

Approval of the Application by Music Quality Enhancement (MusiQuE) for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee
2 November 2020

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Ver. 1.0
Date 2020-11-04
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Application of:	15/05/2019
Agency registered since:	01/11/2015
External review report of:	31/07/2020
Review coordinated by:	National Association of Schools of Music (NASM)
Review panel members:	Mark Wait (chair) (academic), Norma Ryan, Oliver Vettori, Mirela Matei (student), Pieter-Jan Van de Velde (panel secretary)
Decision of:	02/11/2020
Registration until:	31/07/2025
Absented themselves from decision-making:	N/A
Attachments:	1. Confirmation of eligibility, 28/05/2019 2. External Review Report, 31/07/2020 3. Request to the Review Panel, 12/10/20 4. Clarification by the Review Panel, 24/10/20

1. The application of 15/05/2019 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 28/05/2019.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 31/07/2020 on the compliance of MusiQuE with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the chair of the review panel (letter of 24/10/2020).

Analysis:

5. In considering MusiQuE's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:

- *quality enhancement reviews of institutions*, including the *critical friend reviews* option;
- *quality enhancement reviews of programmes*;
- *quality enhancement reviews of joint programmes*;
- *institutional accreditations*;
- *programme accreditation*;
- *accreditation of joint programmes*.

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6. The activities *quality assurance desk for institutions*, *consultative visits* and *coordination of benchmarking projects* are not activities within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to MusiQuE's registration on EQAR.

7. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on MusiQuE's level of compliance with the ESG.

8. With regard to the specific European Standards, the Register Committee considered the following:

ESG 2.6 – Reporting

9. The Register Committee noted the delay in MusiQuE's publication of reports, i.e. the time between the site visit and the publishing of reports may be up to one year. The Committee underlined the panel's recommendation that the agency should optimise the process in order to reduce such delays.

10. The panel reported that MusiQuE has recently introduced *critical friend reviews* as a modified version of MusiQuE's quality enhancement reviews. The new addition includes annual visits by 'critical friends' to various departments and programmes which result in specific reports; these feed into the agency's self-evaluation and final quality enhancement review report.

11. The Register Committee noted that the agency does not publish the specific reports resulting from the *critical friend review*, neither separately nor together with the final quality enhancement review report. The Committee has therefore asked the panel to clarify its stance on this practice considering the requirement of the standard 2.6.

12. In its clarification letter, the Panel explained that the *critical friend review* report was one element of the review process and one of the documents informing the *quality enhancement review* report. The panel did not find it necessary to publish the outcomes of *critical friend reviews* as maintaining the report in confidence gave the "critical friends" the liberty to be more straightforward and explicit.

13. The Register Committee concurred with the panel's appreciation of the added value of the "critical friend approach" and welcomed such innovative approaches in agency's external quality assurance activities.

14. The Register Committee, however, underlined that the agency is expected to publish full reports prepared by the experts. In the Committee's understanding, these need to cover the full evidence reviewed and the full analysis made. Hence, where several reports are produced within one

procedure, such as the *critical friend reports*, all reports should be published.

15. The Register Committee added that it would be sufficient to publish the critical friend reports together with the final external review report, rather than separately.

16. Considering the non-publication of critical friend review reports, the Register Committee was unable to concur with the panel's conclusion of (full) compliance and concluded that MusiQuE complies only partially with standard 2.6.

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ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

17. The Register Committee noted that MusiQuE's appeals procedure only applies to the reviews that result in an accreditation decision, but does not cover the agency's enhancement type of reviews. Since higher education institutions may have concerns related to the application of the criteria and the judgments also in the enhancement reports, these should equally be subject to appeal in line with the standard.

18. During its site-visit the panel further learned that it is not always clear to stakeholders involved how a complaint will be approached and how exactly are responsibilities defined.

