



REPORT
Music Programmes
Royal Conservatoire Antwerp
Belgium
4-6 February 2025

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List of abbreviations

| ACRONYM | IN FULL |
|---------|---|
| AEC | Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de musique et Musikhochschulen |
| AP | Artesis Plantijn University of Applied Sciences and Arts |
| ARIA | Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts |
| ASAP | Studentenraad AP Antwerpen (General Student Council of the AP University of Applied Sciences) |
| EEA | European Economic Area |
| FTE | Full-time equivalent |
| OLR | Opleidingsspecifieke leerresultaten (Programme-specific competencies/learning outcomes) |
| PAT | Procedure Afwijkende Toelating (Exceptional Admissions Procedure) |
| RCA | Royal Conservatoire Antwerp |
| SAS | School of Arts Student Council |
| SER | Self-Evaluation Report |
| SCK | Strategische Coördinatie & Kwaliteit (Strategic Coordination and Quality Service) |
| VLHORA | Vlaamse Hogescholenraad (Council of the Flemish Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts) |

Introduction

The Royal Conservatoire Antwerp was founded in 1898 by Flemish composer and music pedagogue Peter Benoit (1834-1901) as the first Dutch-language institution for higher music education.

In 1968, the institution moved to the brand-new campus on Desguinlei, where it is still located today. In 1995, 15 colleges in the province of Antwerp merged to form Antwerp Polytechnic. The arts campus was extended to a new building in 2010, allowing the drama, dance, music, and accompanying teaching courses to be brought together in one location.

Following the 2003 structural decree, the conservatoire's Music programme was transformed into a three-year 180-credit academic bachelor's programme and a two-year academic master's programme. As part of the decree requirement for university colleges to be associated with a university, the AUHA (Associatie Universiteit & Hogescholen Antwerpen) was founded. In 2013, the Artesis Hogeschool merged with the Plantijn Hogeschool to form the Artesis Plantijn Hogeschool, or AP for short. The Royal Conservatoire Antwerp and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp became two Schools of Arts within the new AP Hogeschool.

This Music programmes review is the latest step in the Quality Enhancement and Assurance processes of RCA and will consider two departments, Jazz and Classical Music, which offers degrees in Instrumental, Vocal Studies, Conducting and Composition.

To support continuing reflection, and after a previous assessment in 2018, more recently RCA has engaged further in a Critical Friend Review, which included visits of experts at departmental level. The SER for this review responds further in providing a document which is the result of interviews, data analysis, critical self-reflection and consultation, all driven from the Music programmes Heads and music staff. Teachers, students, policymakers, alumni and colleagues from the profession provided additional reflections as part of the SER preparation.

The review team for this Music programmes review comprised of:

- Henk van der Meulen (Chair): former Director, Royal Conservatoire The Hague (Netherlands)
- Brian Weir (Secretary): Director of Academic Administration and Student Experience, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (United Kingdom)
- Julia Peters (Peer Reviewer): Research Associate in Music Education and Quality Management, Musikhochschule Lübeck (Germany)
- Ricardo Pinheiro (Peer Reviewer): Associate Professor, Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa, Polytechnic University of Lisbon (Portugal)
- Sara de los Campos (Peer Reviewer - student representative): Bachelor in Vocal Studies (Classical Music), Royal Conservatoire The Hague (Netherlands)

Key data on Royal Conservatoire Antwerp

| | |
|--|---|
| Name of the institution | Royal Conservatoire Antwerp |
| Legal status | Artesis Plantijn University of Applied Sciences and Arts |
| Date of creation | 1898 |
| Website address | www.ap-arts.be/en/royal-conservatoire-antwerp |
| Departments | Classical Music and Jazz |
| List of reviewed programmes | <p>Bachelor of Arts in Music, including: instrumental/vocal studies, composition and jazz</p> <p>Master of Arts in Music, including: instrumental/vocal studies, conducting, composition and jazz</p> |
| Number of students enrolled in the programmes reviewed | 418 (2023/24) |
| Number of teachers serving the programmes reviewed [permanent and part-time staff] | 65 full-time equivalent (FTE) or 177 (total staff members) |

Alignment with institutional goals and strategy



1. Governance and decision making at programme level

1.1. The programme goals and context

Standard 1.1 *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.*

The Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (RCA) is part of the AP University College (AP) and the Music programmes subject to this review subscribe to the strategic mission, objectives, and goals of AP (SER pg. 7). However, AP previously agreed to a request from their two schools of arts (RCA and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts) to add a discipline specific sixth goal relating to “artistic excellence and relevance in a local and global context” (SER pg. 7).

RCA played a leading role in the translation of the Dublin Descriptors as part of the AEC’s Polifonia working group and the subsequent Flemish translation was included in the Government’s 2018 structural decree. This acts as the basic framework for compliance of the competences for all relevant Flemish Schools of Arts, including RCA (SER pg. 7).

The attendees of meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management) confirmed the SER narrative that AP is fully aware of the context under which RCA operates as a specialist institution. Attendees at the meeting further described the methodology AP applies when allocating financial resource to RCA. This is based on a set number of students and the number of students per teacher ratio. The consequence is that advanced planning is always required should RCA wish to develop or implement a new strategic direction. Evidence collected during this meeting confirmed the panel’s perception that the financial climate is particularly challenging for all parties, including AP (although globally this is in no way a unique position).

RCA has developed five guiding principles to inform their policy and curriculum development, including multi-disciplinarity, diversity, student engagement, sustainability, and internationalisation (SER pg. 7). Similarly, policy and curriculum development are informed by research (Ap 6). Further consideration of the overarching AP Strategic Goal 2 “maximum learning gains for every student” then informs a “renewed educational vision” for the RCA Music programmes. This vision includes four person-centred pillars where students can: grow in what they do as well as who they are; co-determine their learning processes; learn both inside and outside the walls of the institution; and work together, including across the programme (SER pg. 7).

The combination of excellence at programme level is clearly aligned with the mission and vision of RCA, and relevant to the context in which graduates will be employed (SER pgs. 7-8). This is achieved in the BA and MA in Music programmes through the individual approach to student learning and the support of highly devoted staff. As a demonstration of this commitment at senior management level, attendees of meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management) reported that the Head of RCA not only meets with the Student Council every month but also teaches on the programme through delivering an academic module on Student participation and Leadership.

There is a reflectiveness in expressing some concern regarding digitisation, sustainability, and well-being (SER pg. 8), as well as on artistic research and student critical thinking development (SER pg. 10), and this could be more present in the jazz curriculum. The response from RCA is the development of OLRs which attempt to respond to the study of repertoire, acquisition of technical competencies and the movement towards self-resilience of students and independent study (SER pg. 11, Ap 13).

International profile and competences of graduates, which are clearly stated in the mission, are achieved through multiple partners at national and international level, as well as by the independency of students in shaping their own educational experience (SER pg. 7, Ap 4 pgs. 1-2, Ap 5 pgs. 1-2).

Representatives at meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management) noted the RCA ethos of this activity being weighted towards artistic research rather than conventional musicology, but they felt this appropriate in a conservatoire setting. Description was provided of four separate research discussion groups, and that approved research activity attracts additional individual staff payment and backfill.

During meeting 1b (Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd cycle) it was explained further that the Research Department covered all subjects offered within the Music programmes, which was a strength also noted in meeting 3 (teachers). The repository of music staff research activity is held on a central database where they can make submissions for assessment at intermediate and final stages. However, it was also noted that activity taken outside of RCA is only recorded if staff choose to do so and an opportunity was potentially being missed to record or profile external activity.

The Music programmes retain close contact with the ARIA research institute (SER pg. 8). Representatives in meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management) confirmed that research activity starts on the bachelor level but at this stage is more embedded through the development of musicianship. During meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office), attendees confirmed a growing sense of support from ARIA for research activity but noted current considerations in ensuring that ambition to grow was met with the reality of resources available to deliver. Those in meeting 3 (teachers) further confirmed a strong link between research and the curriculum, particularly when opportunity arises for projects to bridge across different departments.

The review team finds that the programme's goals are clearly stated, reflect institutional mission and vision, and are aligned with overarching institutional strategy.

While this is a programme (rather than institutional) review, the relationship between AP and RCA in this regard has significant impact and requires comment. The review team believes there is a well-organised quality assurance framework feeding down from AP through a partnership of mutual understanding. The review team commended the support of the specificity of delivery from AP to RCA through the addition of a subject specific curriculum goal, which, in turn, demonstrates a reciprocal awareness of the contribution RCA can make to AP's overall strategic ambition. However, this is not without challenge in the current financial and global contexts and there is a need for RCA to build understanding regarding financial sustainability within an arts funding model.

The review team finds significant strategic alignment of institutional mission and vision at course level. The music courses adopt this mission and vision centred on training professional musicians with a distinct artistic personality, through outstanding bespoke student programme, with a critical and open approach within an international context (SER pg. 10). However, staff participants at both meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) and meeting 3 (teachers) were less clear on how strategy aligns to their day-to-day role. Further consideration could be given to how institutional vision feeds down to departmental staff and student delivery levels and, more, how RCA can assure itself that implementation is being achieved at these levels.

RCA is conscious of the role of research in learning and teaching (Ap 6), and of addressing the evolution of higher music education including through professional practice, internationalisation, multi-portfolio careers of graduates and the broader arts landscape nationally (SER pgs. 8-9). Nevertheless, the review team considers that artistic research and student critical-thinking development could be more present in the jazz curriculum.

Suggestions for enhancement 1:

The review team suggests that RCA strategically plans to navigate a challenging financial climate, working collaboratively with AP for mutual benefit and in support curriculum developments.

Suggestion for enhancement 2:

The review team suggests that RCA take opportunities to celebrate success - of note, continue to develop policies around multi-disciplinarity, student engagement, sustainability, internationalisation, and research activities.

Compliance with Standard 1.1

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 1.1 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|------------------|
| Bachelor | Fully compliant |
| Master | Fully compliant |

1.2. Programme's stakeholder's role in decision making

Standard 1.2 *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).*

There is a clear structure of representation at RCA for stakeholder engagement in decision making. These include the Board of the School of Arts, responsible for strategic, artistic, and educational direction, Programme Committees (Classical Music and Jazz), an Artistic Music Board including external representation from the profession and alumni and thematic working groups centred on elements of Performance Practice (SER pgs. 11-12).

Membership of these committees demonstrates a balanced representation of key stakeholders, and the consultancy structure offers meaningful input to the evaluation, development and decision making around the music courses. Students have a formal place in various governing bodies and working groups at the University and College Association level, and at the College and Conservatoire levels (SER pg. 13).

The RCA Head of School of Arts provides weekly feedback from the Management Team and the Core Task Consultation of the AP University College. There are twice-yearly Middle Management Consultation events and, Flanders-wide, the Head of RCA attends the Policy Working Group of VLHORA, representing the interests of the Schools of Art to Government (SER pg. 12).

In addition, RCA School of Arts has a Student Council (SAS), composed of yearly elected student representatives. The SAS meets regularly with the Head of the School of Arts (SER pg. 13) and two representatives from each student council also sit on the AP General Student Council (ASAP). The recognition of the Student Council suggests robustness in consultation and decision making at an institutional level and students can receive academic recognition for their participation in councils through the elective course unit 'Student Participation and Leadership' (SER, pg. 14).

Attendees to meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management) confirmed that work with student voice mechanisms were continuing to be developed and that, on occasion, representatives had to be approached directly rather than be elected or volunteered. However, attendees also noted that formal structures were complemented by the more informal dialogue with students through an open-door policy and, in some areas, small cohort size. During meeting 4 (students) the review team was informed that this was very much the case, although attendees also noted a lack of presence or visibility of a broader student voice framework to feedback on teaching and learning or student-centred themes including power relations.

A broad-based consultation 'Think Tank' was formed by RCA in 2021 to consider the Profile of the Future Classical Musician. The Think Tank gave both cross-programme advice and programme-specific recommendations to classical music, something which the panel feel could be expanding to other areas, such as jazz. Recommendations informed programme development and included advice on curriculum content and delivery, externality, socio-artistic pathways, and the role of technology. Students, teachers, administrative and

technical staff were included in the reflection and recommendation process (SER pgs. 12-13).

The review team finds that there is an appropriate organisational structure consisting of several bodies and committees overseeing operational and curriculum policies and programme delivery. However, there is discrepancy in embedding stakeholder engagement at all levels, and the review team notes, for example, during meeting 4 (students) that a clear student voice framework is not always visible. Attendees of meeting 1a (with representatives responsible of the programme management) acknowledged that this is work in progress.

The review team heard further from students that occasionally changes to curriculum were not fed through to delivery and individual pathways were often difficult to visualise. The review team agrees, and this will be commented on further in Standard 2.1.

