

Decision Regarding Assessment of the Performing Arts Study Programme Group Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

20/06/2018

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education at the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Performing Arts study programme group at the first and second level of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in seven years.

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and point 41.1 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the First and Second Level of Higher Education', authorised in points 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA'), the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 4.03.2016 the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (hereinafter the Academy) submitted an application to the Council for the quality assessment of the music study programmes to be conducted by MusiQuE, an organisation specialised in the external evaluation of higher music education institutions. The Council approved the application in its [session on 15.03.2016](#).
2. On 10.11.2016 the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and EKKA agreed upon a time frame for conducting the quality assessment of Dramatic Arts study programmes under the Performing Arts study programme group.
3. Formation of Assessment Committees
 - 3.1. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 27.09.2017, approved the following composition of the quality Assessment Committee for the Performing Arts study programme group at the first and second level of higher education at University of Tartu, Tallinn University and the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (hereinafter the Committee), who assessed the **Dramatic Art** study programmes at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

Hannu Apajalahti	Chairman of the Committee – Lecturer, Sibelius Academy/University of the Arts Helsinki (Finland)
Gretchen Amussen	Director of External Affairs and International Relations, Paris Conservatoire (France)

Paula Tuovinen	Vice-rector University of the Arts Helsinki (Finland)
Anthony Dean	Dean of Cultural Engagement/Professor of Performing arts, University of Winchester (UK)
Ildikó Sirató	Associate professor, Institute for Literary and Cultural Studies, University of Pannonia (Hungary)
Sue Dunderdale	Director, writer, producer (UK)
Ankna Arockiam	student; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (UK)

3.2. The assessment of **Music** study programme under the Performing Arts study programme group at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre was conducted by the Committee formed by MusiQuE in the following composition:

Mist Thorkelsdottir (Chair)	Chairman of the Committee – Thornton School of Music, University of Southern California (US)
Claus Finderup (review team member)	Rhythmic Music Conservatoire, Copenhagen (Denmark)
Mary Lennon (review team member)	DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, Dublin (Ireland)
Antoine Gilliéron (student)	Hochschule für Musik, Luzern (Switzerland)
Christopher Caine (review team member acting as Secretary)	Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (UK)

4. The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre submitted the following study programmes for assessment under the Performing Arts study programme group:

Dramatic Art study programmes

Dramatic Art (Bachelor’s studies)

Theatre Arts and Theatre Pedagogy (Master’s studies)

Music study programmes

Music (Bachelor’s studies in English)

Music (Master’s studies in English)

Music Performance (Bachelor’s studies)

Music Performance (Master’s studies)

Composition and Electronic Music (Bachelor’s studies)

Composition and recording Arts (Master’s studies)

Musical Instrument Teacher (Bachelor’s studies)

Instrumental and Vocal Pedagogy (Master's studies)
Music Teacher (Bachelor's studies, joint study programme with Tallinn University)
Musicology (Bachelor's studies)
Musicology (Master's studies)
Contemporary Performance and Composition (Master's studies)

5. The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 1.09.2017, and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 8.09.2017. For the Music study programmes, the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre submitted the self-evaluation report to the MusiQuE.
6. The Committee for Dramatic Art study programmes made the assessment visit on 3.11.2017 and MusiQuE made the assessment visit for Music study programmes on 22 – 23.11.2017.
7. The Committee for Dramatic Art programmes sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 8.01.2018, and EKKA forwarded it to the Academy for its comments on 9.01.2018, and the Academy delivered its response on 21.01.2018.
8. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 22.01.2018. The MusiQuE submitted its final assessment report as approved by the MusiQuE Board to EKKA on 25.04.2018. The assessment reports are an integral part of this decision. The reports are available on the EKKA website.
9. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment reports along with the Academy's self-evaluation reports to the Council members on 6.06.2018.
10. The Council with 11 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 20.06.2018, and based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Performing Arts study programme group at the first and second level of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

General recommendation related to Performing Arts study programme group at Tallinn University, University of Tartu and the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

Based on the interviews conducted with the teaching staff, students, alumni and employers, the Assessment Committee suggests that professional networks (including various HEIs) initiate an overarching debate about the roles and objectives of study programmes on music and dramatic art on the Estonian higher education and cultural scene. Merging folk dance and folk music study programmes would be worth considering.

I. DRAMATIC ART STUDY PROGRAMMES

General strengths of Dramatic Art study programmes

- 1) One of the key strengths of the Drama School of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre lies in its time-honoured and distinguished traditions of teaching dramatic arts, whereas the lecturers currently working there have been raised in the same spirit. The name of the school

itself stands for a reliable education, being a well-known trademark among theatre professionals as well as audiences.