19. The Register Committee noted that MusiQuE has an Appeals' Committee, formed of one standing member and one individual appointed in response to each specific appeal. The panel remarked that the Board of MusiQuE is the decision-making body responsible for endorsing the judgement of the review team and also the body nominating the members of the Appeals' Committee, which may raise a concern of potential conflict of interest. The Register Committee therefore underlined the panel's recommendation of reviewing the procedure for appeals in order to guarantee a fair decision making and avoid such potential conflicts of interest.

20. Considering the several above-mentioned issues the Register Committee could not follow the panel's conclusion of (substantial) compliance but considered that MusiQuE complies only partially with ESG 2.7.

ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

21. In its last review the Register Committee concluded that MusiQuE complies only partially with the standard because the lack of involvement of students, alumni and the broader society in the governance of MusiQuE. The Register Committee also underlined that a student Board member should not be considered as representative of their organisation, but should serve in an individual capacity.

22. The Register Committee noted that MusiQuE has since its last review created a permanent student seat on its Board (as of November 2017). While

the Register Committee welcomed this change, the Committee further underlined the review panel's recommendation on the need for a more diverse range of stakeholders to be involved in the governance and work of the agency.

23. The Register Committee sought clarification from the panel whether it had considered the risk that the *critical friend reviews* could have a supporting or consulting role, which could lead to the quality enhancement review issuing judgments on matters that MusiQuE's critical friends have assisted to develop or implement. The panel was asked how it satisfied itself that MusiQuE prevents such potential conflicts of interest.

24. The panel explained that it considered the *critical friend review* as a first phase of the Quality Enhancement review. The panel argued that this process did not result in conflicts of interest as the MusiQuE processes were similar to other processes where institutions are required to follow-up on previous peer reviews and consider inputs from stakeholders. The panel added that during its review it was able to ascertain that the involvement of external reviewers not only assisted to avoid conflicts of interest, but as well served to prevent them at the end of each full cycle.

25. Having considered the clarification from the review panel, the Register Committee could follow the panel's conclusion that MusiQuE complies with ESG 3.1.

ESG 3.3 – Independence

26. The panel noted that since its last review the MusiQuE Board now makes the final decision on its own composition. Considering the changed arrangements, the Register Committee was unclear how the members of the MusiQuE Board could be dismissed and if so on what ground. The Committee has therefore sought further clarifications from the panel.

27. In its response, the panel explained that the absence of an external body to appoint or dismiss Board members was something specific to the legal form of a Foundation in Belgium. The panel further referred to the agency's statutes, which provide the possible reasons/circumstances for the ending of the mandate of one board member.

28. The Committee noted that the panel found the current organisational arrangement to be adequate in guaranteeing the independence of the Board and its members in the context of an international quality assurance agency.

29. Having considered the clarifications from the Register Committee could follow the panel's conclusion that MusiQuE complies with ESG 3.3.

ESG 3.5 – Resources

30. In its last review the Register Committee noted that MusiQuE did not have sufficient firm agreements with higher education institutions to achieve financial self-sustainability and thus concluded on partially compliance.

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31. The Register Committee learned that since its last review, MusiQuE has managed to expand its activities, and to increase its annual income from its reviews and other activities substantially. MusiQuE's has also reduced its reliance on the Association Européenne des Conservatoire (AEC)'s financial support, who has been covering a high proportion of its staff costs.

32. **The Committee welcomed these positive developments and concurred with the panel's conclusion that MusiQuE complies with the standard, while it also underlined the panel's recommendation to MusiQuE's in achieving full financial sustainability.**

33. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

Conclusion:

34. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that MusiQuE demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

Standard	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Full compliance	Compliance
2.2	Full compliance	Compliance
2.3	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.4	Full compliance	Compliance
2.5	Full compliance	Compliance
2.6	Full compliance	Partial compliance
2.7	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
3.1	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.2	Full compliance	Compliance
3.3	Full compliance	Compliance
3.4	Full compliance	Compliance
3.5	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.6	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.7	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

35. The Register Committee considered that MusiQuE only achieved partial compliance with two standards. In its holistic judgement, the Register Committee concluded that these are specific and limited issues, and had confidence in MusiQuE being able to address those. MusiQuE therefore continues to comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.