However, the review team also finds commendable strength and involvement in the wider alumni and profession stakeholder group to inform curriculum thinking and quality assurance and would encourage that this is something to arrange more regularly.

Suggestion for enhancement 1:

The review team suggests that RCA develops a broader framework for student feedback, including processes to elect and support student representatives.

Suggestion for enhancement 2:

RCA should improve stakeholder engagement to inform learning outcomes and curriculum reviews, particularly through more regular use of mechanisms such as a 'Think Tank' and the alumni/profession network.

Compliance with Standard 1.2

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 1.2 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|------------------|
| Bachelor | Fully compliant |
| Master | Fully compliant |

Educational processes

2. Students' perspectives

2.1. Admission and student-centred learning

Standard 2.1 *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.*

Admission to the Music programmes of RCA is via formal application and selection, set out clearly in the Education and Examination regulations and the Admission Test Protocol. In addition to artistic level and quality, candidates are also required to demonstrate motivation and potential for development of musical talent (SER pg. 29). A jury of internal and external experts assess the candidates based on a fixed set of criteria, evaluating the artistic level at which a candidate could enter the institution (SER pg. 30).

RCA has developed a close working relationship with Flemish preparatory schools to support the education of young exceptionally talented musicians. Through the Young Talent and the Exceptional Admission Procedure (PAT), future talented learners aged under 18, can apply for admission to RCA for part-time study. Support from the candidates' secondary school education must be in place and around five young learners enrol with RCA via this entry route annually (SER pg. 31).

Applications to study at RCA are also considered at master's level, through accreditation of previous education or admitted subject to the completion of a preparatory bridging programme (SER pg. 30).

The review team heard from students during meeting 4 (students) that admission processes and requirements are clear regardless of entry route. Attendees further reflected on their own experiences as being friendly and that entrance jury members had wanted to hear about applicants as individuals and consider their potential to grow as an artist.

The classical music and the jazz department, both deliver the Music programme divided into 60 annual credits and containing both fixed subject areas and room for personalisation through elective modules. The classical music department divides the credits across various disciplines which include Principal Discipline; Music Training; Cultural Education; Physical Awareness; and Elective courses. Interestingly, the jazz department shares the same distinct disciplines except Physical Awareness, which is not included (SER pg. 16).

The room for personalisation in the curriculum is well articulated, particularly at master's level and with a number of course profiles listed and options for individual profiling (SER pg. 17). The elective subjects are limited at bachelor level but become more flexible with more choice as a student might progress through their course and, indeed, onto the master's level where a minimum of 15 credits is included. Students can also choose elective modules in addition to the 60-credit minimum required, including from other AP courses outside of RCA (SER pg. 31).

The Jazz department seeks to train musicians who combine expertise with the development of a distinct artistic personality. It looks to achieve this through practice-oriented training, flexible and individually adapted pathways, a wide range of electives, ensembles and projects, flexible choice of teachers, digital and electronic competences, and physical and mental support (SER pgs. 26-28).

The classical music variant of the Music programme is based on a commendable two track policy described in the SER (pg. 19-26). During meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management) it was noted that this two-track offer was unique in the sector and, in addition, had been developed as a response to graduate outcomes and the profession. Attendees of meeting 1b (Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd cycle) went on to confirm their belief that, through offering students' flexibility within curriculum pathways and employment outcomes, RCA was unique in Flanders.

Classical music track 1 is focussed on traditional competences through excellence and grounded expertise, collaborative learning, and networking, a cultural and theoretical foundation, critical reflection and research, physical and mental support and resilience and performance practice (SER pgs. 19-22).

Track 2 has a complementary focus to prepare students for multi-portfolio career paths. It looks to achieve this through an introduction to the wider socio-cultural field, entrepreneurship and networking, creative projects (including a central Creative (End) Project), interdisciplinary co-creation, improvisation and score-free musicianship, digital and electronic competencies, and the Teaching Artist (SER pgs. 22-26).

Attendees in meeting 1b (Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd cycle) reflected that the best ideas often come through students' creative project proposals. Attendees in meeting 3 (teachers) went further by describing how the drive for such projects from students provided a unique opportunity to RCA due to the collaborative potential within the physical estate. Meeting 2 attendees (senior administrative staff/QA office) offered some reflection on the need to balance student expectations with resources available (and good advance planning) before also concluding how lucky they felt to be working in and with the venues in which RCA is located.

Feedback from attendees at meeting 4 (students) fully appreciated the optionality which comes from the two-track system in classical music. However, they noted it was less clear at the beginning of their studies what this would mean for them individually and this often took quite some time and personal investigation to establish. Further observations included that, regardless of which track, certain elements of one track sometimes felt less core or relevant to the other (i.e. traditional theory or harmony teaching feels quite traditional and less fundamental for track 2).

RCA state they are pioneers within AP University in developing on-line Portfolio learning, particularly through Arts in Society and Entrepreneurship subjects. This includes the ability for graduates to export their portfolio from the digital learning environment after graduation (SER pg. 18).

The review team finds that the student-centred approach to the delivery of learning and teaching and RCA is commendable. This should be celebrated more, particularly when

student-generated initiatives evidence institutional strategic ambition to embed equality and diversity, interdisciplinary work, entrepreneurial spirit, and multi-portfolio outcomes.

The review team finds that, in line with students and Chairs of sections expressed perceptions, course descriptors, subject descriptors, and choice of repertoire at end of year assessments do not seem to reflect the commendable strategic and curriculum ambitions of RCA, particularly relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion or multi-portfolio career outcomes.

The review team considers that the elective choice is limited at bachelor level and framed in a structure where individual student choice relies on informal dialogue. While optionality and a two-track system are commendable, a clearer articulation of study paths at an early stage for students is desirable. This should be supported through an enhanced structure or formal dialogue between staff and students, and through greater interdepartmental dialogue between staff across RCA as part of a developing learning and teaching strategy. The result will be an enhancement of opportunities to celebrate student outcomes which are aligned to institutional strategic goals for graduates.

Suggestion for enhancement 1:

The review team suggests that RCA increases the flexibility and choice of elective modules, particularly at bachelor level.

Suggestion for enhancement 2:

It is suggested that RCA raises awareness and articulation of the commendable study pathway options for students.

Compliance with Standard 2.1

The Review Team concludes that the programme comply with Standard 2.1 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|------------------|
| Bachelor | Fully compliant |
| Master | Fully compliant |

2.2. Students' progression and assessment

Standard 2.2 *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.*

The Music programmes strive to maximise the development of each student's individual musical potential through individual study plans. Flexible study paths, the ability to study part-time, and elective subjects allow students to further personalise their study programme (SER pg. 31).

Students can apply for individual adjustments based on support needs or personal circumstances, language support is available to non-Dutch native speakers and, since 2024-25, English language support has also been made available (SER pg. 32).

Principle Discipline teachers provide a great deal of personal attention through group work and individual lessons, with an emphasis on mastering the instrument alongside development of individual artistic voice (SER pg. 16). There is a clear description and value placed on interdisciplinary and co-creation work, student-centred learning (SER section 2.2), specific profiles for piano and composition at master's level (SER pg. 17) and methods of teaching delivery including lectures/seminars, artistic practice, group work, workplace learning and short courses (SER pg. 17).

In the theory subjects offered, there is the opportunity to support different students according to their background. Those coming with a higher level can either start at a more advanced level (and get exemptions) or intensify their study by converting it from a subsidiary subject to a principal subject (SER pg. 21).

The decision to integrate research and performance throughout both bachelor and master, including when to use critical reflection, is promoted clearly (SER pg. 16). Through this embedded research focus, students engage in critical-reflection, and the methods are revised yearly to ensure they are up to date and connected to the mission and vision (SER pg. 21, Ap 6, Ap 11, Ap 12).

The addition of creative entrepreneurship through the Creative (End) project (SER pg. 24), the growing importance of improvisation and digital competencies (SER pg. 25), and the development of interdisciplinarity in the student introduction week and the annual project Next Door (SER pg. 24) are all particularly notable and significant.

In meeting 1b (Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd cycle) the review team noted that a feedback culture has started to emerge, and included voluntary training and development talks several times a year to support the development of feedback vocabulary and collegiate improvement. Conversely, in meeting 4 (students), representatives expressed their request at the Programme Committee for more training of delivering safe peer-to-peer feedback as part of an emerging framework and culture.

Students annually demonstrate progress through artistic practical exams, and in bachelor's year 3 and master's year 2 they do so with a public performance with an external jury member (SER pg. 19). The master's Exam Creative (End) Project gives students the notable opportunity to realise a full artistic production, in collaboration with an external professional organisation, and linked to research.

During the winter evaluation meeting, the interim results of all students are discussed. For each student, the course of study is discussed and what feedback will be given by whom. After internal class exams, feedback is given by teaching staff. After public end of year exams, students receive oral feedback from both external and internal jury members. Following the development of an in-house MS Excel spreadsheet to track marks, students

now also receive emails with individual written feedback digitally. RCA has stated ambitions to also be able to deliver these interim results and comments to students in-year (SER pg. 33).

The review team heard during meeting 3 (teachers) that students had been requesting in-year feedback to support their progression and reference the newly developed Excel spreadsheet as an internal solution. In meeting 4 (students), students also raised this mid-point feedback as being welcomed and attendees in meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) reflected that a more effective student tracking and feedback system was a necessity.

The Critical Friend Review previously noted for RCA that the Complaints and Appeal Procedures and practices should be made more transparent to students (Report, Critical Friend for Wind and Brass. Education). Additionally, examination regulations are not visible in the RCA webpage (nor in the supporting documents of the SER provided for this review), although these were located by the review team on the AP website.

For the past eight years, RCA has received annual programme reports (with Flemish benchmark indicators) from the Strategic Coordination and Quality Service (SCK) of the AP (SER pg. 33); the results show an excellent study yield of student outcomes.

The review team finds that there is a diverse range of assessment formats including tests for knowledge and understanding, artistic ability and skills, artistic practice, reflection assignments and portfolio submissions (SER pg. 18). These assessments are process-orientated (formative), student-centred and closely monitor individual progress in all aspects.

While evidence was presented to outline system developments at mid and end of year points, the review team noted the need to develop more robust and transparent feedback systems for students and, in general, enhancement of a feedback culture which would support student progression and experience.

The review team supports the ambition of RCA, as noted in meetings 2 and 3, to learn from student-led experiences and cross-departmental activities as a mechanism to inform curriculum development – an example of good curriculum enhancement being fed from the bottom up.

The review team also finds that the implementation of a software system to track progression and outcome would enhance student engagement, staff oversight and institutional assurance. AP has such a software package and RCA should progress discussions regarding implementation.

Recommendation:

The review team recommends that in support of the further development of an institutional feedback culture, RCA should reinforce feedback mechanisms to make them more robust and transparent and develop an assessment and feedback strategy, which includes peer-to-peer assessment.

Suggestion for enhancement:

It is suggested that RCA evaluates implementing a more effective student tracking system, within the existing AP structure.

Compliance with Standard 2.2

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 2.2 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| Bachelor | Substantially compliant |
| Master | Substantially compliant |

2.3. Students' employability

Standard 2.3 *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.*

The RCA educational vision places emphasis on the acquisition of both advanced expertise and universally applicable competences, which they deem are crucial to access the profession (SER pg. 34). In meeting 3 (teachers), attendees reflected on RCA's ethos of establishing a foundation for all students before the curriculum allows the ability for individuals to develop their artistic voice and for the conservatoire to celebrate the most diverse outcomes.

During their studies, students can benefit from professional stage and networking opportunities (SER pgs. 20 & 28). Additional performing opportunities, both internally and externally, some unpaid and some with expenses reimbursed, include the RCA Sessions, student-led collaborations, and concerts in local social settings. The compulsory course Artist in Society offers interdisciplinarity and social experience (SER pg. 23) and there is strength, particularly on the jazz department, of outward mobility.

The Music programmes offer part-time study options to support students who want to combine work with study. The alumni survey, conducted between every 3 to 5 years and aligned to programme review procedures, shows 64% of respondents answering that their current job was largely or even entirely an extension of their studies, with an employability rate of 91.9% (SER pg. 34). An alumni section for the RCA website is planned for 2026 (SER pg. 35).

The SER (pg. 9) notes that graduate musicians will often end up in a portfolio career combining various part-time, freelance, and self-employed activities in multiple fields of

playing, composing, coaching, creating, entrepreneurship, arranging, producing, organising or socio-artistic work. The two-track framework looks to support and respond to this observation within curriculum delivery.