- 2) The Drama School and its teaching staff have strong links with professional theatres.
- 3) The school operates in an elegant historic building, and its potential is used fully. However, the Drama School is also involved in the planning of the new school building.
- 4) A trusting relationship between teaching staff and students facilitate individual guidance.
- 5) The teaching staff understands well the links between studies and the actual needs of the theatre world.
- 6) The lecturers have a shared philosophy of teaching and a passion for their profession.

General areas for improvement and recommendations for Dramatic Art study programmes

- 1) It is recommended to explore ways to develop all areas of teaching and learning in the light of current trends in theatre and recorded media while engaging the entire family of the Academy. The management, together with the teaching staff, should create a clear vision for the future development of studies, and a strategy to support it.
- 2) It is necessary to find opportunities for making the building accessible for students with special needs.
- 3) The assistant head of the Drama School is currently overloaded with various tasks and needs more support.
- 4) It should be considered what kind of collaboration opportunities with other institutions arise from the new learning and performance spaces, and how this should be reflected in the studies.
- 5) It is recommended that the management finds ways to use other rooms outside the Drama School for teaching and learning, and encourage the students to find new collaboration initiatives and explore ways to involve students with special needs.
- 6) Psychological counselling should be made available for students.
- 7) Due to the intensive learning and close relations between students and teaching staff, it is necessary to establish a formal system for giving feedback and a procedure for dealing with potential complaints.
- 8) In a situation where the teaching and learning take place in quite isolated theatre circles, and the lecturers are often the future employers, the management should find ways to evaluate students more transparently and fairly, so subjective attitudes and prejudgement do not determine their future.
- 9) The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre should give more support to its staff's professional development as artists as well as teaching staff.
- 10) Courses on the principles of pedagogy and adult education should be provided for the teaching staff, especially for practitioners who do not have extensive experiences in teaching.

Dramatic Art (BA)

Strengths

- 1) All members of the teaching staff are experienced and distinguished practitioners as well as competent lecturers with contacts with the professional theatre world. They are devoted to the Drama School and its students.
- 2) The students have one course-master during the entire study period.
- 3) Theatres and other future employers are closely involved in student enrolment and conducting studies.

- 4) The students can take part in some masterclasses at the level of Master's studies.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The syllabi of the field of study of directing and dramaturgy shall be amended to meet the 21st-century requirements for teaching of these professions.
- 2) It is recommended that the management strengthens the organisational side of the study process in order to balance the profoundly personal contribution of the teaching staff. The evaluation criteria and methods should be more concrete and transparent, and giving feedback to students as well as teaching staff shall be more formal.
- 3) The management should also find ways to maintain the intensiveness of studies, while encouraging initiatives by individual students, being more open to collaboration with other HEIs and internationalising the Drama School even further.
- 4) It is advisable to increase the share of film acting studies in the study programme.
- 5) Also, it is recommended to offer students more opportunities for creative development in the field of innovative and unconventional theatre outside Estonia.
- 6) Student representatives should be given time to participate in the work of the Academy's student council.
- 7) Students should have a real opportunity to contribute to the study programme development.
- 8) More attention shall be paid to the counselling of local Russian speaking and international students.

THEATRE ARTS AND THEATRE PEDAGOGY (MA)

Strengths

- 1) Shifting of the focus of the study programme for each year of new admissions and a considerable international dimension diversify the studies and add innovation.
- 2) An international dimension, taking the form of various contacts, working with visiting lecturers and masterclasses, is one of the key strengths of the Master's study programme. During intense weeks of practical work, highly qualified international lecturers and practitioners conduct teaching. Students' plays are in the repertoires of professional theatres thanks to fruitful cooperation.
- 3) Learning is cohesive and practical work is much emphasised.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) During intensive courses, however, the workload might be too much for the students.
- 2) The Drama School should take advantage of the considerable international dimension of the Master's level to also educate teaching staff of Bachelor's level and attract international students.
- 3) The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre should provide more support to students in order to improve the currently low graduation rate.