36. The Register Committee approved the application for renewal of MusiQuE's inclusion on the Register. MusiQuE's renewed inclusion shall be valid until 31/07/2025¹.

37. The Register Committee further underlined that MusiQuE is expected to address the issues mentioned appropriately and to resolve them at the earliest opportunity.

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¹ Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.



**1040 Brussels
Belgium**

Brussels, 28 May 2019

**Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Inclusion on the Register
Application no. A88 of 15/05/2019**

Dear Linda,

We hereby confirm that the application by MusiQuE for renewal of registration is eligible.

Based on the information and draft terms of reference provided, the external review coordinated by the The National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) fulfils the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

We confirm that the following activities of MusiQuE are within the scope of the ESG:

- Quality enhancement reviews of institutions
- Quality enhancement reviews of programmes
- Quality enhancement reviews of joint programmes
- Institutional accreditations
- Programme accreditation
- Accreditation of joint programmes

Please ensure that MusiQuE's self-evaluation report covers all the aforementioned activities.

We further remind you that MusiQuE was found to comply only partially with the following standards when MusiQuE was admitted to the Register; the issues related thereto should be specifically addressed in your self-evaluation report and the external review report:

3.1. Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

The Register Committee concluded that MusiQuE only partially complies with the standard because students, alumni and the broader society were not involved in the governance of MusiQuE. The Register Committee also underlined that a student Board member should not be considered a

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representative of their organisation, but should serve in an individual capacity.

3.5. Resources

The Register Committee noted that MusiQuE did not have sufficient firm agreements with higher education institutions that would fully assure its ability to achieve financial self-sustainability. The Committee therefore concluded that MusiQuE only partially complied with the standard.

We confirm that the following activities are not within the scope of the ESG:

- Quality enhancement review of pre-college institution and programme
- Evaluation of research activities undertaken by higher music education institutions
- Consultative visits

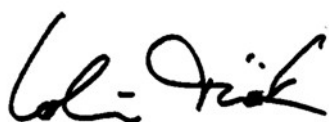
While these activities are not relevant to your application, it is MusiQuE's choice – in agreement with the review coordinator – whether those activities should be commented upon by the review panel.

The external report should, however, address the relation between consultative activities and quality reviews, in particular the measures in place to avoid conflict of interest having regard to Annex 5 to the EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG.

We will forward this letter to NASM in its capacity of the coordinator of the external review. At the same time we underline that it is MusiQuE's responsibility to ensure that the coordinator and review panel take account of the present confirmation, so as to ensure that all activities mentioned are analysed by the panel.

This confirmation is made according to the relevant provisions of the EQAR Procedures for Applications. MusiQuE has the right to appeal this decision in accordance with the Appeals Procedure; any appeal must reach EQAR within 90 days from receipt of this decision.

Yours sincerely,



Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: NASM (coordinator)

Brussels, 12 October 2020

Application by MusiQuE for Renewal of Registration on EQAR

Dear Mark,

The MusiQuE - Music Quality Enhancement (MusiQuE) has made an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

We are contacting you in your capacity as chair of the panel that prepared the external review report of 11/02/2020 on which MusiQuE's application is based.

The EQAR Register Committee's rapporteurs have been considering the application and the external review report. We would be obliged if you could clarify, in consultation with the panel members as necessary, some matters in order to contribute to the consideration of MusiQuE's application:

In its review report, the panel notes that MusiQuE has initiated a new and complementary approach to its *Quality Enhancement* reviews, in the form of a *Critical Friend review*. The *Critical Friend review* includes annual visits and reports, the results of which feed into the process of the higher education institution's self-evaluation and external review report.