Attendees in meeting 3 (teachers) reflected how much this situation has changed in the last 10 years and their confidence that RCA was providing training which was equipping multi-portfolio musicians. They noted that this was taking place through a more diverse non-classical background, the encouragement to generate innovative ideas, and by developing a new dialogue with students.

Curricular changes and other measures are taking place to meet the industry needs (SER pg. 12-14). External stakeholders participate in the creation of the curriculum and the possibilities of networking are ensured through several partnerships and (both national and international) guest teachers. Attendees of meeting 5 (alumni and representatives from the music profession) evaluated what the artist of the future might look like, understanding what it is to be a maker in society. They reflected that the RCA should be a place to experiment, resulting in graduates who could enter society with an interesting history and something to offer.

The review team finds that student outcomes and employability are very good and encourages RCA to celebrate further all outcomes as evidence to inform future direction for the arts in Flanders. This is particularly significant within the framework of the two-track system and the role that RCA can play in providing artists in society. Consideration should be given to how RCA might build on this commendable work internationally, through graduate profiles and global networks.

The review team notes that the development of an alumni policy, with support from AP, would help to further the profile and network of RCA graduates. However, in developing an evidence base for this, the review team suggests that an alumni survey should be completed more often than merely being aligned to programme review procedures every 3-5 years.

Suggestion for enhancement 1:

The review team suggests that RCA develops a more frequent alumni survey and use a graduates' network to inform future directions, including internationally.

Suggestion for enhancement 2:

RCA should utilise the enthusiasm of the alumni and professional network group already established as expressed during meeting 5 to inform curriculum development and graduate support.

Compliance with Standard 2.3

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 2.3 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|------------------|
| Bachelor | Fully compliant |
| Master | Fully compliant |

3. Teachers' perspectives

3.1. Staff qualification, professional activity and development

Standard 3.1 *Members of the teaching staff¹ 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.*

Despite restrictions placed by the Flemish Government on the recruitment of staff who are not European passport holders, an open and international process supports RCA employing teachers who are active in their professional field, have links to Belgian musical life, have interest in or experience with interdisciplinary work or/and have experience with artistic research. This “community of experts” demonstrate a strong connection with professional practice and are valued by the institution (SER pg. 37).

The core staff total 65 FTE, or 177 individual staff members, complemented by visitors and contributions from international artists, teachers, and external jury members. Teaching staff operate in line with the APERO qualities of AP: ambitious, passionate, genuine, respectful, open (SER pg. 37).

During meeting 5 (alumni and representatives from the music profession) it was questioned what opportunities already exist or could emerge to diversify the staff demographics through a strong focus on recruitment of multi-portfolio (aligned to track 2) professionals. Such a strategy might also provide role modelling for students.

The SER (pg. 37) notes that for Main Subject teachers pedagogical certificates are not routinely required, nor specific training for staff new to teaching. Rather, RCA prefers to use effective teaching experience as the focus of recruitment criteria. Professional development opportunities for teachers have increased over more recent years and now include focus on student support and welfare and professional development as part of lifelong learning.

In 2024-25, AP commenced mandatory on-line training modules for all leaders called IN-SCOPE, and RCA organises an annual INSPIRE study day for both schools of art (SER pg. 38). In meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) it was noted that attendance at this event had been of around 60 participants, which felt low, but positively the agenda setting included thematic suggestions from staff.

RCA articulates a goal of creating a learning community of teachers where knowledge is exchanged informally and formally (SER. pg. 38-39). Formally, this is done through training, sharing of practice, cross-departmental projects, internal and external collaboration, and teachers learning from each other. CoCon., the RCA staff room, is where colleagues can engage ideas and take part in discussion regarding teaching and learning in a more informal setting.

¹ The standard and related questions refer to all teaching staff regardless of their types of contracts – permanent, temporary, associate, etc.

In meeting 3 (teachers), teachers confirmed that AP offers a range of training and development courses, although staff attend these in their own free time. Attendees noted they were content to do so as it serves the student.

The review team agrees that the teaching staff body of RCA is a team of experienced and internationally active professionals who are aligned with RCA's values.

The review team finds that recruitment processes could include consideration of teaching certification or training needs for staff new to education. Further, RCA should consider how recruitment might complement staff recourse for teaching on track-two, employing individuals with professional experience in multi-portfolio careers. Other strategic goals which could be supported by staff recruitment would include equality and diversity (particularly gender balance).

While evidence of good informal dialogue within departments was noted between chairs and teaching staff in meetings 1b and 3, RCA should consider how to share examples of best practice institutionally, including with drama and dance. The review team notes further opportunity through consideration of how research activity might connect to curriculum innovation.

Despite professional development training being available through AP, the review team notes potential for the RCA to develop specific staff training for staff. This might, for example, be centred on themes such as artists as teachers. Such a programme would allow for a wider spread of expertise institutionally and support the development of new staff.

Recommendation 1:

The review team recommends that RCA considers developing a People Plan which might support the enhancement of teaching staff with an international profile and/or professional experience in careers closely aligned to Track 2 outcomes. Such a plan might also usefully consider continued staff development and the sharing of best practice amongst colleagues.

Suggestion for enhancement 1:

The review team suggests that RCA considers what systems would support better tracking of teachers' qualifications and staff development needs.

Compliance with Standard 3.1

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 3.1 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| Bachelor | Substantially compliant |
| Master | Substantially compliant |

4. External perspectives

4.1. International perspectives and experiences for students and staff

Standard 4.1 *The programme offers a range of opportunities for students and staff to gain international perspectives and experiences.*

The Music programmes' physical location allows students to access a wide variety of performance opportunities from international artists performing in DE SINGEL (SER pg. 39). RCA also offers a wide range of opportunities for international mobility supported and encouraged through Erasmus+, Metric (Modernising European Higher Education through Improvisation), EOA (European Opera Academy), BIP's (Blended Intensive Programmes), the Jazz Cool Project, MUSAE (Multidisciplinary skills for entrepreneurship among artists) and LOTUS (Leadership and Organisation for Teaching and Learning at European Universities) (SER pgs. 39-40).

International teaching staff only total 24 EU and 10 non-EU in a staff population of 177, while over 50% of students enrolled in the Music programmes are international. RCA offers an English language taught programme at master's level (SER pg. 39).

RESONO is a joint Master programme for composers and performers at master's level (SER pg. 40) which looks to respond to a modern music career and emphasises the importance of versatility, innovation, and social commitment. SIKOYO is a further international project in which RCA partners across a range of other higher education music providers to explore learning processes, performance skills, artistic outcomes, and the pedagogical tools to improve improvisation methodologies (SER pg. 40).

In meeting 5 (alumni and representatives from the music profession) attendees who were graduates of RCA affirmed the training they had received had prepared them for the careers they were now developing. Attendees at this meeting were also able to support the developments from the Music programmes, particularly in the last 10 years, with open-mindedness and through active engagement with alumni and the profession. Of note, attendees mentioned the enhancement of interdisciplinary work and the Creative (End) Projects as particular achievements.

RCA states (SER pg. 39) that the Music programme focuses on international excellence, with an international scope and supporting international projects and mobility. The review team finds that RCA could benefit from belonging to a network of HEIs on its own right.

Suggestion for enhancement:

RCA should consider whether institutional membership of a European consortium could enhance strategic mission and vision.

Compliance with Standard 4.1

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 4.1 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|------------------|
| Bachelor | Fully compliant |
| Master | Fully compliant |

4.2. Engagement within the external institutional and social context

Standard 4.2 *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.*

The SER states that “The study curriculum includes collaborations with partners from professional arts and music organisations and with individual artists from the city, the region and from international institutions” (SER pg. 40).

RCA further notes several links with the professional sector at national and international level and includes these external perspectives in the yearly revision and enhancement of the programme (SER pg. 12). Further collaboration is noted with orchestral projects, ensemble playing, opera, master classes, didactic excursions, internships, events or project work and other curricular units (SER pg. 40).

The physical connection of RCA with DE SINGEL, given that RCA is housed within the larger Arts Campus, brings several opportunities to engage with national artistic activity and the international profile of visiting artists (SER pg. 41). During meeting 4 (students) students were slightly less positive about the reality of this physical closeness, describing a perception of missed opportunities to work together more often. The reasons for this, of course, potentially being operational or requiring discussion.

Through the subjects Ensemble, Musical Project, Creative Project 1 and 2, Creative (End) Project and Artist in Society, students actively meet professional partners from the socio-cultural sector, within Antwerp and more widely (SER pg. 41). The Creative (End) Project further develops partnership with several socio-cultural organisations in the city district (SER pg. 41) and socio-cultural aspects are incorporated in Project 1 and Project 2 at master's level (SER pg. 23-24).

During meeting 5 (alumni and representatives from the music profession) the review team noted the opportunity RCA presents to keep the profession connected with the students of our time so to learn from the new generation as the arts continue to evolve. Thought was provided on how RCA might be a partner and laboratory for the evolution of the arts, though research, arts in society and contributing to discussion as an advocate for the arts.

The review team finds that opportunities exist for RCA to use lifelong learning curricula opportunities to further develop local and national networks and their institutional role. Development in other music genres (for example, pop music for schools or local community

folk music) will offer opportunity for curriculum development which aligns to the two-track curriculum and student experience.

The review team believes that the RCA physical location offers significant and mutually beneficial opportunities to all stakeholders, both artistically and educationally, and could be evaluated further. Alumni and representatives from the music profession also expressed that opportunities may come through shared programming and further development of shared spaces. There is also a desire to use new or alternative programming as an opportunity to further embed collaboration within the context of longer-term planning.

In addition, the review team finds that RCA could utilise gained knowledge at under 18 level delivery to inform developments further. Also, the review team encourages RCA to take the feedback the review team received from alumni and representatives from the music profession to work in collaboration with pre and post higher education partners to become a laboratory of the future for music in society and research informed.

Suggestion for enhancement:

In support of institutional profile raising, the review team suggests RCA considers organising more conferences and further develop international collaborations, in partnership with DE SINGEL and through academic research and outreach activity.

Compliance with Standard 4.2

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 4.2 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|------------------|
| Bachelor | Fully compliant |
| Master | Fully compliant |

Learning resources and student support

5. Resources

5.1 Finances, facilities, services and support staff

Standard 5.1 *The programme has means and resources to ensure its successful delivery and to secure its sustainable development.*

RCA is located within a larger International Arts Campus and performance venue of DE SINGEL. AP University and the Flemish Community jointly own the site, and other resident organisations include the contemporary music group the *Nadar Ensemble* and *I Solisti*, an extended Wind ensemble (SER pg. 46).

The building is equipped with shared technical installations, common entrances, and front of house facilities. The recent vacating of Radio 2 from the buildings allowed the development of Blok L on the campus, which included a new meeting room for RCA, dance studios, a multifunctional space, recordings studios and a hub for research activities (SER pg. 44). Shared production teams, technical installations, cleaning, security, and maintenance staff are of real benefit. AP owns 34% of the campus and estate management facilities responsibility is overseen by a Management Committee (SER pg. 46).

The sharing of the RCA's own buildings with drama and dance (SER pg. 44) offers real potential for collaborative projects across several subjects as well as attending performances and contact with professional artists and guests (SER pg. 46). The Music programmes presents good evidence to demonstrate considerable infrastructure at its disposal, conforming to international standards. This includes 68 teaching and practice rooms designated for the Music programmes, four additional large rooms, production, and performance spaces, and (when available) spaces in DE SINGEL for large orchestral performances and recitals (SER pg. 44).

AP provides a range of ICT and Wi-Fi support installation to RCA, policy documents, information and AP digital platforms can be accessed via the intranet. DigitAP is the institutions electronic learning environment, iBamaflex the system where students can review their personal files and e-Campus allows access to AP library services and access to digital recourses, including remotely (SER pg. 44-45). Senior leadership acknowledged in meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management) that enhancement of recording studio facilities and the fibre network were issues which continued to require prioritised resource allocation. In meeting 3 (teachers), representatives met agreed with this, noting the fibre cable connectivity project was deemed to be taking too long and was now in its third year.

The SER (pg. 43) offers open reflection on the “tight funding situation”, based on a maximum number of credits across all programmes which is not linked to any potential increase in student cohort size. The amount of funding granted by the Flemish government is fixed in advance, and the Music programmes are conscious of making sharp choices.

Funds for operational delivery or development are also limited, and the SER gives further examples of the challenges being experienced through maintenance of instruments and the delivery of a sufficient number of masterclasses. RCA reflects that discussions with AP are ongoing, in addition to potential external funding streams including Bolster, an organisation of friends and donors (SER pg. 43).

