	ANTAL ÁROK	Teachers' Trade Union, Vice President, Editor in Chief, Pedagógusok Lapja (Teachers's Quarterly)	Council for Economic and Social Affairs, employee wing
	ERZSÉBET M. ESZTER BAJZÁK	Catholic Educational Agency and In-Service Training Institute, Head of Institute	Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference
	TAMÁS BIHALL	Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vice President; B-A-Z County Chamber of Commerce and Industry, President	Council for Economic and Social Affairs, employer wing
	BENŐ CSAPÓ	Institute of Education, University of Szeged, Professor	Hungarian Academy of Sciences
	VALÉRIA CSÉPE	Institute of Psychology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), Research Professor, Corresponding Member of HAS; Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Deputy Secretary General	Hungarian Psychological Association
	ELEMÉR HANKISS	ELTE University of Budapest, Professor	Council for Economic and Social Affairs, employer wing
	GÁBOR HAVAS	Institute of Sociology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Senior Research Fellow	Parliamentary Committee for Youth, Social and Family Affairs
	MÁRIA HERCZOG	Károly Eszterházy College, Associate Professor	Council for Economic and Social Affairs, civil wing - Hungarian Economic and Social Council
	GYÖRGY HORN	Alternative Secondary School of Economics, Teaching Advisor	The Prime Minister
	ANDREA KÁRPÁTI	Centre for Multimedia and Educational Technology, ELTE University of Budapest, Professor	Parliamentary Committee for Youth, Social and Family Affairs
	GÁBOR KERTESI	Institute of Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Professor	The Prime Minister
	JÁNOS KÖLLŐ	Institute of Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Senior Research Fellow	Council for Economic and Social Affairs, employee wing
	JUDIT LANNERT	Tárki-Tudok Ltd. Centre for Knowledge Management and Educational Research, General Manager	Parliamentary Committee for Education and Science
	† ILONA LISKÓ	Institute for Educational Research and Development, Senior Research Fellow	Hungarian Sociological Association
	JÓZSEF NAGY	Institute of Education, University of Szeged, Professor Emeritus	Hungarian Academy of Sciences
	MARGIT ROMÁN, MRS. NAGY	Centre for Integrated Regional Vocational Training, Nyírvidék Region, Manager	Parliamentary Committee for Budget, Finance and Audit
	ISTVÁN NAHALKA	Institute of Education, ELTE University of Budapest, Associate Professor	Parliamentary Committee for Education and Science
	MAGDA RÉVÉSZ	FIOKA Child and Youth Welfare Service, director	Association of Social Workers
	BALÁZS TÖLLI	Berzsenyi Dániel Lutheran Secondary School, Headmaster	The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary
	JÚLIA VARGA	Corvinus University of Budapest, Institute of Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Professor	The Prime Minister
LÁSZLÓ VASA	Szent István University, Associate Professor	Parliamentary Committee for Budget, Finance and Audit	

[APPENDIX I2] EVENTS LISTING FOR THE ROUND TABLE FOR EDUCATION AND CHILD OPPORTUNITIES (OKA)

	AGENDA/EVENT/CONFERENCE	DATE
1.	OPENING MEETING 1. Objectives, the rule of order and the work plan 2. Opening remarks by Károly Fazekas, Gábor Kertesi, János Köllő and Júlia Varga	20 March 2007
2.	MÁRIA HERCZOG • Early years development	3 April 2007
3.	BENŐ CSAPÓ • The scientific foundations of education reform	17 April 2007
4.	GÁBOR HAVAS • Equality, desegregation	2 May 2007
5.	GÁBOR KERTESI • Assessment, evaluation and accountability	15 May 2007
6.	VALÉRIA CSÉPE • Pupils with special educational needs	29 May 2007
	WORKSHOP with Jean Paul Reeff on the German education reform	29 May 2007
7.	ILONA LISKÓ • Vocational training and training for secondary school dropouts	13 June 2007
8.	JÓZSEF NAGY • The first years of primary school	26 June 2007
9.	JÁNOS KÖLLŐ • Measure of employment policy	10 July 2007
10.	ANDREA KÁRPÁTI • Teacher education	10 July 2007
	International conference: RENEWAL OF EDUCATION – HUNGARY’S FUTURE AT STAKE. Participants: Philip Adey (King’s College, London), Cordula Artelt (University Bamberg), Jürgen Baumert (Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin), Jarkko Hautamäki (Helsinki University), Suzanne Hidi (University of Toronto), Erno Lehtinen (University of Turku), Jari-Erik Nurmi (University of Jyväskylä), Jean-Paul Reeff (ICHINI), Lauren Resnick (University of Pittsburgh), Roger Säljö (Göteborg University), Patrik Scheinin (University of Helsinki), Stella Vosniadou (University of Athens).	3 September 2007
11.	JÚLIA VARGA • Institutional structure and funding in education	4 September 2007
12.	JUDIT LANNERT • The budgetary effects of declining pupil numbers	4 September 2007
	Joint conference with the Hungarian Pedagogical Association and the Seventh Congress on Education Policy: THE RENEWAL OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN HUNGARY	25 September 2007
	WORKSHOP with Olaf Köller (Institute for Educational Progress, Humboldt University, Berlin). Presentation: Developing a National Assessment System in Germany	24 October 2007
13.	1. Proposal by Károly Fazekas for the OKA work plan for the next six months 2. János Köllő’s talk on the first part of the recommendation package concerning public education policy 3. Andrea Kárpáti’s report on the progress of state administration talks concerning teacher training 4. Júlia Varga’s report on the progress of the working group planning the amendments to the Local Government Act	30 October 2007
14.	1. Expert’s talk on guarantees of the right of access to primary education 2. Discussion of the first part of the recommendation package concerning public education policy	20 November 2007
15.	Discussion of the second part of the recommendation package concerning public education policy	11 December 2007
16.	Discussion of OKA’s recommendations concerning SEN	22 January 2008
	Conference introducing the McKinsey report HOW THE WORLD’S BEST PERFORMING SCHOOL SYSTEMS COME OUT ON TOP	25 January 2008
17.	1. Discussion of recommendations concerning teacher training 2. BENŐ CSAPÓ • The second stage of public education and school leaving examinations	18 March 2008
18.	DISCUSSION OF THE GREEN BOOK	18 June 2008
	CONFERENCE INTRODUCING THE GREEN BOOK	25 November 2008

Meeting materials and conference papers are available for download from the OKA website: http://oktatas.magyarorszagholnap.hu/wiki/A_Kerekasztal.