- **ESG 3.1:** In its analysis of the *Critical Friend* review, how did the panel satisfy itself that MusiQuE prevents potential conflicts of interest? Did the panel consider the risk where the *Critical Friend review* has a supporting or consulting role, which could lead to the Quality Enhancement Review issuing judgments on things that MusiQuE's critical friends have assisted to develop or implement?
- **ESG 2.6:** Could you please specify if the panel found it acceptable that the *Critical Friend* review reports are not made public (either separately or together with the Quality Enhancement review report) and if so why?
- **ESG 3.3:** We noted that since its last review the MusiQuE Board decides on its own composition. Could you please clarify if the

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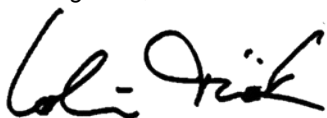
panel has considered whether in this new arrangement the members of the MusiQuE Board can be dismissed and if so on what ground?

We would be grateful if it was possible for you to respond by 24 October 2020, and we would appreciate if you get in contact with us should that not be feasible.

Please note that EQAR will publish this request and your response together with the final decision on MusiQuE's application. We, however, kindly ask you to keep information related to the application confidential until the final decision has been published.

We acknowledge that it might not be possible to clarify all of the above. However, we appreciate your assistance and I shall be at your disposal if you have any questions in relation to this request.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colin Tück".

Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: Pieter-Jan Van de Velde (secretary)
NASM (coordinator)
MusiQuE

Mr. Colin Tück
EQAR
Aarlenstraat 22
1040 Brussels
Belgium

October 24th 2020

Dear Mr. Tück
Dear Colin,

On behalf of the MusiQuE Review Panel, it is my honor respond to the questions you pose on behalf of the EQAR Register Committee. It is based on the materials submitted by MusiQuE, on our recollections of our on-site discussions, on our review of our notes from those discussions, and on input over the past several days from the Panel, and from our scribe, Pieter-Jan Van de Velde. We hope this is helpful to the Committee's evaluation of MusiQuE's application.

Please don't hesitate to be in touch if there is any further explanation or clarification that you or the Committee require.

Most Sincerely,

Mark Wait, Panel Chair, MusiQuE

Panel Introduction:

In order to answer to the questions raised by EQAR, the review panel refers to the description of the Critical Friend review as provided under standard 2.3 which suggests the following:

“For higher education institutions which want to take a next step in the integration of their internal and external quality assurance processes in order to ensure a better preparation or follow-up of the external processes, MusiQuE has recently developed the Critical Friend Review which is also described above. In this approach a MusiQuE review visit is preceded and prepared by annual visits by ‘critical friends’ to various departments or programmes, some components are added to the processes referred to above (also described in the MusiQuE Handbook for Critical Friend Review):

- each programme or department to be reviewed sends relevant material to the ‘critical friend’;
- the latter conducts a review including formal and informal elements;
- the ‘critical friend’ then produces a report with recommendations, structured in line with guidelines which MusiQuE has developed on the basis of the MusiQuE Standards;
- the department or programme prepares an action plan in response to the ‘critical friend report’ and implements the action plan.

For each programme or department, these steps are similar. After some years, each programme or department will have been reviewed by a ‘critical friend’ once or twice, and therefore produced an

improvement plan and worked on these improvements. The regular review procedure undertaken by a review team will then take place.”

ESG 3.1

EQAR Question: In its analysis of the Critical Friend review, how did the panel satisfy itself that MusiQuE prevents potential conflicts of interest? Did the panel consider the risk where the Critical Friend review has a supporting or consulting role, which could lead to the Quality Enhancement Review issuing judgments on things that MusiQuE's critical friends have assisted to develop or implement?