Despite limited financial resources, a pay improvement has been implemented by RCA, including a 6% increase in 2019 before the Flemish Government provided further 6% increase in 2022. RCA chose to increase its payments to guest teachers in line with this increase and, from 2022-23 salaries have been indexed annually. The Government decision also resulted in guest teachers with a contract of 50% or more over a period of one calendar year receiving remuneration attached to an annuity based on the number of years' service. RCA concedes this was justified (SER pg. 46) but the consequence of this is an increase in the total salary costs for which there is currently no additional resource being made available.

In meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management), senior leadership acknowledged that this is a priority for RCA to address through a new wage policy plan, so to value all teaching staff equally and regardless of contract type. There was reflection that this required resource choices, but during meeting 1b (Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd Cycle) and meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) it was also acknowledged that the issue had to be addressed. In meeting 2, it was also stated that HR systems were not efficient for managing staff recruitment or development effectively but that, in responding to government regulations requiring employers to commit to developing people, several steps were now being taken to move support for staff forward.

RCA has a large contemporary instrument collection, audio equipment, a collection of historical keyboard instruments, a wide range of string and wind instruments, and an extensive range of percussion instruments. Within the last 10 years a large-scale maintenance and improvement project has been implemented in which a total of 87 pianos were either replaced or reconditioned, culminating in the purchase of a Steinway Concert Grand (SER pg. 44). In meeting 4 (students), comments were offered regarding general day to day maintenance of the RCA buildings rather than larger capital infrastructure projects and limited opening hours, with early evening closure on Fridays and limited weekend access.

RCA uses Asimut for timetabling scheduling processes (SER pg. 44). In addition, regarding the use of new technologies, the multi-year project Hybrid-Stage is working towards structural integration of technology across music, dance, and drama courses. In addition to being a tool for collaboration and hands-on studio facilities for staff and students, the installation of recording facilities will allow students to be able to make personal recordings more easily (SER pg. 45).

The RCA's invaluable library houses over 650,000 volumes and is one of the most recognised heritage libraries in Flanders. The library develops its own research projects and acts as a music library for the benefit of the public, both locally and more widely (SER pg. 45). The Arts Campus Reading Room is a collaborative project between RCA, DE SINGEL and the Flemish Architecture Institute. It acts as the public face of a specialised teaching and research library but is also a quiet space for study or research by RCA staff and students.

The School of Arts retains oversight for production, personnel, finance, marketing, and communication staff locally. However, in a significant change operationally, student administration, counselling and ombudspersons work moved from direct responsibility of RCA to the central AP Student Centre in 2022 (SER pg. 46).

The review team notes that the consequence of the funding situation is a perception of it not always being possible for artistic ambition to be met by financial and/or other resource needs.

The use of space, including the concert hall, drama studios and rehearsal spaces is evidence of collegiate working. However, while additional funding from AP was found to fix the drama studio roof (evidenced by the review team during the Guided Tour), studio facilities require further updating and students noted a continued need for routine maintenance on site.

The review team noted that RCA has a devoted but busy staff team, both academic and professional support. However, it is a low staff base and there is little or no time for staff to think strategically or consider solutions to administration or other issues. The review team finds that finding some time to allow staff to think would better support RCA in prioritising strategic developments and resource. Consideration might also be given to reassigning part of teaching staff contracted time to group coaching/teaching or online delivery, freeing up room use for activities which need take place in person.

Recommendation:

The review team recommends that RCA should benchmark funding methodology within Flanders to support further dialogue with AP for longer term financial sustainability. This benchmarking would also assist RCA in evaluating staff to student ratios and support consideration of longer-term estates and facilities requirements of specialist music training.

Suggestion for enhancement:

The review team suggests that online teaching methods could be developed (for example in theory classes) to free up time in the schedule and space in the building.

Compliance with Standard 5.1

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 5.1 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| Bachelor | Substantially compliant |
| Master | Substantially compliant |

5.2 Health and wellbeing

Standard 5.2 *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.*

Students have access to two student counsellors who offer help to students and make direct referral to other support services offered by AP, including assistance with social service provision, accommodation, psychological matters, among others (SER pg. 46). Wellbeing is also a priority for AP, who promotes a stress and workload clinic for staff and organises an annual "What's AP" week with tips to promote wellbeing, which will be extended to students in 2024/24 (SER pg. 48).

Students can access Study Programme Counsellors for specific advice regarding their studies or academic progression, who also maintain contact with academic staff (SER pg. 47). While attendees in meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) noted the ability to refer students to the wider AP support network for specialist intervention, in meeting 4 (students) students noted that the services were not particularly well advertised, and they were more likely to seek support internally from RCA.

In meeting 1b (Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd Cycle) attendees noted the need for more free time for students to reflect, grow and think. Furthermore, in meeting 3 (teachers) representatives agreed, also commenting that the workload for students at bachelor years 1 and 2 felt heavy. Additionally, mention was made to examples of students splitting a year over two part-time years to manage workload. Students in meeting 4 (students) noted that individuals on track 2 had to also complete the 'core' components of track 1 and this sometimes led to a sense of overload.

Physical awareness, Alexander Technique and Yoga are offered as part of the Music programmes curriculum. For example, students can join group classes in Pilates and individual Alexander Technique lessons. As part of the wider campus, the courses benefit from a physiotherapist permanently onsite and physical awareness classes provide information and guidance on injury prevention. Students benefit from the collaborative HeArts (Healthcare for Artists) project, a centre for the prevention and treatment of injury with University Hospital Antwerp and the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences of the University of Antwerp (SER pg. 47).

The wellbeing of everyone, students, teachers, and staff, is noted as a priority concern for RCA and the review team finds that health and wellbeing content within the curriculum is commendable.

The RCA Wellbeing Sounding Board Group monitors and promotes health and wellbeing initiatives. The working group has several sub-groups including focus on a Code of Conduct – commendably developed in collaboration between students and staff – teaching@KCA - including a professionalisation programme for teachers- working@KCA - in support of staff welfare (SER pg. 47). Promotion of wellbeing work is communicated through a "yes we care" awareness raising campaign (SER pg. 48). Attendees in meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) positively noted that membership to these groups is via volunteering, making it accessible to all and meaning a greater number of people are involved.

A fourth sub-group concentrated their work on a Mission and Action Plan for Diversity and Inclusion for RCA, who approach diversity as something which is pluralistic and holistic, and which extends across intersectionality and integrated into recruitment and teaching policies. This work includes the implementation of personalised study pathways for students and embedded into the curriculum through Entrepreneurship training, Creative

Projects, Musical Projects, and Artists in Society work in the community (SER pg. 49). Of 177 staff members in 2023-2024, only 44 are women, representing just 25% (SER pg. 37). Several recommendations from the Critical Friend Review have been implemented with a view to improving the gender balance in teaching staff.

In meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management), representatives acknowledged that RCA is striving to be a pioneer for diversity and inclusion rather than a follower. Attendees of meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) confirmed that a comprehensive diversity plan is in place and work is ongoing. Attendees also noted RCA used to have a dedicated staff resource for equality and diversity, but this was now centralised with AP. In meeting 4 (students) students noted that they would encourage greater support for international students and enhanced training for academic staff working with neurodivergent students.

Students noted uncertainty regarding which support services were provided by RCA and which by AP. They reported that students tend to refer themselves to RCA staff for all support needs and the review team finds that greater clarity regarding all support routes should be more clearly identified for students.

As presented in Standard 2.1, students also noted that those on track 2 had to also largely engage in much of the core training requirements of track 1. Teaching staff reported that the early years of bachelor training did feel over-loaded for new students. The review team notes that RCA should continue to embed this system to support greater transparency and understanding of student schedules.

The review team noted from management staff, teachers and students' evidence of previous work to enhance equality and diversity and several attendees referenced a dedicated staff resource to support this work which had previously been in place, but which is currently vacant. The review team notes this and finds that there may be potential for collaborative work with AP in this area, and through other curriculum themes.

Recommendation 1:

The review team commends the work undertaken thus far in support of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and recommends further consideration of how specific staff recourse and partnership with AP might support continued enhancement.

Recommendation 2:

The review team recommends that RCA considers the fullness of student timetables and looks to identify ways to prioritise learning for students on different tracks and to free time for wellbeing and self-reflection.

Suggestion for enhancement:

It is suggested that RCA considers how to contribute to AP's institutional identity for innovation and creativity, health, and wellbeing curricula.

Compliance with Standard 5.2

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 5.2 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| Bachelor | Substantially compliant |
| Master | Substantially compliant |

6. Communication processes

6.1. Internal and external communication processes

Standard 6.1 *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.*

RCA's communication ethos reads: "Good communications not only promote operational efficiency, but also contribute to a healthy working environment, a strong organisation and the success of students, individual staff members and the Conservatoire as a whole" (SER pg. 50).

There is evidence of a coherent design language in communication, both in the SER specifically and via printed material and online presence (Ap 26). Information is always communicated bi-lingually in both Dutch and English (SER pg. 51). The AP Student Centre has unified communication at an institutional AP level, but internal communication at RCA includes an intranet, digital screens and signage, print materials, student updates emails, Memo (a weekly staff internal e-newsletter), Ad Valvas (e-noticeboards), and other software systems including Asimut, Digitap, MS Teams and ECTS database (SER pg. 51).

While objectives to be measured for external communication are described in the SER, internally much weight is placed on the RCA open door ethos and oral communication (SER pg. 51). These internal communication mechanisms ensure access to information and proper functioning of the programme, but questions arise as to how effective or auditable they are.

In meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) it was reflected that there may be several systems and processes in place meaning clear messages or answers to initial queries are not always immediate. Recognition was given to the benefits of RCA academic progression and personal support being based in the same office as a first point of contact for students and which addresses many issues. However, in further discussion (regarding where responsibilities lie between AP and RCA) acknowledgement was given that how appointments are made with the most appropriate support service and then communicated to students is currently being developed.

In meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) the potential to centralise internal communication for RCA was discussed, noting that several systems were currently in use. Students met in meeting 4 (students) agreed that a variety of messaging systems were in place, but that most messages were communicated via email only and often missed. They also noted that the intranet is not particularly well advertised and, frustratingly for them, there was a perception of a lack of promotion and marketing externally for performances.

Similarly, the review team heard in from teaching staff in meeting 3 (teachers) and in meeting 4 (students) about a perception of there being too many communication systems which do not seem to complement each other. During meeting 2 (meeting with senior administrative staff/QA office) it was conceded that several different systems are used, and communication processes could be streamlined.

The review team agrees that there appears to be too many systems or processes for communication to be effective and encourages RCA to continue developing procedures in

line with their ambitions for clearer communication. The review team finds that software options might support more efficient and effective communication and should be given some consideration. This in turn would make a more efficient use of limited professional staff resources, both academic and professional support. Students in meeting 4 (students) reported a perception of reduced external profile for performance work and the review team finds that external facing communication and promotion could enhance the RCA role as an artistic producer in Antwerp and more widely.

More efficient communication functionality would also release the current focus on too much communication between staff and students being informal. While an 'open door' ethos is commendable to some degree, and promotes a community of support, it also does not allow for any audit trail or record of decision for moments when things may go wrong. While not suggesting a removal of good informal communication, the review team finds that a more trackable process of monitoring and recording official communication for student feedback and progression would offer consistency and assurance to all stakeholders.

Recommendation 1:

The review team recommends that RCA centralises internal communication to more limited systems and ensures clear messaging.

Suggestion for enhancement:

RCA should consider how to improve external marketing of performance activities. Increased profile of the already diverse performance activity from the Music programmes would not only enhance student experience but support the professional development and profile of staff.

Compliance with Standard 6.1

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 6.1 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| Bachelor | Substantially compliant |
| Master | Substantially compliant |

Quality Culture

7. Quality Culture

7.1. Quality Culture at programme level

Standard 7.1 *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.*

The review team feels it important to note the context under which this latest programme review was being held. It is part of a longer-term timeline of external quality assurance processes in which RCA has engaged. The previous programme review was completed in 2018, and outcomes of that process informed a subsequent MusiQuE Critical Friend Review between then and this latest programme review, which constitutes the final part of the Critical Friend Review (SER pg. 4). All this offers RCA the opportunity, through its own initiative, to mark progress, reflect on enhancement, engage in external independence of assurance, and engage with stakeholders and partners regarding future direction.

“The quality assurance system is based on the belief that by connecting internal and external knowledge and feedback, the quality of both improvement processes and external accountability can be optimised” (SER pg. 54).

At a teaching level there is clearly structured evaluation (for example, OLR-orientated evaluation) and the actions progressed as an outcome of feedback from the last review and critical friends’ visits as referenced in the SER (SER pg. 55-56). In meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management) it was confirmed with the review team that the Critical Friend Review had enabled quality assurance discussions at a course and departmental level, in addition to institutional assurance. Further confirmation was received in meeting 1b (Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd Cycle) where attendees noted the process had facilitated interesting discussion focused on quality enhancement.

