

# Executive summary

## Report

### Programme Accreditation

## Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S.)

### BA Training and MA STUDIOS

### (Brussels, Belgium)

**Site-visit: 20-22 March, 2024**

#### Introduction

##### P.A.R.T.S. and its programmes

The Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S.) was founded in 1995 as a private initiative by the choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. P.A.R.T.S. has always been independent rather than affiliated to a larger educational organisation, and from 1997 and 1998 respectively it has received public funding from the Flemish Ministry of Culture and the Flemish Ministry of Education.

In 2000, the curriculum was restructured into two cycles of two years each: the Training Cycle and the Research Cycle, with both cycles starting only every two years. A new structure started in 2013 with the Training Cycle extended to three years; this evolved into the BA Training programme. Pilot continuation programmes called Research Studios eventually evolved from 2019 into the two-year MA STUDIOS. Both the Training and the STUDIOS cycles passed the 'Toets Nieuwe Opleiding' of the Nederlands Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie (NVAO) and were respectively awarded recognition as a professional Bachelor programme (June 2019) and academic Masters programme (July 2020). Each cycle is only offered every three years so that the same cohort of students follows through the entire cycle.

Since 2001, P.A.R.T.S. has operated on a management agreement with the Ministry of Education of the Flemish Government as a registered 'Institution offering excellent art training' (Art. III.119 of the decree of higher education). The management agreement is renewed every five years. P.A.R.T.S. is currently in its fifth policy period (2022-2026). At the



time of the review visit P.A.R.T.S. was pursuing 'Sui Generis'<sup>1</sup> status with the Flemish Government which was subsequently approved on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

## **Context and scope of the review**

P.A.R.T.S. approached MusiQuE to conduct its first external evaluation procedure. Following advice from the NVAO, the Flemish government gave permission to assess both the BA and Masters programme as part of the same process. Both degrees are currently validated until September 2024.

## **About this report**

The report serves as the assessment report for the BA Training and MA STUDIOS programmes offered by P.A.R.T.S.. The assessment of the programmes was carried out by an independent review team of international peer reviewers. In this report the review team presents its findings, considerations and conclusions.

Because of the unified nature of the P.A.R.T.S. learning community, and the many shared aspects between the BA Training and MA STUDIOS, the majority of the review team's findings apply to both programmes but where necessary they are differentiated.

## **Steps of the procedure**

The assessment followed a three-stage process:

- P.A.R.T.S. prepared a self-evaluation report and supporting documents, offering background information and insights about the programmes under review;
- an international review team studied the self-evaluation report, visited the institution on-site and reviewed a sample of student-led work and classes live during the site visit before reaching weighted and substantiated conclusions regarding the programmes;
- the review team produced the assessment report.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Sui Generis' or 'of its own kind' refers in the Flemish public sector to a small number of organisations that are self-standing and independent.



# Summary of the compliance with the Standards and recommendations

The review team concludes that the P.A.R.T.S. programmes comply with the *Standards for Programme Review* as follows:

1. Governance and decision making at programme level	
<p><b>Standard 1.1</b> The programme's goals are clearly stated and relevant to the national legal context. They reflect the institutional mission and vision, and they are aligned with the overarching institutional policies and strategy. They are effectively achieved through the content and structure of the curriculum, and its methods of delivery.</p>	<p>BA Training Fully compliant</p> <p>MA STUDIOS Fully compliant</p>
<p><b>Recommendations / Suggestions for enhancement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Standard 1.2</b> The delivery of the programme is supported by an appropriate organisational structure, and clear, transparent and effective decision-making processes that include a balanced representation of the programme's stakeholders (students, teaching staff, support staff, representatives of the music profession and related artistic domains).</p>	<p>BA Training Fully compliant</p> <p>MA STUDIOS Substantially compliant</p>
<p><b>Suggestions for enhancement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following established good practice in HE, P.A.R.T.S. should consider inserting student representation formally into every level of governance and decision-making.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>P.A.R.T.S. prides itself on its agile and responsive decision-making; it should consider how the student feedback in the MA STUDIOS could be acted upon mid-way through the programme. <b>(Recommendation for MA STUDIOS)</b></li> </ul>	
2. Students' perspectives	
<p><b>Standard 2.1</b> Clear, coherent, and inclusive admission criteria exist, to establish artistic / academic suitability of incoming students at programme level. Admitted students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the learning process and to engage in critical-reflection. They are supported to achieve the intended learning outcomes through an appropriate and effective blend of teaching and learning styles and pedagogies. The programme and its methods of delivery are adequately catered by staff and support services.</p>	<p>BA Training Fully compliant</p> <p>MA STUDIOS Fully compliant</p>
<p><b>Recommendations / Suggestions for enhancement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Standard 2.2</b> The programme has effective procedures in place to formally monitor and review the progression of its students. Assessment methods are clearly defined and effectively demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. There is an effective complaints and appeals system in place at programme level.</p>	<p><b>BA Training</b> Partially compliant <b>MA STUDIOS</b> Partially compliant</p>
<p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The review team strongly recommends that P.A.R.T.S. reviews its course learning outcomes to make them more user-friendly and effective; P.A.R.T.S. must clarify how assessment measures intended learning outcomes, and how feedback effectively supports students to meet them. The aim should be for constructive alignment of learning outcomes, taught learning activities and assessment. It is particularly important that visiting teachers understand and communicate the link between learning outcomes and studio practice and the flow through to assessment against learning outcomes.</li> <li>• Tight scheduling for visiting teachers should not compromise their capacity to explain assessment criteria or give timely and detailed feedback to students; the review team suggests that P.A.R.T.S. should prioritise this element in guidance and training for visiting teachers.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Standard 2.3</b> The programme has effective mechanisms in place to ensure that students acquire the necessary skills that facilitate their transition towards a professional life in the music and / or related artistic domain. Procedures are in place to formally and effectively monitor students' subsequent employability and professional achievement. The information thus collected is efficiently used to maintain an active link with the music / artistic profession and to further develop the curriculum.</p>	<p><b>BA Training</b> Substantially compliant <b>MA STUDIOS</b> Substantially compliant</p>
<p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The review team recommends that P.A.R.T.S. should consider how to develop its systems to monitor students after they leave. The review team notes that the process has already started with the recent survey and recognises that P.A.R.T.S. is extremely well networked in the field and has 'an ear to the ground' as regards its graduates. Nevertheless, more formal quantitative and qualitative data collection and monitoring, appropriate to the size and scale of the institution, would be both beneficial and expected in a higher education setting.</li> <li>• The review team recommends that P.A.R.T.S. should consider how to engage alumni in the ongoing enhancement of its programmes, particularly as regards employability.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>3. Teachers' perspectives</b></p>	
<p><b>Standard 3.1</b> Members of the teaching staff are qualified for their role and are active as artists/pedagogues/ researchers. The size and composition of the teaching body are sufficient and appropriate to effectively deliver the curriculum. There are adequate opportunities for teaching staff for continued professional development.</p>	<p><b>BA Training</b> Substantially compliant</p>

	MA STUDIOS Substantially compliant
<b>Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given the critical frontline position of the Tutor and the breadth of the scope and responsibilities of the role, the review team recommends that contingencies are in place in the case of absence in order not to put the student experience at risk.</li> <li>P.A.R.T.S. should give further consideration to the professionalisation of its teaching body. This may involve both formal qualifications and continuing professional development. The review team sees this as an important stage in P.A.R.T.S.' evolution as a degree-awarding institution.</li> </ul>	
<b>4. External perspectives</b>	
<b>Standard 4.1</b> The programme offers a range of opportunities for students and staff to gain international perspectives and experiences.	BA Training Fully compliant MA STUDIOS Fully compliant
<b>Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>	
<b>Standard 4.2</b> The programme's educational processes reflect the institutional policies and strategies in place for an active social engagement. The continued development and maintenance of links with the music profession and the wider artistic, cultural, educational and/or other relevant sectors within society is an integrated part of the programme.	BA Training Fully compliant MA STUDIOS Fully compliant
<b>Suggestions for enhancement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognising the existing strong lines of communication with professional stakeholders, P.A.R.T.S. might consider ways to involve them more formally in discussions for curricular developments, including for the MA STUDIOS programme.</li> </ul>	
<b>5. Resources</b>	
<b>Standard 5.1</b> The programme has means and resources to ensure its successful delivery and to secure its sustainable development.	BA Training Fully compliant MA STUDIOS Substantially compliant
<b>Recommendations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>P.A.R.T.S. should investigate ways and means to improve access to existing library stock and to expand library resources to support independent research at both</li> </ul>	