II. MUSIC STUDY PROGRAMMES

Strengths of the Music study programmes

- 1) The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre is a forward-looking university that takes pride in its past and meets both national and international expectations for contemporary music education fully. The selection of study programmes offered by the Academy is dynamic, and the graduates enjoy wide-based employment opportunities. The study programmes reflect the vision of the Academy, where a balance is found between innovation, internationalisation, openness and traditions and being devoted to the Estonian society and culture.
- 2) Teaching and learning under the study programmes are of high quality, and the employment rate of the graduates is excellent. The study programmes comply with the framework and structure of the Bologna reforms and other international agreements and mostly comply with the learning outcomes of the PDD (*Polifonia/Dublin Descriptors*) and AEC (*Association Européenne des Conservatoires*).
- 3) The lecturers are very highly qualified, focused on continuously improving and promoting the learning culture, as well as devoted to communication with the students during the rather numerous contact lessons. The emphasis put on self-reflection and critical thinking in pedagogic and instrumental study programmes is praiseworthy. The Academy encourages professional development, including international mobility of the teaching staff. Lecturers in the Musicology Department have an extra-strong scientific background. The Academy makes sure that the teaching staff is sustainable and that there is a right balance between older, more experienced and younger teaching staff with fresh ideas and competences. International visiting teaching staff organising masterclasses or teaching for a longer time has a positive impact on teaching and learning.
- 4) The classrooms are state-of-the-art, and the new building has enormous potential. The learning environment is aesthetically pleasant and functional. Effective support systems are available for the students.
- 5) The Academy has remarkable creative and professional contacts, and collaboration networks on both local, national and international level and these benefit the Academy as one of the top players on the European higher music education landscape. The Academy has found an excellent balance between promoting Estonian culture and society and the international dimension. Student and teaching staff mobility, international projects, the Interpretation and Production of Contemporary Music study programme, masterclasses and international seminars and conferences indicate that the Academy is active internationally.
- 6) The Assessment Committee was impressed by how the teaching staff is involved in the evaluation process, the use of external evaluators in Master's exams and cross-using teaching staff to evaluate exams of different disciplines.
- 7) The study information system is very good and comes with an excellent IT support.
- 8) According to the employers, graduates of the Academy make brilliant teachers in Estonian schools, bringing along contemporary approaches.
- 9) The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre stands on solid financial grounds and funding of the study programmes is ensured. The Academy is aware of the risks related to the construction of a new building and has considered the investment carefully.

Areas for improvement and recommendations for Music study programmes

- 1) Descriptions of study programmes are somewhat uneven. It is advisable to review the documents related to and the descriptions of the study programmes and align them better with the learning outcomes of the PDD and AEC, to make sure that different fields of education are comparable. Strengthening the critical thinking learning outcome in the descriptions of the Bachelor's study programmes needs special attention.

- 2) It is necessary to ensure that a language barrier related to English and/or Estonian would not become an obstacle for international students in participating or progressing in their studies. The requirement of language skills should be defined in the terms and conditions for enrolment. Sufficient language courses shall be offered for the students.
 - 3) Although the evaluation criteria for some study programmes (such as Music Composition) are very wide, the methods and strategies of evaluation must be better defined in the descriptions of the study programmes. Both local and international students must understand the evaluation criteria in the same way.
 - 4) The definition of artistic research should be clarified so that the lecturers of performing arts study programmes would be able to realise their research interests better.
 - 5) It is advisable to ensure financial means for the sustainable development of the Interpretation and Production of Contemporary Music study programme since it is a study programme with considerable weight in terms of the international profile of the Academy.
 - 6) It is recommended to offer formal continuing education opportunities for the teaching and support staff at the level of the Academy to ensure equal treatment of staff in all departments.
 - 7) It is advisable to optimise the decision-making processes related to Bachelor's and Master's study programmes of Music and Classical Music Performance, which, according to the assessment committee, are currently too complex because as many as ten departments are involved in their implementation.
 - 8) The students should be more systematically and consistently involved in the development of the study programmes of the Academy; also, the response rate of feedback questionnaire should be improved.
 - 9) The assessment committee agrees with the Academy that even more stakeholders should be involved in the study programme development. One of the options would be to follow the example of Interpretation and Production of Contemporary Music study programme and involve an external member – an employer – in the work of the study programme council.
 - 10) Internal quality assurance principles and procedures for individual study programmes should be well documented across the entire quality cycle (such as summary manuals, annual review and study programme based reporting, and other).
 - 11) The number of local students enrolling is on the fall; thus, more attention shall be focused on the benefits of the Academy in marketing it (such as a high number of contact lessons, individual guidance and an intimate learning environment).
- 11.** Point 41 of the 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Group at the First and Second Level of Higher Education' establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receiving the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations outlined in the assessment report, and decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years. It is set out in point 48 of the same document that the quality assessment of study programme group can rely on assessment reports, which include the analysis and assessment described in point 34, and are approved by international professional organisations or other competent assessment bodies. Point 6 of the same document stipulates that if it is possible to take a final decision, in compliance with this procedure, based on the assessment report, then the assessment council approves the report, considers the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the assessment report, and takes a decision regarding the time when the next quality assessment of the study programme group will be conducted.
- 12.** The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations presented in point 10 of this document and found that the study programme, the teaching conducted under

these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements, and

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Performing Arts study programme group at the first and second level of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in seven years.

The decision was adopted by 11 votes in favour and 0 against.

13. The Council proposes that the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre will submit an action plan to EKKA concerning the areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the reports no later than 20.06.2019.
14. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.

The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days.

A judicial challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court under the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council