The review team took the opportunity to ask during each stakeholder meeting to what extent they had felt engaged in the preparation of the SER and, commendably, every group responded positively. Of note, representatives met during meeting 1b (Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd Cycle) had been able to comment and offer feedback during drafting, senior administrators met during meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) felt it was a good picture of RCA, and teachers met in meeting 3 (teachers) - while noting they had learnt some new information- took real pride in the themes of interdisciplinary work, equality and diversity and student-centred learning. In meeting 4 (students) students also expressed that they had been offered opportunity to contribute, as well as alumni and representatives from the music profession who, in meeting 5 (alumni and representatives from the music profession) were fully aware of the content of the SER related to their area of review. In meeting 1a (representatives responsible of the programme management), senior leaders felt that while it could have been a little more objective – and that most areas needed context addressed between classical and jazz pathways – regardless, the SER felt a very honest document.

Internal quality assurance tools are in place and data collection allows a proper monitoring of the programmes through student and employee surveys, among other tools (SER pg.

54). A student questionnaire covering aspects of a programme delivery is organised annually by RCA and is in addition to a broader AP questionnaire considering application process, enrolment, study guidance, facilities, and library services. (SER pg. 54). In meetings 3 (teachers) and 4 (students) both groups of attendees noted that participation in surveys was low, and alumni surveys are only conducted every 3 to 5 years as the programme is reviewed.

During meeting 2 (senior administrative staff/QA office) it was noted that quality assurance oversight has shifted with enhanced resource now available via an AP quality assurance officer directly supporting RCA. This work also supports the Quality Assurance Advisor for RCA, although at the time of the review visit there was a transition between the previous and new role holder. Nevertheless, it was also noted that there was a developing collegiate approach to quality assurance, including the identification of individual departments to share best practice. Those present in the meeting also noted that ambition continued to establish a bespoke quality assurance policy for RCA to assure AP of compliance but, also, to celebrate enhancement and highlight work happening at a 'local' RCA level.

External feedback is part of the quality assurance processes, both from external stakeholders and with monitoring tools. This feedback is a structural part of the constant and systematic quality control that the school undergoes on its own initiative (SER pgs. 54-55). A comprehensive evaluation of programmes and services sits alongside the student life cycle and external jury members benchmark students' exams with the expectations of the professional field (SER pg. 55). Critical reflection is embedded in the professional field committee discussions.

In meeting 5 (alumni and representatives from the music profession) the review team noted the Advisory Committee, with a real sense of enthusiasm, commented that members would be willing to meet more regularly and contribute to the work of RCA and quality assurance and enhancement.

The review team commends the Music programmes for undergoing a Critical Friend Review procedure. At the same time, it also finds that RCA should look to develop further an institutional culture of quality to address questions of what achievable and qualitative enhancements are and what do they mean for staff and students. The review team notes that this opportunity includes a growing understanding of the role of robust quality assurance and enhancement processes, particularly in work which takes place outside of the classroom. In this regard, the review team believes RCA has a unique opportunity within its national sector.

The review team suggests that opportunity will subsequently emerge to create an institutional feedback environment which is part of the ethos of everyday working at RCA. Involving students and staff in true quality enhancement, which 'feeds-up', the review team notes suggestions from teaching staff (meeting 3) that sometimes the very best ideas to stimulate assurance can be generated through student-led but strategically informed activities.

In meeting 3 (teachers) and meeting 4 (students) there was an inconsistency in understanding regarding the role of quality assurance and enhancement, particularly regarding how feedback and surveys support curriculum development. RCA should

consider how to articulate greater understanding in a transparent and accountable way, so that quality assurance and enhancement is inherent in all staff roles.

The review team notes a need to better utilise and understand evidence-based data to inform strategic decision-making, particularly around student outcomes and surveys for current students and graduates. The review team notes that alumni and representatives from the music profession would be pleased to have more frequent engagement with RCA in support of curriculum development.

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that RCA considers how teachers are assessed in their own teaching, supported with professional development and, through the sharing of best practice, enhancing student learning and experience.

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that RCA develops student and alumni feedback mechanisms (including surveys) as part of developing formal review processes in support curriculum development.

Suggestion for enhancement:

It is suggested that RCA should extend more regular meetings with willing external stakeholders to support of quality assurance and curriculum development.

Compliance with Standard 7.1

The Review Team concludes that the programmes comply with Standard 7.1 as follows:

| Programme | Compliance level |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| Bachelor | Substantially compliant |
| Master | Substantially compliant |

Summary of the compliance with the Standards and recommendations

The review team concludes that the Music programmes of the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp comply with the *Standards for Programme Review* as follows:

| 1. Governance and decision making at programme level | |
|--|-----------------|
| Standard 1.1 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. | Fully Compliant |
| Suggestions for enhancement 1: The review team suggests that RCA strategically plans to navigate a challenging financial climate, working collaboratively with AP for mutual benefit and in support curriculum developments. | |
| Suggestion for enhancement 2: The review team suggests that RCA take opportunities to celebrate success - of note, continue to develop policies around multi-disciplinarity, student engagement, sustainability, internationalisation, and research activities. | |
| Standard 1.2 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). | Fully Compliant |
| Suggestion for enhancement 1: The review team suggests that RCA develops a broader framework for student feedback, including processes to elect and support student representatives. | |
| Suggestion for enhancement 2: RCA should improve stakeholder engagement to inform learning outcomes and curriculum reviews, particularly through more regular use of mechanisms such as a 'Think Tank' and the alumni/profession network. | |
| 2. Students' perspectives | |
| Standard 2.1 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 | Fully Compliant |

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <p>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>Suggestion for enhancement 1:</p> <p>The review team suggests that RCA increases the flexibility and choice of elective modules, particularly at bachelor level.</p> <p>Suggestion for enhancement 2:</p> <p>It is suggested that RCA raises awareness and articulation of the commendable study pathway options for students.</p> | |
| <p>Standard 2.2 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>Substantially Compliant</p> |
| <p>Recommendation:</p> <p>The review team recommends that in support of the further development of an institutional feedback culture, RCA should reinforce feedback mechanisms to make them more robust and transparent and develop an assessment and feedback strategy, which includes peer-to-peer assessment.</p> <p>Suggestion for enhancement:</p> <p>It is suggested that RCA evaluates implementing a more effective student tracking system, within the existing AP structure.</p> | |
| <p>Standard 2.3 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>Fully Compliant</p> |
| <p>Suggestion for enhancement 1:</p> <p>The review team suggests that RCA develops a more frequent alumni survey and use a graduates' network to inform future directions, including internationally.</p> <p>Suggestion for enhancement 2:</p> <p>RCA should utilise the enthusiasm of the alumni and professional network group already established as expressed during meeting 5 to inform curriculum development and graduate support.</p> | |

| 3. Teachers' perspectives | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Standard 3.1 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. | Substantially Compliant |
| <p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p>The review team recommends that RCA considers developing a People Plan which might support the enhancement of teaching staff with an international profile and/or professional experience in careers closely aligned to Track 2 outcomes. Such a plan might also usefully consider continued staff development and the sharing of best practice amongst colleagues.</p> <p>Suggestion for enhancement 1:</p> <p>The review team suggests that RCA considers what systems would support better tracking of teachers' qualifications and staff development needs.</p> | |
| 4. External perspectives | |
| Standard 4.1 The programme offers a range of opportunities for students and staff to gain international perspectives and experiences. | Fully Compliant |
| <p>Suggestion for enhancement:</p> <p>RCA should consider whether institutional membership of a European consortium could enhance strategic mission and vision.</p> | |
| Standard 4.2 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. | Fully Compliant |
| <p>Suggestion for enhancement:</p> <p>In support of institutional profile raising, the review team suggests RCA considers organising more conferences and further develop international collaborations, in partnership with DE SINGEL and through academic research and outreach activity.</p> | |
| 5. Resources | |
| Standard 5.1 The programme has means and resources to ensure its successful delivery and to secure its sustainable development. | Substantially Compliant |

Recommendation:

The review team recommends that RCA should benchmark funding methodology within Belgium to support further dialogue with AP for longer term financial sustainability. This benchmarking would also assist RCA in evaluating staff to student ratios and support consideration of longer-term estates and facilities requirements of specialist music training.

Suggestion for enhancement:

The review team suggests that online teaching methods could be developed (for example in theory classes) to free up time in the schedule and space in the building.

Standard 5.2 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.

**Substantially
Compliant**

Recommendation 1:

The review team commends the work undertaken thus far in support of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and recommends further consideration of how specific staff recourse and partnership with AP might support continued enhancement.

Recommendation 2:

The review team recommends that RCA considers the fullness of student timetables and looks to identify ways to prioritise learning for students on different tracks and to free time for wellbeing and self-reflection.

Suggestion for enhancement:

It is suggested that RCA considers how to contribute to AP's institutional identity for innovation and creativity, health, and wellbeing curricula.

6. Communication processes

Standard 6.1 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.

**Substantially
Compliant**

Recommendation 1:

The review team recommends that RCA centralises internal communication to more limited systems and ensures clear messaging.

Suggestion for enhancement:

RCA should consider how to improve external marketing of performance activities. Increased profile of the already diverse performance activity from the Music programmes would not only enhance student experience but support the professional development and profile of staff.

7. Quality Culture

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <p>Standard 7.1 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>Substantially Compliant</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p>It is recommended that RCA considers how teachers are assessed in their own teaching, supported with professional development and, through the sharing of best practice, enhancing student learning and experience.</p> <p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p>It is recommended that RCA develops student and alumni feedback mechanisms (including surveys) as part of developing formal review processes in support curriculum development.</p> <p>Suggestion for enhancement:</p> <p>It is suggested that RCA should extend more regular meetings with willing external stakeholders to support of quality assurance and curriculum development.</p> | |

Conclusion

On reflection, the review team considers this process to be an informative, inspiring and wholly valuable experience. This was right from the first considerations of the SER to the conversations and observations during our site visit and, finally, the evaluation and drafting of this report. The diverse composition of the team enabled us to look at things from various angles, comparing our considerations with the people we met in all our meetings at RCA.

It is clear to the review team that RCA has talented and motivated students and dedicated and committed teaching staff and management, who work together to co-create valuable teaching-learning pathways for future professional musicians. The fact that all the MusiQuE standards reviewed as part of this visit have qualified with a level of compliance convincingly illustrates this. We wholeheartedly thank everyone at RCA involved in this review process for their valued contributions. We believe their participation made the clear trajectory towards continued quality enhancement obvious. Indeed, the review team were left with an overriding feeling that all stakeholders could be even more aware of the many achievements and qualities of RCA and celebrate them more.

Some overarching summative thoughts from the report of the review team are below.

Creating space for a holistic approach

The review team observed that, since the last review, RCA Music programmes have progressed with commendable developments in the fields of interdisciplinarity, entrepreneurship, research, diversity and sustainability. These are all major and fundamental themes. At the same time, it appears that more traditional elements of the curriculum, and the delivery of them, have largely remained unchanged. If the time and resources these topics require does not lead to integration with the curriculum, an overload for students, teachers and management may result. These curriculum elements offer a view beyond (individual) projects and working groups and could offer a more holistic approach to higher music education and the society RCA is aiming to serve. Combining this notion within the context of limited financial resources, one might think of the RCA Music programmes as a tree in need of pruning of its branches to grow stronger.

Student centred learning and interdisciplinarity

The RCA Music programmes are rightfully proud of the possibility students are given to create a personal pathway. However, in practice this seems to depend largely on a student's own initiative. The review team notes there might be room to (re)consider the shape which independent student learning could take, both within a larger elective part of the curriculum, and through a more structured place for peer learning. The contradiction occurs that, while some parts of the curriculum seem almost overcontrolled, the interdisciplinary projects appear under-coached. Most students we met regarded interdisciplinary practises as useful for their development. True interdisciplinarity requires a lot of time and the development of specific expertise and resources so that interdisciplinarity can become the RCA's unique selling point.

Financial (and other) resources

In the SER, as well as in various meetings, the review team noted comments regarding RCA's financial restraints. It is impossible for the review team to make a judgement on this issue. However, the review team observed that there might be opportunity for RCA to

attempt (again) to redefine its position within the AP University College. Comprehensive benchmarking with other institutes for higher music education, within Flanders, Belgium, and internationally might offer evidence and data to support discussions for an increase in AP funding or other opportunities from public and private sources. In addition, creative use of the existing budget, where one should not shy away from cutting spending practices which sometimes appear to be unchangeable, might lead to a greater efficiency while at the same time create some room for development.

