



# **Master of Music & Master of Sonology**

**Royal Conservatoire The Hague**

**University of the Arts The Hague - The Netherlands**

**Development dialogue**

**Report**

**2021**

## Introduction

The Master of Music and Master of Sonology programmes offered by the Royal Conservatoire, the faculty for music and dance of the University of the Arts The Hague in The Netherlands, were assessed by an independent review team of international peer-reviewers. A development dialogue was organised after the site visit, to allow representatives of the programmes to discuss both strengths and potential improvements from a development perspective with members of the review team. In this report, the main elements discussed during the development dialogue are presented.

The review team consisted of the following members:

- Dame Janet Ritterman (Chair), Chancellor of Middlesex University London and Vice President, Royal College of Music, London;
- Mist Thorkelsdottir, Head of International Programs in the Performing Arts at the University of Southern California, Thornton School of Music;
- Jeffrey Sharkey, Principal of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow;
- Michael Harenberg, Head of Sound Arts studies at the Bern University of the Arts (Switzerland), lecturer, composer and researcher;
- Neil Wallace, Former programme director of De Doelen Concert Hall in Rotterdam, co-founder and director of the Big Idea Foundation, and founder and artistic director of the bi-annual international festival for innovation in choral music International Choral Biennale;
- Isabel González Delgado, Master student in music research at Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya, Barcelona;
- Jef Cox, Secretary.

## Context of the review procedure

The review team assessed both the Master of Music and Master of Sonology programmes in the context of the Dutch external quality assurance system, which is regulated by law and implemented by the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). For the assessment of the programmes, the review team was asked to make use of the NVAO assessment framework for the 'Experiment Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Accreditation'.<sup>1</sup>

However, because of its international profile, the Royal Conservatoire expressed the wish not only to have the Master of Music and Master of Sonology programmes assessed on the basis of the relevant national frameworks, but also to receive feedback on the programmes based on the internationally recognised assessment framework of MusiQuE - Music Quality Enhancement. In its self-evaluation report, the institution explains this choice as follows: "This is consistent with the opinion of the Royal Conservatoire that an institution can only call itself truly international if it is also willing to use internationally based methods for assessment and tools for external review. Therefore it is only the MusiQuE framework that can assist in a qualified comparison of programmes and institutions at an international level and confirm an international profile of a programme or institution." (Self-evaluation report, p. 6)

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<sup>1</sup> The University of the Arts The Hague passed an Institutional Audit in 2020. Institutions that have successfully completed the Institutional Audit have the opportunity to apply for participation in the 'Experiment Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Accreditation'. The experiment was set up by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and is implemented by NVAO. The University of the Arts applied, and was permitted, to take part in the experiment. Existing programmes offered by institutions which have passed an Institutional Audit are normally assessed with a limited framework featuring four NVAO standards. In the context of the 'Experiment Institutional Accreditation with a Lighter Programme Accreditation', however, these programmes are being reviewed with a lighter framework: only the assessment in relation to standard 1 (Intended learning outcomes) and standard 4 (Achieved learning outcomes) is presented to NVAO as part of the application for accreditation of the programmes. The institution is responsible for organising the assessment of standards 2 and 3 independently, without involvement from NVAO in the review process.

For this reason, the review team assessed the programmes also against the MusiQuE standards for programme review.

Both the assessment on the basis of the NVAO framework and the assessment on the basis of the MusiQuE standards for programme review resulted in separate reports. In the development dialogue, elements resulting from both assessments were jointly discussed.

### **Organisation and structure of the development dialogue**

The development dialogue was organised by the institution and took place online on 15 November 2021. A large group of representatives of both programmes (including institutional managers, heads of department, teaching staff and support staff) participated.

The discussions during the development dialogue took place in an informal atmosphere and were facilitated by the Chair of the review team. The Chair presented a concise overview of selected strengths and elements for improvement at the start of the development dialogue. Both the review team members and the institutional representatives agreed to use the overview to structure the discussion.