<p>levels, but particularly for the MA STUDIOS programme through online journals, databases and e-books. These ways and means might include partnership arrangements with larger institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic delivery costs for the Masters programme must be fully recognised in future funding agreements to alleviate uncertainty about its continuity. <b>(Recommendation for MA STUDIOS)</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Suggestions for enhancement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>P.A.R.T.S. should keep abreast of digital course management and administrative solutions that could benefit both students and staff.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Standard 5.2</b> The programme ensures a safe learning and working environment. The programme provides effective support for all students and staff to preserve and improve their mental and physical wellbeing.</p>	<p><b>BA Training</b> Fully compliant <b>MA STUDIOS</b> Fully compliant</p>
<p><b>Suggestions for enhancement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review team commends the student wellbeing mission statement and encourages P.A.R.T.S. to develop it into a student wellbeing strategy which would bring it into line with accepted practice in dance higher education internationally.</li> <li>The review team recommends that the review of student workload already underway for the MA STUDIOS programme should also be undertaken for BA Training students. It should include attention to the credit framework for courses and accredited contact time, a consideration of potential overloads and the effects of the attendance policy.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>6. Communication processes</b></p>	
<p><b>Standard 6.1</b> Effective mechanisms are in place for internal communication within the programme. Information provided to the public about the programme is, clear, consistent, regular, and accurate.</p>	<p><b>BA Training</b> Fully compliant <b>MA STUDIOS</b> Fully compliant</p>
<p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>	
<p><b>7. Quality Culture</b></p>	
<p><b>Standard 7.1</b> The programme builds an environment where internal and external feedback is sought and connected, and where staff and students are actively involved in an ongoing dialogue about the quality of education and the programme activities. The programme is thus enabled to ensure the quality of its curriculum and educational processes, and to work towards an all-encompassing quality culture.</p>	<p><b>BA Training</b> Fully compliant <b>MA STUDIOS</b> Fully compliant</p>
<p><b>Suggestions for enhancement</b></p>	

- The review team suggests that P.A.R.T.S. pursues opportunities for further development in annual course monitoring processes, action planning, and formal and confidential student feedback.
- The review team suggest that P.A.R.T.S. could involve external stakeholders, including its own alumni and professional visiting teachers, more formally in its quality assurance mechanisms.
- P.A.R.T.S. should consider carrying out an external benchmarking exercise to guide the development of the MA STUDIOS.

## Conclusion

P.A.R.T.S. is a small-scale, very well regarded and sought-after provider of higher education in contemporary dance practice and choreography. It is a confident and highly effective institution, efficiently and creatively run by an impressive staff team; it values its independence and ability to do things its own way, whether in the operation of its unusual cyclic structure in which students work intensively with their cohort for the duration of their programme, its high degree of international recruitment without government-imposed quotas or differentiated fees, or its cherished informality and light-touch, non-bureaucratic, operations.

The review team found there is a very strong quality culture at P.A.R.T.S., evidenced by its 'conversation culture' and characterisation of itself as a learning institution; this is manifested in many ways across the school including in its willingness to engage in open and honest dialogue in the meetings with the review team and acknowledge problematic areas in the SER. P.A.R.T.S. also found that undertaking the SER against MusiQuE standards prompted new thinking, such as a revision of the mission statement, as well as identifying areas that needed attention or could be improved, for example, training and development for teachers. The review team finds this commendable and has every confidence that the recommendations it has made will be thoughtfully addressed.

The way in which P.A.R.T.S. works is often informal and implicit rather than formal and explicit; the review team has suggested some ways in which it feels reinforcing that informal culture with explicit mechanisms (e.g. making a workable and explicit link between course learning outcomes and studio practice or introducing student representation on committees) and tightening up some procedures (e.g. monitoring of graduates) will ultimately safeguard its cherished light-touch agility. This is in line with international expectations of a degree-awarding Sui Generis institution and with P.A.R.T.S.' developing maturity as a world-class player in higher education.

It is often difficult to separate P.A.R.T.S.' programmes, the school itself and its environment – everything is connected by a clear mission and philosophy. As stated in the SER (p.15) the organisational structures of the BA and the MA are almost identical and in turn overlap with the structure of the institution. Consequently, both programmes attract an international cohort and are taught by an array of professional visiting professionals; both programmes enjoy enviable facilities as well as opportunities for internships and residencies; both programmes set out to educate both mind and body at differentiated levels.

However, the MA STUDIOS programme is still developing and in some ways has still to find a confident expression of its identity and USP; this is a priority for P.A.R.T.S.. In the site visit senior staff and board members were frank about the financial precarity of the MA STUDIOS programme and the need for a sustainable source of income to operate and maintain its new infrastructure.

In the view of the review team it is of the utmost importance that the autonomous status of this special and unusual institution is safeguarded. P.A.R.T.S. has a very strong case for support; it is a world-leading institution in contemporary dance education that enhances the reputation of Europe's capital, Brussels. The review team was impressed by the artistic energy and integrity of P.A.R.T.S. and wishes it well in its next phase.