Staff development

There are various ways in which teaching staff are offered possibilities to take part in professional development activities. However, the numbers doing so are relatively low and the review team notes that ways could be found to embed professional development (educational, didactical, through research) within a more structured framework. If the themes of interdisciplinarity, entrepreneurship, research, diversity and sustainability are to be developed across the RCA and across the curriculum, teaching staff will need to be given the opportunity to embody them.

Quality culture

The review team observed most members of the Music programmes community (be it students, teachers or management) were open to comments and discussion as part of their everyday operation. However, a lot of this valuable exchange and discussions seems to take place informally and survey data does not necessarily paint a truly representative picture when participation is low. So, between the day to day, often informal, communication and quality enhancement framework, this is an area that might be explored. The development of a clearly formatted student tracking system will certainly help, importantly to create the learning environment the RCA wishes to embody. This could include the day-to-day practice of feedback, across the institution, where well worded criticism is not seen as negative, but part of an ongoing process which will lead to the desired insight and improvement.

In conclusion

The subjects described in the paragraphs above are all interrelated, and the review team has described these thoughts for the RCA and its Music programmes to consider as part of our overall report. These summative comments are not prescriptive but should be seen as an invitation for the RCA to create its own and we believe, ever-evolving bright future. The review team realises that the issues RCA is facing, are by no means unique; however, we feel RCA's Music programmes could uniquely contribute to the wider discourse of the themes that international higher music education is currently facing. As they look to do so, the review team wishes everyone at RCA all the very best.

Annex 1. Site-visit schedule

| Day 1 – (04/02/2025) | | |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Time | Meeting | Participants |
| 08:45 | Welcome Review Team | |
| 9:00-9:30 | Review Team meeting | <i>Review Team members briefing</i> |
| 9:30–10:15 | Meeting 1a Meeting with representatives responsible of the programme management | <i>Dean Heads of programme Classical Music Head of programme Jazz</i> |
| 10:15-11:00 | Meeting 1b Chairs of sections and Coordinator 3rd Cycle | <i>Chairperson of Plucked instruments and brass Chairperson of Composition Chairperson of Movement study trajectory counsellor Chairperson of Key instruments Chairperson of Creative enterprise Chairperson of Strings Chairperson of Percussion Coordinator 3rd cycle (Research - PHD)</i> |
| 11:00-11:15 | Review Team meeting | <i>Review Team members share conclusions with Secretary (debriefing)</i> |

| | | |
|-------------------|---|---|
| 11:15-12:45 | Meeting 2 Meeting with senior administrative staff/QA office | <i>Finances and HR Communication Administration Quality Assurance International Relations Artistic planning and production Student counsellor</i> |
| 12:45-13:00 | Review Team meeting <i>Review Team members share conclusions with Secretary</i> | |
| 13:00-14:00 Lunch | | |
| 14:00-15:30 | Meeting 3 Meeting with teachers | <i>Jazz European Opera Academy Main teachers: Saxophone, Chamber music teacher brass, Teacher of contemporary flute technique Teachers in composition, screen scoring, analysis major, research, historical performance practice Creative Project coaches</i> |
| 15:30-15:45 | Review Team meeting <i>Review Team members share conclusions with Secretary (debriefing)</i> | |
| 15:45-16:00 Break | | |
| 16:00-17:00 | Guided tour – Review of the facilities (studios, concert venues, practice facilities, libraries etc.) | |
| 17:00-18:30 | Review Team meeting <i>Reflection on the first day and preparations for day 2</i> | |

| | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| 18:30-19:50 | Dinner as proposed by the institution | <i>Dean</i> <i>Head of Classical Music</i> <i>Head and artistic staff member of Jazz</i> <i>Artistic Staff member classical music</i> <i>Artistic Staff member classical music</i> <i>Section Chairperson Creative Entreprise</i> <i>Quality Assurance</i> |
| 20:00-21:00 | Concert by the Saxophone Orchestra of Antwerp and Bruxelles Conservatoire | |

| Day 2 – (05/02/2025) | | |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Time | Meeting (working session) | Participants of the meeting |
| 9:00-9:30 | Review Team meeting <i>Review Team members briefing</i> | |
| 9:30–11:00 | Meeting 4 Meeting with students | <i>Composition bachelor, programme committee</i> <i>Violoncello master</i> <i>Voice master, ex-Sphinx, programme committee</i> <i>Percussion bachelor</i> <i>Piano master</i> <i>Drums master, Student Council</i> <i>Voice jazz bachelor</i> <i>Drums jazz master</i> <i>Saxophone jazz bachelor</i> |
| 11:00- 11:15 | Review Team meeting <i>Review Team members share conclusions with Secretary (debriefing)</i> | |
| 11:15-11:30 Break | | |
| 11:30-12:45 | Observation of student performances during class and rehearsals | |
| 12:45-13:00 | Review Team meeting <i>Review Team members share conclusions with Secretary (debriefing)</i> | |
| 13:00-14:00 Lunch | | |
| 14:00-15:30 | Observation of student performances during class and rehearsals | |
| 15:30-15:45 | Review Team meeting: <i>Review Team members share conclusions with Secretary (debriefing)</i> | |
| 15:45-16:00 Break | | |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| 16:00-17:00 | Meeting 5 Meeting with alumni and representatives from the music profession | |
| 17:30-19:00 | Review Team meeting <i>Reflection on the second day and preparations for feedback meeting</i> | |
| 19:30 Dinner in the City Centre - Review Team alone | | |
| 21:00 | Jazz jam by students RCA in De Muze - City Center - Melkmarkt | |
| Day 3 – (06/02/2025) | | |
| Time | Meeting (working session) | Participants of the meeting |
| 9:00-10:30 | Review Team meeting Final preparations for the feedback meeting | |
| 10:30–11:15 | Meeting 6 <i>representatives responsible of the programme management</i> | <i>Dean</i> <i>Heads of programme Classical Music</i> <i>Head of programme Jazz</i> |
| 11:15-12:00 | Feedback to the institution | invitation to all other members met during the site-visit |
| 12:00-14:00 | Lunch | <i>Dean Royal Conservatoire Antwerp</i> <i>Head of jazz - artistic staff member jazz</i> <i>Head of Classical Music</i> <i>Head of organisation, administration, finances, HR</i> <i>Artistic staff member classical music</i> <i>Artistic staff member classical music</i> |

Annex 2. List of documents provided to the review team

1. Executive summary to the Music programmes
2. History of the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp
3. Graphics showing the student numbers per major and the distribution between Belgian, EEA and non-EEA students in academic year 2023-2024.
4. Strategic goals of the AP University of Applied Sciences 2021-2025
5. Renewed educational vision AP University of Applied Sciences
6. Research Policy of the Music programmes
7. Gen Z Analysis AP Infographics (Dutch)
8. Programme Learning Outcomes ABA-MA Muziek-Music and their link to the Dublin Descriptors and the Flemish qualification structure
9. Organisational Regulations of the AP University of Applied Sciences
10. Organisational Regulations Council Schools of Arts
11. Study guides Classical Music 2024-25
12. Study guide Jazz 2024-25
13. Programme curricula Classical Music 2024-25
14. Programme curricula Jazz 2024-25
15. Impact of OLR's based on an export from Power BI - competency matrix
16. Policy Paper on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence
17. Overview of projects and concerts Music 2018-2024
18. Q Alumni survey Music 2023 (DeepL translation)
19. Example of an activities sheet (DUTCH)
20. Team approach Brass section.
21. Mission & Implementation Diversity and Inclusion
22. Programme Learning Outcomes of the bachelor's and master's Music programmes
23. Evaluation form & feedback mail entrance exam Classical Music
24. Portrait of the Composition class
25. Overview of rooms and concert halls - Asimut
26. Overview of external guests Classical & Jazz 2019-2024
27. Examples of evaluation forms
28. Examples of posters, flyers and brochures
29. Education and Examination regulations 2024 – 2025
30. Critical Friend Reports 2021 & 2022
31. Self-Evaluation Report
32. Review Report 2018

Annex 3. Definitions of compliance levels

- **Fully compliant.** *A standard is fully compliant when the approaches, structures or mechanisms relevant to that standard are fully implemented in a coherent and consistent way.*
- **Substantially compliant.** *A standard is substantially compliant when the standard is in place, while minor gaps have been observed but the manner of implementation is mostly effective. In such cases Review Teams are asked to include a recommendation as to how full compliance can be achieved.*
- **Partially compliant.** *A standard is partially compliant when the standard is in place, while significant gaps have been observed, or the manner of implementation is not sufficiently effective. In such cases Review Teams are asked to include a recommendation as to how full compliance can be achieved or a condition*.*
- **Not compliant.** *A standard is not compliant when the approaches, structures or mechanisms relevant to that standard are lacking or implemented inadequately. In such cases Review Teams are asked to include a strong recommendation or a condition*.*

*(*Please note that conditions can only be formulated in accreditation reports and not in quality enhancement review reports.)*

Annex 4. Critical Friend summary reports

Executive summary

Critical Friend Report

Keyboard department

**Royal Conservatoire Antwerp
(Antwerp, Belgium)**

Site-visit: November 2021

Concept programme for the visit

| MONDAY 22/11/2021 | | Where |
|-------------------|--|--|
| 9.30-10.30 | welcome by dean, head, artistic board and quality advisor | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 10.30-11.30 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| | harpsichord class (9.30-13) | room 138 |
| 11.45-12.15 | meeting with section chairperson keys | meeting room deSingel |
| 12.15-13.00 | meeting with section chairperson keys some of the teachers | meeting room deSingel |
| 13.00-14.00 | lunch | student restaurant |
| 14.00-17.00 | opportunity to visit classes and have individual talks with the teachers | |
| | piano classes (13-15) | room 152 |
| | opera class + accompaniment by a collaborative piano student (14-16) | room 57 |
| | harpsichord classes (14-15) | room 138 |
| | organ classes (14-17) | |
| | | St. Laurentius church corner Markgravelei / Van Schoonbekestraat 155 2018 Antwerpen |
| | optional: 15-16.30: Ear training level 2 | room 164 |
| 19.00 | Diner jointly CF winds and keys | Grand Café deSingel |

| TUESDAY 23/11/2021 | | Where |
|--------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 09.30-10.30 | meeting with key students and student council | meeting room (backstage) |
| 10.30-12.30 | opportunity to visit classes and have individual talks with the teachers | |
| | piano classes (10.30-12.30) | room 151 |
| | optional: general music theory level 2 (Rhythm module) 10-11 | room 160 |
| 12.30-13.30 | lunch | student restaurant |
| 14.30-17.30 | opportunity to visit classes and have individual talks with the teachers | |
| | 14.30 individual meeting on Collaborative Piano | vergaderzaal |
| | collaborative piano class (15-16) | room 154 |
| | piano classes (15-19) | room 57 |
| | piano class (16.30-17.30) | room 152 |
| 19.00 | group lesson piano | room 57 |



Summary of the report

It is my pleasure to start this report by expressing my gratitude to the RCA for the excellent organisation and documentation. This visit happened in a nice and friendly atmosphere, with honest and open discussions. My special thanks go to the Head of Classical Music, Quality Assurance Coordinator and Keyboard Section Chairperson for their kindness and dedication. I also enjoyed fruitful discussions with my colleague Helena Gaunt, who visited the RCA at the same time as the critical friend for the woodwind instruments section.

Through sections 1 to 4 of the visit report, the Critical Friend **commends** the Keyboard department's:

Involvement in Erasmus+ European initiatives such as the METRIC and the MUSAE projects, facilitated by RCA's geographical position and large international network.

High teaching and artistic level of the harpsichord section, having access to the important instruments collection of the Vleeshuis Museum.

Good level of strong faculty profiles and fairly large international attractiveness of the piano section. Within the piano section, it is worth noting the focus on Belgian (and Flemish) composers, alongside with the Project XXI and contemporary repertoire.

Curriculum, vast professional network and internship opportunities for students in the Master's programme in Collaborative piano.

Infrastructures, being located in the RCA building and the DeSingel International Art Center, as they build a perfect environment for professional integration and interdisciplinarity.

Engagement to undergoing an strategic transformation of quality culture, including the implementation of the 2018 MusiQuE recommendations.

Based on the observations presented in sections 1 through 4 of the visit report, I offer the following specific **recommendations** for consideration (by instrument and areas):

1. Goals, design and delivery of the study programme

Accordion:

- Have a strategic discussion with the local competitors also offering the accordion as a main discipline.

Organ:

- Open a distinct Master for ancient keyboards (harpsichord, pianoforte, organ, clavichord).
- Open a *Maestro al cembalo* Master programme (as a Baroque equivalent to the Collaborative piano programme).
- Develop the ancient keyboards inside the Conservatoire an excellence centre for historically informed. performance for the benefit of the Classical department (ornamentation, temperaments, organology...).
- Encourage improvisation modules.