### **Overview of the elements discussed**

The institutional managers expressed themselves being impressed by the rigour of the analysis and observations made by the review team in the reports, and indicated that they would like to discuss the various recommendations made with the review team members. The section below provides an overview of the elements discussed.<sup>2</sup>

The following strengths of the master's programmes under review were mentioned by the chair of the review team:

- The institution's self-critical approach, and the open, welcoming and not defensive atmosphere in which the review itself took place.
- The clarity of the self-evaluation report and the high quality of the supporting documents.
- The institutional commitment to quality and the desire to move forward and continually search for ways to strengthen the programmes still further.
- The commitment to student-centred learning and the way in which it is realised through the structure of the master's programmes and the variety of approaches to learning and teaching.
- The programmes' international orientation.
- The support, encouragement and care given to students during the admission process and in elaborating their master project plan.
- The clarity of the curriculum structure of the programmes.
- The way in which artistic research is embedded in the programmes and is facilitated through the 'master circles'.
- The strong links and regular dialogue with the profession.
- The development of the 'critical friend' approach.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For an optimal understanding of the elements listed in this section, readers are encouraged to consult the reports resulting from the assessment on the basis of the NVAO framework and the assessment on the basis of the MusiQuE standards for programme review first. These reports can be found on the MusiQuE website or through the following link <https://www.musique-ge.eu/reports/review-reports/>

<sup>3</sup> The Royal Conservatoire uses the term 'critical friends' to refer to external peers whom the institution has selected to provide external perspectives and advice. For the Royal Conservatoire, a 'critical friend' is an external expert who is considered as an authority within the specific field of study of one of the disciplines in the master's programmes. Critical friends form a part of the external dimension of the internal quality assurance system of the institution.

- The support provided to staff, and the fact that teaching staff are encouraged to meet regularly and to operate as educational teams of teachers rather than as individual tutors, also in giving feedback to students.
- The comprehensive documentation about the programmes available for all stakeholders.
- The plans of the Royal Conservatoire to strengthen the connection with its alumni community and to increase the involvement of alumni in the delivery of certain parts of the programmes.

The following suggestions for further improvement were discussed:

- The recommendation to organise an exchange of views between various critical friends.
 

Programme representatives indicated that bringing critical friends together offers opportunities indeed, but that at the same time the institution seeks to avoid doubling up efforts and to keep a clear differentiation between the roles of the critical friends and the external review team.
- The recommendation to present the intended learning outcomes of the programmes in a simpler fashion.
 

Programme representatives agreed that presenting the learning outcomes more simply might indeed help stakeholders of the programmes to better internalise their content and significance.
- The recommendation to develop a more clearly coordinated approach to the providing of feedback to students.
 

Programme representatives indicated they recognise this as an area for further improvement, and welcomed the fact that the review team encourages the programmes to continue improving the way in which feedback is provided to students.
- The recommendations relating to internationalisation, interdisciplinarity and diversity, and the opportunities (and challenges) linked to exploring these themes together with other partners in the context of the move to the new Amare building.
 

Programme representatives indicated they are keen to make use of the momentum occasioned by the move to Amare to take the reflection on these themes to the next level.
- The recommendation to adopt a more strategic approach to the prioritisation of partnerships for the programmes.
 

Programme representatives indicated that this recommendation will help to trigger a discussion on what could be the key questions to be asked when selecting future partners.
- The recommendations about the organisational structure of the programmes and the extent to which it facilitates cross-departmental collaboration and 'cross-fertilisation' across and within the programmes.
 

Programme representatives indicated that students themselves come up with proposals for collaboration across departments, and that the institution looks forward to further facilitating this dynamic in the new Amare building, where departments hope to find increased possibilities for developing stronger connections.
- The recommendation to further increase consistency and alignment within the programmes.
 

Programme representatives are aware that further work can be done to improve consistency (for example with regard to grading within each programme) and indicated that steps are already being taken to improve this.