Panel Reaction:

The panel did consider Critical Friends Reviews as a first phase in the Quality Enhancement Review process, and not as a separate activity conducted apart from Quality Enhancement Reviews. A Critical Friends review includes a range of external peer-review visits to the institution by independent external experts who review institution activities and deliver a report which serves as a starting point and as such informs both the self-evaluation and external review report. The review team is advised by the analysis provided by critical friends, the provisions of which serve to inform the work of the review teams. However, the review panel maintains the responsibility to analyse the institution under review through the Quality Enhancement Review including during the site visit. Since the Quality Enhancement reviewers conduct their responsibilities independent of the Critical Friends Review process, the panel found that this innovative process does not appear to result in conflicts of interest, and further that the MusiQuE processes appear similar to other cyclical external quality assurance processes where entities are required to follow-up on previous peer reviews and consider inputs from stakeholders. Moreover, it would appear that MusiQuE's approach spreads the period of review to an institution over a period of time, providing an interactive approach which leads to in depth input beyond that which may result from the more classical site visit model where a review team focuses its activities on document research, interviews, and possibly a visit to the institutional facilities. Additionally, at the end of each full cycle, to ensure objectivity and consistency with MusiQuE requirements, a new individual is selected as the Critical Friend, the selection of which is managed by MusiQuE (see MusiQuE Handbook for Critical Friend Review, p. 6).

It should be noted that in its report, the panel commended MusiQuE for its development of this innovative approach to gathering information, as it opens and maintains a constructive and insightful conversation between external experts and institutional representatives through the review processes. During its review the panel was able to review and ascertain that the involvement of external reviewers, trained and assigned following stated MusiQuE procedure, in the Critical Friend Quality Enhancement Reviews not only assists to avoid conflicts of interest, but as well, serves to prevent them (see MusiQuE Guidelines for Peer Reviewers, Section 1.3.3.)

ESG 2.6

EQAR Question: Could you please specify if the panel found it acceptable that the Critical Friend review reports are not made public (either separately or together with the Quality Enhancement review report) and if so why?

Panel Reaction:

A Critical Friend Review report is but one of the documents informing the Quality Enhancement Review report, which is the final and public outcome of the process. As is the case in most other

external review processes, the final Quality Enhancement Review report includes discussion of all information discovered and reviewed by a review team, particularly that which may be consultative rather than compliance-focused. This ensures that the Quality Enhancement Review report includes information which is accurate and has been verified by and from many different sources. Since the Critical Friend Review is merely one aspect of the review process, the panel did not consider it necessary to publish the Critical Friend Review reports separately, or together with the final report. Indeed, maintaining the report in confidence can assist institutions in that the critical friends are at liberty to be more straightforward and explicit in a document which remains unpublished, the result of which can perhaps enhance and advance strategic institutional developments.

ESG 3.3

EQAR Question: We noted that since its last review the MusiQuE Board decides on its own composition. Could you please clarify if the panel has considered whether in this new arrangement the members of the MusiQuE Board can be dismissed and if so on what ground?

Panel Reaction:

The absence of an external body which appoints or dismisses Board members is specific to the legal form of a Foundation in Belgium. MusiQuE has aligned itself with this principle. While any approach addressing the composition of a Board requires stakeholders to appoint the members, the review panel found the current approach to be adequate in guaranteeing the independence of the Board and its members in the context of an international quality assurance agency which has as key stakeholders higher education institutions. This current approach was chosen explicitly in order to prevent any higher education institution from having undue influence on the composition of the Board.

As indicated in Article 2 of the agency's statutes "The mandate of the members of the Board shall come to an end:

- upon resignation;
- upon being declared bankrupt or applying for a suspension of payments;
- upon being removed from office by the court in the cases provided for by law;
- upon being removed from office by the other members of the Board;
- upon termination of the capacity that formed the reason for their appointment;
- upon the member's death.

Before a decision is taken to remove a member of the Board from office, the individual concerned shall be given an opportunity to put forward a defence during the meeting."

The panel considers that this provision guarantees the independence of the Board of Directors, while providing a procedure to dismiss a Board Member whenever this is considered to be relevant by the other Board Members.