Piano:



- Enlarge the repertoire.
- Encourage team teaching at Master level.
- Encourage internal masterclasses.
- More exams with external juries.
- Develop a strategy and find an investment budget to gradually replace the instruments and to take good care of them.

Master's programme in Collaborative piano:

- Give a clearer frame to internships (workload, place in the curriculum).
- Enlarge the programme to instrumental accompaniment and chamber music (with the chamber music piano teachers), encourage team teaching at Master level.

2. Quality Culture

- Define more strongly the school national and international profile and priorities (benchmark with other Flemish/Belgian/Dutch/German schools). Think about the opportunities of joint programmes.
- Develop even more the interdisciplinarity (creative projects, special weeks) and the connections among the departments and DeSingel.
- Take the opportunity of the generational change (touching also the keyboard department) to hire young staff with the new skills (artistic, academic, administrative) RCA needs to implement its strategic objectives into every part of the institution.
- Develop a strong collective leadership (dean/artistic council/head of department/section coordinator), including staff and student participation. Keep in touch with RCA's alumni.
- Reserve specific resources (budget, spaces, etc.) for the structural transition.

Critical Friend: Philippe Dinkel

Philippe Dinkel was born in Switzerland has completed his piano studies in Geneva (premier prix de virtuosité, class of Harry Datyner), Bloomington (Indiana University, Alfonso Montecino) and Brussels (Pascal Sigrist). Chamber music is highly important in his concert activities, notably within the Trio Musiviva (1st prize of the Colmar competition), the Quatuor Sine Nomine and various other artists and ensembles. He holds a Master in Musicology of the Geneva University. Author of numerous articles and conferences, he has taught musicology, music history and analysis before becoming head of the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève, and from 2009 of the Haute Ecole de Musique de Genève. He has been president of the Conference of the Swiss Music Universities and served on the 22 board of the Association Européenne des Conservatoires and in various juries of musical competitions (Clara Haskil, Enesco, Thailand international piano competition, Tchaikovsky competition for young musicians). He is the chair of the artistic committee of the Geneva Music Competition and the dean of the Music and Performing Arts department of the University of Applied Arts and Sciences of Western Switzerland (HES-SO). He also works as an expert for the European foundation MusiQuE, active in the field of evaluation and accreditation in higher music education.





Executive summary

Critical Friend Report
Wind & Brass departments
Royal Conservatoire Antwerp
(Antwerp, Belgium)

Site-visit: November 2021

Concept programme for the visit

| MONDAY 22/11/2021 | | Where |
|-------------------|---|--|
| 9.30-10.30 | welcome by dean, head, artistic board and quality advisor | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 10.30-11.30 | opportunity to visit classes rehearsal of wind orchestra (10-12.30h) flute classes (morning) | witte zaal room 154 |
| 11.30-12.00 | meeting with section chairperson winds | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 12.00-13.00 | meeting with section chairperson winds and some of the teachers | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 13.00-14.00 | lunch | student restaurant |
| 14.00 | opportunity to visit classes and have individual talks with the teachers 14.00: classes saxhorn and cornet 14.00: open class piccolo (starting at 13.30) 14.30: peer teaching class 15.00: class contra bassoon 15.30: classes trombone 16.00: classes saxhorn and euphonium | room 108 gele zaal witte zaal lokaal 101 room 140 room 161 |
| 19.00 | Dinner with section chairpersons and artistic board joinly CF winds and keys | Grand Café de Singel |

| TUESDAY 23/11/2021 | | Where |
|----------------------|---|--|
| 09.30-10.30 | meeting with brass students and student council | Vergaderzaal (meeting room) |
| 10.30-12.30 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| | 10.30: one-to-one online talk with clarinet teacher | online meeting |
| | 11.00: public rehearsal/classes saxophone | room 139 |
| | Optional: 10:30 - 12:00 - Ear training 1 - (Dutch group) | room 163 |
| 12.30-13.30 | lunch | student restaurant |
| 13.30-15.30 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| | 13.30: classes Clarinet / | room 101 |
| | 14.30-16.00 audition training - internal class concert trumpet | zwarte zaal (black hall) |
| | Optional: Analysis with wind students B2 (15-16u) | room 161 |
| 16.00-17.00 | meeting with <u>students</u> wind instruments | Vergaderzaal (meeting room) |
| 19.00 | group concert meeting by the wind section | Zwarte zaal |
| WEDNESDAY 24/11/2021 | | Where |
| 09.30-10.00 | meeting with head of administration and organization, student counselor and IRC jointly CF winds and keys | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 10.00-10.30 | meeting with section chairpersons and artistic board | Online meeting |
| 10.30-11.00 | free time or visit classes | |
| | flute classes | room 101 (9-13u) |
| 11.00-12.00 | feedback meeting - winds (hybrid) | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| | with section chairperson winds and students and teachers of the section | online meeting |
| 12.00 | lunch for both CF and all students and teachers involved | Vergaderzaal (meeting room) |



Summary of the report

It was a pleasure and an honour to conduct this critical friend visit in person, and to have the opportunity for both face-to-face discussions and observations of a range of lessons and classes. Over the course of the three days, meetings were organised with members of the Royal Conservatoire's senior management, artistic board, quality assurance and enhancement staff, teaching staff and students. I was particularly impressed and heartened by the openness and readiness of all involved to engage in this critical friend process at a deep and constructive level.

Through sections 1 to 4 of the visit report, the Critical Friend **commends** the Wind & Brass departments':

Offered opportunities to lead on collaborative skills and orchestral playing at local level.

Strong artistic creativity of the trumpet class and its role in curating and realising performance in contemporary contexts.

Artistic creativity and how it links strongly to artistic research, which seems to be maturing well and having an impact at many levels.

Impressive shared determination to ensure sufficient flexibility to be able to respond to individual differences in levels of attainment in making repertoire choices.

The appropriate specialisation at Master's level.

High quality of individual playing in the students recruited, with some exceptional students encountered during the visit.

Teaching staff for their high levels of artistry and craft expertise in their individual disciplines.

Impressive facilities of the conservatoire.

Progress made since the 2018 institutional review from Musique in relation to quality culture.

Shared examples of internships for students in orchestral and professional ensemble projects in other contexts.

Based on the observations presented in sections 1 through 4 of the visit report, the Critical Friend offers the following specific **recommendations** for consideration, by areas:

1. Goals, design and delivery of the study programmes

Align the vision, mission and goals of the wind and brass departments with the institution's strategic direction.

Develop focused dialogue and discussion with both teachers and students within wind and brass departments about skills development, and the ways that different aspects of curriculum support these and professional integration.

Develop projects and ways of working within the wind and brass departments to create a stronger bridge to the wider curriculum.

Explore potential for exchange and collaborative learning between teachers to support development of curriculum and pedagogy.



Develop an institutional approach to diversifying repertoire studied and included within assessments.

Develop a co-ordinated plan for evolving HIP within wind and brass, aligned with institutional direction.

Develop student recruitment strategies and plans for wind and brass departments.

2. Teaching and learning environment

Develop a staffing plan for both wind and brass departments, ensuring equivalence of opportunities for students.

Consider short, medium and longer term plans for evolving pedagogy and educational culture to align with the forward-facing vision, mission and cornerstones of educational excellence of the institution.

Further consider the ways in which the section chairs can be empowered and supported, individually and collectively, in their roles as leaders of change.

Explore ways to improve the students' experience of access to practising facilities.

3. Quality Culture

Building on successful progress to date, develop more detailed plans for the next stages of evolving the internal quality culture, particularly linked to the four cornerstones of educational excellence, and to some of the issues raised and how ownership of quality assurance and enhancement is collaboratively shared at all levels of the institution, including the teachers.

Develop quality and quantity of written feedback given to students on assessed performances.

Consider enhancing the Vademecum with information about assessment panel constitution and processes; develop approaches to engaging students with the Vademecum.

Review the communication of the Code of Conduct, and transparency of the channels available for both students and staff to raise issues of concern/complaint in relation to teaching and learning.

Explore ways to extend professional internships and side-by-side activities.

Explore win-win opportunities through community partnerships to enhance students' experience, and optimise use of institutional resources focused on civic profile and/or student recruitment.

Critical Friend: Helena Gaunt

Helena Gaunt is a musician, author and thought-leader on music education and professional practice, having been a professional oboist for many years, and founding member of the Britten Sinfonia. Principal of the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama (RWCMD) and a Professor, she sits on the Council of the Royal Philharmonic Society, and has recently completed a leading role for the European Association of Conservatoire's major project *Strengthening Music in Society*.

Helena joined RWCMD in 2018 after over 25 years teaching and in leadership roles at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London where she initiated and directed the



international Reflective Conservatoire Conference, chaired the Innovative Conservatoire (ICON) partnership, and set up the Guildhall Creative Entrepreneurs scheme, incubating over 40 new businesses in the performing arts.

Major publications include 'Musicians as "Makers in Society": A Conceptual Foundation for Contemporary Professional Higher Music Education' (2021); *Expanding Professionalism in Music and Higher Music Education: A Changing Game* (2021) co-edited with Professor Heidi Westerlund; *Musicians in the Making: Pathways to Creative Performance* (2017) co-edited with Professor John Rink and Professor Aaron Williamon, and *Collaborative Learning in Higher Music Education* (2013). She is a National Teaching Fellow (2009) and Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Executive summary

Critical Friend Report

Jazz & Pop department

**Royal Conservatoire Antwerp
(Antwerp, Belgium)**

Site-visit: March 2022

Concept programme for the visit

Critical Friends - Detailed programme - Jazz

| MONDAY 21/03/2022 | | Where |
|-------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 9.30-10.30 | welcome & kick-off meeting with Dean, Head of department and QA | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 10.30-11.15 | guided tour with production staff | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 11.30-13.00 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| | 11.30-12.30: Ensemble course | room 227 |
| | 11.30-12.30: Ensemble course | room 228 |
| | 12.30-13.00: Guitar lesson | room 114 |
| | 12.00-13.00: Eartraining | room 58 |
| | 11.30-13.00: Voice lesson | room 118 |
| 13.00-14.00 | lunch with Head of department and QA advisor | Grand Café deSingel |
| 14.00-15.30 | Masters exam double bass | |
| | 14.00: (interdisciplinary) masters concert | room 228 |
| | 14:50: evaluation masters concert | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| | 15:10: feedback moment | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 15.30-16.30 | Meeting with students (bachelor and master) and recent graduates | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 16.30-17.30 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| | 16.30-17.00: Rhythm section class | room 210 |
| | 16.30-18.00: rehearsal vocal ensemble | room 228 |
| | 16.30-17.00: drum lesson | room 226 |
| 17.30-20.00 | Free time | |
| 20.00 | Call it anything jam session <i>a gentle suggestion</i> | Rataplan |

| TUESDAY 22/03/2022 | | Where |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 09.30-10.30 | meeting with quality advisor schools of arts | Vergaderzaal (meeting room) |
| 10.30-12.00 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| | 10.30-12.00: complete vocal technique | room 137 |
| | 10.30-11.00: piano lesson with (bass teacher) | room 226 |
| | 11.00-12.00: ensemble lesson | room 227 |
| | 10.30-11.00: sound in time (free improvisation class) | room 228 |
| | 10.30-12.00: Harmonisation at the piano | room 127 |
| | 10.30-11.00: Harmony lesson with | room 162 |
| | 11.00-12.00: ensemble lesson with | room 226 |
| | 11.00-12.00: guitar lesson | room 162 |
| | 10.30-12.00: Rhythm section class | room 228 |



| | | |
|-------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 12.00-13.00 | meeting with jazz teachers | Vergaderzaal (meeting room) |
| 13.00-14.00 | lunch | student restaurant |
| 14.00-16.00 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| | 14.00-15.30: ensemble lesson | room 227 |
| | 14.00-15.30: ensemble lesson | room 226 |
| | 14.00-14.30: sound in time listening session | room 228 |
| | 14.30-15.30: rhythm section class | room 228 |
| | 14.00-16.00: bass lesson | room 119 |
| | 14.00-16.00: piano lesson | room 137 |
| | 14.00-14.30: improvisation technique voice | room 164 |
| | 14.30-16.00: voice lesson | room 164 |
| 16.00-17.00 | departure to concert hall de Singer Rijkvorsel | Entrance hall Royal Conservatory |
| 17.00-18.30 | sound check | De Singer Rijkvorsel |
| 17.30-18.30 | meeting with Head of Jazz | De Singer Rijkvorsel |
| 18.30-20.00 | dinner | De Singer Rijkvorsel |
| 20.30-23.00 | Breathing concert | De Singer Rijkvorsel |

| WEDNESDAY 23/3/2022 | | Where |
|---------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 10.00-10.30 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| | 10.00-10.30: Harmony 2 | room 160 |
| 10.30-11.00 | meeting with student counselor | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 11.00-11.30 | meeting with international relations coordinator | |
| 11.30-12.30 | preparation time for feedback meeting | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 12.30-13.00 | feedback meeting | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |
| 13.00 | lunch | meeting room (vergaderzaal) |

Summary of the report

I would like to thank all interviewed groups, management, staff, teachers, and students of the Jazz Department at the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp (RCA), for their participation and openness towards the Critical Friend review visit during the week of March 21st of 2022. Their comments and information provided, together with their willingness to be involved in the process of internal quality assurance, are the most valuable tool to gather all required information to implement the necessary updates and reforms of the strategic direction of the Jazz Department. All presented documentation, study plans, and related materials, which I have carefully evaluated, enabled me to gain a deep and objective insight for the present review visit to have both a wide and detailed perspective.

I would particularly want to express my sincere gratitude to the dean of RCA, the quality advisor, and the head of the Jazz Department, for making the Critical Friend review visit possible as a part of MusiQuE's processes of Quality Enhancement in Music Higher Education. They have prepared the visit with the highest level of professionalism and a genuine dedication toward the Jazz Department and its sustainable development. The preparation of the documentation package, meetings, interviews, coordination of

scheduled activities, and the visit to lessons have been organized very thoughtfully, and very efficiently, making me feel very comfortable at all times and facilitating a constructive environment for the interviews and honest self-reflection. I would like to also thank everyone involved for making the effort to speak in English, both at the meetings and during the lessons.

My overall impression about the Jazz Department is very positive indeed, with a high artistic level shown by the students, an excellent and balanced group of teachers, dedicated supporting staff, and such wonderful facilities and premises for delivering a jazz study programme at the highest international level of excellence, academicism, and artistry. I would also like to emphasize the high level of personalisation of the curriculum for every individual student, to facilitate the development of their own artistic vision and talents to succeed in a very competitive and multi-disciplinary professional landscape. In general, I have not detected any substantial problems or weak areas in need of special attention. However, the natural and regular need for updating the offered programmes, curriculum, educational and managerial practices, artistic research, digitization, entrepreneurship, internationalization, etc. with the addition of the drastic impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has inflicted on higher music education during the last two years, makes altogether necessary to undertake some measures to strengthen these and other areas which I will address in this document. Finally, it is important to state that RCA is going through a transition period of reforms and deep transformation, which will also require the rethinking of the role, influence, and visibility of the Jazz Department within the conservatory, the higher music education system in Belgium, and the European and international jazz education network.

Through sections 1 to 4 of the visit report, the Critical Friend **commends** the Jazz & Pop department's:

Student-centred approach of the curriculum.

The rigorous, professional and dedicated teachers' work with the students during lessons and department's balanced student-teacher ratio.

RCA's facilities for offering an inter-disciplinary space and teaching-learning environment for the students

The individual support provided to the students.

The amount of concerts, master classes, and assorted educational activities promoted by the jazz department both on and outside campus.

Based on the observations presented in sections 1 through 4 of the visit report, the Critical Friend offers the following specific **recommendations**, by areas::

Explore the construction of a recording studio, as there is a real need for a professionally equipped studio, where the Jazz Department and all the other programmes at the RCA could record and practice.

Adopt a more open and articulated feedback approach to the students to improve the assessment methods and learning outcomes.

Enhance student involvement and participation, to increase students' presence in lessons and stimulate the group spirit.



Develop a more actively involved and visible (i.e.: student associations, multi-disciplinary activities, performances) department on the RCA's campus, aiming to have a bigger influence and impact on the conservatoire's development and artistic life.

Consider some kind of administrative support to the head of the department.

Explore an even more active international exposure to attract high-level international students to study full-time at the RCA.

Establish a clear differentiation between the bachelor's and master's levels on how research is implemented is recommended.

Critical Friend: Iñaki Sandoval

Iñaki Sandoval is an internationally acclaimed pianist, composer, music producer, and educator whose career spans continents and genres. He has performed and recorded with an illustrious array of musicians, including Eddie Gomez, Billy Hart, Bob Mintzer, Tom Warrington, Stefan Karlsson, Marvin Stamm, Sizao Machado, Greg Badolato, Carles Benavent, Horacio Fumero, David Xirgu, David Mengual, Jordi Bonell, and Joan Albert Amargós, among others.

In 2009, Iñaki founded Bebyne Records, a label that has produced over 25 albums for world-class artists, including nine of his own. Among his notable works is *The Estonian Trilogy* (2018), a three-CD solo piano collection comprising the albums *Winter Poems*, *Mimesis*, and *Harmonic Etudes*. His piano trio projects have garnered critical acclaim, including *Miracielos* (2012) with Eddie Gomez on bass and Billy Hart on drums, and *Electric Trio Live* (2015), featuring Carles Benavent on bass and Roger Blavia on drums. As a composer, Iñaki most recently created the original score for the feature film "*Zuloaga: Luz Dentro de la Sombra*" (*Light Within the Shadow*), scheduled for theatrical release in 2025.

Iñaki is deeply committed to higher music education and the development of future generations of artists. He currently serves as the Dean of the School of Music at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Previously, he held prominent positions such as Director of the University of Tartu Viljandi Academy in Estonia (2015–2020), Founding Dean of Graduate Studies (2013–2015), and Founding Director of the Jazz Department (2003–2015) at the Liceu Conservatory in Barcelona, Spain, part of the Berklee International Network of Schools. He is also an Aspen Institute Spain Fellow, a former council member of the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC), and a board member of the International Association of Jazz Schools (IASJ).

An artist of exceptional distinction, Iñaki Sandoval is a Steinway & Sons Artist and Roland Artist, reflecting his status as a leading figure in contemporary music and performance.



Executive summary

Critical Friend Report

**Composition & Conducting and Music Theory
departments**

**Royal Conservatoire Antwerp
(Antwerp, Belgium)**

Site-visit: November 2022

Concept programme for the visit

Critical Friends - Detailed programme - Music Theory and Composition

| MONDAY 14/11/2022 | | Where |
|--------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 9.30-10.30 | welcome by dean, head, artistic board and quality advisor | meeting room |
| 10.30-11.30 | meeting with Composition students | |
| 11.30-12.00 | meeting with artistic board member Music Theory & Composition | meeting room |
| 12.00-13.00 | meeting with students Music Theory | meeting room |
| 13.00-14.00 | lunch | student restaurant |
| 14.00 - 18.00 | opportunity to visit classes and have individual talks with the teachers | |
| 19.00 | Dinner | |
| TUESDAY 15/11/2022 | | Where |
| 09.00 - 12.00 | opportunity to visit classes and have individual talks with the teachers | Misc. |
| 09.00 - 12.00 | Music Theory Classes | |
| 10.00 - 12.00 | Composition: Forum | |
| 12.00-13.00 | lunch | student restaurant |
| 13.00 - 14.00 | meeting with teachers Music Theory | meeting room |
| 14.00 - 16.00 | opportunity to visit classes | |
| 14.00 - 16.00 | GMT Classes | Misc. |
| 13.00 - 16.00 | Composition Classes | Misc. |
| 16.00-17.00 | meeting with teachers Composition | Vergaderzaal (meeting room) |
| 17.00 - 20.00 | Free time | |
| 20.00 | This is not a Concert Hall: student-led peer learning moment | Zwarte zaal |



| WEDNESDAY 16/11/2022 | | Where |
|----------------------|--|--------------|
| 09.30-10.30 | meeting with head of administration and organisation and/or student counselor and/or IRC / and language officer? | meeting room |
| 10.30 - 11.00 | meeting with section chairpersons and artistic board | |
| 11.00-12.00 | feedback meeting with section chairperson and students and teachers of the section | meeting room |
| 12.00 | lunch for both CF and all students and teachers involved | meeting room |

Summary of the report

I was invited to talk to all of the art faculties (music, dance and drama) about the benefits and possibilities of enhancing learning through collaboration. I enjoyed seeing how this had progressed when RCA hosted the AEC Congress in 2021 and was then honoured to be invited to serve now as a critical friend for the composition and music theory departments. I spent three days in the institution, having read some well-prepared materials in advance. RCA has a warm and welcoming atmosphere overall and this was noted in the leadership of the conservatoire, the composing department colleagues and among the theory and composing teachers and students.

My conversations with every group of teachers, students, senior leaders were all engaging and thoughtful. Every person started from a premise of respect and fondness for the institution. This is not something anyone should take for granted as it does not exist in every institution. Supportive environments like the one at RCA allow teachers, staff and community to thrive, even through difficult times, as people feel able to speak and be heard, and grapple with challenges and opportunities that come to every institution.

Through sections 1 to 4 of the visit report, the Critical Friend **commends** the Composition & Conducting and Music Theory departments’:

Excellent classes in music theory, ear training, improvisation and harmony.

Graduates’ high level of competency upon finalisation of the Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes.

Rigorous assessment procedures, demonstrating the achievement of learning outcomes.

Teaching staff’s quality training.

Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures, remarking the series of critical friends visits that occurred during the previous year.

Based on the observations presented in sections 1 through 4 of the visit report, I offer the following specific **suggestions** your consideration, by areas:

1. Goals, design and delivery of study programme



Consider how large the theory/ear training requirement needs to be. Could some content be delivered online to free both curricular time and space in rooms? Could RCA have different pathways with some opting for less traditional western music theory for composers/performers who wish to explore more collaboration, other forms of music or deeper community engagement?

Ensure that external examiners are briefed on the divergent nature of student composition work and asked to evaluate on each piece's own terms.

2. Teaching and learning environment

Find ways to plan for succession in composition and theory areas and improve gender and diversity balance of faculty. Work carefully to ensure qualified and diverse applicants are invited and encouraged to apply. Doing so will help with representation, variety of ideas and get a better gender balance of student composers in RCA.

Consider how senior leadership could be better supported (admin assistants) so they could be given responsibility for an internal overview between disciplines and an external oversight of professional partnership.

3. Public interaction

Find more opportunities for composers' works to be performed for the public, with new music ensembles, required elements of graduating recitals and possible partnerships internally with professional music groups.

Foster space for collaboration between music, dance and drama. This could be inspired with a learning/teaching conference inviting all faculty at the start of the year around common themes, guest speakers and inviting open discussion. It could then be a pathway for students, if there are ways, some could have less traditional theory requirements and more negotiated projects between disciplines.

Critical Friend: Jeffrey Sharkey

Pianist and composer, Professor Sharkey, became Principal of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in September 2014, leading Scotland's national conservatoire of dance, drama, music, production and screen. During his tenure, RCS has raised its profile domestically and internationally and has been ranked in the top 10 world leading institutions for 6 out of the last 7 years. He is passionate about all of the RCS's performing and production arts and the collaboration between them. He has grown several key partnerships, having RCS join the Nordic Association of Conservatoires as well as CUK and AEC. Jeffrey served as Director of Johns Hopkins University's Peabody Institute from 2006-2014 where he helped to revitalise the curriculum and start a number of successful programmes with the colleges of Arts and Science, Engineering, Business, Education and the School of Medicine. Jeffrey served on the Board of Singapore's Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, an institution founded by the Peabody Institute, contributing to its strategic direction and helping it become one of the most important conservatoires in Asia. He also developed key partnerships in Korea, Taiwan and China. In Baltimore, Jeffrey started free programmes in music and dance to reach out to the wider community. These were connected to key arts organisations in the city and created pathways for talented youngsters to receive support throughout their studies. He also created the Academy programmes within the Preparatory to serve future professional musicians. Before coming to Peabody he was Dean of the Cleveland Institute

of Music.*

Jeffrey lived in the United Kingdom for 13 years, serving as director of music at the Purcell School in London and head of academic music at Wells Cathedral School where he started the school's composition department. He was a founding member of the Pirasti Piano Trio, which recorded with ASV Records in the United Kingdom and toured throughout Europe and the United States. He maintained his performing profile in the United States and Europe coaching chamber music as a faculty member and in master classes and summer festivals throughout the country. He performed with the Baltimore Symphony and collaborated with members of the Cleveland, Orion, and Cavani Quartets.

Jeffrey Sharkey is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music where he was the conservatory's first double major in piano and composition. He earned a Master of Music degree in composition from Yale University and an MPhil from the University of Cambridge. His teachers have included pianists John Browning, Boris Berman, Constance Keene and Peter Frankl and composers Aaron Copland, Jacob Druckman, Earle Brown, John Corigliano and Robin Holloway. He was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2022, and a Trustee of the National Centre for Music in 2025.

